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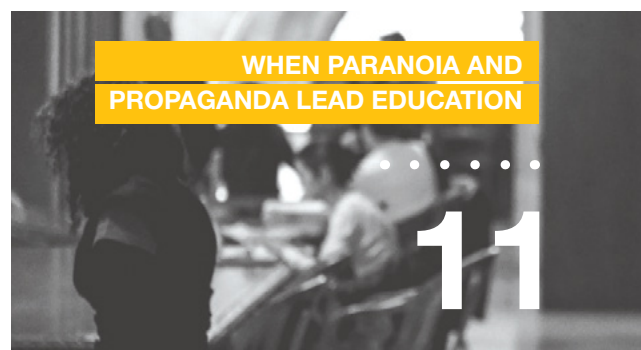
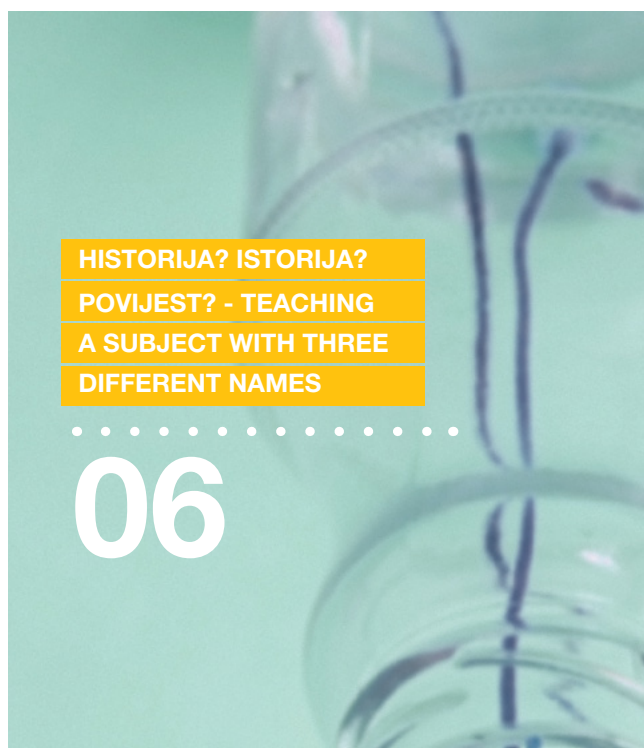
Balkan PERSPECTIVES

A magazine on Dealing with the Past

WHAT HISTORY DO WE
TEACH? WHAT HISTORY DO
WE LEARN?

Why education is important within the process of
dealing with the past.

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EDIT- ORIAL

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Prishtina, October 2017

Dear Readers,

In recent days, we as a team have been discussing a theatre play featuring actors from across the Balkans. They were presenting their own memories and stories from their lives, all of which were very moving. But what left the greatest impression was the fact that all these stories became interlinking facets of one shared history which had had a huge impact on all their lives. The play's biggest achievement was bringing all of these perspectives together on one stage.

Unfortunately, when it comes to school-based education regarding history and cultural memory, this kind of multiperspectivity is lacking in more or less all of the countries involved in Balkan.Perspectives. This becomes clear while reading many of the articles gathered in this issue, which looks at dealing with the past and education. School books have a big role to play in this as the underpinning of most history classes. That is why we wanted to present two studies: one conducted in Serbia examining the content of Serbian, Bosnian and Kosovar schoolbooks; and another researching and comparing the depiction of crucial historical events in Serbian and Kosovar textbooks.

But – since education takes place not just in schools but in a variety of informal settings too – we have also included some articles dealing with these informal approaches to history.

So, the magazine starts with some Vox Populi collecting thoughts on how people experienced their history textbooks and ends with voices from Mostar, which played host to an international summer school this year. The school gave its young participants the opportunity to explore different narratives of the past. We hope you enjoy this article and all the following ones in this eighth issue of Balkan.Perspectives, so that it can contribute in a small way towards a more multiperspective approach to the history of this region, wherein education plays a crucial role.

As always, we are looking forward to your comments and remarks on this issue and hope that you find the reading useful and enriching. If you'd like to subscribe to the magazine or to get in touch, please contact balkan.perspectives@forumzfd.de.

The Editorial Team

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How did you experience your history textbooks in school?

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Well, the term history is absolutely relative in the Balkans. Depending on who is in power, it is being written and corrected. I learned it as a child during the war and it literally started from learning that we, Serbs, are the oldest people and the only ones in the world. Even as a child I did not believe it. I was raised in accordance with the principle that paper stands everything, whether it is true or not. And that is exactly what history textbooks are. They have changed throughout armed conflicts.

Čedomir (34)

When we speak about history books and their importance, two things should be considered: The first is the saying „History is the teacher of life“ and it is important to continue learning, in order for bad things not to be repeated, but our educational system puts them on the margins, so that history always repeats itself, as we are experiencing today. The second is the saying „History is written by the victors“ , and this is important to mention in order for certain parts to be better corroborated by historical facts from reliable sources. They should be included in a single book, rather than three books that focus on a single people.

Luka (18)

My impression when it comes to history textbooks for primary schools is as follows: too little attention or too few lessons are devoted to national history, starting from ancient times, Middle Ages and New Ages, up until the war period of 1992-1995. This is particularly true when it comes to the latest aggression, fight for independence and genocide, topics about which students get only very limited and superficial information.

Damir, (32)

SERBIA

Nowadays, textbooks are more illustrative, less infomative. When I went to school it was vice versa. Both types of textbooks had advantages and flaws.

Brankica (36)

Textbooks were once monotonous, with no illustrations and often with blurry maps. Today's textbooks are trying to adapt to the demand and current trends. While doing tasks students can find some quotes, anecdotes that will help them understand the material, connect it and at the same time develop critical thinking. On the other hand, there are publishers who are not willing to keep pace with time and completely neglected illustrations, brain teasers, logic tasks but are insisting on some dry text, which might be 30 years old. Although our science developed during that time, some publishers have decided not to change a single sentence, let alone the thesis.

Branislav (29)

I am not happy with Serbian textbooks when it comes to the context concerning the break-up of Yugoslavia and the armed conflict in the former Yugoslavia. It is my opinion that textbooks have a tendency to represent the relations between neighboring nations as if they were destined to clash. They intend to impose rigidness and generalization in the perception of other nations, in order to finally justify the armed conflict, which actively prevents the possibility of reconciliation. As a historian I must say that Yugoslavia was a country where most of people lived in peace and that cooperation between neighbours has lasted to this day.

Aleksandra (30)

KOSOVO

It has been a while since I last learned in school about history, but there is one thing that I still remember. I recall that many of my history teachers, did not like the history text books. As a solution they used dictation as a teaching method. In elementary school when we learned about Illyria, the teacher used to dictate everything. Then in high school another teacher used to do the same when we were learning about the history of Albania. Back then I did not understand why they were doing so, I thought, we have the books why go through all the trouble of writing everything down, but today I guess the main reason why they did so was because the books were published before the war and did not have enough information about Albanian history.

Edina (25)

In our history books we have learned about the past of the humankind. Also, great importance has been given to the national history of Albanians, while pointing out the injustices that we've experienced throughout the centuries, the many wars for freedom and independence, up to the declaration of the independence of Albania, the continuation of resistance against invasion in the territory of Kosovo, and the independence at last, along with other historically and culturally important events. I really enjoyed them because I was curious and wanted to know the history of the world and also the history of humankind and its evolution!

