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Judit Klement

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Imagining Bosnian Muslims in Central Europe, Representations, Transfers and Exchanges. Edited by František Šístek. New York–Oxford: Berghahn, 2021. 302 pp.

The present volume is the result of a Czech research project entitled “Central Europe and Balkan Muslims: Relations, Images, Stereotypes,” coordinated by Ladislav Hladký and František Šístek. *Imagining Bosnian Muslims in Central Europe* proposes a panorama of the encounters, exchanges, and transfers among the peoples of Central Europe and the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The volume devotes attention to the development and transformations of a modern Bosnian Muslim identity on the long term. It investigates the attitudes and policies of Central European societies towards Bosnian Muslims and asks how Central European representations and conceptualizations of Bosnians affected the identity of the latter. Central Europe is understood by the authors in the widest possible sense, which covers the former territories of the Habsburg Monarchy, the Balkans, and Germany. The Balkans and Central Europe are deeply intertwined and overlapping ethnic spaces, and, as František Šístek convincingly argues in the introduction, Croats, Serbs, and Slovenes should be included in discourses on Central Europe even if these peoples are ascribed to other regions as well. The time scope of the volume extends from the early nineteenth century to the twenty-first century, which is necessary if one seeks to offer an analysis of the long-term influences and effects of Bosnian Muslim history concerning identity constructions and representations. A case in point is the effects of the Millet system on religion, nation, and culture. The Millet system not only restrained the formation of national identities in the nineteenth century, which was reinforced by the policies of Béni Kállay (the long-time Habsburg governor of the province) on separating religious communities. It also had a lasting influence on the identity constructions to which Bosnian Muslims turned in the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav periods (as discussed in the chapter by Božidar Jezernik).

Bosnian Muslim identity has been significantly influenced by the special (ethnic and religious) position of the group in the constantly changing political landscape in the Balkans. The chapter by Charles Sabatos attributed a malleable and weak identity to Bosnian Muslims. For instance, the Croatian writer Vjenceslav Novak regards them as misguided Serbs who have been lost to their community. South Slavic writers would consider their identity as a “temporary

costume” (p.146) which should be replaced by a different Slavic identity in the long run.

There are no thematic sections or underlying structure in the volume, but some arguments are put forward by several articles and thus are worth discussing in some detail. One of them concerns the special status of Bosnian Islam in the Muslim world. Zora Hesová introduces the concept of secularity, that is “a capacity to exist *qua* religion within a secular context” (p.117). The high level of secularity of Bosnian Muslims is largely thanks to the legacy of Habsburg rule, which established an autonomous Islamic community. Hesová demonstrates how this institution managed to survive until the twenty-first century, for instance, in the very structure of the most recent constitution of the Bosnian Islamic community in 2004. The process of secularization had started in other spheres in the late nineteenth century as well. Concerning the educational system, Oliver Pejić describes how Croatian elementary school textbooks were adapted to the needs of both Christian and Muslim pupils. The deliberate adaptation of textbooks helped replace traditional religious schools with interconfessional state schools and promoted the Westernization and integration of the Bosnian Muslim community in line with the efforts of Habsburg administrators.

The Habsburg experience and the geographical proximity of Bosnian Muslims to Europe significantly impacted Central European attitudes towards the community. These attitudes, like the Bosnian Muslim identity, were malleable and constantly changing. The negative stigmatization of Bosnian Muslims is a recurring phenomenon in Central European societies. The chapter by František Šístek argues that Czech literature and travelogues generally presented a negative image of Bosnian Muslims. The “Turk” (also used as a synonym for Bosnian Muslims) is similarly presented as barbarian and savage during the occupation war. The chapter by Martin Gabriel reveals that Muslim fighters were associated with the Turks and were described as “brute and inhuman” in the Habsburg press. The Turkish reference remained a long-standing stigma for Bosnian Muslims, as illustrated by Marija Mandić, who notes a particular Serbian proverb (“A Turk convert is worse than a Turk”) and its uses in public discourse. The proverb was used to repudiate and demonize the Ottoman heritage and stigmatize Slavic Muslims as betrayers of the national body. However, the geographical proximity of Bosnian Muslims and the direct interactions between Bosnian Muslims and Central Europeans resulted in positive attitudes towards Bosnian Muslims in certain contexts. The chapters by Aldina Čemernica and Merima Šehagić give examples of these attitudes: Bosnian Muslims are regarded as secular and white

Europeans, the exemplary representatives of a European Islam. In addition, Bosnian Muslim migrants faced less discrimination and stigmatization (for example in Germany), and they were even regarded as a refugee elite in some countries. This positive view was shaped in part by the aforementioned higher level of secularization among Bosnian Muslims.

As is noted in the closing remarks, the volume does not fully adopt the promised long-term perspective, because the Yugoslav period has attracted much less scholarly attention so far and, as is plainly seen in the time-scope of the present contributions. In the meantime, there has been a growing interest in the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina under Habsburg rule between 1878 and 1918. This finds expression in the plethora of works devoted to the political, cultural, and economic aspects of Habsburg occupation in the provinces and in the creative use and rethinking of now classical approaches like Said's Orientalism and post-colonial theory, which are nicely reinterpreted and rethought in the present contributions. However, the volume does not do justice to representations and transfers in the whole of the Central European region. The interactions among Hungarians and Bosnian Muslims are not addressed in any of the contributions, although the Ottoman Empire and Hungary have had an eventful common history, and Hungary, as an integral part of the Habsburg Monarchy, was actively involved in the occupation and annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. A symbolic indication of this neglect is that Francis Joseph is often referred to in the text as "the Kaiser," although Bosnia and Herzegovina was occupied by the whole of the empire and was governed by the common minister of finance (not responsible to and not elected by the Austrian or Hungarian government). In spite of this lacuna, the volume is a welcome addition to the ongoing scholarly debates on the history and present of Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of the Balkans but also as a constitutive element of Central Europe.

Mátyás Erdélyi

French Research Center in Humanities and Social Sciences

Research Center for the Humanities, Institute of History

matyas.erdelyi@cefres.cz

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