

## FORUM

# Historiography in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Between Academic Discipline and Political Activism

Husnija Kamberović

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina  
[husnija.kamberovic@ff.unsa.ba](mailto:husnija.kamberovic@ff.unsa.ba)

The wars of Yugoslav succession in the 1990s dramatically stimulated interest in the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). To satisfy this interest from the outside world, many historical publications offered up various explanations for the outbreak of the wars.<sup>1</sup> Yet the prior, and perhaps more significant, development occurred on the eve of the war, when historians in Bosnia and Herzegovina – although to a considerably lesser extent than in Serbia and Croatia – made an important contribution to national(ist) mobilisation and to the creation of a belligerent atmosphere by sensationally broaching traumatic topics linked to the Second World War.<sup>2</sup> The war in the 1990s left behind a devastated and divided country and created deep social divisions which have also affected the role and status of the nation's historiography. Many today accept the claim that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country in which there exist three views on history, although this is only partly true, because in this country far more than 'three views on history' exist. In practice, the thesis of three national historiographies (Serbian, Croatian, and Bosniak)<sup>3</sup> turns out to be completely erroneous, because the existence of 'national historiographies' would also presume the existence of clearly defined thematic and methodological approaches to historical research, and that is not the case with historiography in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Hence, it is more precise to speak of a scholarly historiography that exists alongside an ideologically or politically motivated historiography or 'parahistoriography', by which is meant 'dealing with history . . . in a completely different way than studying history'.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, it must be noted that divisions within Bosnian-Herzegovinian historiography reflect the cleavages between rival historiographical centres (Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Tuzla, and Mostar). A further complication that today escapes the attention of most researchers regarding the state of historiography in Bosnia and Herzegovina is that, even within these centres, there exist additional divisions into Bosnian Serbian, Bosnian Croatian and Bosnian Bosniak historiographical circles.<sup>5</sup> Differences in scholarly views also existed prior to 1990, but they did so as a completely understandable feature of historiography as a

<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Donia, 'Prolazna slava. Djela o Bosni i Hercegovini na engleskom jeziku, 1990–1999' ('Fleeting Fame: The Works on Bosnia-Herzegovina Published in English, 1990–1999'), u: *Prilozi* br. 29. (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2000), 261–74.

<sup>2</sup> Radomir Bulatović, *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac s posebnim osvrtom na Donju Gradinu. Istorijsko-sociološka i antropološka studija* (Jasenovac Concentration Camp with Special Reference to Donja Gradina. Historical-Sociological and Anthropological Study) (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1990); Vladimir Dedijer and Antun Miletić, *Genocid nad Muslimanima, 1941–1945. Zbornik dokumenata i svjedočenja* (Genocide Against Muslims, 1941–1945. Collection of Documents and Testimonies) (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Three national communities predominate in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks, with the latter known as (Bosnian) Muslims until 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Andrej Mitrović, *Raspravljanja sa Klio* (Discussions with Clio) (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1991), 129–31.

<sup>5</sup> Edin Radušić, 'Pitanje ustanka 1875–1878. u bosanskohercegovačkoj historiografiji: između historijske istine i multiperspektivnosti' ('Question of the Uprising of 1875–1878 in Bosnian Historiography: Between Historical Truth and Multiperspectivity'), u: Dževad Juzbašić and Zijad Šehić (ed.), *Prilozi o historiografiji Bosne i Hercegovine (2001–2017)* (Contributions on Historiography of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2001–2017) (Sarajevo: Akademija nauka i umjetnosti Bosne i Hercegovine, 2020), 99–130.

scholarly field. By contrast, at the outset of the 1990s, these differences became exacerbated not as the result of differing scholarly approaches but because of varying political orientations. As a result, the last historiographical works published before the outbreak of the war in 1992, which did not bear the mark of national divisions, even today stand as valuable scholarly contributions.

Before the war, professional norms were well established within historical institutions and were not altogether eroded by the parahistoriography that surfaced in the 1990s. Among the key institutions was the University of Sarajevo (founded 1949) with its historical studies at the Faculty of Philosophy, and from 1959, the Institute for the History of the Workers' Movement, an independent research institute whose name has changed several times and which today exists as the Historical Institute at the University of Sarajevo. Beginning in 1965, this institute published the journal *Prilozi* (Contributions), and since 2008 the journal *Historijska traganja* (Historical Explorations). In Banja Luka, the Historical Institute was established in 1979 and the following year began publishing its own journal, *Istorijski zbornik* (Historical Anthology). The Historical Institute in Banja Luka mostly focused on the history of the Bosnian Krajina, i.e. northwestern Bosnia. Besides Sarajevo and to some extent Banja Luka, which were even before 1990 recognisable historiographical centres with their universities, institutes, and journals, after 1995 both Mostar and Tuzla also developed as centres in which there were not only historical studies in the sense of education and scholarship but also numerous professional associations. These associations appeared in postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina as one of the possibilities for counteracting the impact of politics on historiography.

