

Bosnia has stood at the crossroads between the Muslim Ottoman Empire (Bosnia succumbed 1463 but adopted Islam), Eastern Orthodox Christian Serbia (Serbia defeated 1389 but retained Christianity), and Roman Catholic Christian Western Europe.

Roman Catholics

Bosnian Croats - Croatia to the north

17%

Eastern Orthodox Christians

Bosnian Serbs - Serbia to the east and south

31%

Muslims

Bosnian Muslim Slavs - From Ottoman Empire after 1463

44%

Bosnia was a multi-faith and pluralist country and republic within Yugoslavia. Sarajevo was a multi-faith pluralist city. Islam in Bosnia was from the beginning broad-minded and inclusive. Jews found Bosnia very tolerant compared with Christian Europe's ghettos (Richard I expelled Jews from England in 1190 who only returned with Oliver Cromwell and especially from 1655). In 1492 many Jews ejected from Spain (after Muslim rule ended) came to Bosnia. Mosques, synagogues and churches were close to each other. In the 1700s Muslims from the shrinking Ottoman Empire came into Bosnia, Austria-Hungary gained Bosnia in 1878 and Serbia became independent.

After World War 1 Bosnia was part of the new state of Yugoslavia. In the Second World War Croatian fascists (Ustashe, sympathisers with Nazis) killed Serbs, Jews, Gypsies, Communists, and political opponents. Serb Chetniks killed many Ustashe and Croats. The Communist-led Partisans liberated Yugoslavia and its Josip Broz (Tito) set up a socialist state. It was balanced across ethnic groups. It was a crime to promote ethnic power.

Tito died in 1980. The collective leadership lasted ten years. Ethnic nationalism took over. Serbia's Communist Party leader, Slobodan Milosevic, became a nationalist leader. In March 1992 Bosnia held a referendum for independence. Serbia wrongly labelled Muslims as extreme fundamentalists, so that many Bosnian Serbs fearfully supported ethnic cleansing to create a Greater Serbia. With Serbs throughout Bosnia, this meant widespread war.

On April 6, 1992 the Serb siege of Bosnia's capital Sarajevo started and lasted 43 months. Over 12,000 residents were killed by sniper bullets and bombs, including 1,500 children. Those who lived lost over two stone weight (13 kg) on average. The UN removed most personnel in 1992 leaving a small force of ineffective peacekeepers including at the airport under Serb control. Many Bosnians were killed at the airport.

The Yugoslav Army and Serb militias removed non-Serbs from within Bosnia by terrorising, shelling and shooting. There were expulsions, detention camps, individual and mass killings of men and boys, systematic raping of women, and torture. Families and communities were destroyed. 200,000 of 4.4 million Bosnians were killed. Another 200,000 were badly injured, 50,000 being children.

Sixty percent of all houses in Bosnia, 50% of schools, and a 30% of hospitals were damaged or destroyed. The infrastructure was severely damaged. Mosques were toppled. War lasted 4 years involving Serbs, Croats and Muslims.

An international arms embargo had the perverse effect of stopping Muslims defending themselves against attack although they tried.

American led NATO intervention finally brought this war to an end. After the Dayton Peace Accords (Ohio USA on November 21, 1995 and signed in Paris on December 14, 1995), Republika Srpska for Serbs (49% of Bosnia) and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina of Bosnian Muslims and Croats (51%) were established.

So Bosnia which was multi-faith and pluralist became separated into nationalities and faiths, although Bosnia and Herzegovina tries to recreate a multi-ethnic country again especially in Sarajevo.

The International Criminal Tribunal was established by the UN Security Council in February 1993. This was the first international war crimes court since the Nuremberg trials after World War II. There was a later Serb ethnic cleansing war in Kosovo (which NATO ended). With the return of the rump Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) to democracy, Milosovic was taken to The Hague for trial. Karadzic and his military commander, Ratko Mladic of Serbian nationalism are still at large in Republika Srpska. Some Croats and a few Bosnians have also faced trial and conviction.

Questions

Was Bosnia a multi-faith country/ republic before the Second World War? Explain the answer in sentences.

Did Bosnia enjoy religious pluralism before the Second World War? Explain the answer in sentences.

Was Yugoslavia a multi-faith country during World War 2 and did it enjoy religious pluralism then? Write the answer in sentences.

During the Bosnian War and afterwards, would you describe the region as multi-faith and / or enjoying religious pluralism? Give the evidence.

In what way did the Serbs label Islam in Bosnia before the war in 1992? How would you describe Islam at that time and before?

Describe the historical experience of Jews in Bosnia and compare this with elsewhere in Europe.