

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Islam in Bosnien-Herzegowina und die Netzwerke der Jungmuslime (1918–1983)*, by Armina Omerika. Harrassowitz, 2014. xiv, 362pp. Hb. € 68.00. ISBN 9783447065825.

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Since the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1992–1995, references to collaboration of the Bosniaks, i.e. Bosnian Muslims, with the Germans in the Second World War have become quite well known. Tabloid magazines and TV documentaries have shown posed NS propaganda photos of soldiers of the Waffen-SS *Handžar* division in fezzes or in prayer, sometimes complemented with quotes of Himmler about Muslims and their virtues as warriors. Especially the 1943 visit of the Mufti of Jerusalem, Amīn al-Ḥusaynī, then exiled in Berlin, to Sarajevo to support the formation of the unit received attention by historians. This might lead to the impression that Bosniaks were enthusiastic about the German Reich. Information on the actual background, including the massacre of Bosniaks in the summer of 1942 and the conflict between the Muslim elite and the leadership of the “Independent State of Croatia,” is often neglected in such texts. But one does not have to be a specialist on Balkan history to understand that Himmler’s phantasies and the self-portrayals of Nazi propaganda i.e. from the files of the German *Bundesarchiv* are a very limited source of information for analysis, given the diversity of discourses and opinions among Muslims in Southeast Europe during the Second World War.

With her dissertation on the networks of the Bosnian “Young Muslims” Armina Omerika has made a fundamental and pioneering contribution. At the centre of her work is an initially informal group of Muslim high-school and university students from the urban Muslim middle class that came together in 1939/40 and was inspired by the members of the *El Hidaje*, a conservative-reformist scholars’ association. The Young Muslims were recognized as that body’s youth association in 1941. After the war, how-

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ever, the networks of Young Muslims were the most important Muslim opposition group to the Communist dictatorship, until its structures were broken up and its leaders jailed in 1949-1953. The group's name became known to a wider international public during a Sarajevo 1983 court case against five political dissidents whose biographies and ideas place them within the networks of Young Muslims. One of them was Alija Izetbegovic, who in 1992 should become the first President of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This fact underlines the importance of the Young Muslims; a lay movement of shifting sociological profile with a deeply religious orientation, which until 1992 was mostly in opposition to the state apparatus as well as to the loyal official representatives of the Islamic community of Yugoslavia.

Omerika tells the story of this network, embedded in the political history of the Bosnian Muslims in Yugoslavia from 1918 to 1983. An entire chapter is devoted to Husein Džozo, a former member of the Handžar division, who in the 1960s became a leading thinker and driving force of Islamic reform in Yugoslavia, himself building heavily upon the heritage of the reform movement around Muḥammad 'Abduh and along the lines of Maḥmūd Shaltūṭ. Her sources for the war years were contemporary periodicals and other publications; for the post-war period she used documents of the newly founded Islamic organizations, edited interrogation records, memoirs, a remarkable number of interviews, and documents from family archives. When it comes to the periodicals of the 1960s it is not always possible to clearly differentiate between regime and opposition publications.

For the 1941-1945 period, the model of the "Ustaša state" is hardly suited to explain the position of the Young Muslims and their discourses during the so called "Independent State of Croatia" (NDH). According to the sources examined by Omerika, as an organization of mainly under-age students, the Young Muslims had few ideological commonalities with the Croatian nationalism of the Ustaša other than anti-communism. Their basic tenets were instead exclusively Islamic and revolved around the reform and 'revival' of Islam, inspired by the popular publications of Middle-Eastern authors which had meanwhile become reproduced and translated among Balkan Muslim publics as well. In practical terms however, their efforts centred on care of their own refugees and their texts referred more to the defence of the Muslim population, even if their own active military efforts were not particularly pronounced.

Omerika clasifies the scholarly organization El Hidaje as moderate traditionalism, but also detects Salafist influences from Egypt, deriving from the education of some religious leaders. She finds the Young Muslims to be a juxtaposition of conservative convictions, activist habitus but also modernizing elements, for example in their education efforts, the mobilization of women as well as their leisure activities and cultural programmes. A categorization as anti-modern seems in any case doubtful, as the rejection of traditionalist torpor and the goal of overcoming the “backwardness” of the Muslims were constitutive for the group. The networks that Omerika describes do not seem very hierarchical, a “Führer”-cult or racism are not part of the ideological profile; like other authors, she emphasizes that El Hidaje distanced itself from the Ustaša-led persecution of Serbs or Jews in several resolutions, even if the same kind of opposition was not extended to the German politics in general.

