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Dominika Kaniecka
Jagiellonian University
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1754-8171

Museum of Literature and Performing Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina – the Difficult Heritage of a Nationally Heterogeneous Country

Introduction

This text is an attempt to organize information about an important but, for various reasons, little-known cultural institution: the Museum of Literature and Performing Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo. I began my research with the thesis that this institution is an example of a troubled legacy. The question of the potential impact of its activities on the strengthening of the common cultural identity of the inhabitants of a nationally heterogeneous country is naturally related to both this thesis and the areas of my previous literary and cultural studies research. On-site queries, interviews and extended participant observation also drew my attention to the circumstances that hinder this museum's work and its continuation in line with its original mission and vision.

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In this article, I focus primarily on the last decade of this institution's operation (2013–2023): the period of Šejla Šehabović's directorship. I intend to explain why the cultural heritage associated with this institution can be considered problematic, and I zoom in on the rescue strategies that were consistently implemented to preserve the museum's original concept. I also deliberately go back to the very beginning: to the initiatives of the first director, Razija Handžić, which provide an important point of reference for the institution's activities in the period I am analysing, as does the fact that in both periods the Museum was led by women – both of them writers, poets, activists – who were extremely determined in their actions.

In accordance with the principles of preventive humanities (a concept introduced in Polish Academia by Ewa Domańska) that I hold dear, I entered the research with a commitment to an ethic of reciprocity, somewhat infected by "causal idealism" (Resilience Academic Team (RAT), 2022, pp. 11–12). The data collection was not only intended to lead to a scientific description of the problem, but I was also aware from the beginning of the need to sensitize representatives of the scientific and cultural communities to the situation of the institution in question. Thus, even during the research, the information obtained should serve the purpose of gradually bringing the institution in Sarajevo closer to its sister institution in Warsaw.[1]

I conducted the essential field research in May 2022, but it was preceded by preliminary research in November 2021 and two short visits in July 2022 and 2023. The time span of the research allowed for careful identification of the museum's operational issues and ways of solving them. It was also conducive to building relationships with the museum's employees, which made it much easier to conduct and analyse a survey on, among other things, their involvement in saving their workplace. This reflection took into account information gleaned from observations and extended interviews with employees (current and former) and others associated with the museum,[2] the museum's collections and promotional materials, as well as press texts and content available on the museum's website and social media.

[1] The result of these activities was a study visit by the director of the museum to the Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature in Warsaw (organized by the Polish Embassy in Sarajevo), initiated by me and carried out in May 2023.

[2] I recorded twelve in-depth interviews with current and former museum staff (primarily curators) and volunteers. Eight interviews, in my opinion also valuable for other research in the field of culture and literature, are available in the open collections of the RODBUK UJ Repository (in files named "Museum of Literature and Performing Arts of B&H – interviews"; Kaniecka, 2022).

I will use memory studies and research on cultural heritage as a broader interpretive framework, primarily the reflections of Sharon Macdonald and the explorations of Monika Stobiecka. Macdonald is basically interested in intangible heritage, especially its troublesome aspects. I identify troublesome or inconvenient heritage here with her proposed term "difficult heritage", understood as a past that is significant for the present but is simultaneously challenging because of its inability to be identified with current collective identity (Macdonald, 2009, p. 1). Macdonald's questions, including how heritage makes the past palpable (Macdonald, 2021, p. 37), also apply in describing the situation of this Sarajevo museum. Stobiecka, on the other hand, sees heritage as a cultural process, thus perpetuating Laurajane Smith's definition, in which the centre of gravity shifts from objects to cultural and social processes, to the creation and practice of heritage precisely in the course of these processes (Stobiecka, 2022, pp. 119–120). The researcher indicated by Sobiecka additionally emphasizes that heritage understood in this way constitutes a performative practice of an emotional and subjective nature (Smith, 2023, pp. 124–125). This is an important context for reflecting on the role of those who create and visit this Bosnian-Herzegovinian institution. As a reference point, I also use publications on the history of museums (including literary museums) and the scarce studies on such institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The unavoidable political context and directly related questions about the controversy over the name of the Museum of Literature and Performing Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina also requires appropriate references.

Why does the public need museums?

In the introduction to the study *Muzeum. Historia światowa* [Museum. A World History], Krzysztof Pomian draws attention to the paradoxical nature of museums. In his view, they are both useless and indispensable (Pomian, 2023, p. 5). This uselessness refers to the undeniable fact that museums do not meet the basic needs of life, while their indispensability is accompanied by a more extensive commentary. Pomian writes, among other things, that museums prove that one belongs to the civilized world, that their existence has a beneficial effect on the level of art and science, that their educational role is not in doubt, and that they are an attraction for tourists (Pomian, 2023, p. 5).

In a conversation with Šejla Šehabović about the condition of this museum, the question of its purpose arises in a completely different context. Asking this question is part of the daily routine for the director, who is responsible for a public institution without regular funding. It is not about deep reflection on the museum's condition, but rather about the circumstances it faces. Šehabović emphasizes that belief in the crucial cultural importance of the museum and its collections is key to the institution's survival. The director does not shy away from opportunities to remind people of who founded the museum and for whom they did it, thus imposing a kind of obligation on herself and her team of collaborators to their predecessors.

The primary role of museums is to preserve continuity and protect heritage (Pomian, 2023, p. 11). This Sarajevo museum was established as a kind of sign of defiance against the image of illiterate and culturally backward Bosnians that had been nurtured for decades. Today, it still has to resist circumstances and prove its own indispensability in an ethno-national narrative-dominated public space.

Current state of the museum

This museum, which is dedicated to the literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina and has formally been in existence since 1961, is a small cultural institution – not one of the most popular. Located in the very centre of Sarajevo, today it occupies all the rooms in a historic mid-19th century building.[3] Attention is drawn to the unique oriental architecture and the stone courtyard separated from the street with a wall and gate. The permanent exhibition is located in small rooms on two levels of the building; it presents ten writers significant for the culture of Bosnia and Herzegovina (but also for the whole former Yugoslavia).[4] As a museum that presents collections organized by authors' lives and their works,

[3] The house first belonged to the wealthy Skarić family, later to the Despić family, which was important for the development of culture. See the institution's self-presentation on the official website https://mkpubih.com/ (accessed 14.09.2022).

[4] As part of the permanent exhibition, the following are presented: Silvije Strahimir Kranjčević (1865–1908), Petar Kočić (1877–1916), Kalmi Baruh (1896–1945), Isak Samokovlja (1902–1955, Zija Dizdarević (1916–1942), Branko Ćopić (1915–1984), Hasan Kikić (1905–1942), Mak Dizdar (1917–1971), Meša Selimović (1910–1982), Ivo Andrić (1892–1975).

the display cases feature manuscripts, documents, and personal items belonging to writers; the panels contain reproductions of photographs and information highlighting selected themes from their biographies and excerpts from their literary output. In addition, the permanent exhibition's exhibits also include individual pieces of furniture that once belonged to the writers and bookcases with fragments of their libraries (including one complete cabinet that once belonged to Silvije Strahimir Kranjčević). The second part of the permanent exhibition includes content on the history of theatre in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as profiles of nine artists associated with the theatrical arts. The literary and theatrical parts are discreetly separated by a red curtain. The permanent exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue, the texts for which were prepared by Šejla Šehabović, Amina Abdičević, Zlatan Delić and Ifeta Lihić (*Stalna postavka*, Šehabović et al., 2016).