Bledor (20)

Just recently, as I was working on an article about history textbooks, I realized how poor my knowledge about history was. I have never been a history fan since our books tend to be boring and dull, and I never was critical about what we learned. I just saw a badly written story with a lot of numbers in it. But a few months ago I found out that these books contain a lot of mistakes when it comes to the war in Kosovo. There are no footnotes, so noone knows where this information is taken from. Also, doing some research, I saw that neither in Kosovo nor in Serbia history is shown as it actually happened. This has the tendency to raise prejudices and hatred between the youth.

Kaltrina (22)

MACEDONIA

History books serve us to understand the past. They are very different, in the sense that children of different nationalities learn different history. The events are the same, however, the heroes who took part in those events, very often are appropriated by each people. It is important to know about the events, whereas the authors strive to be objective so that later, the readers understand the truth.

A. Nikodinovska (18)

I think that history books distort the truth. Lately, they are being used to manipulate children of a school age, who are the most vulnerable.

M. Todorova (27)

History books are a tool that teachers use already in elementary school to instruct children on how the history of a people, throughout the years, has developed and gone through changes, including a broad chronology of the facts inherited from our ancestors to date.

Y. Maliqi (25)

Historija? Istorija? Povijest?

- teaching a subject with three different names

It's not only when it comes to the subject of history that the ethnic fragmentation of schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina is evident. How to move on from there? Let teachers and students take the lead, suggests Melisa Forić.

The answer to the question “how to teach history in Bosnia and Herzegovina?” is not easy to formulate, at least not for those who do not have sufficient knowledge of the structure of post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina and its social relations – characterised as they are by deep ethnic divisions. The education system fully reflects the administrative organisation of the country and its division into two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska, as well as Brčko District. Furthermore, the Federation also consists of ten cantons. There are different ministries that prescribe and implement different laws in the field of education, i.e., define curricula and approve textbooks for all primary and secondary school subjects.

Deep rooted division

In addition to the above mentioned administrative fragmentation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a much more relevant division is the internal division of the education system into three systems based on ethnic identity – Bosniak, Serb and Croatian. The deep roots of this division go back to the 1992 to 1995 war, and these systems have continued to exist legally and in peace until today. Their common characteristic is an expressed one-sided perspective and mutual exclusion. Education is seen as a means to create three different ethnic histories, languages and cultures – rather than a means for developing a common state identity. The most absurd result of such a system is the existence of the phenomenon of “two schools under one roof”, with different entrances and classes that begin at different hours of the day in areas inhabited by Bosniaks and Croats.

History is part of the core national curriculum and as such is of particular importance for all three ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This is also confirmed by different names used for this subject in three language variants – Bosnian (historija), Serb (istorija) and Croatian (povijest). Although the Framework Law on Primary and Secondary School Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina defines that the common core content of curricula will ensure that a positive relationship and feeling of belonging to the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina is developed through the educational process (Article 43), preference is given to national history.

Until several years ago, in the curricula and workbooks used in parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina with a Croatian majority, as well as in Republika Srpska, national history was interpreted as the history of the Croatian or Serb people, whereas Bosnia and Herzegovina was barely mentioned. In a way, this is a result of the long practice of importing textbooks from Serbia and Croatia, which lasted until 2002. Interventions resulted in certain changes, introduction of contents that incidentally also cover topics relating to the history of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Meanwhile, in textbooks in areas with a Bosniak majority, national history is understood as the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The background to all these changes involved hard work by a series of state-level commissions established at the initiative of the OSCE Mission and Council of Europe in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These worked on the harmonisation of curricula and development of common core contents for history and other national subjects, as well as removal of offensive contents from textbooks and improvement of textbook quality. While some of the mentioned interventions were largely cosmetic in nature, there are some evident improvements.

Where are the interests of students?

All of this seems quite complicated, even chaotic, inducing us to start asking ourselves: where are the interests of students represented in all this? Or do the politics and national interests of politicians come first? This question may best be answered by teachers. They are the ones who know best the situation in the field, in the classroom, in their daily communication with students and their colleagues. Thanks to their role and responsibility, they are frequently trying to tackle these obstacles. It is a fact that curricula are conceptually outdated, that textbooks – despite all the improvements – are frequently an insufficient source of information, especially since they only offer a one-sided perspective. As such, history teachers frequently find themselves searching for new sources of knowledge and possibilities to improve the quality of history classes.

Introducing multiperspectivity against obstacles

We can view this as a bottom-up change: if a system does not allow improvements, teachers can still improve the way they teach, through being creative and the outlining of positive values prescribed in curriculum content. Although the mandates of institutions of the relevant ministries – such as educational and pedagogical institutes – should include the obligation to provide teachers with opportunities to further their professional development, such examples are rare. Life-long learning, included in education strategies of almost all European countries, is almost an abstract term in our case. Given the lack of formal training, teachers gladly venture into independent development and strengthening of their own competences. Numerous NGOs and professional organisations have organised various conferences, seminars and trainings in the field of history over the past decade, and together with teachers from Bosnia and Herzegovina have developed additional teaching materials for history classes.

It is worth mentioning are Council of Europe and OSCE initiatives, as well as the work of NGOs such as the European Association of History Educators (EUROCLIO), the Association of History Teachers of Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUROCLIO HIP BIH), the Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation of Southeast Europe (CDRSEE), ForumZFD and others. Additional teaching materials such as history textbooks, compendiums of sources or workshops on controversial and sensitive topics and the culture of remembrance are a positive step towards goals that were defined and rooted in the European practice of teaching history a long time ago.

Although they promote a multi-perspective view, active learning, working with sources and independent critical thinking, such materials have mostly not been approved and recommended for use by the competent ministries. However, their value has been recognized by teachers that have attended seminars and trainings – which mostly take place during weekends since any absence during working days requires the approval of the competent institution. The possibility of training and acquiring new knowledge and teaching techniques, meeting colleagues from different parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the platform for an exchange of experiences has been described as a great advantage by them. New ideas, techniques, teaching materials that are directly included in classrooms thus become a prospect for overcoming differences, obstacles and stereotypes.

We know that teachers have accepted these materials and methods and use them in class, at least for those parts of the curriculum that allows them to act autonomously. Their creativity is well received by students, which reinforces the motivation of all of us dealing with this kind of work to continue doing it. If the purpose of history classes is to teach children to think for themselves and to have a critical attitude towards the past in order to be active citizens of this society who make independent decisions, we have to insist on high-quality history lessons.



Melisa Forić, born in Sarajevo, currently works as an assistant professor at the Department of History of the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo. Before, she worked for more than ten years at the Centre for Balkan Studies of the Academy of Sciences and Art of Bosnia and Herzegovina. She is the author of several history textbooks for primary and secondary schools and a co-author of the textbook for the subject “Culture of Religions”. Additionally, she is the Secretary of the Association of Teachers and Professors of History of Bosnia and Herzegovina and has participated in various international projects in the field of history, teaching history and culture of remembrance.

Multiperspectivity

Sowing the seeds of reconciliation

An interview with Joanna Hanson and Shkelzen Gashi:

After the presentation of the *NGO New Perspektiva* project “Multi-perspective History Teaching in Kosovo” in August 2017, we asked Joanna and Shkelzen some questions, as we wanted to know more about their research and the findings.