### Attempts at Institutional Cooperation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The divisive historiographical scene that emerged after the war had its roots already before 1990, when the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina underwent a transformation. The impact of the ruling nationalist parties was obvious immediately after the November 1990 elections, because history served as a means of national mobilisation and to a considerable extent laid the groundwork for the war.<sup>6</sup> During the war from 1992 to 1995, historiography in Bosnia and Herzegovina shared the fate of the state: faculties and institutes were devastated in terms of personnel, many served belligerent politics or, through a withdrawal into silence, sought a way to preserve scholarly dignity, though without the possibility of publishing new research. In Banja Luka the Historical Institute practically ceased to exist, and the corresponding institute in Sarajevo shared the fate of the city.

During this time, much was being written about the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina abroad, and some attempts by Sarajevo historians to publish were more a sign of spiritually 'keeping in shape' than constituting any really serious scholarly research endeavour. Wartime conditions did not leave any space for more significant scholarly research, but an outlet was found in the organising of scholarly conferences, some of which left behind a deep legacy. Two such especially important conferences, both of which had been in preparation already before the outbreak of the war, were the conference *Sefarad 92* held from 11 to 14 September 1992, and dedicated to the topic of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and their settling in Sarajevo, and a conference on a half millennium of Sarajevo's history, held from 19 to 21 March 1993. Instead of new research, perhaps the most important scholarly historical work which was published in Sarajevo by Bosnian historians was the book *Bosna i Hercegovina od najstarijih vremena do kraja Drugog svjetskog rata* (Bosnia and Herzegovina from the Ancient Times until the End of World War II), which was a mixture of serious scholarly contributions and the effect of mythology as caused by the wartime siege.<sup>7</sup> This work was published by the

<sup>6</sup> This could also be felt in serious scholarly institutions such as the Historical Institute. For some remarks about this, see Husnija Kamberović, *Historiografija u Bosni i Hercegovini u službi politike (Historiography in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Service of Politics)* (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2012), 15–18. Some leading historians, such as Milorad Ekmečić, openly joined in the creation of new nationalist narratives in the historiography.

<sup>7</sup> Ibrahim Tepić and Asaf Džanić (ed.), *Bosna i Hercegovina od najstarijih vremena do kraja Drugog svjetskog rata (Bosnia and Herzegovina from the Ancient Times until the End of World War II)* (Sarajevo: Generalštab Armije Republike Bosne i Hercegovine, 1995).

General Staff of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina because Ibrahim Tepić, a professor of history at the University of Sarajevo, was at that point a member of the General Staff's Administration for Morale, which gathered historians to write 'a synthesis of the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina'. The second, somewhat expanded, edition of this book was published in 1998 by the Bosnian Cultural Centre in Sarajevo.

The divisiveness of the historical scene persisted after 1995, and international cooperation proved difficult to achieve.<sup>8</sup> After a few years the German Friedrich Naumann Foundation supported a dialogue of Serb and Croat historians, and there were attempts to realise similar exchanges within Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the outset of the twenty-first century, the Sarajevo Institute initiated this kind of venture, but after three meetings, which were held in various parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Banja Luka, Mostar, and Neum), it was clear that Banja Luka and Mostar were not ready for this kind of cooperation. Historians from Banja Luka and the western (Croatian) half of Mostar did not participate, given that they were institutionally oriented towards Belgrade and Zagreb, respectively. Although this was an attempt to, in conjunction with the participation of historians from Serbia and Croatia, encourage intra-Bosnian dialogue, it was clear that the war years had left deeper traces in the historiography than anticipated. The only result, other than that scholarly dialogue and cooperation took place at all, was the publication of a small book on the historiography of Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>9</sup>

New attempts at intra-Bosnian cooperation were made in 2013–14, during the preparations for the commemoration of the centenary of the start of the First World War.<sup>10</sup> Yet these attempts also failed to achieve a positive result, and hence starting in 2017 a new initiative was launched in the shape of the event 'History Fest'. It seemed that in Banja Luka a small group of young historians were ready to cooperate, but, ultimately, no new forum for dialogue emerged. The cooperation of historians from Sarajevo with their colleagues from Mostar functions, but exclusively on an individual basis, and not institutionally.

