

## STUDIE / ARTICLE / BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

## Bosnian-Herzegovinian Literature: The History of a Transnational Concept and Its Prospects in the Post-Conflict Society

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### **Bosnian-Herzegovinian Literature: The History of a Transnational Concept and Its Prospects in the Post-Conflict Society**

One way the decentralization of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) manifested at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s was the consolidation of the cultural individuality of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). An integral part of this process was the elaboration of a concept of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature, which, through its future canon, was supposed to integrate domestic literary traditions as well as contemporary writings by all authors from BiH, regardless of their ethnic origins or self-identifications. What were the arguments of the proponents of such a transnational approach to the classification of literature, and what challenges did they face? How did they conceive Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature? What were the milestones of its affirmation, and did the process continue after the collapse of the SFRY? What are the forms, limits, and prospects of employing the concept in today's BiH, affected by the persistent ethnic polarization of society caused by the armed conflict in 1992–1995? The paper aims to seek answers to these questions and thus reveal some aspects of the post-conflict heritage of contemporary BiH in the field of culture.

**Keywords:** Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature; literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina; transnational literature; national literature; cultural history of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Bosnian studies; Yugoslav studies; post-Yugoslav studies

Even before the War of Yugoslav Succession (1991–1995), which drastically and perhaps irreversibly ripped apart its social fabric, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) had sometimes been described as “the most complicated country in Europe”.<sup>1</sup> What is now a clichéd label, usually associated with an extremely complex political system and gargantuan administration of the post-conflict BiH, has historically referred to the country’s remarkable ethnoreligious, regional, and cultural diversity, accompanied by its delicate position on the intersection of imperial, political, and national ambitions of its neighbors.<sup>2</sup> However, the notable heterogeneity of BiH has not always been viewed as a hindrance or a nuisance. This particularly holds true for the field of culture, where diversity is generally perceived as an appreciated quality and a comparative advantage, if approached outside the twisted logic of ethnonationalism.<sup>3</sup> The intention of this paper is to illustrate the point by highlighting a noteworthy effort to blunt a conflicting potential of the manifold internal divisions of BiH by harmonizing its varied cultural traditions. More precisely, the aim will be to outline and comment on the history and present state of the conceptualization of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature as a specific transnational system and a distinctive value category within the context of South Slavic and Yugoslav literatures.

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- 1 The designation is customarily attributed to Slovenian literary critic and politician Josip Vidmar (1895–1992), who used it in the following statement during the first session of the State Antifascist Council for the National Liberation of BiH (ZAVNOBiH) held in Mrkonjić Grad in 1943: “Ako se u Bosni – koja je najkomplikovanija zemlja u Evropi – ostvari potpuno bratstvo Srba, Hrvata i Muslimana, onda ga neće biti teško ostvariti ni između Srba, Hrvata, Slovenaca, Makedonaca pa čak i Bugara.” [“If a thorough brotherhood of Serbs, Croats, and Muslims is achieved in Bosnia – which is the most complicated country in Europe – then it won’t be difficult to achieve it also between Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, and even Bulgarians.”] *Zemaljsko antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Bosne i Hercegovine, Dokumenti 1943–1944., Knjiga I* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1968), p. 31. Note: all translations to English are mine (PS).
  - 2 Ivan LOVRENOVIĆ, *Unutarnja zemlja: kratki pregled kulturne povijesti Bosne i Hercegovine* (5. pregledano i dopunjeno izdanje, Zagreb – Sarajevo: Synopsis, 2017), pp. 9–38; 164.
  - 3 On the ethnonationalist concept of culture see Ivan ČOLOVIĆ, *The Balkans: The Terror of Culture. Essays in Political Anthropology* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2011).

The beginnings of such an approach are closely connected with the gradual but profound change of the status as well as the self-perception of BiH within socialist Yugoslavia at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>4</sup> It was at this time when a new generation of politicians, such as Džemal Bijedić (1917–1977), Hamdija Pozderac (1924–1988), and Branko Mikulić (1928–1994), entered the scene, inclined to strengthen the position and individuality of their home republic within the federation. The renowned publicist and author Ivan Lovrenović (\*1943), himself a significant participant in the conceptualization and affirmation of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature, holds that it was during the era of these politicians when BiH finally ceased to be what it had been since 1945 and what he calls: “a colony of the most ordinary type, more of a colony than it was under Austria-Hungary, a colony in every sense, political, energetic-industrial, transportational, social, educational, cultural.”<sup>5</sup> Without judging the legitimacy of Lovrenović’s assessment,<sup>6</sup> it can hardly be disputed that BiH benefited greatly from the decentralization of Yugoslavia between 1966 and 1974. Not only in terms of asserting its political status and engaging in thorough modernization, but also due to the new approach taken by its political leadership to the national question and cultural policy.

4 Marko Attila HOARE, *The History of Bosnia: From the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (London: Saqi, 2007), pp. 324–337; Srećko M. DŽAJA, *Politička realnost jugoslavenstva (1918–1991): s posebnim osvrtom na Bosnu i Hercegovinu* (Sarajevo – Zagreb: Svijetlo riječi, 2004), pp. 271–287; I. LOVRENOVIĆ, *Unutarinja zemlja*, pp. 253–268; Ivan LOVRENOVIĆ – Miljenko JERGOVIĆ, *Bosna i Hercegovina – budućnost nezavršenog rata* (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2010), pp. 75, 87–88, 94–96, 103.

5 “Danas se u Bosni ne zna ili neće da zna, što je Bosna i Hercegovina bila do Mikulićeve generacije – najobičnija kolonija, više kolonija nego što je bila pod Austro-Ugarskom, kolonija u svakom smislu, političkom, energetsko-industrijskom, prometnom, socijalnom, obrazovnom, kulturnom. Ono što su ovi novi političari sa cijelom svojom garniturom uspjeli za vrlo kratko vrijeme promijeniti, nije pretjerano nazvati kopernikanskim obratom u modernoj povijesti ove zemlje.” [“Today in Bosnia, it is not known or doesn’t want to be known, what Bosnia and Hercegovina was before Mikulić’s generation – a colony of the most ordinary type, more of a colony than it was under Austria-Hungary, a colony in every sense, political, energetic-industrial, transportational, social, educational, cultural. What these new politicians and their entire set managed to change in a very short time, it is not an exaggeration to call it a Copernican turn in the modern history of this country.”] Ibidem, p. 87.

6 On the peripheral status of the postwar BiH dominated by Serbian communist cadres and the Belgrade-centered policies of the time see M. A. HOARE, *The History*, pp. 324–328; Šaćir FILANDRA, *Bošnjačka politika u XX. stoljeću* (Sarajevo: Sejtarija, 1998), pp. 229–234; Ivo ŽANIĆ, *Hrvatski na uvjetnoj slobodi: jezik, identitet i politika između Jugoslavije i Europe* (Zagreb: Fakultet političkih znanosti, 2007), pp. 49–73.

It was in this period when Muslims were officially recognized as the sixth distinct nation<sup>7</sup> of Yugoslavia and a specific variant of Serbo-Croatian was introduced as the language standard for BiH (*bosanskohercegovački standardnojezički izraz*).<sup>8</sup> Roughly at the same time, the foundations of many key educational, scientific, and cultural institutions and enterprises were laid in the federation's central republic. As early as 1964, a highly meritorious series "Kulturno nasljeđe Bosne i Hercegovine" [The Cultural Heritage of BiH] was inaugurated as a joint publishing project of the prominent Sarajevo publishers Svjetlost and Veselin Masleša.<sup>9</sup> Major centers of philological research were founded in the republic's capital in the form of the inconspicuously named Institute for Literature (Institut za književnost, est. 1966) and Institute for Language (Institut za jezik, est. 1972).<sup>10</sup> There were also hundreds of schools and public libraries established between 1966 and 1974 on the territory of BiH,<sup>11</sup> as well as new universities in Banja Luka (1975), Tuzla (1976), and Mostar (1977).<sup>12</sup> Last but not least, from the Bosnian-Herzegovinian perspective, not only was 1966 the year when internal strife in the League of Communists of Yugoslavia culminated in the fall of the powerful SFRY's vice president and minister of interior Aleksandar Ranković (1909–1983) and the victory of proponents of decentralization, but it was also the year when the Scientific Society of BiH

7 S. M. DŽAJA, *Politička realnost*, pp. 258–271; Š. FILANDRA, *Bošnjačka politika*, pp. 234–325; Husnija KAMBEROVIĆ, ed., *Rasprave o nacionalnom identitetu Bošnjaka* (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2009).