In my research for this article, I dealt only with literary collections. In 2022 in the museum's repository, there were more than sixty collections devoted to literature.[5] Most were materials related to authors connected with Bosnia and Herzegovina during the existence of socialist Yugoslavia (thirty-five named collections) and writers from the turn of the 20th century (a dozen collections). In the collections dedicated to specific authors, attention is drawn to the small representation of women writers (only three collections today) and contemporary authors (to be discussed later).

The materials are stored in a repository that is being gradually upgraded. Access to them, although open to all interested parties (both scientists and enthusiasts), is not easy. Most of the exhibits are not catalogued, and the museum does not have a separate and safe space for quiet work on the collections (in the warm months, the courtyard is used for this). Insight into individual collections requires the intermediation of curators overburdened with other work. The museum library exists only in the form of a disorganized book collection, which is impossible to use (there is no separate room, no employee taking care of the book collection, and no system for making titles available).

The first floor of the building hosts administrators' and curator's offices. On the first floor, in addition to the permanent exhibition, there is a gallery –

[5] The notation in the catalogue promoting the permanent exhibition indicates that there should be sixty-seven of them. I counted a total of 57 authors (including 3 female writers) and five separate collections described as The Association of Writers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Association Writers of Yugoslavia, press clippings thematically related to literature, contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina writers, and scattered materials for study.

a space intended primarily for temporary exhibitions produced at the museum, but also rented out for commercial use.

Well recognized in the minds of the city's residents is the beautiful museum courtyard, which turns into a café during the summer months. For decades, the professional activities of the institution were oriented towards the elite and niche area of high culture, and to this day most of the museum's events are rather intimate in nature.

The financial and legal status of the Museum of Literature and Performing Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina has remained unregulated since 1995, thus significantly hampering its activities. After the end of hostilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995), it was not determined to which ministry the museum and six other cultural institutions would be subordinated;[6] no government department was obliged to take responsibility for their operation, therefore there was no regular funding, and funds had to be raised through grants announced by the authorities. Well-established cultural institutions with a long-standing tradition in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been forced to plan expenditures based on projects and external grants, as have NGOs, which unfortunately translates into the need to prepare exhibitions and events in a hurry. Exhibitions, including those produced entirely by the museum, are usually presented for only one week (with a few exceptions) due to the need to rent gallery space.

At the time of my research, the Museum of Literature had ten employees, all waiting to be paid their outstanding salaries. In April 2024, the Parliament of the Canton of Sarajevo passed a law on the temporary cofinancing of long-neglected cultural institutions, offering hope for gradual improvement of the situation.[7] In November 2024, the High Representative (OHR) also took

[6] These include the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Zemaljski muzej Bosne i Hercegovine), the National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Nacionalna i univerzitetska biblioteka Bosne i Hercegovine), the Art Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Umjetnička galerija Bosne i Hercegovine), Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Historijski muzej Bosne i Hercegovine), Cinemaoteka Bosnia and Herzegovina (Kinoteka Bosne i Hercegovine), and Library for the Blind and Visually Impaired of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Biblioteka za slijepa i slabovidna lica Bosne i Hercegovine).

[7] The law adopted on April 26, 2024, came into effect at the beginning of May 2024. It provides for co-financing of salaries for employees of the Museum of Literature and Performing Arts (as well as all institutions listed in footnote 6). The text of the law is available on the website: https://skupstina.ks.gov.ba/sites/skupstina.ks.gov.ba/files/zakon_preuzimanje_institucija_kulture_hitni_postupak.pdf (*Zakon o privremenom preuzimanju sufinansiranja institucija kulture i obrazovanja čiji je osnivač Bosna i Hercegovina*, 2024).

a stance on the issue, obliging the state to take responsibility for the legal status of the mentioned institutions.[8]

The origins and development of the Museum of Literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina

The discussion regarding the need for a museum dedicated to literature began in 1955 (Maglajlić, 2006, p. 142). Its material beginning was to consist of exhibits belonging to the Literary Branch of the Sarajevo City Museum, including the cabinets of writers Silvij Strahimir Kranjčević and Petar Kočić.[9] The concept and shape of the postulated institution were consulted among a wide range of intellectuals, writers and cultural activists.[10] The most committed to the creation of the new institution was Razija Handžić,[11] once a partisan and poet, but at that time a curator in charge of the literary collection of the city museum. The decision to open the Museum of Literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina was made in April 1961[12] by the authorities of

[8] His order, adopted on November 21, 2024, came into force forthwith. The text of the law is available on the website: https://www.ohr.int/order-supporting-the-functioning-of-the-national-and-university-library-of-bosnia-and-herzegovina-and-other-cultural-institutions-of-significance-for-bosnia-and-herzegovina/ (*Order Supporting the Functioning of the National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Other Cultural Institutions of Significance for Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 2024).

[9] The mentioned artifacts came from collections originally created by the Institute for Balkan Studies at the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, later donated to the city (see Abdičević et al., 2013, p. 4).

[10] One of the exhibits in the permanent exhibition is a document showing the results of consultations in which 30 people participated (including Ivo Andrić, Hamza Humo, Ilija Kecmanović, Midhat Begić, Meša Selimović, Olga Marasović, Milan Bogdanović, Branko Ćopić, Đuro Gavela, Nijaz Dizdarević, Branislav Đurđev, Veljko Petrović, Moni Finci). The respondents were asked about the benefits of opening such an institution, the thematic scope (eras and specific authors), the name, the scientific or educational character, the ideological orientation, the criteria for selecting writers, and the attitude of such an institution towards others also dealing with literature. The document also shows that the surveyed writers were also consulted separately about the potential presentation of their work.

[11] Razija Handžić (1909–1994) was a poet, editor of the women's magazine Nova žena, radio editor and employee of several cultural institutions. She is openly involved in the activities of the Anti-Fascist Women's Front (AFŽ). For more on her importance to the culture of Bosnia and Herzegovina, see Delić (2016).

[12] At a similar time, a museum dedicated to Polish literature is being established in Warsaw. It is noteworthy, however, that it has evolved from an institution originally dedicated to

Bosnia and Herzegovina, then a republic of Yugoslavia. The Sarajevo museum was located in a few cramped rooms of a historic building on Sima Milutinović Sarajlija Street, then still full of tenants (Papić, 1965, p. 4). The aforementioned Razija Handžić was appointed as the institution's first director. Documents and press comments available today confirm her persistence and determination. It was Handžić who oversaw the discussions on the form of the future museum and set the direction of its development. Radivoj Papić, summing up the five-year period of her directorship, enumerated the challenges she managed to overcome (premises and financial difficulties); he praised her ability to build beneficial contacts for the future of the institution, her ingenuity in acquiring new materials of value to the museum, and her readiness to constantly educate herself and learn about good museological practices (see Papić, 1965, p. 4). Šejla Šehabović, who holds the post of director today – a continuation of Razija Handžić's work – also points out that the initiator of the museum was able to not only plan her work well but also use favourable circumstances wisely. A prime example of this is a series of initiatives to raise awareness of the museum's existence (and its significance for Bosnian-Herzegovinian culture) that were undertaken in the autumn of 1961 following the announcement that Ivo Andrić had been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Subsequently, the first director's efforts to maintain regular contact with the only Yugoslav Nobel laureate in this field undoubtedly positioned Andrić as a "future exhibit".[13]

The foundation document[14] specified the institution's basic tasks: to collect and secure materials related to the lives and works of writers connected with Bosnia and Herzegovina, to scientifically compile and museologically systematize them, and to prepare them to be made available in exhibitions and scientific research works. These were intended, the decision further noted, to foster the broadening of the nation's cultural horizons by introducing the mass public to significant literary titles (from literary antiquities to contemporary texts), eras or trends, and to develop an interest in reading and a love of books.