The high points of intra-Bosnian cooperation were reached with the presentation of Tomislav Išek's book about the Croatian cultural organisation 'Napredak' at the Philosophical Faculty of the University in Mostar and the discussion organised in the Herceg Stjepan Kosača building in Mostar about the book *Multikonfesionalna Hercegovina* (Multiconfessional Herzegovina) by the German historian Hannes Grandits. These events were an indication that professional cooperation was possible, even though the further development of these efforts stalled.

These attempts at establishing intra-Bosnian dialogue among historians show that, despite what has been achieved with international assistance, the weakness of Bosnian-Herzegovinian scholarly institutions is quite pronounced. The lack of state support for serious – as opposed to politically instructed – scholarly research is a weakness which remains present in Bosnia and Herzegovina until today. Conversely, the efforts of certain academic institutions to retain their independence and objectivity result in a denial of state financial support. A good example of this is the case of the Historical Institute in Sarajevo, which in 2016 almost ended up on the street because of a lack of state support. State institutions showed no interest in resolving even the question of basic accommodation for scholars, never mind any support for some larger scholarly projects. In such a context the conditions do not exist for the more independent development of young historians in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This has led to a situation where some of today's leading authorities on the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina are foreign historians, who can carry out more independent and objective scholarly research.

<sup>8</sup> Christian Promitzer, 'Whose is Bosnia? Post-communist Historiographies in Bosnia and Herzegovina', in *(Re) Writing History; Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism*, ed. Ulf Brunnbauer (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 54–93.

<sup>9</sup> Adnan Huskić and Husnija Kamberović (ed.), *Naučni skup Historiografija u Bosni i Hercegovini od 1990. do 2003. Mostar 24–26. oktobar/listopad 2003. (Scientific Conference: Historiography in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1990 to 2003. Mostar 24–26 October 2003)* (Sarajevo: Friedrich Naumann Stiftung, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> This topic was the subject of bitter discussions in the Balkans. See: Husnija Kamberović, 'Commemoration of the First World War in Bosnia and Herzegovina', *Prilozi* br. 43 (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2014), 7–15.

## Newer Approaches to Research

The Sarajevo circle of historians remained quite diverse even after 1996. The focus on national narratives, above all on the Bosniak one, can best be viewed in the book *Historija Bošnjaka* (History of the Bosniaks) by Mustafa Imamović, but also in some other books.<sup>11</sup> Many books on Bosniak national history have been reissued, which is a continuation of the practice begun in 1990, which was designed to help awaken a national consciousness. Already in 1990, Safvet-beg Bašagić's romanticist book on the history of Bosnia and Muhamed Hadžijahić's work on the historical processes of the integration of the Muslim nation were published. After 1996 a new edition appeared of Atif Purivatratra's text on the history of the Yugoslav Muslim Organisation, the most important political party in Bosnia and Herzegovina between the two world wars; Mustafa Imamović's book on the legal status and internal political development in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Austro-Hungarian period was also reissued.

However, an alternative national narrative was also powerfully present among Bosniak historians. We find an example of this in the work of Enver Redžić, who was the fiercest opponent of the Bosniak national narrative.<sup>12</sup> Dževad Juzbašić and Ilija Hadžibegović, who mainly wrote about the Austro-Hungarian period and the first decades of the twentieth century, were closely aligned with Redžić's focus on the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as opposed to national history. This group of historians was very professional and anti-nationalist and their impact was particularly important in the creation of a new generation of professional historians.

Between these two extremes, there exists another group of historians in Sarajevo who, while they engage with themes from national history, do so without ideological zeal. This group includes the works by Tomislav Išek, who wrote several works on the history of Croats in BiH,<sup>13</sup> as well as the works of Ibrahim Kemura on the history of Bosniaks. Their research engages with the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina without mythological by-products. This is significant, as mythological approaches to history remained present after 1995, though for the most part these affected the historiography of older periods.

Around 2000, new angles of inquiry came to the fore within the Sarajevo circle of historians. Particular attention was paid to the socialist period as well as to the role of historical myths, memory culture, local history, Holocaust research, culture and the press, as well as the question of identity in history. As such, the scope of research significantly transcended the national perspective.<sup>14</sup> The bearer of these ideas was the Sarajevo Institute of History, which entered into dialogue with historiographies outside Bosnia and Herzegovina and in this manner opened the pathway to new chapters in historiographical development.