Joanna and Shkelzen, in your project you have analysed how various events in Kosovo-Serbian history are presented very differently in the textbooks of both countries. Then you have also compared those two different narratives to the views of other international historians. What were your most important findings?

Joanna: As a basis for our discussions, we looked at different events in Kosovo’s history. We found that the single-perspective approach is present in the textbooks of both Kosovo and Serbia. This approach is exacerbated by unsubstantiated historical facts or language which is anachronistic and incorrect. Teachers told us they did not always agree with the textbooks but that politicians blocked their ability to change or modify the manner of teaching. These basic flaws need to be addressed in a committed manner.

Shkelzen: Many clear differences are revealed in the approach of the school history books in Serbia and in Kosovo towards the events in the territory of Kosovo. These differences can be grouped as follows: aspiration for ownership of the territory of Kosovo; presentation only of the crimes committed by the other side, presenting oneself as the victim and the other as the aggressor and silence on Albanian-Serbian collaboration. This shows that the countries are not sowing the seeds of reconciliation in the next generation.

Shkelzen, you have invested a lot of time into the data collection. Can you give us an example of the main narrative one can find in these textbooks?

Shkelzen: The most important elements of Kosovo’s history are the crimes committed by the Serbs, organised into regular army and police, against Albanians; as well as the crimes of the Albanians, mainly not organised, against the Serbs.

The Kosovar textbooks present only the crimes of the Serbs against Albanians in 1912, 1918-1919, and during the period between the two world wars, in 1945 and after the Second World War, as well as during the 1998-1999 war. It is rare that these textbooks offer information to quantify the Serbian crimes, and even when it is offered, it is in an exaggerated form.

The Serbian textbooks present only the crimes of the Albanians against the Serbs in 1915, 1941-1943,

1999-2000, describing them as ‘the attacks of local gangs of Albanians’ or ‘Albanian terror against Serbs’. These textbooks generally do not give data for these crimes.

Your website <http://www.new-perspektiva.com/multi-perspektiva> promotes a multi-perspective approach to history. Can you tell us what you mean by that?

Joanna: There is no clear definition of a multi-perspective approach but we think this is a good one: It is “a strategy of understanding”, in which we take into account another’s perspective or others’ perspectives in addition to only a single one. It means being able and willing to regard and understand a situation from different perspectives.

Joanna, you refer to your multi-perspective approach as methodology. To what extent is it more than just a collection of secondary literature?

Joanna: The multi-perspective methodology of teaching and writing history is a complex discourse. Textbooks should contain a range of illustrations and examples of other sources e.g. documents, oral history, newspaper articles, to make them more readable and instructive to the students.

The multi-perspective methodology of teaching includes a whole range of teaching skills apart from the textbooks. It removes the practice of teaching history as a subject only to be memorised, because that does not enable the pupil to challenge the information or to interpret the facts and find different sources. Memorising is not conducive to students developing their critical thinking abilities. Teachers and textbooks, therefore, have to present their students with different sources and perspectives related to the history they are teaching. If teachers are teaching, e.g., what happened when Christopher Columbus arrived in the West Indies, they should ask their students to not only understand how and why he went there, but how members of his crew may have seen the journey, what it meant to the indigenous people on the islands. This can be done using textbooks but also other materials from illustrations and online documents or a visit to a museum.

It can be a difficult task for teachers and they need to have a clear concept of why they are teaching history. Teachers in Kosovo are now starting to have the opportunity to learn about using the multi-perspective approach so there is hope that teaching will become more open and including various perspectives. They need dedicated training to help them develop these skills.

Shkelzen, you mentioned the “silence on Albanian-Serbian collaboration” earlier as a characteristic of dealing with history in textbooks. What do you mean by that? Could you give us some examples of these collaborations?

Shkelzen: In none of the textbooks from Kosovo and Serbia is there mention of the meetings, agreements and collaboration of the political and military representatives of the Albanians with their Serb counterparts. There is e.g. no mention anywhere of:

- collaboration between some of the most significant leaders of the Albanian uprising (1912) with the Serbian representatives in Prishtina, from whom they got weapons to fight the Ottoman Empire;

- the meeting of the leader of the Albanian Kaçak movement remaining under Yugoslavia (after the First World War) with the local Serb authorities about living un-harassed, on condition that his movement extended to only three villages; and later another meeting with senior Serb officials where he asked for Kosovo to have the right for self-government;

- collaboration between the Legal Society for the Defence of Islam (after the First World War), which represented the Albanians in the Serbian parliament, and the two major Serbian political parties in Yugoslavia to the extent that sometimes these political parties even shared the same electoral list;

- close collaboration between the Albanian communists of Kosovo (during and following the Second World War) with the Serbian/ Yugoslav communists;

- the agreement of the leaders of peaceful resistance among the Albanians of Kosovo (1996) with the Serbian president to open up school and university buildings to Albanians in Kosovo; and later also the meetings between them on finding a peaceful solution for the Kosovo issue (1998).

So, I hope the future schoolbooks in Kosovo and Serbia will mention these meetings, agreements and collaboration of the political and military representatives of the Albanians with their Serb counterparts.

Historians aren't usually very fond of making predictions, but maybe you could make an exception: Will future textbooks in Kosovo and Serbia contain more perspectives on events on Kosovo-Serbian history than the current ones?

Joanna: We are concerned with the historical single perspective-narrative in Kosovo and Serbia which does not enable students to interpret or question it. Nevertheless, there are increasing pressures, both domestic and international, on the education system to change this approach.

At our meetings with different groups of teachers, it became clear that there is a readiness of participants to discuss the issue of the multi-perspective approach to the teaching of history. Teachers see the impact of the dangers of the single-perspective approach, but they feel their role is restricted by politicians.

Euroclio training for teachers and changes to the curriculum are being introduced by the Ministry of Education. These include multi-perspective teaching for grades 6 and 7. I am, therefore, optimistic, as these are history-teaching processes which all European countries have undergone since the 1970s. I also believe the social media which provides a whole array of other historical sources, both good and bad, creates a pressure for change as well.

During your project you also organized discussions with a member of the Polish-German Textbook Commission, which were met with big interest – what do you think, is it maybe even realistic to think of having a joint Kosovo-Serbia textbook one day too?

Joanna: It would be excellent to have a joint Kosovo-Serbian textbook in the future, rather as there are joint Polish-German textbooks but this will take time. At present, however, both sides should focus on giving their pupils and students unbiased and widely-sourced multi-perspective narratives and access to sources of the other witnesses and participants in their joint history.

Thank you both very much for the insight in your project!



Joanna Hanson is a historian and the Executive Director of the Kosovo NGO New Perspektiva.

Shkelzen Gashi works as an independent researcher for different NGOs. He completed his MA on Democracy and Human Rights on the joint study program of the Universities of Bologna and Sarajevo. He continually monitors the presentation of the history of Kosovo in the history schoolbooks in Kosovo, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia, and published the results of this research in 2016 in three languages. Shkelzen has spent time at the Georg Eckert Institute at Braunschweig, Germany researching and learning the skills of dealing with history in post conflict situations.

When paranoia and propaganda lead education



The instrumentalisation of education to create stereotypes of Albanians as “dangerous” is not entirely unintentional. Paranoiacs need an alibi to justify discriminatory policies and to cleanse their consciences that have been soiled by propaganda that renders Macedonia dangerous.