8 Josip BAOTIĆ, "Književnojezička politika 1970–1990 – borba za zajedništvo i ravnopravnost," in *Jezik u Bosni i Hercegovini*, ed. Svein MØNNESLAND (Sarajevo: Institut za jezik u Sarajevu – Oslo: Institut za istočnoevropske i orijentalne studije, 2005), pp. 435–477; Krešimir MIĆANOVIĆ – Luka PRKAČIN, "Od Deklaracije i Predloga do Simpozijuma. O književnom jeziku i politici u Bosni i Hercegovini (1967–1970)," *Fluminensia* 35, 2 (2023), pp. 507–522; Krešimir MIĆANOVIĆ, "Hrvatski jezikoslovci i bosanskohercegovački standardnojezički izraz," in *Periferno u hrvatskoj književnosti i kulturi / Peryferie w chorwackiej literaturze i kulturze*, eds. Krešimir BAGIĆ – Miranda LEVANAT-PERIČIĆ – Leszek MAŁCZAK (Katowice: Wydawnictwo UŚ, 2021), pp. 457–481.

9 See Jozo DŽAMBO, *Kulturno nasljeđe Bosne i Hercegovine 1964–1991. Bibliografija*, <https://ivanlovenovic.com/clanci/bosna-argentina/kulturno-nasljede-bosne-i-hercegovine-1964-1991-bibliografija> (accessed 17 February 2024).

10 On the intertwined history of the two institutions see their web pages: Institut za književnost i kulturološke studije, <https://www.ff.unsa.ba/index.php/en/about-the-institute-for-literature-and-cultural-studies>; Institut za jezik, <http://izj.unsa.ba/en/about-us/history/> (both accessed 18 February 2024).

11 I. LOVRENOVIĆ, *Unutarnja zemlja*, p. 257.

12 *Socijalistička republika Bosna i Hercegovina. Separat iz II izdanja Enciklopedije Jugoslavije* (Zagreb: Jugoslavenski leksikografski zavod, 1983), pp. 234–235. Up to then, the only university in BiH was the one in Sarajevo, founded in 1949. Ibidem.

(Naučno društvo Bosne i Hercegovine, est. 1951) was upgraded to the Academy of Sciences and Arts of BiH (Akademija nauka i umjetnosti Bosne i Hercegovine).<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, the golden era of what would soon come to be called Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature (*bosanskohercegovačka književnost*) had just begun.<sup>14</sup> Namely, in 1966, the novelist Meša Selimović (1910–1982) published his *Derviš i smrt* [Death and the Dervish], often characterized as one of the greatest Yugoslav novels of all time, and the poet Mak Dizdar (1917–1971) released what would become the most revered collection of Bosnian-Herzegovinian poetry, *Kameni spavač* [Stone Sleeper]. Several other extraordinary works of literature followed in the coming years by authors such as Nedžad Ibrišimović (1940–2011), Anđelko Vuletić (1933–2021), Derviš Sušić (1925–1990), Vitomir Lukić (1929–1991), and Skender Kulenović (1910–1978). By 1970, when Branko Ćopić (1915–1984), another writer from Bosnia and an acclaimed Yugoslav author at the time, published his finest collection of stories, *Bašta sljezove boje* [A Garden the Color of Mallow], we can talk about a well-established literary center in BiH, whose all-Yugoslav and also international relevance could already be measured not only by the exceptional opus from the only Yugoslav Nobel-prize winner for literature, Ivo Andrić (1892–1975), but also by the outstanding aesthetic qualities of recent books by a set of contemporary authors.<sup>15</sup>

When we put together this literary boom with the aforesaid political support for the affirmation of BiH's individuality within Yugoslavia, then it comes as no surprise that this turn instigated new ways of looking at literary production coming from the central republic of the federation. Thus, when the second volume of the second edition of *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije* [Encyclopedia of Yugoslavia] was published in 1982, unlike the encyclopedia's first edition,<sup>16</sup> it contained an overview of the history of literature on the territory of BiH, in which the users read that "post-war Bosnian-Herzegovinian writers are [...] increasingly tying their life destiny to BiH", and that "[a]s part of all these new circumstances, a new definition of

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13 S. DŽAJA, *Politička realnost*, p. 280.

14 I. LOVRENOVIĆ, *Unutarnja zemlja*, pp. 264–265.

15 Ibidem, p. 264; see also *Socijalistička republika*, p. 262.

16 Miroslav Krleža (1893–1981), as the editor-in-chief of the first edition (1955–1971), accepted with a certain amount of self-denial the proposal of the secretary of the editorial board for BiH, Ilija Kecmanović (1902–1975), to remove the entry on literature in BiH after 1878, authored by M. Selimović. See Krleža's account of the matter: "Iz Krležine ostavštine. Marginalije. Enciklopedija Jugoslavije. Izbor," *Kolo* 1 (2007), <https://www.matica.hr/kolo/308/iz-krlezine-ostavstine-marginalije-enciklopedija-jugoslavije-izbor-20508> (accessed 25 February 2024).

the term Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature makes its way into the consciousness, which is also theoretically formulated as a phenomenon whose totality is determined by real aesthetic and literary-historical arguments without denying its national-literary compositeness.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the entry claimed that “in principle, there are no more traditionally inherited dilemmas about determining the affiliation of Bosnian-Herzegovinian writers to national literatures.”<sup>18</sup>

Notwithstanding certain idealistic simplification contained in the latter statement, the fact is that since the end of the 1960s and throughout the remaining two decades of the existence of SFRY, a new transnational concept of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature was elaborated by domestic literary scholars, essayists, and editors. Midhat Begić (1911–1983), Risto Trifković (1924–1992), Radovan Vučković (1935–2016), Vojislav Maksimović (\*1943), Muhsin Rizvić (1930–1994), I. Lovrenović, Enes Duraković (1947–2024), Slobodan Blagojević (\*1951), Stevan Tontić (1946–2022), and others produced a considerable number of valuable conceptual essays,<sup>19</sup> anthologies, and even entire series of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature (or “literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina” /*književnost Bosne i Hercegovine*/ as some of them insisted on calling it).<sup>20</sup> However, they had failed to write a comprehensive synthesis of its history, which would be an essential step in codifying its canon encompassing all domestic literary traditions as well as contemporary writings by all authors from BiH, regardless of their ethnic origins or self-identifications.

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17 *Socijalistička republika*, p. 261.

18 In the original, the entire quoted passage, from the pen of I. Lovrenović, reads as follows: “Međutim, poratni bosanskohercegovački književnici sve više vezuju i svoju životnu sudbinu za BiH. U sklopu svih ovih novih okolnosti probija se u svijesti, pa biva i teorijski formulirano, novo definiranje pojma bosanskohercegovačke književnosti, kao fenomena čija se cjelovitost utvrđuje realnim estetskim i književnohistorijskim argumentima, a da se pri tome ne negira njegova nacionalno-književna kompozitnost. Tako u načelu više nema tradicionalno naslijeđenih dilema oko određivanja pripadnosti bosanskohercegovačkih pisaca nacionalnim literaturama.” (Ibidem).

19 See the most representative, although not exhaustive, anthology of major conceptual texts on Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature published up to the early 1980s: Ivan LOVRENOVIĆ – Vojislav MAKSIMOVIĆ – Kasim PROHIĆ, eds., *Savremena književnost naroda i narodnosti BiH u književnoj kritici* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1984–1985).