In light of these developments, it would be mistaken to regard the Sarajevo circle as operating exclusively within the framework of Bosnian discourse. In the institutional sense, the Historical Institute asserted itself as the most important scholarly institution, whose research was significantly broader than any national or state framework. Other institutions in Sarajevo, through their

<sup>11</sup> Mustafa Imamović, *Historija Bošnjaka (History of Bosniaks)* (Sarajevo: Bošnjačka zajednica kulture, 1997). According to his own words, the author 'prepared himself already from an early age' for the writing of this book, but the intensive writing of it transpired from 1993 to 1996.

<sup>12</sup> Enver Redžić, *Sto godina muslimanske politike u tezama i kontroverzama istorijske nauke. Geneza ideje bosanske, bošnjačke nacije (One Hundred Years of Muslim Politics in the Theses and Controversies of Historical Science. The Genesis of the Idea of the Bosnian, Bosniak Nation)* (Sarajevo: Akademija nauka i umjetnosti – Institut za istoriju, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Tomislav Išek, *Mjesto i uloga HKD 'Napredak' u društvenom životu Hrvata Bosne i Hercegovine između dva svjetska rata (1918–1941) (The Place and Role of the HKD 'Napredak' in the Social Life of the Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina between the Two World Wars (1918–1941))* (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2015); Ibrahim Kemura, *Značaj i uloga 'Narodne uzdanice' u društvenom životu Bošnjaka (1923–1945) (Importance and Role of 'Narodna uzdanica' in the Social Life of the Bosniaks, 1923–1945)* (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Husnija Kamberović (ed.), *Historijski mitovi na Balkanu. Zbornik radova (Historical Myths in the Balkans. Proceedings)* (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2003); Husnija Kamberović (ed.), *Identitet Bosne i Hercegovine kroz historiju. Zbornik radova, 1–2 (Identity of Bosnia and Herzegovine during History. Collection of the Work)* (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2011).

historiographical contributions, also broke down the deceptive depiction of the Sarajevo circle's allegedly exclusive Bosniak orientation. This is especially apparent in the circle of Bosnian Franciscans and their journal *Bosna Franciscana*, which debuted in 1993. Besides the journal, the Franciscans publish abundantly, focusing above all on the fate of their Franciscan brothers, especially their suffering during the Second World War and the socialist period. The Vrhbosna Catholic theological seminary, in addition to regularly publishing the journal *Vrhbosnensia*, also publishes a number of other books on Bosnian history, in particular on the history of the Roman Catholic Church. In addition, an Institute for the Islamic Tradition of the Bosniaks has been established, whose research focuses more on the religious component of Bosniak national identity.

During the past decade, the research of the Sarajevo historical circle, at least as regards the twentieth century, has expanded to include questions of political violence and the position of ethnic minorities, thereby also opening up new perspectives on questions of national identity and culture.<sup>15</sup> Issues of migration also attract the attention of historians, as does the field of political biography, which has produced several valuable works.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, since 2016, the Sarajevo historical circle has also been afflicted by increased political pressure on scholarly research.<sup>17</sup> Up to that point, the historiography of this circle, even when dealing with topics related to the Second World War, and especially topics related to the socialist period, resisted revisionist temptations.<sup>18</sup> The new tendencies lead in different directions, with the risk that the entire historical enterprise follows the politicised practice that has dominated research about the 1992–5 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The exclusive research focus on Bosniak victims from 1992 to 1995, which was the main preoccupation of historians in the Sarajevo-based Institute for Research on Crimes against Humanity and International Law, gradually morphed into a research agenda that focused exclusively on the suffering of only Bosniaks in the more distant past. This created the popular perception of this institute as the main representative of the Bosniak historiographical narrative.<sup>19</sup> It is noticeable that in the most recent years research has begun in the field of ecological history, to which the newly formed Association for Modern History has devoted particular attention. Since its founding in 2016, this professional association has gathered together historians who desire to be active without political interference.

Historiography in Tuzla is linked to the Philosophical Faculty at the university there, and more recently to the Centre for Research in Modern and Contemporary History. In contrast to the Sarajevo circle, the one in Tuzla has moved more in the direction of nurturing the Bosniak national narrative. At the outset, the trend was explicitly revisionist, but over time Tuzla evolved into an important centre, with several journals which appeared off and on, but also with a few that received international affirmation.<sup>20</sup> The most well-known historical journal which now appears in Tuzla is *Historijski pogledi* (Historical Views), published by the Centre for Research in Modern and Contemporary History. Earlier on, the journal *Historijska misao* (Historical Thought), published by

<sup>15</sup> Dženita Sarač – Rujanac, *Odnos vjerskog i nacionalnog u identitetu Bošnjaka od 1980. do 1990. godine (Relation between Religion and Nationality in the Identity of Bosniaks from 1980 to 1990)*, (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2012); Sonja M. Dujmović, *U ogledalu promjena – srpsko građanstvo u Bosni i Hercegovini, 1918–1941 (In the Mirror of Changes – The Serb Middle Class in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1918–1941)* (Sarajevo: Institut za historiju, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Amir Duranović, 'Debate about Personality as a Factor in Modern Bosnian History', u: *Historia Moderna* br. 1 (Sarajevo: Udruženje za modernu historiju, 2020), 43–56.