It is almost three decades now since Macedonia gained its independence, as a pluralist and democratic country. However, these years have not been enough for the two million-strong state to detach itself from the communist mentality of the domination of the “majority” over the “minority” through the ideology that “all should obey the party”. Often, schools are an instrument of the state to propagate ideologies. So, it is not by chance that we come across the paranoia of a xenophobic state in various forms throughout the vertical and horizontal of the education system. Unfortunately, the belief that Albanians and the other non-Macedonians represent a danger to the state – and, consequently, to the Macedonian people – is still cultivated in Macedonia. Therefore, to prevent the “bad from happening”, their rights must be curtailed and controlled by “the mother-party”.

Nevertheless, as it has been proven many times through the 28 years of Macedonia’s independence, the parties that have led the state and put in place the education policies, have been anything but a mother figure to the Albanians – the second largest population in the country. This must be the reason why they still do not surrender – even now – to textbooks that denigrate Albanians

as: “mountain people”, “barbarians”, “collaborators of the occupiers”, “occupiers of Macedonian homes and properties”, “denizens” and so on.

The instrumentalisation of textbooks to dehumanize Albanians as “dangerous” does not relate only to their past, but also to their future. Therefore we get, “Tomçe dreams of becoming a pilot”, versus “Agim, a shepherd”. Further, while “Macedonian students discuss whether to listen to music or watch a science documentary”, “the Albanian students make plans how to steal the grade books from school, and tear them apart”! Creating such stereotypes is not entirely unintentional. Paranoiacs need alibis to justify their discriminatory policies, to cleanse their tarnished conscience from preventing the opening of Albanian schools in Manastir, Prilep, Ohër, Prespë, Veles and Skopje. Still, nowadays, schools in the capital do not permit the opening of parallel classes taught in Albanian, giving lame excuses about there being no teachers available or that there is no space. Two years ago, according to official data, there were 1,401 Albanian children in Macedonia who are not realizing their constitutional and legal right to be educated in their mother tongue. Of them, 1,217 were attending school in Macedonian, and 184 in Turkish.

They did not do so out of the free will of their parents but because the Ministry of Education failed to open schools and did not provide teachers who speak Albanian.

Thus, mechanisms of under-appreciation, namely mass assimilation of the “minority” by the “majority” are abundant. The idea of “teaching Macedonian from grade one” may be reactivated, because that is the language of the state and ‘we cannot wait for pupils to reach the third or fourth grade’. The logic being that: this way the likelihood of Albanians being bothered by the names of the Yugoslav heroes at school will decrease; they will react less when the Macedonian classes are filled with Albanian students; when there will be only one professor instead of 14 for each class, or when their schools will have 2,000 or more students, whereas the schools of Macedonians have 1,000 or less. In fact, such policies lead somewhere else: towards the consumption of injustice and accumulation of interethnic hatred, which will surely erupt one day – when the cup of discrimination overflows. Multi-ethnic Macedonia circles around this danger for as long as the instrumentalisation of education and its use as the justification of chauvinistic policies is not done away with.



Laura Papraniku is an expert on Macedonian education issues. As a journalist, she has covered this sector since 2001. Laura is currently working for Radio Shkupi and is a contributor to Koha newspaper. She has a professional master’s degree in Education Management and Policies.

A Chance To Develop Critical Thinking

Educational institutions have become places of intolerance in Bosnia and Herzegovina. That's why initiatives like the "Education for Peace" project are very much needed, writes Alexandra Letić, programme manager of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights

● **A**lthough the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina ended 22 years ago, its consequences are still very visible in all segments of society. Painful war experiences, political crises and poverty have resulted in chauvinism, ethnic animosities, xenophobia, intolerance and discrimination becoming the dominant model of behaviour and thinking. Local communities, as basic cells of social interaction, are still separated. While the country has made some progress in terms of reforms towards a democratisation of the society, Bosnia and Herzegovina remains deeply divided along ethnic and political lines, which in turns paves the way for further radicalisation and even extremism.

These divisions have direct implications for the daily lives of citizens, especially the development of the personalities and attitudes of younger generations, who cannot recall periods of peaceful coexistence, but rather remember only periods of tension, conflict and division. Growing up in mono-ethnic communities, where everything related to the dominant ethnic group is glorified and the existence of "others" is minimised or fully ignored, makes young people unable to perceive a future of peaceful coexistence. Instead, it constitutes a firm basis for an intolerant, closed, wary, even violent relationship based on prejudice and stereotypes towards those who do not belong to "their" group.

At the same time, processes of dealing with the past – which recognise established facts on crimes, understand conflict patterns, demystify battles and war heroes, deconstruct narratives of past and current conflict generators – are of sporadic nature and exclusively present only in the area of civil society activities. Few national and international NGOs are trying to bolster capacity building in the educational system of Bosnia and Herzegovina to enable it to sustain the complexity of the process of facing the violent past and taking distance from it. However, such attempts are mostly isolated, short-term and without any significant institutional support.

Instead of supporting such approaches, educational institutions, which are the most responsible ones for “instilling” skills needed for building and preserving peace in young generations, have become new places of divisions, intolerance, ethnocentrism and distrust. The teaching materials covered in secondary schools are mostly focused on the history and culture of the dominant ethnic and religious community, without any critical assessment or challenging of events or actors from their own ethnic and religious group. Institutional approaches towards studying the recent violent past, are almost non-existent.

Schools are not only following political agendas and matrices in Bosnia and Herzegovina, they are also putting themselves in a position in which they are a means for manipulating facts and history. They have become places where inhumane acts are protected and justified and therefore make a post-conflict social revival impossible. The task of objectively dealing with the past in order to create a better common future and foster intercultural understanding, requires a critical mind, which challenges and explores, as well as asks sensitive, but crucial questions to those around it. Such a spirit would need to be created at schools, but is something that is rarely found these days at educational institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

So, the fact that the general society and politics are ignoring activities focused on dealing with the past and peace building has a direct impact on the manner in which the educational system is addressing such topics. In consequence, young people are increasingly prone to reproducing hate, intolerance, inter-ethnic and inter-religious fear, segregation and even supporting conflict generators at the local and national level. Ignoring the need to open sensitive and painful topics from the recent past for discussion, especially among youth and especially as part of formal education, is closing the door for possibilities to achieve positive social changes over the long term, something that is more than needed, if we wish to progress.

The project “Education for Peace”, implemented by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights over the past years, aims to restore the educational function of schools through cooperation with teachers. It contributes to their capacity building in terms of dealing with the past and tries to enable them to initiate a critical dialogue about the past among youth. We are deeply convinced that honest teachers understand the importance of such a dialogue, but also their own role in it.

Changes have to occur at institutional, personal and structural levels. We believe that teachers that have acquired skills related to peace building, intercultural cooperation and reconciliation have the ability to create innovative classes. They can become advocates of positive change and teach students about crucial values for a peaceful coexistence in Bosnia and Herzegovina based on their own example. We believe that young people who have a chance to learn about the past in an unbiased manner, to understand and contextualise facts on patterns and policies of crimes that were committed, have a chance to develop critical thinking. This does not endanger their identities, but rather leads the way to dialogue, cooperation, respect and understanding. We believe that schools that apply peace building methods, reconciliation and intercultural understanding will become better places for learning and socialising. Over time they will become what they should have been from the beginning, namely educational institutions that educate young generations in order to make them conscious and able individuals. These individuals will shape our country in the future and make it a pleasant place to live in for all its citizens.

