Making Muslim Women European

Giomi, Fabio

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The traveler passing through the Bosnian town of Banja Luka circa 1910 could choose from a wide range of postcards to send home. While a considerable number of these cards depicted diverse aspects of the region’s rich cultural heritage—picturesque villages, ruined fortresses, men and women dancing in folk costumes—others showed the newly-built infrastructure that was becoming an increasingly prominent part of the Bosnian landscape: iron bridges, factories, grid-iron streets, railroads, etc.

One postcard in particular affords a glimpse of Savior Street, one of the main roads in the city center of Banja Luka. The Hotel Austria and Elliot Café are clearly recognizable in the background, places which were at the heart of the town’s life. 

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“Giomi’s book provides an outstanding and original exploration of Balkan political and social history with an accent on the uncharted histories of Bosnian Muslim women. The author presents a unique narrative and engages with the complexities of everyday realities by paying closer attention to the role of non-state actors in shaping the Muslim woman question. Through detailed archival records completed with primary and secondary sources, Giomi illustrates the historical journey that brought Bosnian Muslim women out of their traditional private context and demonstrates how women took an active part in articulating their own needs and concerns.”

Krassimira Daskalova, Professor of Modern History, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Bulgaria

“A well-framed, systematic investigation into what the archives tell us about Muslim women’s lives in Bosnia and Herzegovina between the end of Ottoman rule and the onset of World War II. Without romanticizing or downplaying the extent of control exerted on women by the prevailing gender regime of the time, Giomi’s study shows in vivid, contextualized detail how Muslim women also did not conform to orientalist and Balkanist stereotypes of silenced, oppressed, and invisible figures. By highlighting these community and individual efforts at improving Muslim women’s lives and educational access well before the establishment of socialist Yugoslavia, this book further breaks down the myth that the legal reforms and banning of the face veil by the Yugoslav state unilaterally ‘liberated’ Muslim women and the Bosnian Muslims as a whole.”

Elissa Helms, Associate Professor, Department of Gender Studies, Central European University, Vienna

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fabio Giomi is CNRS Researcher at the Centre for Turkish, Ottoman, Balkan and Central-Asian Studies, Paris. Before joining CETObaC in 2014, he was a postdoctoral fellow at the Maison des Sciences de l’Homme Foundation (Paris) and at the Institute for Advanced Study at Central European University (Budapest). His research focuses on the history of South-East Europe between the end of the 19th century and the middle of the 20th century, with particular attention to the Yugoslav space.

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