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two prominent writers: Mickiewicz and Słowacki. Its activity began in 1955, while the programmatic expansion of its scope of activity began in 1960 (Kucza-Kuczyńska, 1986, pp. 9–10).

[13] One of the more popular anecdotes related to the writer's interest in the fate of the museum is the one about the postcards sent by Andric from his numerous travels. He signed himself on them in this way. This memory will be recalled in a conversation with me by, among others, the first curator Mira Miljanović.

[14] The formal beginning of the new institution is marked by a document called *Rješenje o osnivanju muzeja književnosti*, dated April 27, 1961 (based on *Zakon o muzejima*; published in *Službeni list Narodne Republike Bosne i Hercegovine*, No. 53/60). I cite all documents according to their reprints prepared by Ikbal Cogo (here see Cogo, 2016, p. 68).

It is interesting that this description includes signals of a kind of modernity of this institution, since the future audience was also expected to get acquainted with more complex works and with "progressive artistic communication" through permanent and temporary exhibitions (Cogo, 2016, p. 68).

The first documents[15] also contain information about the scientific nature of the museum, its educational role, and its organizational structure (including a six-member Museum Council, three of whose members were appointed by the Parliament of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina).

In accordance with the plan for the gradual development of the institution that was stipulated in the foundation document, the collections were expanded unhurriedly. At the initial stage, there was still no room for displaying the first collections, so activities were mainly concerned with acquiring and organizing materials. The first curators, while developing collections, were also learning on the job[16]. The first exhibition was based on the museum's own resources related to the life and work of Petar Kočić (*Petar Kočić. Život i djelo*), the pretext being the fiftieth anniversary of this author's death. The exhibition was presented in the spaces of the Museum of the City of Sarajevo (later in three other cities). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the tasks of those employed at the museum increasingly began to include theatre, as a result of which an additional branch dedicated to this area was established. In 1977, the institution officially changed its name to the Museum of Literature and Performing Arts, but it continued to deal predominantly with literature.

Temporary exhibitions were initially presented in other facilities. Of greatest interest was the *Znakovi pored puta* [Signs of the Roadside] exhibition organized in Collegium Artisticum,[17] where the most valuable exhibits from the museum's

[15] A few years after the foundation, a document also appeared that described the direction of the museum's development: *Zakon o Muzeju književnosti Bosne i Hercegovine*; publication *Službeni list Narodne Republike Bosne i Hercegovine*, No. 38/67 (Cogo, 2016, pp. 84–85).

[16] The only person experienced in working with literary exhibits was the first director (thanks to her work at the Literary Branch of the Sarajevo City Museum). In the first half of the 20th century in what is now Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was difficult to find experienced staff: there were no schools, and there could be no network of museums. Until World War II, only two such institutions existed (the National Museum/Zemaljski muzej in Sarajevo, established in 1899, and the Ethnographic Museum/Muzej Bosanske pokrajine, established in Banja Luka in 1930), while between 1945 and 1961 as many as 13 were established (Rizvanbegović, 1976, p. 110).

[17] Anniversary publications refer to the 10,000-strong audience for this exhibition (Ljiljak, 2001, p. 6). In the first 30 years of its existence, the museum prepared a total of 28 literary exhibitions presented outside its own premises (Miljanović, 2001c, pp. 11–16).

collection were displayed (including the manuscript of the novel *Na Drini ćuprija* and a manuscript of poems by Mak Dizdar). The acquisition of more rooms in the building on Sima Milutinović Street brought the institution closer to preparing a permanent exhibition. In 1986, for the museum's twenty-fifth anniversary, an exhibition entitled *Izbor iz književnih zbirki muzeja*[18] [Selections from the Museum's Literary Collections] was opened. A selection of its exhibits served as a small permanent exhibition, but the premises' circumstances were still not conducive to opening to a wider audience. Gradually, the storage conditions for the increasing number of exhibits also changed. In time (in the former basement), a museum repository was created that housed a sizable part of the collection.[19]

The same process of describing exhibits was applied throughout the assembling and cataloguing of the museum's steadily expanding resources, whether from its inception or as new items were added over time. For the most part, the collections were organized according to a biographical key consisting of the author and his work (manuscripts, documents, correspondence, photographs, personal items, book collections or parts of them). In the anniversary publication *40 godina. Muzej književnosti i pozorišne umjetnosti Bosne i Hercegovine*, one of the first custodians, Mira Miljanović, meticulously described the process of acquiring materials (Miljanović, 2001a, pp. 49–50). Donations from authors played a not insignificant role. Meša Selimović donated the manuscript of his novel *Derviš i smrt* and the archives of the journal Brazda; Skender Kulenović donated the manuscripts of two texts and a handwritten issue of his high school almanac; the already mentioned Ivo Andrić donated two versions of the manuscript of his novel *Na Drini ćuprija*, a fountain pen, and numerous translations of his books into foreign languages. On the occasion of the preparations for the exhibition *Znakovi pored puta* in 1980, an invitation was extended to literary circles (and specific contemporary writers) to donate manuscripts. This gesture received quite a response, but subsequent initiatives were not as fruitful. Miljanović also enumerated other failures. It proved impossible to buy back both the archive that Ilija Kecmanović had amassed during his lifetime and the rich archive left behind by Skender Kulenović, while attempts to acquire valuable documents from the legacy of Antun Branko Simić also failed. Until 1992, it was common to buy objects and documents of interest

[18] The catalogue noted that it consisted of 213 items from literary collections and 23 items from the cabinets of Silvij Strahimir Kranjčević, Petar Kočić and Hasan Kikić (Maglajlić et al., 1986).

[19] Luckily for the exhibits, the cellar room was originally used to store wine, so the temperature was relatively constant. I learned from the museum's penultimate director that the room was additionally secured due to its proximity to the river.

to the museum; however, after the outbreak of the war, the collection expanded sporadically with only donated materials.

Publishing activities developed slowly. The museum's titles included three monographs on writers (P. Kočić, F. Jukić and S. Ćorović) and an occasional study on the literary heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Mapa književne baštine Bosne i Hercegovine*, 1989).[20] Two issues of the institution's signature professional journal Baština were also published before the war. Later, mainly catalogues accompanying exhibitions were published (if there were funds for this). In the first decades, conservation work securing the oldest documents was also a regular task that was carried out in cooperation with the National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

During the war years (1992–1995), the museum did not cease operations. It was at that time, in 1992, that several rooms on the first floor were adopted for exhibition space. Thus the institution gained its own gallery, with the nickname of prominent poet Mehmedalija Mak Dizdar written into its name: Galerija Mak. The relatively safe location in besieged Sarajevo turned the Museum of Literature into a place bustling with cultural life, with many exhibitions and book promotions held there during the war,[21] and even three theatrical performances.