Aleksandra Letić is a programme manager of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights. She has been working on processes of dealing with the past in Bosnia and Herzegovina and countries of the former Yugoslavia for more than ten years and was a member of the Expert Working Group of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina tasked with the development of the Transitional Justice Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina. She regularly engages in youth education programmes that connect formal and informal educational processes.

● *Serbian history textbooks contain a highly selective offering of information, a Humanitarian Law Centre study finds. In particular, the “self-victimisation” narrative of the wars of the 1990s gets in the way of a critical perception of the past, argues Marijana Toma.*

Biased And Superficial

During the armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia more than 130,000 persons lost their lives, several million became refugees or internally displaced persons, and we are still looking for approximately 10,000 missing persons. Tens of thousands of people suffered as victims of different war crimes committed in these conflicts: mass killings, enforced disappearances, systematic rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as torture in numerous concentration camps and detention centres.

Ongoing nationalistic narratives

A significant number of facts regarding these crimes being judicially established before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) which has been accompanied by numerous initiatives (mostly from civil society) for dealing with the past. Yet states in the region continue to nurture conflict through their encouragement of nationalistic narratives about past wars, mostly based on self-victimization and a complete lack of empathy for the suffering of members of other ethnic groups.

After political changes in October 2000, among other difficulties, Serbia faced challenges of constructing a responsible and honest relationship with the legacy of war crimes committed by the members of the Serbian forces during the Yugoslav wars. This effort was one of the

most important preconditions for reconciliation with its neighbours, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo.

While there has been some progress since 2000 in the implementation of certain mechanisms of transitional justice, the overall definition, implementation, and fulfilment of core goals and strategies for dealing with the legacy of atrocities committed in the 1990s have not been treated as a priority. The transitional justice process was not the result of an honest intention of political elites to reconcile with their neighbours. On the contrary, those elites expressed that intention only as the result of political conditioning and pressure from the international community and its institutions. In Serbia, responsibility for crimes committed by members of Serbian forces was denied, or rationalized by insistence on crimes committed against Serbs, which exaggerated the numbers of Serbian victims and minimized the numbers of victims of other ethnic groups.

The role of younger generations within post conflict societies

Consequences of this kind of relationship with the crimes of the past are dangerous for the society in many ways, but most of all for generations born immediately before and after the wars. Not only have younger generations never played a significant role in initiatives for dealing with the past and the implementation

of transitional justice, but these generations are also the inheritors of dominant narratives about their own nation as the only or the biggest victim of armed conflicts in the 1990s. These narratives are strongly found within the system of formal education that presents distorted portrayals of the recent past, through selective presentation of facts and biased analysis of wartime events. This interpretation is especially prevalent in the presentation of war crimes during the 1990s in history textbooks in Serbia, and the interpretation of the recent violent past that they encourage young people to adopt.

War crimes in history textbooks across the region

In its “Analysis of the content of history textbooks in Serbia regarding the wars in the former Yugoslavia in the light of the facts established before the ICTY”, published in December 2015, the Humanitarian Law Center (HLC) has presented the most comprehensive study yet of the presentation of war crimes in Serbian history textbooks. The HLC found that atrocities committed in the former Yugoslavia are presented in a biased and superficial manner, with selective choice of desirable information, in order to present Serbs as the only and/or greatest victims of conflicts in 1990s, while the facts about suffering in other nations in the region, or Serbian responsibility for that suffering, have been completely neglected. Additionally, the textbooks

give more attention to the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), while narratives about wars, and especially war crimes, are presented only in few sentences. The biased manner is noticeable even within the sections that explain the political crisis that led to the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, which attributes all responsibility to the 'separatist' tendencies of Croatian and Albanian nationalism.

The causes and consequences of the conflict in Croatia receives the most attention in Serbian history textbooks, even though it was not the most intensive or devastating conflict in the former Yugoslavia, when accounting for the number of killed and disappeared, nor was it conducted on the territory of Serbia, as the Kosovo conflict was. A significant amount of attention is given to the destruction in and around Vukovar in the beginning of the war, while there is no mention of crimes committed by Serbian forces against Croatian civilians in territory then controlled by Serbian forces. Most attention is given to the Croatian army and police operations from 1995 – 'Flash' and 'Storm' – in which "planned ethnic cleansing of Serbs from Western Slavonia", as well as of "Serbs from Lika, Kordun, Banija and Dalmatia" was committed. As for victims killed while living in Croatia, only members of the Serbian people are mentioned.

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina received the least attention in Serbian textbooks, even though it was the most intense conflict, as indicated by the number of crimes committed (the largest number of indictments before

the ICTY were raised for atrocities committed in BiH) and the number of non-Serbian persons (approximately 100,000) and Serbs (around 25,000) killed and disappeared. Crimes committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina are mentioned in general terms, without any details on legal definitions of crimes, who was responsible for suffering, or ethnic information about victims. Only the crime in Srebrenica receives more attention, although most textbooks avoid the legal definition of genocide, as established in numerous ICTY judgments on members of political and military leadership of Bosnian Serbs. Only one of the textbooks is more specific about the war crime trials for Srebrenica. However, this textbook also mentions that the number of victims (8,000 Bosniaks) is still disputable, and there are still credible discussions on victims. Besides that, the authors are completely inaccurate when claiming that the judgement of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina against Serbia recognized that the genocide committed in Srebrenica had nothing to do with Serbia. In fact, on the contrary, the ICJ judgment did proclaim that Serbia was responsible for violating the Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, for not preventing the genocide and not punishing those responsible.

The armed conflict in Kosovo is presented only through the perspective of the NATO bombing, which focuses on victims that were killed by NATO forces, material damage inflicted on Serbia between March and June in

1999, and suffering of non-Albanians in Kosovo after the withdrawal of the Serbian Army and Police. The precise numbers of destroyed houses, schools, hospitals and memorials are mentioned, although the numbers of civilians that lost their lives are only mentioned as estimations (between 1,200 and 2,500 persons). Even though a significant number of political and military leaders of Serbia have been declared guilty and sentenced for crimes in Kosovo, Serbian textbooks do not mention the suffering of Albanian civilians (more than 10,000), before or during the NATO bombing.

"Pre-military training", rather than reconciliation?

These interpretations of the wars of the 1990s in history textbooks in Serbia do not contribute in any positive manner to the critical perception of the past, or the education of new generations – something that would contribute to the process of reconciliation in the region. On the contrary, as mentioned by historian Dubravka Stojanovic, the presentation of such narratives serves as "pre-military training" and preparation for future decision makers to create new conflicts. The mobilization of new generations through the system of formal education, when added to the dominant narrative about Serbia as a 'nation-victim' that political elites and the media present to them, successfully prevents the process of dealing with the past. It hinders the dismantling of the 'pledge of silence' that older generations abide by when their children ask the question: What were you doing during

Marijana Toma, a historian from Belgrade, is an expert for transitional justice and dealing with the past. Between 2012 and 2016 she was the Deputy Executive Director of the Humanitarian Law Center. She joined the HLC in 2003, where she worked on documenting war crimes, oral history, forced disappearances and transitional justice. During the past 14 years, she has been involved in numerous transitional justice

projects in the region as well as internationally. Marijana holds a B.A in History from Belgrade University and an MPhil in Political Science from the University of Cape Town, South Africa. Marijana writes and lectures on transitional justice in numerous regional and international informal and formal educational programmes.