20 See the most extensive work to date on the interconnected processes of affirmation of Bosnian-Herzegovinian and Muslim (Bosniak) literature, as well as on the history of scholarly interest in the literature of BiH: Sanjin KODRIĆ, *Bošnjačka i bosanskohercegovačka književnost (Književno-teorijski i književnohistorijski aspekti određenja književne prakse u Bosni i Hercegovini)* (Sarajevo: Dobra knjiga, 2018).

What were the principles of conceptualization and major achievements of affirmation of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature in the period of socialist Yugoslavia? What kind of polemics and controversies regularly accompanied the activities of originators and proponents of the concept? First of all, it should be noted that prior to changes initiated at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, the literary heritage as well as contemporary production of BiH was predominantly divided between Serbian and Croatian national literatures.<sup>21</sup> Within their canons, as within the supranational concept of Yugoslav literature as well,<sup>22</sup> the literature of BiH was generally treated as a regional, subsidiary, or even provincial and at times overlooked component.<sup>23</sup> The prevailing perception of literature written by Bosnian Muslims varied from condescending dismissal to outright rejection, while its authors were expected to declare themselves either Serbs, Croats, or Yugoslavs.<sup>24</sup> This meant that with the affirmation of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature there was a parallel and essentially inseparable process of seeking recognition of Muslim literature.<sup>25</sup> However, the latter began to be truly regarded as a distinct entity only after the dissolution of the SFRY, when it was conceived as Bosniak national literature.<sup>26</sup>

It is generally considered that the Yugoslav debate on the new literature coming from BiH gained momentum at the “Simpozijum o savremenoj književnosti Bosne i Hercegovine” [Symposium on contemporary literature of BiH] organized

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21 Thus, when the first collection of prose by authors from BiH was published in the SFRY in 1950, one of its editors, Salko Nazečić (1904–1970), stated in the preface: “Potrebno je i moguće ovdje govoriti samo o književnicima, jer književnost Bosne i Hercegovine sa nekim svojim specifičnim osobinama posebne književnosti ne postoji.” [“It is necessary and possible to talk here only about writers, because the literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina with some specific features of a distinct literature does not exist.”] Salko NAZEČIĆ, “Predgovor,” in *Zbornik savremene bosansko-hercegovačke proze*, eds. Ilija KEČMANOVIĆ – Marko MARKOVIĆ – Salko NAZEČIĆ (Sarajevo: Svetlost 1950), p. 8.

22 See on the concept of Yugoslav literature: Adrijana MARČETIĆ – Bojana STOJANOVIĆ PAMTOVIĆ – Vladimir ZORIĆ – Dunja DUŠANIĆ, eds., *Jugoslovenska književnost: prošlost, sadašnjost i budućnost jednog spornog pojma / Yugoslav Literature: The Past, Present and Future of a Contested Notion* (Beograd: Čigolja štampa, 2019).

23 See S. KODRIĆ, *Bošnjačka i bosanskohercegovačka književnost*, 9–53; Ibidem, “Nevolje s kanonom: Slučaj bosanskohercegovačke i/ili bošnjačke književnosti (Književnohistorijska retrospekcija)” in *Południowosłowiańskie sąsiedztwo: Slawistyka i komparatystyka dzisiaj*, eds. Bogdan ZIELIŃSKI – Ewa SZPERLIK (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2012), pp. 99–121.

24 Š. FILANDRA, *Bošnjačka politika*, pp. 257–284.

25 See S. KODRIĆ, *Bošnjačka i bosanskohercegovačka književnost*.

26 See Enes DURAKOVIĆ, *Obzori bošnjačke književnosti* (Sarajevo: Dobra knjiga 2012); Ibidem., *Bošnjačke i bosanske književne neminovnosti* (Zenica: Vrijeme 2003).

by Svjetlost publishing house in Sarajevo in November 1970.<sup>27</sup> The keynote speaker of the event, M. Begić, a fundamental figure in the affirmation of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature,<sup>28</sup> argued in his paper “Književna kretanja u Bosni i Hercegovini od 1945. do danas” [Literary movements in BiH from 1945 until today] that the literature of BiH is not only a territorially defined corpus of texts, but also a distinct literary system with a certain degree of internal coherence and specific qualities.<sup>29</sup> Such an outlook was a continuation of the earlier reflections of R. Trifković, who had already stated in 1968 that “[t]he existence of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature has to be accepted as a fact that we can speak out against or have to get used to”.<sup>30</sup> Begić also developed an idea put forth not long before by R. Vučković that Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature should be understood as a dynamic notion

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27 See *Simpozijum o savremenoj književnosti Bosne i Hercegovine* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1971). However, the first contemporary controversy concerning the literature of BiH was sparked in 1967 with an article by Muhamed Filipović (1929–2020), in which the philosopher argued that there is a specific Bosnian spirit contained in the poetry of M. Dizdar and the novels of D. Sušić and M. Selimović. (Cf. M. FILIPOVIĆ, “Bosanski duh u književnosti – šta je to: Pokušaj istraživanja povodom zbirke poezije Maka Dizdara *Kameni spavač*,” *Život* 16, 3, 1967, pp. 3–18). Filipović singled out the three authors of Muslim background as bearers of the Bosnian spirit, while expressing reservations about what he saw as the harmful introduction of a national perspective into domestic literature by many Serbian and Croatian writers, including I. Andrić. Although he positioned himself as an opponent of romantic nationalism, his reflections are firmly rooted in the Herderian concept of *Volksgeist* and the associated notion of national literature as an emanation of the specific spirit of a given nation. Filipović’s contribution to the affirmation of Bosnian literature (as he called it) was thus characterized by a tendency towards essentialism, as well as a certain ambiguity and sometimes contradictory argumentation. See the critical assessments of Filipović’s approach by proponents of the transnational conceptualization of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature: *Savremena književnost*, pp. 19 (R. Trifković), 469–471 (J. Martinović).

28 On Begić’s contribution to the process see Juraj MARTINOVIĆ, “Kontroverze i kontinuiteti u Begićevim shvaćanjima bosanskohercegovačke i muslimanske književnosti,” *Novi izraz: časopis za književnu i umjetničku kritiku* 3, 2 (2000), pp. 38–54; Enver KAZAZ, *Midhat Begić – transformacija poetske kritike i zasnivanje bosnistike i bošnjakistike*, <https://ivanlovenovic.com/clanci/varia/enver-kazaz-midhat-begic-transformacija-poetske-kritike-i-zasnivanje-bosnistike-i-bosnjakistike> (accessed 24 February 2024); Ivan LOVRENOVIĆ, “Midhat Begić i književnost Bosne i Hercegovine danas,” *Posebna izdanja Akademije nauka i umjetnosti BiH* 42 (2012), pp. 85–87. For Begić’s texts on Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature see Midhat BEGIĆ, *Raskršća IV: bosanskohercegovačke književne teme* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša – Svjetlost, 1987).

29 M. BEGIĆ, “Uz književna kretanja u Bosni i Hercegovini poslije oslobođenja,” in *Raskršća IV*, pp. 7–59.

30 “Postojanje bosansko-hercegovačke literature valja prihvatiti kao činjenicu protiv koje možemo ustajati ili sa kojom se moramo saživljavati.” Risto TRIFKOVIĆ, “Pred licem i fenomenom bosansko-hercegovačke literature – biti ili ne,” in *Savremena književnost*, p. 8.



that is not incongruent with the existing literary classifications and its content is open to discussion.<sup>31</sup> In line with these principles, Begić defined it as an idiosyncratic system, an integral part of Yugoslav literature and a complementary category to Croatian and Serbian literatures.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, he asserted that “it is also justifiable to talk about Muslim (but also Jewish) writers in Bosnia and Herzegovina and their literature”, and that “[s]uch a dynamic understanding can also be applied to writers living outside the republic, with all the reservations stemming from their belonging to Croatian or Serbian literature.”<sup>33</sup>

Despite its conciliatory tone, Begić’s paper caused a stir and sparked a heated debate, which unfolded during the symposium and subsequently on the pages of the Sarajevo cultural revue *Odjek*.<sup>34</sup> In his later reflection on the controversy, literary historian Juraj Martinović (1936–2021) aptly noted that “some participants in the polemic were mostly bothered by Begić’s commitment to the affirmation of Muslim literature, while for some the very idea of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature was hard to accept.”<sup>35</sup> In any case, the idea was “subjected to criticism both from those intellectual circles that advocated full autonomy of the individual national literatures as well as those who saw the establishment and affirmation of such a literary structure as a danger to the idea of Yugoslavism and the integration processes that were extremely strong after the liberation.”<sup>36</sup>

Although Begić and other like-minded intellectuals repeatedly emphasized that Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature was deeply imbedded in the wider context of Yugoslav literature and was also closely interwoven with Serbian and Croatian

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31 Radovan VUČKOVIĆ, “Problem pristupa bosanskohercegovačkoj književnosti,” in *Savremena književnost*, p. 31. The text was published in 1970, the same year Begić presented his paper.