<sup>17</sup> Nenad Veličković, *Akademsko šarlatanstvo. Nauka o književnosti i univerzitet u tranziciji – etnografski pristup (Academic Charlatanry. The Science of Literature and the University in Transition – an Ethnographic Approach)* (Sarajevo – Beograd: Mas Media – Fabrika knjiga, 2019), 151–9.

<sup>18</sup> I distinguish clearly between historical revisionism, under which I understand adjusting historical interpretations to fit current political or national interests, with the revision of history, under which I understand adjustments to history in response to newly discovered historical sources. The first involves the manipulation of history while the second is the logical development of history as a scholarly discipline.

<sup>19</sup> On this topic see Mirjana Kasapović, 'Bošnjačke politike povijesti: genocid kao sudbina' (*Bosniak Politics of History: Genocide as Destiny*), *Anali Hrvatskog politološkog društva*, br. 18 (Zagreb: Hrvatsko politološko društvo, 2021).

<sup>20</sup> Adnan Jahić, *Muslimanske formacije Tuzlanskog kraja u Drugom svjetskom ratu (Muslim Formations of the Tuzla Region in the Second World War)* (Tuzla: DD 'Zmaj od Bosne' i KDB 'Preporod,' 1995).



the Department of History of the Faculty of Philosophy in Tuzla, was also important. This historiographical circle deals intensively with local history, with the historians contributing to the journal *Gračanički glasnik* (Gračanica's Herald) being particularly active in this field. This journal appears in Gračanici, not far from Tuzla, and has grown to become one of the country's most important journals of local history. However, some articles in it are too revisionist in their formulation, which detracts from the overall positive impression. Nevertheless, within this circle there is also a very visible orientation towards broader Bosniak themes, and many historians belonging to this circle have published books outside of Tuzla or even internationally. This circle has explored themes regarding the traditional Bosnian Muslim ulema, and books about the history of the Islamic community and the position of Bosniaks during the twentieth century – and in particular the status of Muslim women – have offered up very valuable knowledge and contributed very significantly to this segment of Bosnia and Herzegovina's history.<sup>21</sup> Of potential concern is the role of the national dimension, which while understandably present in works dealing with political questions, sometimes figures even in books on social themes related to the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the twentieth century. For this reason, it is insufficiently clear in which direction the circle of historians in Tuzla will move in the coming years.

### Not Only Workers for the National Cause

The historiographical scene in Banja Luka only superficially gives the impression of being monolithic. Although at the beginning of the 1980s, Banja Luka historians were particularly renowned for their research into local history, after the outbreak of the war in 1992 they began to engage almost exclusively with Serbian topics, writing works that showed the strong influence of Serbian historiography. Today, this group is centred around the Faculty of Philosophy in Banja Luka, with links to the same faculty in Eastern Sarajevo, and to the Archive of Republika Srpska in Banja Luka.<sup>22</sup> For the most part this circle deals with topics of Serbian national history, about which it has a rather uniform view constructed under the influence of the ideas of Milorad Ekmečić. This historian moved to Belgrade in 1992 and had a great influence on this circle's research into nineteenth-century history and in particular the question of the 1875–8 uprising. This uprising in 1875–8 against the Ottoman authorities is important, because Ekmečić believed that the 1992 war was just a continuation of the Serbian wars of liberation. A similar situation exists with respect to the question of Yugoslavia's establishment and the first decades of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Yugoslav state, where the Serbian national narrative dominates.<sup>23</sup> Draga Mastilović, a professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in Eastern Sarajevo, researched the position of Herzegovina in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, gathering in one place a large amount of historical and anthropological information about demographic, social, economic, political, educational and cultural changes in Herzegovina during the first two decades of the twentieth century. He placed the accent on the suffering of the Serb population until 1918, and when he wrote about social changes, patriarchal culture, ethnic folklore as well as other aspects of social and economic life, this was always focused on Herzegovina's Serb population.

