Recovery from Disorders of the Literary – Cultural Identity in the Western Balkans

Dorin POPESCU[*]

Key-words: *cultural disorders, Bosnian language, national literature, post-Yugoslav literature, cultural otherness*

Interethnic conflicts generated by the breakup of Yugoslavia have accelerated the appearance of identity disturbance, including the cultural identity, literary margin in identity affinity profiles and transformation of the peoples of the Balkans. These disturbances (we understand here by disturbance/disorder a clinical pre-pathological/ a-pathological manifestation of culture, described by deformation, otherness, ambiguity and anxiety) cover all levels and reconfiguration of public mentality, in processes which exceed meanings and amplitude and any similar scenario in any other part of the modern world. Main processes of identity reconfiguration in this territory, generators of disturbance, deformations and otherness of its ethos and culture are supplied/ maintained by the formation and separation trends of the national literature (Bosnian, Serbian, Croatian) from the matrix, the former Yugoslav literature, by the efforts of scientific and policy accreditation of the Bosnian language (and literature), by trends for setting up a cultural environment itself, the celebrity trend of the culture and ethos of Bosnian type etc. These phenomena occur accompanied by tensions difficult to imagine in a bipolar or mono-ethnic world, occupying the center and the periphery of the cultural post-Yugoslav world, entirely and deeply, generating a cultural nature specific not only for a post-conflict world, but of the pre-conflict as well.

Our preliminary observations suggest that there may exist the following three types of cultural and identity disorders which occur during the period of the post-Yugoslav culture: captivity disorders (one-dimensional disturbances/disorders, dominated by the efforts of the Bosnian language, literature and culture to set their own profile in the priority relation to the Serbian language, literature and culture), transfer disorders (two-dimensional type, which involve mutual relationships between transfer/correlation/swapping and two dominant cultural patterns, i.e. Croatian vs Serbian, Bosnian vs Croatian etc.) and chaos disorders (three-dimensional disturbances/ disorders, spatial disorders, which are present in all cultural models in the region of co-existing cultures).

[*] "Andrei Şaguna" University of Constanţa, Romania / the Embassy of Romania to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

„Philologica Jassyensia", an XII, nr. 1 (23), 2016, p. 257–262

BDD-A24483 © 2016 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:41:16 UTC)

A tense and sophisticated connection between these cultural patterns of ethnic type has reached its maximum in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a territory more flexible and more favorable for it than the other from the point of view of ethnic and cultural mixture. Here, in the multiform/ multipolar culture of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is development of both existentialist tragedy of the Bosnian culture, which survived many recovery disorders of its literary/cultural identity, as well as different (other) samples of complicated identity tragedies of the Serbian and Croatian literature and culture, faced with recovery disorders (after their amputation by the cultural dimension of the Bosnian ethos).

1. Captivity disorders – Bosnian culture in searching for its own profile

After hundreds of years of living together within the framework of a pre-Yugoslav, Yugoslav and even post-Yugoslav sophisticated cultural pattern, the Bosnian cultural representatives recently initiated, in all fields, an attempt to recover their own identity, with the priority of recovering their own ethos. From a political point of view, the recovery of their own identity has been seen by analysts as a reaction to the aggressive stimulus of a collective/ common regional mentality that does not produce tolerance toward the Bosnian-Muslim ethos in the Western Balkans.

At this time, the effort of the Bosnian culture to find the exit from its captivity (a captivity of the multicultural pattern which specific differences of its national cultural components have atrophied) has opened numerous working hypothesis/ fronts.

The main territorial playground of the political fight for a confirmed and integrated identity of the Bosniaks-Muslims in the Western Balkans (language, literature, culture, religion, ethos) seems to be the validation/ international recognition of the Bosnian language, as autonomous in relation to its official alternatives / Serbian language, Croatian language, Serbo-Croatian language etc.