32 M. BEGIĆ, “Uz književna kretanja...,” p. 58.

33 “[O]pravdano je govoriti i o muslimanskim (pa i jevrejskim) piscima u Bosni i Hercegovini i o njihovoj književnosti. To dinamičko shvatanje može se primijeniti i na pisce koji žive van Republike, sa svima ogradama koje proizlaze iz njihove pripadnosti hrvatskoj ili srpskoj književnosti.” Ibidem, pp. 57–58.

34 Š. FILANDRA, *Bošnjačka politika*, pp. 259–266; S. KODRIĆ, *Bošnjačka i bosanskohercegovačka književnost*, pp. 224–226.

35 “[N]ekim učesnicima u polemici ponajviše smetalo Begićevo zalaganje na afirmaciji muslimanske književnosti, dok je nekima bila teško prihvatljiva i sama zamisao bosanskohercegovačke literature.” J. MARTINOVIĆ, “Kontroverze...,” p. 40.

36 “Otuda je zamisao bosanskohercegovačke književnosti bila izložena kritici kako onih intelektualnih krugova koji su zagovarali punu autonomnost pojedinih nacionalnih literatura, tako i onih koji su u uspostavljanju i afirmaciji jedne takve literarne strukture vidjeli opasnost za ideju jugoslavenstva i poslije oslobođenja izrazito snažne integracione procese,” Ibidem, p. 45.

literatures,<sup>37</sup> all their efforts regularly faced significant resistance, particularly from within the academic community. Some opponents held that there was no such thing as a distinctive Bosnian literary tradition prior to 1945<sup>38</sup> and that the current state-of-affairs could at most be described in multiple plurals as the “literature of the peoples and nationalities of Bosnia and Hercegovina” (*književnost naroda i narodnosti Bosne i Hercegovine*).<sup>39</sup> Others openly dismissed the activities of advocates of the integrity of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature as the nationalist and/or revisionist appropriation of Serbian and Croatian authors, the denial of the right to national affiliation, or – with reference to the Austro-Hungarian semicolonial administration of Bosnia and Hercegovina – as *kalajevština* or *bošnjaštvo*.<sup>40</sup> This despite the fact that the proponents of the transnational concept of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature defined it as a polycentric system with a composite or mosaic structure, which is in complementary relation to other literatures of Yugoslavia. According to them, the concept as such does not question the uniqueness or undermine the integrity of Serbian and Croatian literature, with which, however, it shares a large number of authors who thus simultaneously belong to two or more literary systems.<sup>41</sup>

In this context, it is worth noting that as early as 1984 I. Lovrenović in his text *Stare i nove vertikale* [Old and new verticals] used the term “dual affiliation” (*dvojna pripadnost*) of authors and spoke of a domestic as well as a global “crisis of the exclusively national concept of literature” stemming from its inherently political, rather than aesthetic, nature.<sup>42</sup> On the same grounds, he advocated the use of

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37 Cf. *Savremena književnost*, pp. 11, 14, 20 (R. Trifković), pp. 21–22 (M. Rizvić), pp. 28, 30–31 (R. Vučković), pp. 48–49 (V. Maksimović), 115 (M. Begić).

38 Begić himself tended to associate the notion of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature primarily with the post-war period and clearly admitted that before the “socialist revolution” there were several separate literary traditions in BiH with a relatively limited degree of mutual convergence. See his contribution to the polemic in *Odjek* magazine from 1971: M. BEGIĆ, “Pismo „Odjeku,” in *Raskršća IV*, pp. 61–62.

39 Š. FILANDRA, *Bošnjačka politika*, pp. 259–261, 284–291.

40 Ibidem, pp. 260–261. During his tenure as an administrator of the occupied BiH (1882–1903), Benjamin von Kállay (1839–1903) promoted the concept of integral Bosnian identity (*bošnjaštvo*) to counter the Serbian and Croatian national ideas that were gaining ground at the time. Some of the advocates of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature themselves vehemently refuted any connection between the concept and Kállay’s ideology. Cf. *Savremena književnost*, pp. 10, 19 (R. Trifković), p. 37 (I. Lovrenović).

41 Cf. *Savremena književnost*, p. 11 (R. Trifković), p. 40 (I. Lovrenović); M. BEGIĆ, *Raskršća IV*, pp. 58, 62.

42 Ivan LOVRENOVIĆ, “Stare osnove i nove vertikale,” in *Savremena književnost*, pp. 35–41.

a singular designation “Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature” (*bosanskohercegovačka književnost*) instead of the term “literature of the peoples and nationalities of BiH” (*književnost naroda i narodnosti BiH*), which he considered politically benevolent but scientifically unsubstantiated, terminologically imprecise, and operationally awkward. According to Lovrenović, the latter term “too literally follows the national conception of literature, and this then brings it into a certain disagreement (not only of a terminological nature!) with the historical development of Bosnian-Herzegovinian culture”.<sup>43</sup> Namely, in the same text, Lovrenović asserted that “[f]or recognition of the cultural identity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is of crucial importance to appreciate its *composite integrity*,”<sup>44</sup> which he regarded to be the defining principle of the historical development of Bosnian-Herzegovinian culture and literature within its frames. In other words, following Begić’s ideas,<sup>45</sup> Lovrenović advocated respecting not only the internal complexity of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature, but also its dynamic integrity, i.e. the historically changing degree of its internal coherence (“*neither has the spirit of integrativeness been completely erased in centuries of seemingly complete isolation, nor has compositeness been suppressed in modern times on the basis of ever stronger integrativeness*”).<sup>46</sup>

What landmark enterprises could be singled out in the process of affirmation of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature between the polemic incited by Begić’s paper presented in 1970 and the publication of Lovrenović’s essay in 1984? Another important milestone that deserves special attention is undoubtedly the conference “Književnost Bosne i Hercegovine u svjetlu dosadašnjih istraživanja” (Literature of BiH in the light of the present research),<sup>47</sup> which was held in Sara-

43 “Ovaj naziv [...] isuviše doslovno slijedi nacionalnu koncepciju književnosti, a to ga, onda, dovodi u određeno nesuglasje (ne samo terminološke naravi!) sa povijesnim razvitkom bosanskohercegovačke kulture.” Ibidem, p. 38.

44 “Za prepoznavanje kulturnoga identiteta Bosne i Hercegovine od presudne je važnosti uvažavanje njegove *kompozitne integralnosti*.” Ibidem, p. 36. Italicized by I. Lovrenović.

45 In his later text on Begić’s contribution to the affirmation of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature, Lovrenović appreciated that he “reconciled its integrity (‘dynamic’, as he used to say) with its national particularities, so that integrity does not nullify particularities, while particularities do not curtail integrity.” In the original: “pomirio njezinu cjelovitost (‘dinamičku’, kako je to govorio) i njezine nacionalne partikularnosti, tako da cjelovitost ne poništava zasebnosti, a zasebnosti ne okrnjuju cjelovitost”. I. LOVRENOVIĆ, “Midhat Begić...”, p. 87.