Distance from the Ustaša regime is also evidenced by the fact that during the immediate post-war years the Young Muslims and their networks were not the target of persecution, although a number of political actors were persecuted or even executed as “collaborators” as well. Despite the gradually increasing persecution, they are at first “not yet on the liquidation list” (181). Clearly, imposing the Communist claim to power in the Muslim milieu required tactical restraint on the part of the state, while the military resistance did not have the dimensions as the Croatian *Križari*. More significant were local fistfights in Sarajevo between the Communist youth organization and their religiously oriented peers. The building of a network of state-controlled institutions in the Islamic community headed by loyal cadres took place until the early 50s, while the state gradually created facts on the ground, by eliminating the sharia courts, expropriating the *vakufs* and outlawing the hijab. During this time, the Young Muslims regained their strength under conditions of illegality, now far beyond their original “bourgeois” milieu, especially in regions such as Eastern Herzegovina where massacres of Bosniaks had occurred during and after the war. The expectation of another war played a role until the early fifties and by now some thought was occasionally given to arming. It is quite remarkable that Omerika was able to reconstruct a resistance discourse for the late 1940s from sources, often as the first to gain access to it. Notably, in this phase nationalist references to Bosnian nationalism still constitute “the most diffuse point” of their ideology (249), by far not being at the centre or even in the focus of their attention. However, the interest with which Young Muslims followed the founda-

tion of Pakistan and developments in Saudi Arabia reveals, according to Omerika, a basic interest in questions of state sovereignty.

Omerika is able to show that following the consolidation of the regime's political power, in the 1960s there was a partial reintegration of the Islamic scholars who had been barred from institutions in the post-war period. The most spectacular case is the above-mentioned Husein Džozo, who was sentenced to a five-year prison term after 1945, but then after initial publications under a pseudonym was able to take over the leadership of the association of religious scholars, the *Ilmija*, in 1964. The lecture series he organized in the Imperial Mosque in Sarajevo, the "Tribina," encouraged the spread of the reform discourse, just as did the *Preporod* periodical founded in 1970, and eased the renewed integration of opposition and student circles into the Islamic community. A separate chapter is devoted to an analysis of Džozo's fatwas and writings. Omerika dates the reactivation of the Young Muslim network to 1965, made possible in large measure by the continuity of personal and family relationships. At times, authors from this circle were given the opportunity to write articles in the annual calendar of the Islamic community, *Takvim*.

This development was connected to the general liberalization, including regulations on religion, in Yugoslavia following the removal from power of secret service chief Ranković in 1966; it also coincided with the recognition of the Bosnian Muslims as a nation and the reduction of the Serbian hegemony in the party apparatus and state institutions. Yugoslavia's relations to Arabic states in its block-free policy may well have had an effect as well. However, Omerika points to the increasing autonomy of external contacts of the Islamic community with the Muslim world and their decoupling from foreign policy. These gained special significance through student exchanges and through the revival of religious education, as was at latest expressed during the opening of the Islamic Theological Faculty in 1977. It was the former that first intensified relations to the Muslim Brotherhood, especially on the part of former Young Muslims. According to Omerika, this influence can be especially detected in the Islamic Declaration of Alija Izetbegović (1970) as well as in a number of other publications; however, support from the pro-western, anti-communist and Bosniak-oriented emigration in German-speaking countries was also important. The periodical *Bosanski pogledi* (*Bosnian Perspectives*) and Teufik Velagić are to be mentioned here.

The 1972 prohibition of *Tribina* was the first clear break. It was a reaction to a strike by the students of the Sarajevo madrasa, who wanted to

enforce a modernization of the curriculum, but on a larger scale, and it coincided with the end of the reform course throughout Yugoslavia in 1971/1972. It is remarkable that in Bosnia, *Tribina*, as a symbol of a policy of openness, tried to find a continuation as early as 1978/79 in a similar lecture series at the *Tabački mesdžid*. The student organizers of the lectures around Hasan Čengić were in contact with and under the influence of the older generation of the Young Muslims, until these lectures, too, were prohibited in 1981. In 1979, however there had been a shift in the relationship between the regime and the Islamic community, which led to Džozo's withdrawal from his functions and the replacement of the editorial staff of the periodical *Preporod*, which he had founded. From now on, propagandistic warnings of the dangers posed by Muslims and the influence of their religious leaders would start to become more frequent in regime propaganda, even in internal talks of the late Tito himself. The background to the Sarajevo proceedings in 1983 against leading representatives of the Young Muslims, including Izetbegović, are discussed in detail only to this point.

Omerika's book examines the history and development of a comparatively small, at times marginalized group, that would ultimately become very influential for the history of Bosnia in the late 20th century on its path to independence. This group was only in the beginnings formally organized, and operated underground from 1945. Yet for decades it remained effective and perceptible as an intellectual and personal relationship network based on multiple ties of kinship and friendship. As this work shows, network analysis is an ideal instrument for investigating this phenomenon. The combination of this approach with analytical, contextualizing chapters and close text readings of the writings of the network's members, makes the investigation very readable, and those who read this book will be rewarded with a substantial and recommendable gain in knowledge about Bosnian history. Over the last 30 years, Bosnia has been subject of comparatively intense scholarly and public attention. Omerika's book with its rich informational value is a welcome reminder, that this attention has often merely touched upon important backgrounds that even today are probably only known to few outside of Bosnia.