At the present moment, the state authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina/ BiH acknowledge the existence of the Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian separate languages and the public institutions at the state level are operating distinctively and accurately with these concepts at all levels (political, administrative etc.). Out of primarily political reasons, the current situation with the recognition of the Bosnian language in the territory of the Serbian entity of BiH, Republic of Srpska, is radically different from the existing one at the state level: the Constitution of Republic of Srpska uses the concept of *the language of the Bosnian people* (Article 7 of the Constitution of Republic of Srpska) and Serbian local authorities from Banja Luka are operating exclusively with this concept, by refusing to legitimize the concept of the *Bosnian language* as alternative or as synonym for the *language of the Bosnian people.*

The distribution of these political positions is reflected equally/similarly in the academic/scientific approaches which are produced in Belgrade and Sarajevo. The Serbian Language Institute of the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts from Belgrade (SANU), through its Committee for Language Standardization, does not recognize the concept of the Bosnian language:

> in order for two languages to be separate languages, they must have different linguistic criteria (genetic, structural and communicative). This is not the case with

BDD-A24483 © 2016 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide”
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:41:16 UTC)

> the Bosnian language, since it is compared to Serbian because all Bosniak linguists claim that the Bosnian and the Serbian languages are only different in their names, but when we compare their linguistic criteria, the two languages are the same. It is obvious that the Bosnian language cannot have either linguistic or legal – but only symbolic – status of an individual language. In the Serbian language, it is only correct to say that language spoken by the Bosniaks is the Bosniak language, not Bosnian (note: public position expressed by SANU in August 2015).

On the other hand, the Bosniak Academy of Science and Arts (BANU),

> does not consider the question of language of our people a problem for science. BANU qualifies this action as one of the many futile attempts to again deny the existence of our people in the important aspects of its life. None of us, and we are confident not even in the scientific world in general, wants to engage in that debate and discuss with uninvited linguists and philosophers who are dragged into this and who engage in the futile and shameful job to deny a language that existed for more than a thousand years, and writing in that language is used for already eight centuries, and in which this people has created a vast wealth of great spiritual and literary treasures. By all scientific duties, linguists and philologists should know much more about that heritage and common treasure than they do. The thousand-year history of the language of Bosniaks, which of course should be scientifically known, was verified in many ways in the undeniable documents of Bosnian literacy and culture, not to speak of the results of Bosnistics branch, no matter how modest they have been so far... Bosniaks speak Bosnian language... (note: public position expressed by BANU in September 2015).

At the international level, the dispute about linguistic identity of the Bosnian language has not been settled yet. While political factors (i.e. Office of High Representative of the international community, which has the priority task to implement the Dayton Peace Agreement from 1995, after the 1992–1995 civil conflict in the territory of Bosnia) admit the existence of 3 autonomous languages as different expressions of the common Serbian-Croatian-Bosnian linguistic corpus (Bosnian language, Serbian language, Croatian language), international scientific institutions are trying to avoid the direct approach to the topic of the Bosnian language autonomy, in order not to aggravate tensions in the interethnic relations in the region.

Attempts on official confirmation of an individual/ autonomous (Bosnian) language could be named zero degree disorders (maximum disorder/perturbation as an icon but also from the axiological or functional point of view), a settlement which depends on related topics, as the recognition of a literature of the Bosnian language (hence a Bosnian literature), a Bosnian culture etc. It is hard to predict chances of this zero degree disorder being assigned its own territory and finding its successful recovery therapies. Only the interdependence of these two criteria is certain, which may postulate the Bosnian language existence in Bosnia and Herzegovina: out of political reasons and scientific/linguistic arguments. A linguistic solution separate from the political is utopian, and a political solution without scientific foundations is useless, or even dangerous, because it can turn the disorder into a pretext for ontological chaos.

BDD-A24483 © 2016 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide”
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:41:16 UTC)

2. Transfer disorders – between tolerance and neuroses

The ethno-religious mixture of the Western Balkans has always generated beautiful lessons of tolerance and at the same time permanent neuroses. Sometimes a single piece placed incorrectly in the alchemy of ethnic, cultural and linguistic cohabitation of the peoples in the Balkans caused wars or conflicts. The success story of the Western Balkans has not been patented yet.