46 “[N]iti je u stoljećima prividno pune izolacije bio posve izbrisani duh integrativnosti, niti se u moderno doba, na fonu sve snažnije izražene integrativnosti, potire kompozitnost.” I. LOVRENOVIĆ, “Stare osnove...”, p. 36. Italicized by I. Lovrenović.

47 *Književnost Bosne i Hercegovine u svjetlu dosadašnjih istraživanja: naučni skup* (Sarajevo: ANU-BiH, 1977).

jevo under the auspices of the Academy of Sciences of BiH in May 1976. It was initiated by M. Begić with the aim of stimulating research on Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature and announcing the commencement of work on the synthesis of its history.<sup>48</sup> Despite initial support, the Academy later withdrew from the project after it was challenged by some of its distinguished members at the beginning of the 1980s.<sup>49</sup> As a result, it eventually met a similar fate as an analogous undertaking to write a “History of the peoples of BiH”, which also never saw completion.<sup>50</sup> It should be noted that in both cases it was a questioning of the legitimacy of treating BiH as a distinctive and integral entity that lay at the heart of the opponents’ argumentation.

Nevertheless, Begić’s 1976 initiative was not for nothing after all. At the very end of the Yugoslav period of the history of BiH, in 1991 and 1992, it resulted in the publication of 25 volumes of *Prilozi za istoriju književnosti Bosne i Hercegovine* [Contributions to the History of the Literature of BiH], the largest published corpus of scholarly texts on Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature to date.<sup>51</sup> The series, which was a joint project of the Institute for Literature and the Svjetlost publishing house, contains books by leading literary scholars of the time, covering various segments of the history of literature of BiH from the Middle Ages to the present.

In 1977, Svjetlost also launched a project called *Poslijeratna književnost naroda i narodnosti Bosne i Hercegovine* (The Post-War Literature of the Peoples and Nationalities of BiH), the aim of which was to supplement the previously mentioned series *Kulturno nasljeđe Bosne i Hercegovine* [The Cultural Heritage of BiH] with an edition of works of contemporary literature. It came to fruition in 1984 and 1985 only after much controversy under the title *Savremena književnost naroda i narodnosti BiH u 50 knjiga* [Contemporary Literature of the Peoples and Nationalities of BiH in 50 Books].<sup>52</sup> To this day, however, it remains the largest publishing venture in the field of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature. It is worth noting that the simple designation “the literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina”, which had been commonly used from the late 1960s until 1976, was replaced with “the literature of the peoples and nationalities of BiH” in the name of the series. The relatively frequent employment of this inelegant and politically laden term from the last third of the 1970s and throughout most of the 1980s can be interpreted as

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48 S. KODRIĆ, *Bošnjačka i bosanskohercegovačka književnost*, p. 360.

49 Š. FILANDRA, *Bošnjačka politika*, pp. 280–281.

50 Ibidem; M. A. HOARE, *The History*, pp. 336–337.

51 S. KODRIĆ, *Bošnjačka i bosanskohercegovačka književnost*, p. 361.

52 Ibidem, pp. 350–351; Š. FILANDRA, *Bošnjačka politika*, pp. 281–282.

a kind of concession to the opponents of the integrity of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature, or as a consequence of the questioning of legitimacy of the concept itself in regular controversies that were an inseparable part of each step in the process of its affirmation.

An illustrative example is the circumstances surrounding the introduction of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature into the curriculum of the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo.<sup>53</sup> Despite opposition from several staff members of the Department of the History of Yugoslav Literatures (Odsjek za istoriju jugoslovenskih književnosti), beginning in the 1979/1980 academic year students were offered a new course called “Književnost naroda i narodnosti Bosne i Hercegovine” (The Literature of the Peoples and Nationalities of BiH).<sup>54</sup> At the same time, the name of the department itself was changed to the Department of the History of the Literatures of the Peoples and Nationalities of Yugoslavia (Odsjek za istoriju književnosti naroda i narodnosti Jugoslavije).<sup>55</sup> The contested introduction of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature as a specific course of study was thus accompanied by the incorporation of the “politically correct” language of Yugoslav socialism in the name of the course and that of the institution that provided it.

Even more escalated controversy followed after the the aforesaid inclusion of an overview of the entire historical development of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature to the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Yugoslavia* in 1982.<sup>56</sup> Namely, the authors of the respective entry, I. Lovrenović, M. Rizvić, and E. Duraković, were subjected to an indiscriminate campaign,<sup>57</sup> in which they were implicitly labelled as “bearers of militant Islam” and “militant Christianity” and blatantly accused of “advocating an ethnically pure Bosnia and Herzegovina”.<sup>58</sup> Although these accusations made by the poet and literary critic Husein Tahmišić (1931–1999) were completely unfounded, their seriousness in the context of socialist Yugoslavia can hardly be underestimated. In their exacerbated form, they show once again that the activities of the proponents of the concept of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature had consistently encountered various forms of resistance.

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53 Ibidem, pp. 284–289.

54 Odsjek za književnosti naroda Bosne i Hercegovine: <https://www.ff.unsa.ba/index.php/bs/odsjeku-za-knjizevnosti-naroda-bosne-i-hercegovine> (accessed 18 February 2024).

55 Ibidem.

56 *Socijalistička republika*, pp. 249–263.

57 Š. FILANDRA, *Bošnjačka politika*, pp. 291–296.

58 “Oni zagovaraju etnički čistu Bosnu i Hercegovinu. [...] Mi imamo ne samo nosioce borbenog islama već i borbenog hrišćanstva.” Quoted according to ibidem, p. 291.

Nevertheless, by the time BiH declared independence from SFRY, substantial results had been achieved. Between 1970 and 1992, domestic writers and their works were included in the curriculum at all levels of education in BiH.<sup>59</sup> An overall history of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature from the Middle Ages to the present was first outlined in the previously mentioned encyclopedic entry (1982) and later elaborated in the individual volumes of the series *Prilozi za istoriju književnosti Bosne i Hercegovine* (1991–1992). Selected works from the entire corpus of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature had been systematically published in specialized series *Kulturno nasljeđe Bosne i Hercegovine* (1964–1992) and *Savremena književnost naroda i narodnosti BiH u 50 knjiga* (1984–1985). Several anthologies were also compiled in the period, whose conceptual grounds clearly reflect not only the naturally differing approaches of their editors but also the development in the prevailing approach to literature of BiH at various stages of its affirmation.

In this context, I would particularly single out the three-volume *Bosanskohercegovačka književna hrestomatija* [Bosnian-Herzegovinian Literary Chrestomathy], published between 1971 and 1974,<sup>60</sup> which was the first comprehensive attempt to present Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature in its entirety, and two anthologies of poetry of the twentieth century, which aptly illustrate the profound change in the social and political climate that occurred between their publication in 1981 and 1990.<sup>61</sup> At the beginning of the 1980s, the editor of the first of them, S. Blagojević, argued in the preface: “I think that this literature can and must be understood as a coherent whole and treated separately in a distinct anthology”.<sup>62</sup> In accordance with this principle, his *Antologija bosanskohercegovačke poezije dvadesetog stoljeća* [Anthology of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Poetry of the Twentieth Century] approaches its subject as an integral entity and as such outlines its possible canon. At the same time, it is the first ever collection to include, under the singular designation “Bosnian-Herzegovinian poetry”, also the works of poets from the first half of the twentieth century, which until then had been dominantly re-

59 S. KODRIĆ, *Bošnjačka i bosanskohercegovačka književnost*, pp. 239–240.

60 *Bosanskohercegovačka književna hrestomatija*, I–III (Sarajevo: Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika, 1971–1974).

61 Slobodan BLAGOJEVIĆ, ed., “Antologija bosanskohercegovačke poezije dvadesetog stoljeća,” *Lica* 10, 3–4 (1981); Stevan TONTIĆ, ed., *Novije pjesništvo Bosne i Hercegovine* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1990).

