
***The New Bosnian Mosaic: Identities, Memories and Moral Claims in a Post-War Society.* Ed. Xavier Bougarel, Elissa Helms and Ger Duijzings. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007. xix, 332 pp. Bibliography. Index. Maps. Figures. List of Acronyms. List of Contributors. Acknowledgments. Pronunciation Guide. \$124.95, cloth.**

***Reviewed By: Peter Locke*
Princeton University**

The New Bosnian Mosaic is a timely, smart, and substantive anthropological intervention into dominant approaches to post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina. The volume assembles twelve studies of Bosnian politics, economies, and social relations after Dayton—by Ivana Maček, Anders Stefansson, Ioannis Armakolas, Hannes Grandits, Torsten Kolind, Stef Jansen, Isabelle Delpla, Kimberley Coles, Larisa Jašarević, and the editors themselves—all firmly grounded in long-term fieldwork. The editors mobilize the thick, empirical grit of ethnographic evidence to challenge taken-for-granted orthodoxies about Bosnia and to illuminate the fluid, complicated, and open-ended sociocultural realities that such orthodoxies tend to mask. This is anthropological storytelling and analysis at its most relevant and effective—bringing complexity and doubt into public debates in a way that opens up new possibilities for both future research and for policy-making—and as such the volume merits attention across disciplines and regional specializations.

The editors use the 35-page introduction—an accomplishment, in itself, of analysis, synthesis, and literature review—to contextualize the essays that follow: they provide a succinct and useful recent history of the region, as well an engaging summary of the ethnological and anthropological work done by local and foreign scholars during the Yugoslav/socialist period. More importantly, they make the case for the necessity and timeliness of a “bottom-up” approach to contemporary Bosnia-Herzegovina, highlighting the ways that a literature dominated by “legal scholars and political scientists” has produced an “overemphasis on institutional and electoral issues,” as well as a reductive framing of the messy realities of post-war society in terms of ethnic dimensions and the “legal categories set forth in the [Dayton] peace agreement” (13). By attending to the on-the-ground flux of current conflicts and solidarities, the essays draw our attention to a wide range of other categories—such as “urbanity and rurality, gender, generation, class and occupation” (2)—that make a difference both in everyday

struggles and in the success or failure of international policies.

In a context of scarcity and the injustices and inequalities of a rapidly transforming economy—accompanied by the continuing evisceration of social welfare measures and the state-citizen relationships familiar to those who came of age in the socialist period—the contributors explore how competition for “housing, jobs and collapsing public services is expressed through strong moral categories,” opposing, for example, “cultured” city-dwellers to “primitive” *papci* (peasants) and displaced persons, those who left to those who stayed, veterans’ groups to a multitude of civilian victim associations (20). Contemporary Bosnia-Herzegovina, the editors observe, is a place of “unyielding moral claims,” which, while “still largely informed by wartime roles and experiences,” also exhibit key continuities with pre-war social processes—and exceed “ethnicity” and “transition”-based explanations. We need to make room for the unexpected, thinking of current social realities less in terms of repair, reconciliation, and restoration and more in terms of transformation and creativity, attending to the ways “new normative frameworks, new forms of governmentality and new allocations of power and wealth” emerge in the wake of war and amidst the fraught and deeply contested encroachment of contemporary capitalist economic forms (35).

The book is divided into three sections, each of which marshals ethnographic evidence to pull the rug out from under one of the reductive approaches that has dominated public understanding of and intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The first section tackles ethnicity; the second, collective memory and “ancient hatreds;” and the third, theories attempting to understand Bosnia in terms of advances and setbacks along a linear “transition” from authoritarian socialism to free-market democracy. In the first section, for example, Maček chronicles Sarajevans’ struggles to survive and make sense of their condition during the siege, showing how their negotiation of “normality” in dire circumstances included—but went well beyond—coming to grips with the ethnicization of politics and violence. And

Kolind, observing interethnic relations in the mixed Croat-Muslim town of Stolac in Herzegovina, demonstrates how “nationalist discourses do not completely permeate everyday life, and there is some space left for alternative identifications and interactions at the local level” (138).

In the second section, the authors firmly locate practices of memory within present-day contests over the shape of Bosnia’s future. Duijzings examines the tense politics of memory around the Srebrenica massacre, on both Serb and Muslim sides, in eastern Bosnia. Bougarel shows how the post-war cult of the *šehid* (martyr) among Muslims reflects both “specific interpretations and memories of the war, as well as new social divides and normative hierarchies within the Muslim community” (191). And Jansen skilfully deploys the detailed story of a single conversation among old friends in the north-eastern town of Tuzla to combat the “sterile simplification” that comes with assuming the overriding importance of national identities in the way that people remember and evaluate their own and others’ wartime experiences (194).

The final section takes up the consequences of “top-down” approaches to post-war recovery and state building through a set of trenchant critiques.

Delpla, to begin with, explores Bosnian attitudes toward the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) to highlight the disconnect between international and local notions of justice, and Helms draws attention to the constraints and hard choices facing women as they navigate the deeply gendered world of Bosnian politics and civil society. Coles targets the “exclusion of Bosnians from an imagined European-ness” (257) by international officials living and working in Bosnia. And Jašarević, examining the everyday re-valuation of exchange relationships and forms of work taking place at the Arizona “black market” near Brčko, shows the woeful inadequacy of pat theories of economic transition from socialism to capitalism.

Taken together, the introduction and the essays offer a much-needed new perspective on Bosnia-Herzegovina—refreshingly grounded in ethnographic research and commendably distrustful of the dominant narratives into which Bosnia has thus far been slotted. It deserves to be read not only by students of the region, but also by those interested in post socialism, post-war governance and humanitarianism, and the sociocultural impacts of war.