The main characteristic of the collective mentality of the Western Balkans is the mixed and sophisticated structure of collective culture and ethos. The lines of force of this structure follow a mystical logic. The parties develop mutual relationships of transfer/ correlation/ swapping, without real chances to decipher its combinative reasons. In this connotative meeting area, the priority types of connections between the main cultural and mental patterns of the Western Balkans (Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian) relate to mutual transfer of their elements and expressions. The main cultural patterns have already been created, as a result of the reciprocal transfers, extensive intersection spaces, which no longer have traditional demarcation lines (the Slavs converted to Islam became Muslims Bosniaks; Muslims Croats, Catholics Bosniaks, orthodox Croats, Catholics Serbs etc. have developed heterogeneous and free forms of cultural and social expression, which multiplies the ambiguity, therefore the anxiety of the mutual relations etc.).

If the transfer logic no longer supports together the whole harmony, under the pressure of disturbing factors, they become transfer disorders, bearing the anxiety and chaos. According to this transfer logic, both the excess (attempt of one cultural pattern to annex the other) as well as the lack of conditions (attempt of one cultural pattern to allow to be transferred, to be deprived of its identity) may cause identity conflicts. From this point of view, not only the conflicts in the area of the former Yugoslavia, which occurred after the fall, are relevant as expressions of the transfer disorders, but also various other politico-cultural processes and developments less visible, which have the same profile (which can easily cause conflict): the pan-Serbian policies in the region, radical Islamization, the hyper Croat project at the level of region etc.

Zero degree transfer disorder seems to be, in this perspective, the pan-Serbian ethos, which is responsible for the transfer of the ontological project with Serbian origin and structure to the level of the others dimensions of the cultural space from the former Yugoslavia.

3. Chaos disorders - zero degree disorders of the Western Balkan space

Apart from the captivity and transfer disorders, the cultural and identity space of the Western Balkans develops the same specific expressions of the maximum alterity – chaos disorders (three-dimensional disorders, in which all cultural and identity patterns in the region coexist).

In contrast to the captivity disorders (where dissolutions of the cultural space are linear, one-dimensional) or to the transfer disorders (which generate dissolution as mutual/bilateral/two-dimensional degradations), the anxiety and disturbances caused by chaos disorders may affect the functioning of the whole pattern for a long-term.

BDD-A24483 © 2016 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide”
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:41:16 UTC)

Chaos disorders are zero degree disorders, because of their nature and effects. In our assessment, these chaos disorders are responsible for both the deterioration of the political/ administrative space of the former Yugoslavia since the beginning of the 1990s as well as, in particular, for the post-conflict dissolution of its cultural space.

At the present moment, this dissolution is in a dynamic phase and shows many painful symptoms, as well as the attempt of the Bosnian cultural circles to create their cultural and identity profile, the attempt of the Serbian cultural circles to survive and to recover post-surgically (after their amputation by the Bosnian and Croatian cultural dimensions/expressions) the overall tendency (of all actors) to reconfigure/reconstruct the mutual relations of all patterns/cultural dimensions etc.

4. Possible therapies

From the perspective of the three types of cultural and identity disorders of the Western Balkans cultural space, it is very difficult to find or to predict the possible therapies in order to have a healthy or a proper functioning of the cultural Western Balkans system. It seems that other mixed patterns in the European cultural area, with specific disorders which are similar, in essence, to those manifested in the Western Balkans, have found particular solutions for solving their cultural and identity disorders (for example, Czechoslovakia, now divided between the Czech Republic and Slovakia) or manifest low tendencies to solving them (the case of the Romanian ethos, broken and dichotomous, in search of its integrative solution from the identity, cultural and linguistic point of view).