62 “[M]islím, da se ta literatura može i mora shvaćati kao jedna koherentna cjelina i posebno razmatrati unutar jedne zasebne antologije.” S. BLAGOJEVIĆ, “Predgovor,” *Lica*, p. 9.

garded as a period of several separate literary traditions coexisting on the territory of BiH.

Even though S. Tontić also conceived his anthology *Novije pjesništvo Bosne i Hercegovine* [Newer Poetry of BiH], which was published nine years later, as a panorama of Bosnian-Herzegovinian poets of the entire twentieth century, he classified them into parallel, nationally defined traditions (Croatian, Serbian, Muslim, and Jewish). This was in line with the “[m]etaphor of interconnected circles/rings of national poetic streams, linked by one country and one language”,<sup>63</sup> which Tontić identified as his inspirational starting point. At the same time, he explicitly “wrote off” the concept of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature as outdated and unnecessary in the upcoming democratic conditions, while he described it as compromised by its alleged political promotion under the previous regime, when, in his view, it undermined the integrity of Serbian and Croatian literatures and hindered the recognition of Muslim national literature.<sup>64</sup> Although Tontić did not question the cultural specificity and integrity of BiH (“A multilayered and multifaceted country, but one nonetheless.”),<sup>65</sup> the conception of the last anthology of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature published during the SFRY, which he compiled, foreshadowed a future development marked by growing centrifugal tendencies and prevalent ethnocentrism.

Before we move on to the post-Yugoslav period, I consider it necessary to define Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature with regard to how it was conceived by the aforesaid pioneering advocates of its distinctiveness. It might be useful to first assert what it is not; it is not a sort of regional variant of Serbian or Croatian literature, a simple amalgamation of several national literatures, or a national literature analogous to Serbian or Croatian literature. Its broadest definition would be that it is a corpus of texts written on the present-day and historical territory of BiH or by authors from BiH active beyond its borders. It is a literature written in various forms of Serbo-Croatian (today: Bosnian, Serbian, Croatian, Montenegrin), historically also in Church Slavonic, Old Bosnian vernacular, Latin, oriental languages (Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish), Ladino (Judeo-Spanish), or Hebrew as well as in the languages of minorities, and recently in other world / European languages used by its transnational authors (most often English and German).

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63 “Metafora povezanih krugova/prstenova nacionalnih pjesničkih tokova, povezanih jednom zemljom i jednim jezikom, ta metafora bila je za mene inspirativno ishodište ove antologije [...]”. S. TONTIĆ, “Predgovor,” in *Novije pjesništvo*, p. 10.

64 Ibidem, pp. 10–13.

65 “Zemlja višeslojna i mnogolika, a ipak jedna.” Ibidem, p. 10.

It is also a supranational literature that integrates Bosniak (formerly Muslim) national literature (including Sandžak and diaspora) with the Bosnian-Herzegovinian segment of Serbian and Croatian national literatures as well as the literatures of minorities living in BiH (most notably Sephardi Jews, but also Roma and other minority communities). Hence, its characteristic feature is the dual or multiple affiliation of authors to two or more national / supranational / transnational literatures.<sup>66</sup> At the same time, it is a fitting category for accommodating authors who do not belong to Serbian, Croatian, or Bosniak literatures,<sup>67</sup> and it provides a suitable frame of reference for reappraising the relevance of authors or works sidelined within the canons of other literatures.<sup>68</sup>

I would also describe it as a transnational literature characterized by its transgression of the borders of national literatures, inherent external overlaps with other literary systems, unique internal dynamics stemming from its compositeness and liminality, pronounced inclination towards syncretism and hybridity, and a number of truly transnational authors.<sup>69</sup> Last but not least, it is an integral yet distinctive and aesthetically highly relevant branch of the (post-)Yugoslav and South Slavic literatures as a whole.

What was the fate of the concept of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature after the demise of Yugoslavia and the subsequent war in BiH that caused the deep and persisting fragmentation of its society? What are the forms, limits, and prospects of employing the concept today? There is a certain symbolism contained in the destiny of the mentioned monumental series *Prilozi za istoriju književnosti Bosne i Hercegovine* (1991–1992), the most voluminous body of scholarship on Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature to date and a sort of a substitute for a synthesis of its history, which has yet to be written. Namely, most of the copies were destroyed during

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66 For instance, we could name I. Andrić (Yugoslav, Bosnian-Herzegovinian, Serbian, and Croatian literatures), or contemporary acclaimed writer Semezdin Mehmedinović (\*1960), whose work belongs simultaneously to post-Yugoslav, Bosnian-Herzegovinian and Bosniak literatures.

67 Telling examples include e.g. Isak Samokovlija (1889–1955): Yugoslav, Bosnian-Herzegovinian, Jewish / Sephardic literatures; or Marko Vešović (1945–2023): (post-)Yugoslav, Bosnian-Herzegovinian and Montenegrin literatures.

68 For example, the stories of I. Samokovlija and Novak Simić (1906–1981), or the novel *Ponornica* (Lost River) by S. Kulenović and their status within Yugoslav literature. Another example would be the prose of V. Lukić or poetry of Ilija Ladin (1929–2001) within Croatian literature.

69 On the extraordinary diversity and transnational relevance of contemporary Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature, see: Enver KAZAZ (interview by Ivan MILENKOVIĆ), “Jezički nomadizam i etika prijateljstva,” *Vreme* 14. 8. 2019, <https://vreme.com/kultura/jezicki-nomadizam-i-etika-prijateljstva> (accessed 27 February 2024).



the war or processed by Fabrika duhana Sarajevo [Tobacco Factory Sarajevo] into cigarette paper.<sup>70</sup> Is there actually any need for transnational approaches to domestic literature in the post-war BiH, which the prominent Sarajevo literary scholar Enver Kazaz (\*1962) described as a “[t]ransitional ethnocultural desert”, where “[e]thnonationalism has managed to mentally occupy each of the three ethnic communities [...], and the traumatic transitional present gives birth to a new Bosnian-Herzegovinian reality and creates a new BiH, without any essential links to the various models of realization of [its] multiethnic, multireligious, and intercultural substance in the past”?<sup>71</sup> The old guard of meritorious advocates of the concept in Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature, most notably E. Duraković and I. Lovrenović, initiated the publication of several anthologies of Bosnian-Herzegovinian poetry, stories, and drama;<sup>72</sup> however, the last of them appeared in 2009, and as far as I know, there has been no anthology of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature published since.<sup>73</sup>

In any case, there is an evident discrepancy between the relatively frequent (albeit non-dominant) application of the category “Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature” in domestic literary scholarship and its rather limited employment (or absence) in the public sphere, including the field of education. The transnational notion of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature has experienced something of a renaissance in the works of several literary scholars who followed the example of

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70 For more details on the subject, see: Hanifa KAPIDŽIĆ-OSMANAGIĆ (interview by Enver KAZAZ), “Jesu li biljke nešto drugo...”, *Sarajevske sveske* 8–9 (2005), pp. 31–33.

71 “Etnonacionalizam je uspio izvršiti mentalnu okupaciju svake od tri etničke zajednice u BiH, a traumatični tranzicijski prezent porađa novu bosanskohercegovačku stvarnost i realizira novu BiH, bez bilo kakvih bitnih veza s različitim modelima ostvarivanja bosanskohercegovačke multietničke, multireligijske i interkulturalne sadržine u povijesti.” Enver KAZAZ, “Tranzicijska etnokulturna pustinja,” in *Subverzivne poetike (tranzicija, književnost, kultura, ideologija)* (Zagreb – Sarajevo: Synopsis, 2012), p. 10.