Studies of cultural memory and oral history as a starting point to deal with the past

Dealing with the past is part of various programs at the University of Prishtina, although there could be much more done. Here are some insights and voices the university's faculty, collected by Arbër Selmani

October 1 this year marked the 20th anniversary of protests that started in Prishtina by students who fought against the macabre regime of that time. In Prishtina, there exists a statue of Mother Theresa, another one of Adem Jashari, that of Skanderbeg, another one reveals the face and body of Ibrahim Rugova, another that of Bill Clinton. There is no museum which covers and documents thoroughly the suffering of the people of Kosovo, which culminated with the war that began in February 1998. In the 1960s and 1980s women's activism was part of the resistance movements in Kosovo, although – this, too, is not properly addressed.

Each of these moments deserves proper academic treatment. But it seems that none of them does receives sufficient powerful academic examination by university programmes in Kosovo. Apparently, such topics are seen as often alien or too far-off to be debated upon or studied. People are interested in these topics, which have shaped today's society. Discussing these monuments in the academic and university context implies knowledge of the historic context and an analysis of it – their acceptance,

but also confrontation with the sentiments they may cause today – and, to a certain degree, the introduction of this knowledge to new generations that did not experience these historic events.

Professor Shemsi Krasniqi is a lecturer at the University of Prishtina of a subject which deals with these monuments. As a lecturer for the Department of Sociology in the Faculty of Philosophy, Krasniqi lectures on communicative cultural memory – myths, folklore, ethnography, museums, social institutions and the past, monuments, family histories, artefacts, and photographs.

Fortunately, this department has managed to include aspects of dealing with the past in their curriculum. Therefore, students can learn more about the past in various ways. Often, there is a tendency to remove such topics from school or university textbooks since their interpretation follows the whims of historians and scholars of their respective countries. However, at the University of Prishtina, a group of professors have not stalled in their mission to connect education and dealing with the past.

“Dealing with the past is very complex, and there is a lot of work to be done. On the other hand, the University of Prishtina does not have funds for research and field work, for excursions or visits, for debates, conferences or meetings with students from other countries,” says Krasniqi.

It is important that students wishing to study or be better informed about the practices of dealing with the past and the construction of collective memory are involved in field work and have access to various field expeditions. Krasniqi says that during his lectures students do not hesitate to speak freely about their past or about their experience in the context of past events.

“In general, yes, although they are not really trained to think about their past and draw lessons from it. I once conducted a focus group-based research with the students from the Sociology Practice class. The topic concerned the war, specifically the 15th anniversary of the Kosovo exodus in 1999. The students told their memories as 4-to-5-year-old children, and gave extremely interesting descriptions, they offered valuable messages and realised that they and their life experiences are an important source of knowledge,” says Krasniqi.

In 2014, ForumZFD in collaboration with Alter Habitus and the Program of Gender Studies/Institute for Social and Human Studies at the University of Prishtina organised Memory Mapping Kosovo – a series of workshops and field-study trips as a space to learn about, to dispute or confirm, and to explore the past. For the first time, in 2014, four ateliers were organised on the topics of public and private memory, socialism and parallel education.

Jeta Rexha was one of the participants of the first edition of Memory Mapping, and of the ones that followed in subsequent years. At that time, she was in her second year of studies at the Department of Sociology. Rexha tells of how the program served as an alternative perspective on how we approach memory and studies of memory, this being the more disciplinary and critical approach.

“The various memorials we researched date back from the Ottoman times, to socialist monuments and monuments erected after the war in Kosovo. The participants went through lots of theoretical texts and visits to memorials around Kosovo. As a result, the participants themselves conducted a research mapping out the information obtained through participation in direct research”, Rexha says.

Memory Mapping Kosovo organised two rounds of events. The second one focused on the topics of the Orient, the city of Mitrovica, the salvaged, and the victims of rape in war, and the feminist approach towards cultural memory. For Rexha, participating in this program was the reason why she continues to be interested in these topics. The result of such programs, both within and outside of the university, at the initiative of professors, is a kindling of interest in the topic among their students.

“Memory Mapping Kosovo was more or less a starting point for my interest in memory studies. It was the foundation that allowed me to rediscover my curiosity about social history and how constructed or – in better words – brought it about. In fact, my curiosity was fed and was transformed into a mass of research ideas, of courage to think in a more structured way about the concepts of memory creation, about the implications stemming from external and internal factors through the existing structures,” says Rexha.

School curricula would benefit from a similar concept like Memory Mapping, she adds.

“Considering how problematic school textbooks can be, a project of this kind opens the doors to opportunities to get acquainted with alternative knowledge, and with an alternative method of study. By opposing rigid thoughts of the past, or even the mere fact of penetrating the past, the current situation created on purpose may be shaken by such initiatives, which for sure would open the doors to new ways of thinking,” concludes Rexha.

Linda Gusia, a sociologist and part of the Faculty of Philosophy, talks about Memory Mapping Kosovo.

“From the outset, the idea was to review the memory which is the most marginalised, and is not part of the general collective memory. We analysed forgotten or marginalised elements. This was taken into consideration because the ‘90s are very important to our identity in general; to Kosovo before and after the war,” says Gusia.

At the faculty, the Department of History teaches the subject “Oral History” and the Department of Sociology has included in its curriculum the subject “Collective Memory”. Both of these subjects substantially support the strengthening of knowledge that students acquire in the field of dealing with the past.

“I think it is necessary to discuss the past. At the university, we started sporadically discussing dealing with the past in various ways, but it is not happening in a more structured or comprehensive manner. Dealing with the past is more of an initiative of NGOs rather than a state one,” adds Gusia.

Just like Shemsi Krasniqi, Gusia says that the academy, with its difficult conditions and lack of support for research or conferences, is continuously insisting on developing the field of dealing with the experience of war in Kosovo and with collective memory.

Gusia tells of how Kosovars lack a feeling of closure and justice and how, therefore, dealing with the past is necessary for our society.

“I think there is more than one approach to forgetting, and the general approach about the past has been to move on, to establish a state, to look forward. I think this is a double-edged blade. The fact that in Kosovo around 70% of population is less than 35 years old is a good thing, as a huge part of the population does not remember the war well. But dealing critically with the past is necessary. It acts as a catalyst and is irreplaceable,” concludes Gusia.

So, even though dealing with the past is not particularly present in academic education in Kosovo for now, it seems promising that it may be more present in the future, thanks to the names mentioned in this text and thanks to others who find ways to deal with a past, in an environment which does not leave much room for academic research and study. In this way, new generations can be educated, not to forget but to deal with the past in their own way, as without it no stable future can be built.

Arbër Selmani is a freelance culture journalist and writer from Prishtina. He is a Bachelor of Marketing and his areas of interest and engagement include cultural studies, multiculturalism, dealing with the past and LGBT issues. In 2013 he was chosen as Kosovo’s journalist of the year by UNWomen and UNDP.

Living to talk about it

Our author, Dardan Hoti, met a very strong woman, who turned her house into a museum to fight against oblivion.

No voices are heard besides lady of the house, Ferdonije Querkezi. Although it is not her profession, now she works as a guide. Often, the voice betrays her, inside her very home, which she has now officially named a museum. The house is quiet and vacant of people. Yet it is filled with memories and pain that she alone can tell us about. Perhaps this is a museum that she wished never existed. However, through this museum, she is educating and nurturing generations in Kosovo. With her powerful emotions and the house's visual truth, she appears to be the saddest teacher in Kosovo.