Museum status

The museum was established by the authorities of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was part of the now-defunct Socialist Federal Yugoslavia. By a decision issued in 1993,[22] the wartime authorities of independent Bosnia and Herzegovina confirmed the museum's status as an institution of public importance.

[20] The study consists of a map and a booklet containing an index and short biographies of 144 writers (including only one female author), as well as lists and descriptions of the most important periodicals and literary events in the republic.

[21] Among them were 6 literary exhibitions. The first, *Rukopisi i djela sefarskih pisaca*, presented the works of Sephardic Jews; the others were exhibitions presented in earlier years, updated when possible: 3 theatrical exhibitions, 28 exhibitions of art works, 8 exhibitions of artistic photography, 13 presentations of archival materials from outside the museum's collection. In addition to the exhibitions, there were also 6 book promotions (Miljanović, 2001b).

[22] *Uredba sa zakonskom snagom o muzejskoj djelatnosti* (*Službeni list Republike Bosne i Hercegovine*, No. 13/93). Article 25 of this document states that responsibility for the museum is assumed by the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina (as the founding institution).

This was the last document that treated the responsibility for the institution at the central, i.e., nationwide, level. Its provisions ceased to be binding under the new political order and no subsequent document has been issued on this level. The signing of the Dayton Peace Accord in 1995, in addition to the ceasefire, brought about a complicated territorially and politically stratified shape of the state, and society was deeply divided into ethno-national groups (for more on this, see Zdeb, 2022, pp. 120–151). The post-war order was to be determined by a new constitution and provisions for newly established authorities, parliaments, ministries of culture, and units responsible for national heritage. Annex Eight of the agreement established the Commission to Preserve National Monuments and obligated the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the constituent Federations of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska (i.e., authorities at all levels of the intricate administrative division) to provide legal and financial care for objects recognized as national heritage (*General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (*Dayton Agreement*), 1995). When defining national monuments, the relevant provisions in the document take into account both movable and immovable property of great importance to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who have a common cultural, historical, religious or ethnic heritage (for more on the ambiguities arising from the non-obvious interpretation of heritage in Bosnia, see Falski, 2022, pp. 36–41). In 2011, such an obligation covered the Museum of Literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina, or more precisely the building itself, indicating the Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as the institution responsible for its fate. However, this provision turned out to be insufficient.

When describing the last three decades of the museum's activities in an interview, the current director, Šejla Šehabović, drew attention to the emotional dimension of political change and its real consequences. Speaking about the attitude of the employees, she pointed out three phases: the phase of great hope, which occurred right after the war, in which it was natural to be ready to work for the reconstruction of the ruined order; the phase of shock, when clear stagnation in political life (after 2006) took away the faith of Bosnia and Herzegovina's citizens in the good intentions of the authorities and led cultural institutions to gigantic troubles; and the third phase, the phase of struggle, based on the commitment of exceptionally determined individuals.

In the postwar years, the museum received grants from the Ministry of Civil Affairs (from the national pool), the Federal Ministry of Culture and Sports, and the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Canton of Sarajevo. Funding, however, was chaotic and irregular. Official authorities at no level

took responsibility for the fate of the institution, although its nature and status as described in the foundation documents had not changed. There are few written records regarding the principles of providing assistance to the museum, but there are many inconsistencies concerning the terms of grants announced for cultural institutions. In addition to the turbulence in the political reality, the beginning of the 2000s also brought the sudden death of the long-time director of the institution, Aleksandar Ljiljak. The institution was handed over to Medhija Maglajlić, a curator with considerable seniority but who had never had ambitions to hold such a post. According to some of the museum's staff, this change was supposed to promote the alignment of the museum's activities with the ethno-national order (but I have not found confirmation of this). The issues related to securing collections and the systematic operation of the institution were growing worse. Funds obtained from grants were insufficient, so museum space (primarily the gallery) began to be rented out for commercial purposes. After Maglajlić's postponed retirement in 2011, the institution was without a director for a year and a half. It survived that time thanks to the determination of the museum's longtime secretary and deputy director, Aida Ključić, a lawyer by training who was happy to see Šejla Šehabović arrive.

The decade of Šejla Šehabović

In 2012, Šehabović accepted the invitation from representatives of the Federal Ministry of Culture and Sports to head the institution, which was standing on the precipice; he officially took over the position in mid-2013. A native of Tuzla, Šehabović[23] was a doctoral student in Gender Studies at the Central European University in Budapest at the time. Although she only became aware of the actual scale of problems and challenges associated with running the museum after starting the job, she did not withdraw. The aforementioned ministry made efforts to resolve the situation of endangered cultural institutions (perhaps due to a decision by the Commission to Preserve National Monuments in 2011),

[23] Šejla Šehabović (born 1977): teacher, researcher and critic of literature, author of short prose forms and poet. Activist involved in social (equality) and environmental issues. Co-author of comic books and Bosnia and Herzegovina literature textbooks.

but a plan prepared by politicians supportive of the museum at the time was never implemented.[24] In the following years, the number of representatives of the authorities who were indifferent or hostile to the institution increased.

Already in her first weeks on the job, Šehabović boldly set the course for change. The museum's opening to a wider audience and targeted collaboration with specialists were adequate to current needs and aligned with Razija Handžić's objectives. From the very beginning, the new initiatives were accompanied by a consistent message about the importance of the collection for the culture of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the institution's real situation. The first projects were implemented with the significant participation of new curator Zlatan Delić. Šehabović has consistently implemented a plan that has always included activities in five areas: literature promotion (through regular work with museum visitors), research (primarily through cooperation with academia), education (educating the new museum audience), archiving (through the creation of new collections), and effective networking (especially through international cooperation). The enthusiasm with which she set to work did not immediately meet with the favour of the museum employees. In the background of the proposed initiatives[25] remained the institution's debts and the six-month arrears of salaries. This problem resounded especially during preparations for the large exhibition *Iz naših književnih i pozorišnih zbirki* [From our Literary and Theatre Collections], an important step in opening to a new, wider audience. The employees' dissatisfaction with the boss's decision was described in the daily press, in response to which the new director, also in the press, calculated the first effects of her involvement. After all, with the support of some employees, she had managed in less than five months to realize ten exhibitions, four literary evenings, two book promotions, two workshop meetings, four festival programs and a theatrical performance; she had also submitted five projects related to financing areas crucial to the continuation of the institution (Šehabović, 2013, p. 29). *Iz naših književnih i pozorišnih zbirki* (which was intended to be an overview of the literary and theatre collections

[24] The decision to appoint a new director was itself intended to be temporary, lasting until the museum's legal status was settled. See *Rješenje o privremenom imenovanju direktora Muzeja književnosti i pozorisne umjetnosti Bosne i Hercegovine* (2013).