72 Enes DURAKOVIĆ – Mile STOJIC – Marko VEŠOVIĆ, eds., *Antologija bosanskohercegovačke poezije XX vijeka* (Sarajevo: Alef 2000); Enver KAZAZ – Nikola KOVAČ – Ivan LOVRENOVIĆ, eds., *Antologija bosanskohercegovačke pripovijetke XX vijeka* (Sarajevo: Alef, 2000); Gordana MUZAFERIJA – Fahrudin RIZVANBEGOVIĆ – Vojislav VUJANOVIĆ: *Antologija bosanskohercegovačke drame XX vijeka* (Sarajevo: Alef, 2000); Ivan LOVRENOVIĆ – Enver KAZAZ, eds., *Rat i priče iz cijelog svijeta: Antologija nove bosanskohercegovačke pripovijetke* (Zagreb: EPH – Novi Liber, 2009).

73 Marko VEŠOVIĆ, ed., *Da je barem devedeset treća (decenija i po bosanskohercegovačkog pjesništva)* (Sarajevo: Dobra knjiga, 2009). See also on the subject Aras BORIĆ, “Antologijske kanonizacije novijeg bosanskohercegovačkog pjesništva,” *DHS: časopis Filozofskog fakulteta u Tuzli* 19, 2 (2022), pp. 45–62.

Zagreb-based literary comparatist Zvonko Kovač (\* 1951),<sup>74</sup> effectively applying the concepts of interliterary communities and multiple affiliations of writers into their research.<sup>75</sup> E. Kazaz, Šeherezada Džafić (\* 1983), and others have demonstrated that these theoretical concepts, defined in the 1970s and 1980s by Slovak literary comparatist Dionýz Ďurišin (1929–1997)<sup>76</sup> and his collaborators, which included Kovač and Brno-based scholar Ivan Dorovský (1935–2021),<sup>77</sup> are extremely felicitous for describing and analyzing the phenomenon of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature. Today, the term “Bosnian-Herzegovinian interliterary community” (*bosanskohercegovačka interliterarna zajednica*), inspired by Ďurišin, is firmly imbedded in Bosnian-Herzegovinian literary scholarship,<sup>78</sup> where it combines with the aforementioned older conceptualizations of domestic literature as a dynamic system characterized by a constant tension between its compositeness and integrity.

Recently, an innovative rethinking of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature was also carried out by Andrea Lešić-Thomas (\* 1972), who attempted to grasp its specific nature through Itamar Even-Zohar’s concept of literary polysystems,<sup>79</sup> Selma

74 See Zvonko KOVAČ, *Međuknjiževne rasprave: Povedbena i/ili interkulturalna povijest književnosti* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2011); Z. KOVAČ, *Međuknjiževna tumačenja* (Zagreb: Hrvatsko filološko društvo, 2005); Z. KOVAČ, “Interkulturalna povijest bosanske književnosti. Uvodne teze ili terminološka i metodološka razilaženja,” *Kolo: časopis Matice hrvatske* 11, 3 (2001), pp. 23–36, <https://www.matica.hr/kolo/285/interkulturalna-povijest-bosanske-knjizevnosti-19855/> (accessed 23 February 2024).

75 See Enver KAZAZ, *Neprijatelj ili susjed u kući (Interliterarna bosanskohercegovačka zajednica na prelazu milenija)* (2. izdanje, Sarajevo: Rabic, 2009); Šeherezada DŽAFIĆ, *Interkulturalni (kon)tekst bosanskohercegovačke interliterarne zajednice* (Sarajevo: Dobra knjiga, 2015); Vedad SPAHIĆ, “Status bosanskohercegovačke književnosti unutar B/H/S/C interliterarne zajednice danas,” *Bosanski jezik* 13, 2016, pp. 91–106.

76 On Ďurišin’s theoretical legacy see César DOMÍNGUEZ, “Dionýz Ďurišin and a Systemic Theory of World Literature,” in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, eds. Theo D’HAEN – David DAMROSH – Djelal KADIR (London and New York: Routledge 2012), pp. 99–107; Marián GÁLIK, “Interliterariness as a Concept in Comparative Literature,” *CLC-Web: Comparative Literature and Culture* 2, 4 (2000), <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1089&context=clcweb> (accessed 23 February 2024).

77 Kovač and Dorovský are the ones who applied Ďurišin’s concepts on South Slavic literatures. See Ivan DOROVSKÝ, *Studia Balkanica et Slavica II*. (Brno: Tribun EU, 2016); I. DOROVSKÝ, *Slovanské meziliterární sbory a rozdíly* (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2004); I. DOROVSKÝ, *Balkán a Mediterán* (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 1997).

78 S. KODRIĆ, *Bošnjačka i bosanskohercegovačka književnost*, pp. 335–339, 364–383.

79 Andrea LEŠIĆ-THOMAS, “Not Looking at a Coffee Mug: Bosnian-Herzegovinian, Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Literatures as Postcolonial Polycentric Literary Polysystems,” in *Jugoslovenska književnost: prošlost, sadašnjost i budućnost jednog spornog pojma*, pp. 125–138.

Raljević (\* 1977), who applied the terminology and methodology of the American transnational studies on the domestic context and conducted a comparative analysis of Bosnian-Herzegovinian and American literature as two essentially transnational systems,<sup>80</sup> and Nebojša Lujanović (\*1981), who employed Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the literary field as an analytical tool to accommodate Bosnian-Herzegovinian authors who defy the constricting canons of national literatures and reviewed the history of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature to define the centripetal forces and connection points forming its syncretic "backbone", which transcends the individual ethnoreligious / national traditions.<sup>81</sup>

Yet it is the discontinuity and ethnicization that dominate the discursive as well as the cultural landscape of the post-conflict BiH. What I see as a predominant model is the affirmation of three nominally separate national cultures (Bosniak, Serbian, Croatian). Literature is no exception in this regard, despite the aforesaid commendable employment of new theoretical approaches to Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature and the nominal presence of more national components of the literature of BiH in the curricula of literature departments at cities and towns with considerable Bosniak populations. Namely, even in the works of most scholars or in the curricula taught in Sarajevo, Zenica, or Tuzla, the literature of BiH is rarely treated as a coherent system and is instead viewed as a sum of three national literatures, or a supplementary wider framework of Bosniak literature. Very telling in this respect are the results of research conducted by Nenad Veličković (\*1962) on the reading books used in Bosnian-Herzegovinian schools. Based on a thorough analysis, Veličković has convincingly shown that these readers, which vary in different parts of the country or even in individual schools and classes according to ethnic majority, function as "a powerful instrument of indoctrination",<sup>82</sup> while he argued that the literature in them "serves ideology, specifically nationalism, which

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80 Selma RALJEVIĆ, "Otvoreni prostori književnosti nasuprot zatvorenih prostora nacije: (trans) nacionalni (kon)tekst savremene američke i bosanskohercegovačke književnosti," *Folia linguistica et litteraria* 43 (2023), pp. 13–30; Eadem, *Književnost bez granica (Studije o savremenoj književnosti, transnacionalnoj književnoj Americi i transnacionalnoj književnoj Bosni i Hercegovini)* (Sarajevo: Buybook, 2023); Eadem, *Trans/bosanskohercegovački književni izrazi* (Zagreb – Sarajevo: Synopsis, 2020).

81 Nebojša LUJANOVIĆ, *Prostor za otpadnike: od ideologije i identiteta do književnog polja* (Zagreb: Leykam international, 2018); Idem, "Centripetalne sile i točke spajanja u prikazima bosanskohercegovačke književnosti," *Fluminensia* 35, 1 (2023), pp. 247–264.