She talks about the toys, the tools, the pictures and clothes now on display. Once, they were used by five other family members, who are no longer here. She recalls all five of them from March '99. On 27 March, a group of masked police officers took them away. Along with the five men of her family, the masked police officers took six other men, eleven in total. Her four sons: Edmond, Artan, Ardian and Armend, and her husband Halim. Later, they took her nephew Vegim, her neighbors Skender Dylhasi with his son Myrteza. Together with them, they took their family friend Shpejtim Ymeraga and two sons from the Jetishi family who happened to be in their house, Shpend and Fatos.

She still does not know anything about three members of her family, apart from the bones of her two sons which she buried in 2005. She keeps looking for a sign from the others.

Although in grief, Ferdonije has decided to tell the world what happened in her home, in spite of the flow of tears she barely controls. She has never given up. From the day after the liberation of Kosovo to today she has been part of numerous protests and meetings, asking that the fate of the missing be uncovered. Her existence has been transformed into a living testimony of what happened in Kosovo 17 years ago. She continues to this day, telling and re-telling her story a thousand times over to all people who visit her museum throughout the year.

“Honestly speaking, each one of us gets used to a certain profession. This telling of the story has become a sort of profession for me,” she says. “I cannot count how many people have visited me in these 18 years. It is so hard, every time I tell this story I live through it again. How they were taken away, how they were sent away.”

Practices like this one by Ferdonije are moving the memory act from a mental state to an activity. Already, she is very good at it, telling the guests in detail what happened, without even forgetting the length of shirts her sons and husband had on. She talks about each photo inside frames and the inscriptions typed with a simple computer font, with the assistance of the association “Thirrjet e Nënave” (Mothers’ Cry). Each one has a story, and she has placed them one after the other.

At one corner of the room, some torn clothes are locked inside a glass shelf. The same clothes her two sons were wearing the day they were captured. Now, they are part of her museum, as a memory, relating to the desire of keeping real things. These memories now have created the relationship with the past and give off perceptions of the past. Another is a cradle in the middle of one of the rooms. It is the cradle that a long time ago, Mother Ferdonije used to rock her four sons, singing to them the most beautiful lullabies as a mother only can. The cradle is now empty but she once believed and hoped she would use it for her grandchildren.

“I changed nothing and I threw out nothing. Everything is here, and I look after these items. I kept even the smallest and simplest tools. The tools they used in their kebab shop, the toys, and everything else,” Ferdonije says.

In the drawers there are several litres of raki that her husband and sons had made with love. Cooking utensils from “Orex”, a restaurant owned by the Qerkezis. Glasses, watches and other items can be found on that shelf. Several pairs of shoes are placed on top of it.

There is a story from the past about each item. A past that was ominous for Ferdonije. Now, she draws her strength from the museum, which she transforms into an archive of memories. These archives now are being shared with and are becoming part of a collective memory.

“Thank God we are free to tell these stories. By concealing them, we never achieve anything. Everyone used to shut us up, and thankfully now we are free, we know we exist and we have stories to tell,” she says.

Although her body shakes by every word that comes out of her mouth, Ferdonije says she still has strength: “If it weren’t like this, this house would not exist.”

She has come across difficulties again. There is no professional individual or state support to look after her memories. The state has not yet assigned any person to work there. So far, the only assistance she has received from the institutions is the plaque placed at the entrance door by the Institute for the Monument Protection in Gjakova.

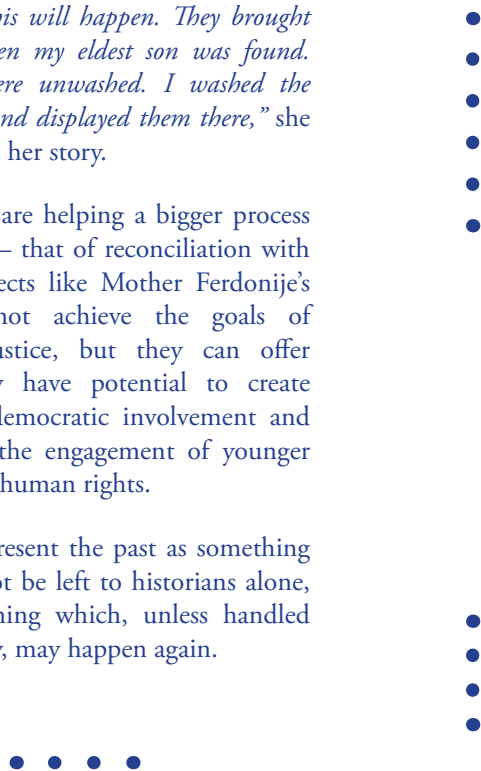
“I have nobody to look after here. According to the decision, an employee was supposed to be assigned to look after the place and a guide too. A year has passed, and nobody showed up, nothing has changed. I was told there is no budget. Also, the roof needs repairing. This is the first thing to be fixed. I was promised to, and I am waiting. There is a room that will serve as an office. The house heating needs work done on it too,” Ferdonije keeps telling.



“They will place clothes in vacuum packaging so they are not ruined. God only knows when this will happen. They brought the clothes when my eldest son was found. The clothes were unwashed. I washed the clothes myself and displayed them there,” she continues with her story.

Her stories are helping a bigger process in the society – that of reconciliation with the past. Projects like Mother Ferdonije’s museum cannot achieve the goals of transitional justice, but they can offer support. They have potential to create spaces for a democratic involvement and to encourage the engagement of younger generations in human rights.

They can present the past as something that should not be left to historians alone, but as something which, unless handled with sensitivity, may happen again.



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Dardan Hoti is a journalist and editor who has worked for various media in Kosovo for more than seven years. He was awarded with the Journalism Poverty Prize by the United Nations Kosovo Team in 2013.



Multi-ethnic education is necessary from the earliest age

Children have the desire to learn in diversity, that is why we should support and strengthen multi-ethnic schools, not only in Macedonia but everywhere, argues Kristina Atovska.



To create a responsible and peaceful multi-ethnic society, education as a socialization factor should be a priority in policy making. In a country like Macedonia, the need for an integrated education, which strengthens mutual understanding, as well as overcoming and accepting differences, is of vital importance. But these conditions are created and multi-ethnic classes are operate in just a few schools in this country. One of them is the primary school Petar Zdravkovski Penko in Skopje, where classes are held in Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish.

Professor Hatice Topali from the Primary School Petar Zdravkovski Penko claims that the effect of joint learning of mutual differences is a better understanding of the present. Additionally, learning together in practice means joint creation of the future, that is, of society as a whole. On the question of how history is studied, that is, whether the contents of textbooks contribute to confronting the past in the direction of understanding differences and accepting them, Topali says that what is studied in textbooks is not enough.

Aside from formal education and what is learned at classes, it is important to pay attention to the relationships that children build outside school. How they behave during breaks or after class says a lot about the benefits of multi-ethnic education. Topali emphasises that in their trilingual school the students had no problems with each other.

“During the breaks, students are constantly together, socializing and discussing their lessons. However, there is work that remains to be done on relationships after school,” Topali says. “The benefits of studying in a multi-ethnic school are socialising in a positive environment at school, getting to know different cultures and traditions. I think this is of great help for understanding the past.”The pupils do not have a complete, age-appropriate account of what happened in the past. But the system has not been adapted to facilitate proper understanding of history, a great number of professors told me.