[25] The media reported in detail about the first initiatives: successful cooperation with the translator-resident program Traduki and PEN, with performer and sevdah theorist Damir Imamovic, or with well-known actors on the topic of performative readings of literary excerpts (see, e.g., Trako, 2013, p. 27).

owned by the museum) was successfully presented on the scheduled date. The extensive catalogue accompanying the exhibition shows that as many as twenty-five writers were presented.[26]

Like Razija Handžić at the very beginning, the new director devoted a great deal of energy to building a network of contacts with communities that are important for the museum. She continued cooperation with those that had been involved with the institution for years (organizers of cultural events with a long tradition, such as "Dani Poezije" or "Susreti Zije Dizdarevića"; cultural associations, or the Bosnian-Herzegovinian branch of the PEN Club), while building understanding with new entities (NGOs, feminist foundations and associations representing marginalized groups). She included academics (primarily comparatists, Slavists, and library scholars) and diplomatic circles in the discussion of the museum's situation. With varying degrees of success, she appealed for attention to representatives of all political factions. The goals that have guided Šehabović have always been a slightly modernized version of those recorded in the founding documents. Strengthening the institution's image as a valuable resource for professional audiences naturally translated into a priority: the accessibility of collections (already being pursued gradually through their digitization). Also at the forefront was the sensitization of both staff and museum audiences to current issues, such as the glaring disproportion in the representation of women writers and women's content in the museum's collections. This resulted in projects such as Zlatan Delić's exhibition on Vera Obrenović Delibašić (*Vera Obrenović Delibašić. Ničija zemlja*, 2015), texts dedicated to Razija Handžić (*Poezija i Muzej Razije Handžić*, 2016), and a presentation of collections related to her (a digital presentation about this writer as part of the museum's 60th anniversary celebration). Other consequences of noticing the previously mentioned disproportion were Ifeta Lihić's exhibition dedicated to Hanka, a female literary and theatrical figure and heroine of Isak Samokovlja's drama (*Nožem, kao u kučku. Život Samokovlijine Hanke u autorskom tekstu i kulturalnom kontekstu*, 2018), and activities dedicated to the past, present and future generations of Sarajevo residents (together with the Historical Museum of BiH, as part of an international project from 2019).

[26] They were Ehdem Mulabdić, Silvije Strahimir Kranjčević, Safet-beg Bašagić, Petar Kočić, Isak Samokovlja, Ivo Andrić, Borivoje Jevtić, Hamza Humo, Ahmed Muradbegović, Antun Branko Šimić, Hasan Kikić, Alija Nametak, Meša Selimović, Šukrja Pandžo, Skender Kulenović, Midhad Begić, Ćamil Sijarić, Branko Ćopić, Mak Dizdar, Ahmed Hromadžić. Derviš Sušić, Josip Lešić, Vitomir Lukić, Izet Sarajlić, Alija Isaković. See Abdičević et al. (2013).

The regular activities also included an attempt to revive the museum's magazine "Baština" (a new editorial board was appointed, and two issues were published in 2015 and 2016).

The need to create an offer that was also accessible and attractive to a wider audience necessitated a change in how the museum communicated its situation and initiatives. As the lack of a fixed budget prevented the creation of a website, the new version of the institution was presented systematically through social media. This proved particularly useful during the lockdown period caused by the coronavirus pandemic. For a year, social media informed the public about the upcoming celebration of the institution's 60th anniversary and the valuable collections (12 series of posts about individual collections were presented[27]). Social media also facilitated the integration of the literary community centred around the museum, if only through the "Iz(olovanje) arhiva" project on Instagram,[28] as part of which more than forty male and female writers read their works.

Šehabović's determination has also been noted in traditional media: not just the frequency of museum news appearing via newspapers, radio, or television, but also the extremely consistent integration of information on current events with an appeal for the preservation of the institution. The inability to fully mobilize the museum's staff, formal restrictions on personnel changes, objective financial problems and conflicts in Sarajevo's intellectual circles provided the background for the decision to involve volunteers in the daily operations of the institution. Volunteers not only streamlined the implementation of planned tasks but also improved relations within the museum as they took on some of the responsibilities off the permanent staff, thus bringing a new kind of commitment to the work and a different dynamic. As a result, the group of enthusiasts of the institution and its collections has grown noticeably. Future collaborators in specific promotional and scientific projects emerged from

[27] From August 2020 to July 2021, 11 collections on writers and one on theatre life in Bosnia and Herzegovina were presented on the museum's official Facebook profile and Instagram account. Each series consisted of an introduction and about 30 posts (photographs or scans of selected exhibits with a commentary by the curator or curator in charge of the series). See https://www.facebook.com/muzejknjizevnostiipozorisneumjetnostibih (accessed 17.12.2023).

[28] The name of the project is a play on words. After removing the passage from the parenthesis, the title "isolation of the archive" is the neutral "from the archive." In April 2020, a 40-day literary quarantine was launched on the museum's Instagram, where recordings of readings of selected works were published daily, and the virtual collection "Iz(olovanje) arhiva" was created. See https://www.instagram.com/muzejknjizevnostiBiH (accessed 17.12.2023).

those supporting the museum. The combination of their ideas and the activities of the curators has resulted in some very interesting and innovative ideas, such as exhibitions paving the way for new museum collections.

Šejla Šehabović's decade has also seen the continuation of good practices in the area of cooperation between the Museum of Literature and other cultural institutions that are primarily affected by a similar fate, namely exclusion from regular state funding: the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Art Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the National and University Library of B&H. Good practices involve collaboration on joint projects (e.g., initiatives related to reclaiming women's presence in urban space within the *Sarajevo History Book – Guidelines for Women's Heritage*), the provision of substantive support in continuously filling out grant applications, and sometimes even short-term loans between institutions, according to the director. Joint efforts have also been made to engage policymakers with the situation of unfunded institutions, including an attempt to push through a lex specialis proposal that would temporarily regulate their legal status.

Let's not forget about the burden of responsibility placed on the person heading the museum and managing the public collections. Following Krzysztof Pomian, I will emphasize that already at the elementary organizational level it is not easy to reconcile even these basic responsibilities. This burden concerns, for example, the obligation of the director to pass on objects to their successors in a condition as close as possible to that in which they were received, while simultaneously having the obligation to display the museum exhibits to visitors (Pomian, 2023, p. 7). This is quite a challenge even under normal circumstances. Ten years of managing an institution without stable funding and with an unregulated status has often involved feelings of helplessness, especially in the face of inhumane grant procedures, but no one has ever given up on saving the museum.[29] Šejla Šehabović's iron-fisted consis-

[29] Stability as such used to be guaranteed by annual grants from the Ministry of Culture of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina for institutions of public interest in Bosnia and Herzegovina (exclusively for seven cultural institutions of unregulated status). Over time, however, the principles of these grants changed and they became available to other organizations as well; the grant application process ceased to be a pro forma procedure with the risk of insufficient funding in each subsequent year. At the beginning of 2023, the situation was also complicated by worldview differences between the new Minister of Culture and the museum director, which significantly hampered communication at unclear moments. Competitions were also held by the Culture Department of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, an authority at the national level. At this level of authority, however, for the sake of ethnic parity (the need

tency in spending the funds raised first on securing the collection, then on salaries (in full knowledge that most of the grants available to the institution allow only a small part of the funds to be used for salaries) has not helped in motivating the long-serving staff to work. As a consequence, however, the employees of the Museum of Literature have learned how to smoothly navigate the grant application procedures, taking advantage of support from diplomatic missions and other external entities. The director found a way to expand the team in 2020 with a competent person who cares about the institution's image. She has also managed to expand the collections, although for many years the heirs of writers' legacies were afraid to donate materials to an institution on the brink of bankruptcy. It is crucial, therefore, to rebuild public confidence in the museum, resulting in three new and extremely valuable collections: Melika Salihbeg Bosnawi, Karim Zaimović, and Zdravko Grebo (all formally acquired in 2023).