82 "Književnost se tu otkriva kao moćan instrument indoktrinacije." Nenad VELIČKOVIĆ, *Školokrečina: nacionalizam u bošnjačkim, hrvatskim i srpskim čitankama* (Beograd: Fabrika knjiga, 2012), p. 8.

in Bosnia and Herzegovina has three faces”.<sup>83</sup> The term Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature itself is still contested and often replaced with the plural form: the literatures of BiH. After all, one of the most significant centers of literary scholarship in the country, the literature department at the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo, is called the Department of Literatures of the Peoples of BiH (Odsjek za književnosti naroda BiH).<sup>84</sup> Although Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature is a fairly accepted category in literary studies abroad, it is sometimes wrongly identified or confused with Bosniak literature.<sup>85</sup>

The situation is even less favorable for the future of the concept of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature in parts of BiH with Serb or Croat majorities. It is almost exclusively Serbian or Croatian literature, respectively, that is researched and taught at the universities in Banja Luka and Mostar.<sup>86</sup> Croatian literary scholars in the country concentrate on what they call Croatian literature in BiH; Serbian scholars are even prone to entirely detach domestic Serbian authors from their primary con-

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83 „Rezultati istraživanja pokazali su da književnost služi ideologiji, konkretno nacionalizmu, koji u Bosni i Hercegovini ima tri lica, i u tome učestvuju osim književnika još autori i recenzenti čitanki, autori nastavnih planova i programa, a u jednom drugom smislu i kritičari, stručnjaci odgovorni za definisanje i promovisanje književnih vrijednosti.“ Nenad VELIČKOVIĆ, *Dijagnoza – patriotizam* (Beograd: Fabrika knjiga, 2010), p. 8.

84 Odsjek za književnosti naroda Bosne i Hercegovine: <https://www.ff.unsa.ba/index.php/en/about-department-of-literatures-of-the-peoples-of-bosnia-and-herzegovina> (accessed 18 February 2024). See also a highly polemical account of the Department and a critique of its conception by one of its employees: Nenad VELIČKOVIĆ, *Akademsko šarlatanstvo: nauka o književnosti i univerzitet u tranziciji – etnografski pristup* (Beograd: Fabrika knjiga, 2019).

85 S. KODRIĆ, *Bošnjačka i bosanskohercegovačka književnost*, p. 21. See also E. KAZAZ, *Neprijatelj ili susjed u kući*, pp. 7–29. There had been no academic seat of Bosnian studies abroad until 2022, when the Center for Bosnian Studies was established at Fontbonne University, St. Louis, Missouri. However, the institution formerly known as Bosnia Memory Project does not specialize in philological research (*bosnistika*), in the sense analogous to *kroatistika* (Croatian studies) or *bohemistika* (Czech studies) at foreign universities. See its web page for more information: <https://griffinshare.fontbonne.edu/bosnia> (accessed 18 February 2024). See also recent publication related to the Center, which defines Bosnian studies primarily in terms of social sciences: Dženeta KARABEGOVIĆ – Adna KARAMEHIĆ-OATES, eds., *Bosnian Studies: Perspectives from an Emerging Field* (Columbia – London: University of Missouri Press, 2023).

86 In the capital of Herzegovina, this holds true for the Croat-dominated University of Mostar (Sveučilište u Mostaru), whereas the curricula at the University of Džemal Bijedić in Mostar (Univerzitet “Džemal Bijedić” u Mostaru) are closer to those taught in cities with Bosniak majority. In Banja Luka, the focus on Serbian literature has been recently meritoriously complemented by a comparative approach to South Slavic literatures in courses taught by Saša Šmulja. Cf. *Komparativno proučavanje južnoslovenskih književnosti 1–2*: <https://www.ff.unibl.org/index.php/sr/studije/prvi-ciklus/srpski-jezik-i-književnost-1-ciklus/nastavni-plan-i-program> (accessed 3 October 2024).

text and view them exclusively in the framework of Serbian national literature. Only recently did Serbian scholars in BiH join their Bosniak and Croatian counterparts in initiating an extensive edition of Serbian literature in BiH, which could be seen as analogous to the already monumental series *Bošnjačka književnost u 100 knjiga* [Bosniak Literature in 100 Books] and *Hrvatska književnost Bosne i Hercegovine u 100 knjiga* [Croatian Literature of BiH in 100 Books], commenced in 1995 and 2001, respectively.<sup>87</sup> I find it symptomatic that one of the members of the editorial board of *Srpska književnost u Bosni i Hercegovini* [Serbian Literature of BiH], Branko Letić (\*1943), on the occasion of the presentation of the first published volumes of the series in March 2019, justified its founding by the need to respond to the aforementioned publishing enterprises of Croats and Bosniaks and thus prove that Serbs also have their own literary tradition in BiH.<sup>88</sup>

Be that as it may, the fact is that what we have witnessed in BiH since its independence is primarily efforts aimed at codification of Bosniak national literature and the canons of Croatian and Serbian national literatures in Bosnia and Hercegovina.<sup>89</sup> Although the concept of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature has not been fully abandoned, from the present perspective, it is evident that it experienced its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s. Its prospects essentially depend on whether the current divergent tendencies, which have dominantly shaped the character of contemporary BiH for the past three decades, eventually prevail, or whether they will ultimately be reversed in favor of the consolidation of the country and its society. Regardless of the outcome, the need for transnational perspectives on literature, which “either challenge or contest altogether notions of purity and exclusivity”<sup>90</sup> of the national concept, will not disappear. It remains to be seen, however, whether the works of truly transnational and internationally acclaimed writers from BiH, such as Aleksandar Hemon (\*1964), Miljenko Jergović (\*1966), and Lana Bastašić (\*1986), whose novels, stories, and essays are enjoyed by readers throughout the former Yugoslavia and also beyond its borders, will be appreciated in the context of

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87 See *Bošnjačka književnost u 100 knjiga*: <https://www.preporod.ba/projekti-i-izdanja/bosnjacka-književnost-u-100-knjiga/>; *Hrvatska književnost Bosne i Hercegovine u 100 knjiga*: [https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hrvatska\\_knji%C5%BEevnost\\_Bosne\\_i\\_Hercegovine\\_u\\_100\\_knjiga](https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hrvatska_knji%C5%BEevnost_Bosne_i_Hercegovine_u_100_knjiga) (both accessed 18 February 2024).

88 *Predstavljeno pet knjiga edicije “Srpska književnost u BiH”*, RTRS, 14. 3. 2019, <https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=329855> (accessed 18 February 2024).

89 See E. KAZAZ, *Neprijatelj ili susjed u kući*, pp. 30–48; Idem, “Nacionalni književni kanon – mjesto moći,” *Sarajevske sveske* 8–9 (2005), pp. 123–133.

90 Paul JAY, *Transnational Literature: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2021), p. 9.

their primary literary tradition or only within other literary systems. One of them will surely be a vibrant yet contested and insufficiently defined complex of post-Yugoslav literature.<sup>91</sup> In this respect, the history and constitutive features of the transnational concept of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature, outlined in this paper, can be highly inspiring and instructive for its further elaboration.

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91 Cf. Tijana MATIJEVIĆ, “National, Post-national, Transnational: Is post-Yugoslav Literature an Arguable or Promising Field of Study?,” in *Grenzräume – Grenzbewegungen. Ergebnisse der Arbeitstreffen des Jungen Forums Slavistische Literaturwissenschaft Basel 2013, Frankfurt (Oder) und Slubice 2014*, eds. Nina FRIEß – Gunnar LENZ – Erik MARTIN (Potsdam: Universitätsverlag Potsdam, 2016), pp. 101–112.

## SUMMARY

The paper outlines the history and present state of the conceptualization of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature as a specific transnational system and a distinctive value category within the context of South Slavic and Yugoslav literatures. After delineating the political and cultural context of the SFRY and BiH at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, when debates on the subject began, the principles of elaboration and major achievements of affirmation of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature in the period of socialist Yugoslavia are presented, including the arguments used by the opposing sides in polemics and controversies, which regularly accompanied the activities of originators and proponents of the concept. Based on their ideas, the author offers a comprehensive definition of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature before proceeding to commentary on the ways, intensity, and prospects of its use in the post-Yugoslav BiH. Although the scholarly reflection of the concept has been recently enriched by stimulating theoretical impulses, its application in the public sphere is fairly limited. The author concludes that a predominant model in the post-conflict BiH is the affirmation of three nominally separate national cultures and literatures (Bosniak, Serbian, Croatian) and that the future of the transnational concept of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature, which experienced its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s, depends on whether the current divergent tendencies shaping contemporary BiH eventually prevail, or whether they will ultimately be reversed in favor of the consolidation of the country and its society.