Identification of a therapeutic cultural and identity solution for the Western Balkans is delayed due to the different political approaches of the local stakeholders and critical level of disorder reached here. Although the region has a positive identity experience, not only a negative one, which allowed the survival of the mixed ethnical model for a few centuries, especially in the second half of last century (Yugoslavia), the identity actors of the Western Balkans seem no longer willing to give to this model a (another) chance for further development, but rather prefer being advocates of fragmentation, discontinuity and separation/autonomy of cultural (and even territorial) ways.

From this point of view, the slippages, identity disorders in the Western Balkans can have a special relevance not only for the region, but also for the identity drama of the Romanian ethos which is in pain and in crisis on both sides of the Prut River in order to find and show a pragmatic political solution.

Our opinion is that the solution to the current dichotomy of the Romanian ethos should become the major concern of strategic decision makers in Bucharest, regardless of the efforts and sacrifices needed to restore our ethos, taking into account the tragic and spectacular experience of the Western Balkans.

BDD-A24483 © 2016 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide”
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:41:16 UTC)

Bibliography

BANU 2015: *Bošnjaci govore bosanskim jezikom. Saopćenje za javnost* [‘Bosniaks speaks bosnian language. Press-Release’], Bošnjačka akademija nauka i umjetnosti (BANU), 2015, web-page of the Bosnian Academy of Sciences and Arts, http://banu.eu.com/ ?p=650.

Boračić 2014: Selma Boračić, Ajdin Kamber, *Language Politics in Bosnia*, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, https://iwpr.net/global-voices/language-politics-bosnia.

Dersso 2012: Solomon A. Dersso, *Taking Ethno-Cultural Diversity Seriously in Constitutional Design: A Theory of Minority Rights*, Martinius NIJHOFF Publishers, Leiden, Boston.

Greenberg 2004: Robert D. Greenberg, *Language and Identity in the Balkans: Serbo-Croatian and Its Disintegration*, Oxford University Press.

Karčić 1999: Fikret Karčić, *The Bosniaks and the challenges of modernity: late Ottoman and Hapsburg times*, El-Kalem.

Malcolm 1996: Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, NYU Press.

SANU 2015: SANU: *Ne postoji bosanski jezik* [‘Bosnian Language does’not exist’], https://www.sanu.ac.rs/, 2015, web-page of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

*** *Constitution of Republika Srpska*, “Official Gazette” of Republika Srpska, 6/92, 8/92, 15/92, 19/92, 21/92, 28/94, 8/96, 13/96, 15/96, 16/96 and 21/96.

*** *Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina*.

Abstract

Interethnic conflicts generated by the breakup of Yugoslavia have accelerated the appearance of identity disturbance, including the cultural identity, literary margin in identity affinity profiles and transformation of the peoples of the Balkans. There may exist the following three types of cultural and identity disorders which occur during the period of the post-Yugoslav culture: captivity disorders, transfer disorders and chaos disorders.

A tense and sophisticated connection between these cultural patterns of ethnic type has reached its maximum in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosnian culture in searching for its own profile is the most eloquent example for the captivity disorders. In this perspective, zero degree transfer disorder seems to be the pan-Serbian ethos, which is responsible for the transfer of the ontological project with Serbian origin and structure to the level of the others dimensions of the cultural space from the former Yugoslavia. Chaos disorders are zero degree disorders, because of their nature and effects; these chaos disorders are responsible for both the deterioration of the political/ administrative space of the former Yugoslavia since the beginning of the 1990s as well as, in particular, for the post-conflict dissolution of its cultural space.

The identity disorders in the Western Balkans can have a special relevance not only for the region, but also for the identity drama of the Romanian ethos. Our opinion is that the solution to the current dichotomy of the Romanian ethos should become the major concern of strategic decision makers in Bucharest, regardless of the efforts and sacrifices needed to restore our ethos, taking into account the tragic and spectacular experience of the Western Balkans.

BDD-A24483 © 2016 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide”
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:41:16 UTC)