When I asked the director about an argument that could fire the imagination of political decision-makers – if only they were actually interested in a serious discussion about the museum's future – she gave the economic argument without hesitation. She is aware that short-term financing of facilities of this type does not allow them to operate in full accordance with their vision and mission, but it also does not pay off at all for the financing parties. The costs of projects prepared and implemented in haste are always larger than the costs of activities planned well in advance.

Šejla Šehabović managed to prepare a new permanent exhibition for the institution's fifty-fifth anniversary and actually opened the museum's doors to literature enthusiasts, schoolchildren, and tourists (the project was carried out with significant financial support from the Norwegian Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina). She also managed to include the Museum of Literature in the large *Muzejske priče* project (financed by European Union funds), thanks to which the permanent exhibition was enriched with an audio guide in three languages. She has also managed to renovate the repository, modernize the storage of the collection (with financial support from the Goethe Institute), and

for agreement between representatives of Bosnians, Serbs and Croats), it was sometimes difficult to achieve unanimity. In the decade I am interested in, there were two years in which no consensus was reached on Bosnia and Herzegovina's budget (the years in question were 2020 and 2021), which meant that these contests were abandoned. In recent years, this has become the norm at all levels of government to launch competitions with very short application deadlines and a complicated settlement procedure.

include the institution in the City Card program (and through this common ticket for city attractions gain easier access to tourists from other countries). When asked about successes, however, the current director points to the people associated with the museum (Hodžić & Šehabović, 2023), whose actions position the institution differently. Former curator Zlatan Delić found inspiration for his doctoral dissertation in the museum's materials, and today he promotes knowledge of the potential locked in the collections in German academia. Former museum volunteer and collaborator Ifeta Lihić, a doctoral student in the US since fall 2023, raised funds for an exhibition about Karim Zaimović (who died as a result of injuries caused by mortar shells in the last days of the war), which led to the transfer of this writer's legacy to the museum's collection.

A difficult heritage

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the strongest political factions support the reinforcement of the distinctiveness of ethnonational groups (sometimes also of the Bosniak, Serbian and Croatian ethnonationalisms), troublesome cultural heritage is easy to find. According to Macdonald, heritage implies ownership and defines belonging – metaphorically or literally (Macdonald, 2021, p. 37); therefore, it serves as an effective tool in either valorizing or devaluing specific groups, being equally useful in the processes of self-identification and exclusion. As stated in the accompanying catalogue of the permanent exhibition (Šehabović et al., 2016, p. 2), the Museum of Literature and Performing Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina "holds evidence, in quantity and quality, of the lives and works of female and male writers of Bosnia and Herzegovina of all nationalities and outlooks", thus aiming to connect writers and literature from the same regions rather than divide them based on their affiliation with national groups that are deliberately presented separately in official narratives. However, there is no shortage of difficulties here. The term "literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina" is problematic in the case of the institution's collection and its name. In the aforementioned foundation document, but also in the documentation available in the museum's collection on the beginnings of the institution, the basic criterion for the selection of writers was their connection to Bosnia and Herzegovina, first and foremost their origin, followed by writing about Bosnia and living and publishing in this country. Today, we

can confidently take these criteria as directions of thinking about literature, which in 20th-century philological reflection was rarely considered as a separate entity without a broader Yugoslav context. Despite this, it was Bosnia and Herzegovina that was the only one of the republics of the former Yugoslavia to open a literary museum, and Ivo Andric turned out to be the only Yugoslav literary Nobel Prize winner (which can also be seen as a significant recognition of Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature). Interest in literature and success in this field provided a significant counterbalance to the damaging stereotype about the backwardness/illiteracy of the people of this republic. In discussions over terminology, worldview disagreements could not be avoided, even in scientific circles.[30] For example, at the University of Sarajevo, the literatures of the nations of Bosnia and Herzegovina began to be taught and studied (using the plural form in the names of the courses and research field), but this terminology is not a nationwide norm. Although political elites in the public sphere favoured initiatives and institutions that are easily identifiable through an ethno-national lens, the institution I examine here has not divided its collections according to the nationality of the authors.

Aleksandar Ljiljak, in a publication marking the museum's fortieth anniversary, explained that it possesses items that are part of Bosnia and Herzegovina's heritage, which most appropriately for their area represent the mosaic structure of many centuries of Bosnia and Herzegovina's cultural life and identity (Ljiljak, 2001, p. 8). When describing the collections, Ljiljak enumerated how many collections represent Bosniak literature (14), how many represent Serbian literature (18), Croatian literature (12), Jewish literature (4), and how many refer to all the literatures of the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina (7), but with the express purpose of emphasizing the diversity of shared resources (Ljiljak, 2001, p. 5).

[30] The main opponents were Enver Kazaz (broadly speaking, an advocate of a singular yet diverse literature) and Enes Duraković (notable for his efforts in codifying a distinct Bosniak literature in Bosnia and Herzegovina). Kazaz, patiently listing the various proposals accumulated over the years (Bosnian literature, Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature, literature in Bosnia and Herzegovina, literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina, literature of the nations and nationalities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, literatures of the nations and nationalities of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Bosniak, Serbian, Croatian, and Jewish literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina), highlights the fact that their multiplicity speaks more about the lack of consensus within academic circles than about the literature itself (Kazaz, 2009, p. 7). To this collection, Sanjin Kordić, a disciple of Duraković, adds the concept of a Bosnian-Herzegovinian literary community, which supposedly aims to reconcile the two irreconcilable positions (see Kodrić, 2019; Zieliński, 2019).

During my research I recorded twelve in-depth interviews with current and former museum staff (primarily curators) and volunteers. These interviews focused on four key issues: the museum's collections (and the accompanying narrative), the difficult heritage, the current situation of the institution, and the commitment to saving it. Those associated with the museum, when asked by me who they thought the institution was inconvenient for today, responded by pointing to those who are not interested in the existence of Bosnia as a state, do not think of its inhabitants as a cultural community, and support ethnonational divisions. Each collection can find a group of interested viewers, but not all are open to a message about a common heritage outside the currently dominant Bosniak, Serbian and Croatian canons. The provocative question regarding the feasibility of dividing the planned catalogue of collections and exhibits according to the national affiliation of authors elicited a clear consensus among my interviewees on maintaining the original profile of the museum without such divisions. They emphasized that in many cases the authors themselves did not declare any national affiliation: "classifying them based on names rather than on what can be discerned from their lives and works would be highly unprofessional", they explained.

The problematic issue in the case of the Museum of Literature and Performing Arts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, therefore, is not heritage understood as a collection of objects of unquestionable scientific, artistic or historical value, but, as Stobiecka and Smith write, it is the way this heritage is practiced (Stobiecka, 2022, pp. 119–120). An important pillar of the collection is materials relating to authors involved in the liberation of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina during World War II. In the first decades of the museum's existence, decisions were made on how to present the works of then-important and canonical writers who were at the same time heroes in the fight against fascism (Skender Kulenović, Branko Ćopić, Razija Handžić and others), victims in the Chetnik or Ustasha attacks (Hasan Kikić, Zija Dizdarević), or persecuted for their origin (Isak Samokovlja). In a decade of saving the museum from closure, these questions have not lost their relevance. They return on the occasion of the formation of a new exhibition – the first truly permanent one – because, as Pomian reminds us, "the cult cultivated in and by museums only seemingly turns to the past" (Pomian, 2023, p. 11). The questions, therefore, concern not only how to present in a post-Yugoslav reality the work of those who actively participated in the formation of the political and cultural life of socialist Yugoslavia, but also how to use their potential in the circumstances

of a post-Daytonian dysfunctional state. The writers involved, the heroes of World War II, symbolically left clear clues and set directions for future action. Their material legacy is a testament to their joint work, solidarity, and willingness to make the supreme sacrifice for the life of the community. This is how the inclusion of these very figures in the permanent exhibition is understood and explained by the current director of the institution, Šejla Šehabović.