Mastilović also dealt with the question of the Bosnian Serb elite's attitude towards the creation of Yugoslavia, showing how the unification of the Serb nation was 'not only the political program of the Serb intellectual and political elite before the [First World] war, but also the centuries-long desire of

<sup>21</sup> Adnan Jahić, *Muslimansko žensko pitanje u Bosni i Hercegovini. Žena u intelektualnom i društvenom životu Bošnjaka od aneksije do zakona o zabrani nošenje zara i feredže (1908–1950) (The Muslim Women's Issue in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Women in the Intellectual and Social Life of Bosniaks from Annexation to the Law Banning the Wearing of zar and feredža (1908–1950)* (Zagreb – Sarajevo: Bošnjačka nacionalna zajednica za Grad Zagreb – Naučnoistraživački institut Ibn Sina, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> According to the Dayton Peace Agreement, Bosnia and Herzegovine after 1995 are divided into two entities: Republika Srpska and Federation Bosnia and Herzegovina.

<sup>23</sup> For a partial departure from this narrative see Boro Bronza, Slavojka Beštić-Bronza, Boško M. Branković and Borivoje Milošević, *Istorija jugoslovenske ideje 1500–1918 (History of the Yugoslav Idea 1500–1918)* (Banja Luka: Nezavisni univerzitet, 2018).

the Serb nation in Bosnia and Herzegovina'. Mastilović also argued that a part of that elite during the war 'positioned itself on anti-Serbian principles and ideologically bound itself to Zagreb and those visions of Yugoslav unity which excluded any possibility of a prior unification of the Serb nation'.<sup>24</sup> Because of this, a complete unification of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia did not occur, even though the preconditions existed for it.

Here, too, just as in Sarajevo, the publication of works or reprints of works which conform to the Serbian national narrative of Bosnian history of the first half of the twentieth century predominate, including works which, for various reasons, had not previously seen the light of day. One example is the doctoral dissertation of Perko Vojnović about Vrbas *banovina* (province), which he defended at the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo in 1979, but which was published only in 1997 in Banja Luka. This book gives Vrbas *banovina*, established during the royal dictatorship in 1929, a Serbian national character, and the author even poses this question:

It remains unclear why the majority Serbian territories and population of Dalmatia, Lika, Kordun, Banija and Western Slavonia were not fused with Vrbas *banovina*. The answer to this question must be found in the illusions of some Serb politicians who believed that as many Serbs as possible should reside in Croatia in order to strengthen the Serbian element and create a bridge of unity between Serbs and Croats. In this manner a large ethnic territory encompassing approximately 550,000 inhabitants, 65% of them Serbs, was sacrificed. This would later have tragic consequences for Serbian national interests.<sup>25</sup>

The interest in the history of Vrbas *banovina* in Banja Luka can also be seen in the publication of the memoirs of *ban* (governor) Milosavljević. This is a worthwhile undertaking, given that the publication of historical sources is not generally practised, even though this is very important for the development of historical scholarship.

Within the Banja Luka circle, the history of the Serbian Orthodox Church is an important topic, providing another building block in the dominant national narrative. Nonetheless, some other new topics are also being broached, e.g. the history of the press, public health, and topics from economic history. Local historical topics are also present, as are some broader research topics related to Yugoslav history, which transcend national narratives.<sup>26</sup> Several valuable works exist regarding the Second World War, including summaries of earlier research on the suffering of the Serb population, but also encompassing published volumes of the interwar and wartime memoirs of Banja Luka communists. The publication of the memoirs of Žarko Lazarević serves to promote the thesis that the 'Serbian Uprising' in 1941 did not involve a population that later split into Chetniks and Partisans, 'because the differences were visible on the ground from the very beginning'. Yet these volumes also show that there were regional specificities in the relations between Partisans and Serb nationalists – in Eastern Bosnia they had joint staffs, while in the Bosnian Krajina the communists created their own units, and in some places shared command with Serb nationalists.<sup>27</sup> In any case, the publication of such books shows that there exist many more nuances to views on the Second World War than one might at first glance conclude. Not all historians are simultaneously *nacionalni radnici* – workers for the national cause who in their works spread ideological and political propaganda. The translations of US historian Emily Greble's work on Sarajevo during the Second World War, and of Canadian

<sup>24</sup> D. Mastilović, *Između srpstva i jugoslovenstva. Srpska elita iz Bosne i Hercegovine i stvaranje Jugoslavije (Between Serbs and Yugoslavs. The Serbian Elite from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Creation of Yugoslavia)* (Beograd – Gacko: Agencija za izdavaštvo 'Filip Višnjić' – Srpsko prosvjetno i kulturno društvo 'Prosvjeta', 2012), 11.

