

The Muslim Resolutions: Bosniak Responses to World War Two Atrocities in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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In the 1912 tome *Unsere Zukunft: Ein Mahnwort an das deutsche Volk*, Friedrich von Bernhardt once wrote: “war is the highest expression in life of a truly cultured people” (55). This book would argue for a more nuanced view of reality. In 1941 Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy invaded royal Yugoslavia and established a puppet regime called the ‘Independent State of Croatia’ (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, or NDH). This polity included all of modern Bosnia-Herzegovina and included nearly one million indigenous Muslims. The dictatorship was led by an extremist Roman Catholic nationalist faction who initiated a campaign of brutal violence against citizens of the Serb Orthodox church and others, many of whom then turned their anger towards the mostly unarmed Muslim civilians. A cycle of religio-communal brutality erupted and several Islamic scholars and Muslim leaders signed a number of formal public resolutions: these documents resolutely condemned the bloodshed and

carnage, and called on the authorities to enforce justice and peace, law and order. In retrospect, it was an act of remarkable courage and bravery.

Eighty years later, several Bosnian academics have produced this book to mark the incident, to reproduce the original texts – where extant – and to comment on them. Editor Hikmet Karčić writes: “The aim of this publication is to present this phenomenon to a wider audience, but research on the project started in early 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and has proven more complex than initially anticipated, not least because there appear to be multiple versions of at least some of the resolutions” (11). To use a beautiful German term, the *Schwerpunktbildung* of this positive endeavour is to inspire readers to reflect on these matters, to examine them more deeply, and then proceed to purposeful action. The comprehensiveness and reliability of the sources concerning these proclamations leave, unfortunately, much to be desired, and they make the task of independent appraisal and elucidation all the more difficult. Unofficial researches to date are riddled with lacunae. Some papers are no longer extant, some have deteriorated, or exist in institutions unwilling to share academic resources in a collegial atmosphere.

This book endeavours to piece together various perspectives and narratives from multiple sources and informants that relate to the traditional ethnic mosaic of pre-war Bosnia-Herzegovina. The editors and contributors believe this will reveal much about the values of Muslim political leadership during this era. Based on substantial fieldwork and a thorough knowledge of sources, they provide an innovative study of the pre-Communist history of Bosnian Muslims and their cultural traditions. The indomitable resolve and sanguine energy of Bosnian Muslim leadership in 1941 is here examined with academic skill, insight, and detachment. *The Muslim Resolutions* elucidates a little-known aspect of the civilization of Bosnia, and unravels the paradoxes and transformations of indigenous Islamic religious identity in the region. It suggests inventive perspectives on the war period, the formation of socio-cultural (‘national’) identities and the strength of such legacies in Eastern Europe. This book offers a substantial contribution to the study of Islam and Muslim society in the modern era.

This is one of the most significant history books of the year, edited by several outstanding scholars. *The Muslim Resolutions* is especially concerned with the complex role of Muslim leadership in the NDH and how this contributed to ideas regarding Muslim identity. Multiple lines of inquiry by the editors and contributors ignore ideological preoccupations and political correctness, and explore issues of race, religion and nationality without bigotry or prejudice. There are several interesting asides that reveal all too human concerns and proclivities. For instance, the Mostar Resolution actually demands the NDH Fascist regime halt non-Muslims from wearing the fez (180-181). It follows that the kind of civilization which we specifically designate as Bosnian reposes not upon a spurious foundation of alleged race, but on an inheritance of achievement and thought and religious aspiration. Hence the formal Resolutions themselves in 1941 and the events that followed until 1945.

This volume is a multi-faceted examination of social encounters between folk groups of differing faiths but common customs and lands. The editors and contributors argue that such encounters and shared apotropaic rituals can solidify into communal time-spaces. Xavier Bougarel in particular, raises the vexed question of why these events and matters—with their complex collective, class and regional resonances—developed the way they did. He queries what happened when such enigmatic intimacies and enthralling discursive processes were challenged and actively destroyed, when the Muslims were ethnically-cleansed from the rural districts of Bosnia over 1941-1945, and the entire country was parcelled into congeries of warlords and divergent political factions, each governed by an obscure provincial camarilla, all lacking in humility or mansuetude. Considered in all its spectra, this is not a direct discussion of religious syncretism or hegemony, then, but a careful articulation of a complicated societal evolution and the *Bosanski Duh*, the Bosnian spirit or character.

The Muslim Resolutions is a remarkable and comprehensive survey of a complex topic. The text is accessible and will make an excellent introduction to more in-depth material. The broad scope and quick pace make this a definite work, though novices should be able to follow the swirl of names and events. This is a solid work for college classrooms and scholars on the history of Muslim communal leadership, socio-political

consciousness, and our current world. The attention to personal testimonies in this book will, in simple fashion, help students grasp underlying concepts with which outsiders sometimes struggle. This is a comprehensive presentation of a multifarious issue and the text successfully combines expert accounts of the deep history of Bosnia and Herzegovina with a highly erudite investigation of where the society is presently. Drawing upon significant new research, the book greatly advances our comprehension of Muslim responses to the processes of nation-building, religion and war in the 1940s. This tome is an essential addition to the literature for both the general reader and students of Islamic civilization alike.

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