Laurajane Smith, writing about heritage as a cultural process, draws attention to the exchange that takes place between the senders and receivers of the museum message. From this perspective, it is not common or divided museum collections that are still problematic, but only the resistance of the participants of the above-mentioned process to the divisions that are omnipresent in public space. The question of the museum's audience, especially given the complex and trauma-laden[31] cultural and intellectual life of Sarajevo, seems inevitable. From the information I have gathered and the observations I made in May 2022, it seems that the Museum of Literature has a loyal audience, albeit a small one. It consists primarily of mature people (who remember the communal experience of the Yugoslav period) who have been involved with specific literary circles for years and have a keen interest in the fate of all underfunded Sarajevo institutions. The effects of the last decade of the museum's systematic efforts to attract new, younger audiences can be seen in single exhibitions and events that are thematically closer to the new generations. According to Smith, visiting the museum is a "performative declaration of identity" (Smith, 2023, p. 124). I deliberately draw attention to the generational stratification of the audience, but my intention is not to confirm that the museum's older audience realizes its attachment to the Yugoslav tradition, while the younger one experiences literary phenomena in a new triple order. While all cultural audiences in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina are constantly confronted with a narrative of national divisions, the rift between generations directly affected by the trauma of war and those trying to free themselves from the burdens of their parents and grandparents is also growing larger. For younger generations, the Museum of Literature is a vehicle for an alternative history to the one currently presented in school textbooks (which follow a separate national curriculum). Smith emphasizes that visitors (and therefore performers) become "an audience of performative interpretive activities authored by the site's management staff

[31] I am referring to the collective cultural trauma that also affects cultural institutions, burdening them with fragmented narratives (see Vuković, 2022, pp. 10–11).

and the interpretive professionals employed therein" (Smith, 2023, p. 124). I cite the description of this "experience" in its entirety to draw attention to the potential that lies in the resources of museum collections and the future decisions of qualified personnel. Over the past decade, the director of the Sarajevo facility has had extremely limited opportunities to review and adjust the composition of the museum's staff and has not had the tools to fully engage her subordinates to work effectively. Today, too, due to the short duration of most exhibitions (except the permanent one), it is still difficult to measure the consequences of a greater readiness for dialogue between the sender and receiver of museum content at the institution in question.

The complex cultural history of Bosnia and Herzegovina, combined with the ethnically driven funding of cultural initiatives, allows us to easily situate the Museum of Literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its collections within the context of discussions on problematic heritage. Macdonald argues that culture can be learned, but heritage that goes far back in time and speaks of our origins cannot (Macdonald, 2021, p. 250). The message that accompanies the museum formula could have a much greater impact on strengthening the communal cultural identity of a nationally heterogeneous society. It could, if it had a chance to reach its audience in a regular and modernized formula, but the financial situation of the institution today does not allow this.

But is the common heritage collected and practiced in the museum, which is problematic for the exclusionary narratives that dominate the political world, an obstacle to its daily functioning? To some extent, it certainly is. After all, if it were possible to easily draw dividing lines in collections and activities between what is Bosniak, Croatian, Serbian or Jewish, the discussion about funding could look very different, and there would probably be no shortage of those willing to take care of collections isolated in this way. Let's note, however, that the museum has not stopped working: without abandoning the vision and mission of the museum, successive directors (the last one being particularly efficient) have managed to maintain cooperation with extremely diverse entities (including those that seem to have ethnonational distinctiveness inscribed in the foundations of their activities, which they proudly present, such as the Preporod association or other national cultural organizations). In addition to the obvious negative consequences, in the lack of political supremacy the director sees greater freedom to carve out new topics. The institution is unfettered and constantly open to all aspects of Bosnian-Herzegovinian diversity, a good example of which is the hosting in 2022 of an exhibition by

Hedina Tahirović-Sijerčić, a representative and researcher of Roma culture and literature in Bosnia and Herzegovina (and the accompanying talks on creating a collection dedicated to Roma authors in the future), but also smaller initiatives supporting other marginalized communities in the country. After vying for attention for so long, it seems that a much bigger problem than the politically inconvenient and troublesome worldview heritage associated with the museum in the public space is the widespread indifference of political elites to the elementary needs of high culture. Although contemporary historical, philological or cultural studies reflection finds the causes of all the troubles in the dormant ethnonational conflict, I will go for Aleksandra Zdeb's political explanation as it seems adequate to the phenomena I observe and describe. This researcher identifies two sources of problems: the inconsistency between the political elites (their rhetoric and culture) and the institutional structure of the state, and the takeover of the state by these elites, which have undermined the credibility of the already difficult-to-implement democratic mechanisms (Zdeb, 2022, p. 12). The realization of the museum's mission and vision is not blocked by polemics about the problematic heritage; it is more threatened by the fact that the state, on which the institution depends, does not work (even if no level of government officially feels responsible for its fate). In interviews with people associated with the museum, there were many voices that suggested that communication with political representatives is ineffective, sometimes even impossible. Aversion to the vision of a shared past illustrated by the collections was cited as a reason, but right next to that was a lack of the will and basic competence necessary to understand the museum's situation (or even a willingness to hear about it). My position is not only based on the opinions collected and analysed: in the course of my research in May 2022, I decided to ask the evasive authorities (at the central, federal and cantonal levels) to consult on the situation of the Museum of Literature and Performing Arts in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I managed to arrange meetings at two ministries.[32] Despite the fact that both conversations allowed me to fill in and sort out some of the facts, and although the interlocutors devoted a lot of time and attention

[32] At the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Canton of Sarajevo, I was received by the Secretary for Cultural Affairs and a minister with a keen interest in the subject. At the Ministry of Culture of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, I was received by two advisors to the Minister. The Ministry of Civil Affairs proposed a date for a meeting after the end of my research stay in Sarajevo. It is not without significance that Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have a ministry for cultural affairs at the national level.

to the matter, the meetings confirmed my conviction that the road to sorting out the museum's status is long and bumpy. Although official representatives of the authorities responsible for culture repeated that their ministries were doing everything possible to support the museum, it was clear from the statements that the procedures undertaken lacked transparency, and that the organization of work at all levels of government was subordinated not to concern for culture as such but to the particular interests of the units for which they were established (the canton or the federation). Our conversations took place in an election year, thus efforts were being made to keep particular groups or politicians in power (for more on the mechanisms of elite reproduction, see Zdeb, 2022, pp. 152–162), so I was aware that assurances regarding careful monitoring of the museum's situation were accompanied by a great deal of courtesy. Thanks to the queries carried out on the spot, I also saw the pace at which the museum team works and the flurry of other duties when a ministry unexpectedly (i.e., according to the prevailing norm) announces a funding competition for institutions such as museums, setting a deadline of fourteen days to prepare applications. It is worth noting that during the period relevant to my research, for two years the Ministry of Civil Affairs did not announce any funding competitions to support state-abandoned cultural institutions. This was because, due to a lack of agreement at the central level, the budget could not be approved at the end of 2020 and 2021, which had consequences in subsequent periods. The current uncertainty and irregularity of financing have resulted in the institution implementing an ad hoc proprietary program instead of implementing the agenda of official state bodies.