<sup>25</sup> Perko Vojnović, *Vrbaska banovina u političkom sistemu Kraljevine Jugoslavije (Vrbaska Banovina in the Political System of the Yugoslav Kingdom)* (Banja Luka: Filozofski fakultet, 1997), 33.

<sup>26</sup> Stojanka Beštić-Bronza, *Ujedinjenje Njemačke i jugoslovensko javno mnijenje (German Unification and Yugoslav Public Opinion)* (Banja Luka: Filozofski fakultet, 2017).

<sup>27</sup> Vladan Vukliš and Marijana Todorović Bilić, *Banjalučki ilegalac. Sjećanja Žarka Lastrića (Banjaluka's Illegal. Memories of Žarko Lastrić)* (Banja Luka: Udruženje arhivskih radnika Republike Srpske – Arhiv Republike Srpske, 2020), 11.

historian Max Bergholz's book on killings in Kulen Vakuf in 1941, can be very inspiring for the historiography of Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>28</sup> These translations also show that historians on the ground in Bosnia and Herzegovina are eager to draw inspiration from new sources.

### Divisiveness in Mostar

The destruction of *Stari most* (the Old Bridge) in 1993 made Mostar a symbol of the divisions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The city carried this mark long after the end of the war, and many regard the city as still divided even today, regardless of the city's formal unification.<sup>29</sup> The historiography of the Mostar circle perfectly illustrates the situation. It is a city with two universities: Džemal Bijedić University and the University of Mostar, which teach history from two ethnic perspectives. Furthermore, it is a city in which (ethnically) separate conferences are held, and in which journals are published with identical names but with starkly contrasting editorial policies. The journal *Hercegovina*, which began appearing in 1981, today appears in two editions: the Museum of Herzegovina and the Archive of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton publishes one, while the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Mostar and the Croatian Historical Institute in Zagreb publish the other. Historiography in Mostar is ethnically divided, with the exclusively Croatian narrative oriented towards Zagreb, while the Bosniak narrative is close to the circle of historians in Tuzla and to some extent in Sarajevo.

As regards the twentieth century, the Mostar circle of historians constructed a Croatian narrative that focuses on the suffering of Croats towards the end of the Second World War and during the socialist era, and especially on the history of the Roman Catholic Church. A book on the church in Bosnia and Herzegovina between the two world wars illustrates the degree to which the history of the church is conflated with that of Croats in Yugoslavia. In this circle, a distinctively negative portrait is drawn not only with respect to the creation of Yugoslavia in 1918, which is treated as a 'military occupation', but also of the Yugoslav experience as such, with the church and the Croats characterised as victims.<sup>30</sup>

This Croatian Mostar circle is distinctively anti-communist in its predisposition, characterising the socialist period exclusively as a dark age. However, some important works of research have also been produced which offer well-argued new insights into the Second World War. Ivica Šarac's books, which study the establishment of the Ustasha regime in 1941 and the founding of the communist regime in 1944–5, are good examples.<sup>31</sup> Searching from different angles, using various types of sources – though it has to be said that he often uncritically trusts church sources too much – Šarac examines issues in the context of memory culture. Šarac showed that the Independent State of Croatia in the memory culture among Croats from Western Herzegovina remained as their national state, and that the partisans in 1944 did not have much support from Croats from Western Herzegovina. As such, he shows how it is possible to muster evidence and arguments in order to arrive at new interpretations of well-known events from the Second World War. Differences within the Croatian narrative also emerge as

<sup>28</sup> Emily Greble, *Sarajevo 1941–1945. Muslimani, kršćani i jevreji u Hitlerovoj Evropi (Sarajevo, 1941–1945: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Hitler's Europe)* (Sarajevo: University Press, 2020); Max Bergholz, *Nasilje kao generativna sila. Identitet, nacionalizam i sjećanje u jednoj balkanskoj zajednici (Violence as a Generative Force: Identity, Nationalism, and Memory in a Balkan Community)* (Sarajevo/Zagreb: Buybook, 2018).

<sup>29</sup> Monika Palmberger, *How Generations Remember: Conflicting Histories and Shared Memories in Post-War Bosnia and Herzegovina* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> 'Posmatrano iz današnje povijesne točke gledišta (...) to ujedinjenje [1918.] značilo je (...) vojnu okupaciju' ('From today's historical point of view [...] this unification [1918] meant [...] military occupation'). Božo Goluža, *Hrvatski narod u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji (Croatian People in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia)* (Mostar: Crkva na kamenu, 2008), 57.

