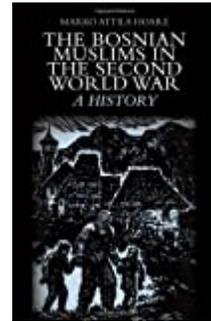




Marko Attila Hoare. *Bosnian Muslims in the Second World War: A History.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 544 S., 30 s/w Abb. ISBN 978-0-19-932785-0; ISBN 978-0-231-70394-9.



Reviewed by Emily Greble

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M. Hoare: Bosnian Muslims in the Second World War

Marko Attila Hoare has done a tremendous service to the field of Balkan history with this impeccably detailed and thoroughly researched study of Bosnian Muslims and the National Liberation Struggle in Yugoslavia. Drawing from a range of local government, Communist party, and institutional archives in Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia, as well as published documents, newspapers, memoirs, and other first-hand accounts, Hoare examines how the Yugoslav Communist Party, and its military wing, the Partisans, developed a successful mass movement during World War II. The critical battlefield, he contends, was Bosnia, a region where Muslims wielded significant power. Thus, winning Bosnia meant recruiting Muslims, particularly conservative Muslims, which led to ideological compromises. Hoare shows how in some Bosnian towns, the Communists deferred to conservative Muslims, who rejected the campaign to mobilize women; in other places, they tailored propaganda to speak to Muslims's concerns over a potential German invasion of Turkey. Town by town, village by village, the Communist Party built a mass movement across Bosnia and Herzegovina, one that catered to the diverse communities it was trying to win over.

For Hoare, the historical narratives of Partisan victory and wartime Muslim factionalism go hand-in-hand. The civil war in Yugoslavia had far more players than the cast of characters with whom historians are most familiar – the Chetniks, Ustashas, and Partisans. Hoare analyzes the development of local Muslim militias, the Muslim Legion in Tuzla, and the emergence of the Green Forces (*zeleni kadar*), which united various Muslim guerilla units in 1943. He also discusses the distinct Muslim Ustasha units, Muslim Chetnik units, and the Bosnian Muslim Waffen SS (*Handžar* Division), which formed in 1943 under the direction of the Nazis. Hoare shows that membership in all of these armies was fluid throughout the war, and alliances often had little to do with the overarching ideological programme of a movement. Instead, they were manufactured out of a variety of local negotiations and compromises. When needing fresh recruits, for example, the Partisans granted amnesty to entire units of enemy soldiers, such as Muslims from the Bosnian Muslim Waffen SS Division, the Green Forces, and the Croatian Home Guard (*domobrani*), decisions that fundamentally transformed the character of the army. Likewise, he reveals a large numbers of Muslim defections from the

Partisans to the Green Forces later in the war. In exploring the tenuous nature of wartime alliances, Hoare persuasively argues that Muslims, both individually and in groups, may have aligned with different wartime factions, but their motives remained consistent: they joined whichever group presented the most convincing plan to defend Muslim civilians and protect Bosnia's identity and integrity in a postwar political order.

By 1944, both local Partisan units and local Communist governments in Bosnia and Herzegovina had grown divided and autonomous. In the political realm, Muslim leaders signed up for a partnership with the Communists, but they maintained their own opinions, outlook, and social policies that did not match the Communist Party's ideology or its postwar plans. Consequently, many local governments became prone to corruption, inefficiency, localism, and reversion to the control of particular families or cliques (p. 215).

Similarly, the Partisan army was a coalition of discrete units often fighting for their own agendas. This fueled distrust within the ranks and proved especially problematic as the war came to a close. The promise of liberation and the implication of Partisan victory meant vastly different things to different Partisan supporters in Bosnia. Consequently, for many Muslim communities liberation felt like a military occupation. "The spectacular nature of the Partisan military victory," Hoare contends, "concealed the shaky foundations of the new Bosnian order" (p. 331).

In 1945, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia faced the challenge of building a state that acknowledged the contributions of the various groups that had contributed to Partisan victory, while simultaneously superimposing a Communist ideological structure. It was an impossible task, especially for Muslim supporters, many of whom wanted to preserve conservative religious norms and local political autonomy. The postwar Communist government tried a number of tactics to consolidate power and build consent. Most significantly, they established a republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, equal to other republics, keeping their promise to Muslims to protect the integrity of the region. The Communists also used elections to mobilize patriotism, tapping into the republic's strong sense of Bosnian pride to build support for Yugoslavia. Hoare points out that while the Communist elections were a farce, they still played an important role in cementing goodwill and building enthusiasm for the Bosnian republic. These political gestures, however, could not overcome the deep ideological rift between the

Communist party and conservative Muslims, who felt betrayed and disillusioned. By 1946, Muslims began to organize movements against the Communist Party's secularization and modernization campaigns.

For the non-specialist, the density of Hoare's narrative might intimidate; the overarching argument periodically takes a backseat to biographical sketches and thick descriptions of local political dynamics. For the specialist of 20th century Yugoslavia, World War II, or Balkan history, the breadth of detail on individuals, military units, and towns — all easily searchable in Hoare's incredibly comprehensive index — will make this study a foundational reference work.

Hoare's approach to Yugoslav history often triggers heated debate, and scholars of World War II Yugoslavia will no doubt feel passionately about his latest study. His treatment of the Independent State of Croatia, the Ustasha regime, and the Bosnian Muslim Waffen SS unit are not as central to his narrative or as comprehensive as his treatment of the Partisans, and this may leave some readers thinking that Hoare lets Muslims off the hook for their participation in radical Right groups. Other readers will disagree with the way that Hoare positions Nazis as defenders of greater Serbiandom. Still others will think the narrative reads sympathetic to the Partisans, even as it discusses some of the Partisans' crimes and retaliatory massacres.

To those tempted to reduce this volume to a few contentious questions, I urge you to consider a few broader historiographical interventions, which I believe are useful for rethinking the way that scholars study World War II Yugoslavia. In challenging the idea that the Yugoslav Partisans were a cohesive unit, Hoare calls on readers to stop thinking about individuals as being Chetniks, Partisans, and Ustashes, labels that he sees as meaningless in defining local-level motives. Instead, Hoare's study demonstrates that the tendency to rigorously categorize individuals, and even military units, into a prescribed box prevents nuanced analysis of the diverse local interests and local armies that characterized each movement. It thus builds upon Stathys Kalyvas's theoretical work on civil war, which empirically analyzes the Greek Civil War, which suggests that we cannot understand the complexity of civil conflict without analyzing local archives and local stories. Stathys Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, New York 2006. Although the Yugoslav civil war happened within the context of Nazi occupation and World War II, it needs also to be analyzed in its local components. To this end, Hoare's examination of local-level

coalitions tests the fruitfulness of concepts of collaboration and resistance when exploring a multi-sided civil war. Instead, he demands that readers consider the political, economic, and local motives behind coalition building. Finally, by studying the wartime movements along-

side the postwar order, Hoare challenges the prevalent recognition of the early Communist state as a blank slate, and also encourages a different periodization of Yugoslav history.

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