Who is saving the museum?

The Museum of Literature and Performing Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been operating for six decades. This has been made possible by everyone who, through their willingness to work without regular compensation, has contributed to the daily functioning of the museum. I am referring primarily to enthusiastic employees, co-workers and volunteers who, despite the problems, did not hide their satisfaction with the tasks carried out at the museum. Their actions, in most cases, are underpinned by the conviction of the unquestionable value of the museum's collections and the need to preserve them unchanged.

When asked about the rescue of the facility and their participation in it, people associated with the museum pointed to various aspects of the process. Aware of the price they pay for standing in the front line of defence of a difficult cultural heritage, they emphasized respect for the work of their predecessors and the museum's chosen profile. They also spoke of a kind of obligation to the next generations, which cannot be deprived of this cultural institution in the course of their education. Former employees recalled attempts made in the post-war period to divide collections and distribute them among cultural institutions along ethnic/national lines (transferring Croatian collections to institutions in Mostar, Serbian ones to Banja Luka, and leaving only Bosniak collections in Sarajevo). Such an initiative was clearly opposed by the former director, Medhija Maglajlić, who still holds the view that her country and culture need the museum in the shape it was originally conceived.

In the more recent history of the institution, Šejla Šehabović, who initiates and oversees activities in line with the original order of the institution, speaks most loudly about its indispensability to Bosnian-Herzegovinian society. The consistency, determination and charisma of the director – as I have tried to show – seem to have been crucial in the uneven struggle for the museum's survival.

Esad Delibašić, while addressing a general question about the survival prospects of museums, emphasizes that one of the fundamental factors is the readiness of both museum staff and society as a whole for change. This readiness manifests, among other things, in the necessity to understand the museum as a medium that does not prioritize one identity over another, in the need for continuous interdisciplinary education of both staff and audience, in the readiness for social engagement, and in mediating the objectification of various opinions and attitudes (Delibašić, 2005, p. 48). The current director is undoubtedly ready for such changes; moreover, she has been implementing them systematically for years, despite objective obstacles, but the readiness of the entire society is difficult to gauge given the numerous dysfunctions of the state.

In the group of individuals who have been saving the museum for years, we can also include individual lecturers who inform their students about volunteering; researchers who confirm with their visits the need for access to the collections, or primary and secondary school teachers who bring their students to the museum. Šehabović stresses that less obvious gestures, such as the provision of small services free of charge or ad hoc help with everyday problems, also play a significant role in saving the institution.

Paradoxically, the survival of the institution in its original form may also have been influenced by a noticeable decline in interest from political representatives in high culture in recent years. The marginal position of this sector poses an objective threat, illustrated by long-standing issues such as lack of funds for document conservation and the inability to regularly pay staff salaries. However, it cannot be ruled out that the collections still form a coherent whole, indirectly also due to potential political decision-makers' lack of knowledge. Indeed, on the new shelves of the museum's repository there is no shortage of "pasts particularly at risk of deliberate distortion" (Rynarzewski, 2010).

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Muzeum Literatury i Sztuk Teatralnych Bośni i Hercegowiny – kłopotliwe dziedzictwo niejednorodnego narodowo kraju

Artykuł jest próbą uporządkowania informacji na temat Muzeum Literatury i Sztuk Teatralnych Bośni i Hercegowiny w Sarajewie. Przedstawia instytucję jako przykład kłopotliwego dziedzictwa, odpowiada na pytanie o potencjalny wpływ jej działań na umacnianie wspólnej tożsamości kulturowej mieszkańców niejednorodnego narodowo kraju. Analiza dotyczy przede wszystkim jednej dekady (2013–2023), ale w opisie pojawiają się też niezbędne odwołania do przeszłości placówki. Rozpatrywane w artykule „kłopotliwe dziedzictwo" jest tożsame z terminem *difficult heritage* utrwalonym przez Sharon Macdonald. W interpretacji opisywanych zjawisk posłużono się narzędziami zaczerpniętymi z badań nad pamięcią i dziedzictwem kulturowym (Macdonald, Stobiecka, Smith). W przypadku sarajewskiego muzeum problematyczny jest sposób praktykowania dziedzictwa w okolicznościach dysfunkcyjnego

państwa. Przedstawione w tekście strategie ratownicze są odpowiedzią na zobojętnienie elit politycznych na elementarne potrzeby kultury wysokiej.

Słowa kluczowe: muzeum literatury; dziedzictwo kulturowe; kłopotliwe dziedzictwo; literatura Bośni i Hercegowiny; tożsamość kulturowa

Museum of Literature and Performing Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina – the difficult heritage of a nationally heterogeneous country

The paper is an attempt to organize information about the Museum of Literature and Performing Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo. It presents this institution as an example of a difficult heritage and answers the question of the potential impact of its activities on strengthening the common cultural identity of the inhabitants of a nationally heterogeneous country. The analysis focuses on one decade (2013–2023), but the description also includes necessary references to the institution's past. The troubled legacy considered in the article is the same as the term *difficult heritage*, perpetuated by Sharon Macdonald. In interpreting the described phenomena, tools taken from research on memory and cultural heritage (Macdonald, Stobiecka, Smith) are used. In the case of this Sarajevo museum, how heritage is practiced in the circumstances of a dysfunctional state is problematic. The rescue strategies presented in the text are a response to the indifference of political elites to the elementary needs of high culture.

Keywords: literature museum; cultural heritage; difficult heritage; literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina; cultural identity

Dominika Kaniecka (dominika.kaniecka@uj.edu.pl) – doktorka nauk humanistycznych w zakresie literaturoznawstwa; adiunkta w Instytucie Filologii Słowiańskiej Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Członkini i współzałożycielka międzyinstytucjonalnej Pracowni Obszaru Postjugosłowiańskiego przy Uniwersytecie Warszawskim, członkini Komisji Kultury Słowian PAU oraz Polskiej Komisji Historii i Kultury Bałkanów (AIESEE). Autorka monografii *Opowiedzieć naród. Chorwackość według Augusta Šenoi* (2014). Zaintereso-

wania naukowe: chorwacka i bośniacko-hercegowińska literatura i kultura, praktyki wspólnotowe na obszarze postjugosłowiańskim, performatywny potencjał współczesnego życia społecznego i politycznego i szeroko rozumiana humanistyka zaangażowana.

Dominika Kaniecka (dominika.kaniecka@uj.edu.pl) – PhD in humanities in the field of literary studies, assistant professor at the Institute of Slavic Philology of Jagiellonian University. Member and co-founder of the inter-institutional Post-Yugoslav Area Research Centre at the University of Warsaw; member of the PAU Slavic Culture Commission and the Polish Commission for the History and Culture of the Balkans (AIESEE). Author of the book *Opowiedzieć naród. Chorwackość według Augusta Šenoi* [Narrating the Nation: Croationness by August Šenoa, 2014]. Research interests: Croatian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature and culture, community practices in the post-Yugoslav area, the performative potential of contemporary social and political life, and broadly understood engaged humanities.

INSTITUTE OF SLAVIC STUDIES
POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
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