<sup>31</sup> Ivica Šarac, *Kultura selektivnog sjećanja. Hrvati Hercegovine i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska. od proklamacije NDH do talijanske reokupacije (travanj–rujan 1941) (A Culture of Selective Memory: Croats of Herzegovina and the Independent State of Croatia. From the Proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia to the Italian Reoccupation (April–September 1941)* (Mostar: Crkva na kamenu, 2012); Isti, *MetaStaze jedne revolucije. Uspostava komunističko-partizanske vlasti u zapadnim dijelovima Hercegovine (listopad 1944 – ožujak 1945) (MetaState of a Revolution: Establishment of Communist-Partisan Rule in the Western Parts of Herzegovina (October 1944–March 1945)* (Mostar: Crkva na kamenu, 2019).



regards some interpretations linked to the significance of the manifest apparition of the Virgin Mary at Međugorje, but these discussions transcend the historiographical framework and take on the characteristics of theological disputes.

While this Croatian circle in Mostar focuses on the suffering of Croats during the twentieth century, the Bosniak circle concentrates on the suffering of Bosniaks, while also offering some broader social analysis. Adnan Velagić has produced a solid analysis of sociopolitical changes in Herzegovina after the Second World War, as well as a book on the suffering of Bosniaks during the war.<sup>32</sup>

In both Mostar circles there exist radically diverging views on the events linked to the 1992–5 war, and the publications on this topic which emerge from Mostar are still far from being proper works of history. The divisiveness in Mostar, without any kind of mutual cooperation, is one of the most striking indicators of the historiographical situation as it has developed in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1990 until today.

## Conclusion

The historiography of Bosnia and Herzegovina has since the 1990s shared the fate of the state and is today divided into several historiographical centres between which there exists only modest cooperation. This divisiveness, however, does not exclusively follow ethnic criteria, and hence it is difficult to speak of three clearly defined ethnic or national historiographies. It would be much closer to the truth to speak of individual historiographical centres which are also internally conflicted. The Sarajevo circle has for a long time preserved a form of topical pluralism. Within this circle, historiography with a predominantly Bosniak focus competes against historiography with a largely Bosnian focus. This circle has since the turn of the century opened up new research fields (historical myths, identities, memory culture, environmental history) and has consistently resisted the political pressure applied by various ruling structures.

Compared to the Sarajevo circle, the Tuzla circle has to a greater extent absorbed the Bosniak narrative, and the Banja Luka circle is orientated towards the Serbian national narrative, though with limited heterogeneity visible in the approaches towards the history of the Second World War and the fascist and anti-fascist movements. Most deeply divided is the Mostar circle with its dominant Croatian and Bosniak narratives, with the latter tending towards the Tuzla circle and the former looking towards colleagues in Zagreb.

All historiographical centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina show interest in the history of religious communities, and this has resulted in a considerable amount of exceptional works but also some that are of more dubious quality. All of the centres fall short in terms of publishing historical sources, at least as regards the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the twentieth century, but more recently an increase of interest in new topics (environmental history, history of public health, history of the press) can be detected on all sides. The Sarajevo circle is today the least revisionist in its orientation, whose new perspectives on twentieth-century history are more or less based on new sources and immune to political pressure. Yet since 2016, precisely this type of pressure can be felt here as well, and the competition of historiography and parahistoriography is in the Sarajevo circle most intense. The future will reveal who emerges as the victor from this competition.

**Acknowledgements.** I would like to thank Robert J. Donia and Christian A. Nielsen, who helped me in writing this paper. I am especially grateful to the anonymous reviewers whose suggestions helped me to present the views in the paper more clearly.

<sup>32</sup> Adnan Velagić, *Hercegovina od 1945. do 1952. Društveno-političke i privredne prilike (Herzegovina from 1945 to 1952: Socio-Political and Economic Circumstances)* (Mostar: Fakultet humanističkih nauka Univerziteta 'Džemal Bijedić', 2008); Adnan Velagić, *Hercegovački muslimani u koncepcijama četničkog pokreta (1941–1945): Historijski kontinuitet, ideološki karakter, vojno-politička pozicija (Herzegovinian Muslims in the Conceptions of the Chetnik Movement (1941–1945): Historical Continuity, Ideological Character, Military-Political Position)* (Mostar: Fakultet humanističkih nauka Univerziteta 'Džemal Bijedić', 2012).

**Cite this article:** Kamberović H (2024). Historiography in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Between Academic Discipline and Political Activism. *Contemporary European History* 33, 886–894. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000516>