The recent past has been particularly difficult for education, as there are discriminatory mistakes in the content and textbooks were withdrawn. However, content reviews are yet to be made. We cannot ignore the fact that our education system has failed in building a tolerant society, which is why priority should be given to education reforms. Social values and norms are learned from the earliest age and that imposes the need for more multi-ethnic schools. A lot of professors, we visited, stressed the necessity of multi-ethnic programmes which should begin to be applied not only in primary education, but also in secondary schools.

What can be observed in the behaviour of students from monolingual schools is the absence of tolerance. Knowledge of languages would further strengthen the friendly relationship between children from the earliest age. Also, a great number of the professors pointed out, children have a desire to learn in and about diversity. In order to satisfy this desire, multi-ethnic schools, which have existed until now in very small numbers, should be implemented in many more educational institutions across the country.



Kristina Atovska is a journalist from Macedonia. She started her career immediately after graduating. She works for TV 24. Apart from political, economic and crisis affairs she reports on the rights of workers through sources within trade unions. She also defends unwaveringly the rights of journalists and freedom of the media, and had been doing so even before she was fired from her first job as a journalist because she wrote a story that severely criticized the former Minister of Internal Affairs.

nice to meet you!

This year, 18 high school students from across the Western Balkans met in the city of Mostar to learn about and discuss shared and contested narratives of the past. The school's motto: "Challenge history". Here's what participants and lecturers took home.

"I had the opportunity to learn a lot about post-conflict mechanisms through socializing with young and creative people from across the region. We participants of the workshop return [home] with the hope of normalizing relations, which are evidently shaken by negative political influences."

(Una Alić, participant from Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

"It was a truly unforgettable experience. The lecturers were amazing and the subjects they told us about were relevant and interesting. Overall, this experience was significant for me because I met a lot of great people from all over the region and learned things we aren't usually taught at school."

(Una Lazić, participant from Belgrade, Serbia)

"At the beginning, we were all just some teenagers from different Balkan countries, but immediately after the first day, one could no longer identify which group was representing Kosovo, Bosnia & Herzegovina or Serbia, since we were all hanging out together in mixed groups. I remember one of the lecturers telling us: 'If the general population of our countries would have the same mindset as the people in this room, we would be in a much better position, both politically and economically.'"

(Amil Salihi, participant from Prizren, Kosovo)

"We have learned a lot about memorials and cultural heritage, but we have also learned to look at history in a different way, and this is extremely useful."

(Teodora Stevanović, participant from Kruševac, Serbia)



"I had never met people from Bosnia or Serbia before and it was really interesting to see their opinions and realize how they see the history of my country, how they see Albanians. This way I also became more knowledgeable about their culture and I now even see how we share some of it because we are from the same region."

(Drin Krasniqi, participant from Peja, Kosovo)

"I have always worked with younger generations, since they have the most potential for change. I believe young people are most likely to overcome prejudice and change the way they perceive the others. These are also the generations that are supposed to lead this society in the future and shape our reality."

(Sabina Čehajić-Clancy, lecturer from Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

"The most provoking question when one deals with the past is: Where do you start from and which historical dimension – social, cultural or political – do you include? The answers to these questions facilitate or hinder reconciliation. The Challenge History Summer School in Mostar tackled the issue of dealing with the past from the educational point of view. The impasse in the Balkans is deeply rooted in the educational system, which in a way reproduces the culture of conflict, by demarcating two or more oppositional sides. Each people's narrative dehumanizes the other country's people by blinding itself from their sufferings. These impressions were brought up in our discussions as each one of the summer school's participants shared their perspective on the subject. The richness of the summer school's programme provided a very comprehensive approach towards all the hot topics from the past. I think that this sort of education is of critical importance to the entire region and should serve as a role model for educational institutions across the Balkans."

(Shefik Shehu, Lecturer from Tetovo, F.Y.R. of Macedonia)

Do you want to find out more about this summer school? Go on www.dwp-balkan.org and read the blog article "Dealing with the past through gatherings of youth from different post-conflict societies" written by two participants.

news & updates

Opening of the Kosovo Documentary Center

In the end of September this year, the Kosovo Documentary Center was opened by the Humanitarian Law Center in the City Library „Hivzi Sylejmani“ of Prishtina. Within the exhibition nine short films, based on data from five trials at The Hague are presented, showing the investigation and the trials against Slobodan Milosević, Vlastimir Đorđević, Nikola Sainović, Ramush Haradinaj and Fatmir Limaj. Besides these films, there is as well an temporary exhibition of photographs taken by Wade Goddard from New Zealand during the Kosovo war and sculptures made from guns by Kosovo-based sculptor Ismet Jonuzi.

The Executive Director of HLC Kosovo, Bekim Blakaj encouraged survivors, to let their stories be documented in the Documentary Center or to bring items from wartime. He also pointed out, that the hearings of the Kosovo Special Chamber, which will be held in The Hague against former Kosovo Liberation Army guerrillas will be covered in the Center as well.

The Documentary Center is now open to the public and meant to be a place of research and information, especially for students, who want to learn more about the war and the ICTY.

Kosovo Documentary Center, City Library „Hivzi Sylejmani“, St. Sadik Bekteshi, No. 16, Prishtina

Promotion of the book „Serbs and Albanians through the centuries“ by Petrit Imami

November 14th 2017, 14:00 EU Information and Cultural Centre Prishtina (Mother Teresa Street 63, Pristina 10000, Kosovo)

After the promotion of the book „Serbs and Albanians through the centuries“ by Petrit Imami at the Mirëdita, dobar dan! Festival in June this year in Belgrade, a discussion and promotion took place in Prishtina as well, organized by Mirëdita, dobar dan! Festival and Publishing house Samizdat B92. The book, resembling an encyclopedia, using almost all available information from historical sources, archive, ground researches, interviews made with witnesses and political actors, attempts to give answers to the relationship of those nations that live side by side for over a thousand years.

Speakers on this event include: Mr. Aleksandar Pavlović (Institute for philosophy and social theory), Mr. Shkelzen Maliqi (Philosopher) and Mr. Shkelzen Gashi (Publicist). Event will be moderated by Mr. Veran Matić (Director of Samizdat B92).

The Festival “Mirëdita, dobar dan!” is organized by Integra (Kosovo) in partnership with Kosovo Foundation for Open Society (KFOS), Youth Initiative for Human Rights (Serbia) and Civic Initiatives (Serbia), and supported by Charles Stewart MOTT Foundation, Swiss Embassy Prishtina, and Ministry of Culture in Kosovo.

next issue

In the upcoming issue of Balkan. Perspektives we will pursue the question, what importance does Justice have in the process of dealing with the past, and how Special Courts can contribute to the reach for Justice and Reconciliation.

Impressum

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The Forum Civil Peace Service (forumZFD, Forum Ziviler Friedensdienst) is a German organisation that was established in 1996. It trains and deploys peace experts to conflict regions where they work together with local partners to promote peaceful coexistence and non-violent conflict resolution. Its strategic partner in the Western Balkans is Pax Christi in the Diocese of Aachen.

In the Western Balkans, the focus is on projects in the field of dealing with the past and on fostering dialogue between opposing parties. This includes school mediation projects, the support of civil society, or enhancing media capacities for a more constructive approach to dealing with the past.

The program is financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

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