

Historiography in Modern Kosovo: Myths, Narratives and Lack of Reconciliation

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Abstract: This article examines the role of education as a factor able to facilitate and achieve reconciliation in countries emerging out of an interethnic conflict. Emphasis is placed on the power and pervasiveness of historiography in creating national identities. Furthermore, the article examines national narratives as basic components of historiography, since we accept that history textbooks are a product of a process that highlights events from the glorious past and silences or ignores any incident that can demonize the nation or diminish its people self-esteem. This article focuses on the case of post-conflict Kosovo, because two nations support exclusive claims on the same territory and these claims are based on myths, oral traditions and narrations. The territorial isolation between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo is exacerbated by the historical textbooks used in the parallel education system each ethnic group has founded, making interethnic reconciliation impossible for the foreseeable future.

Key words: ethnic narratives, myths, historiography, Kosovo, parallel systems

1. Introduction

The science of education is very important in forming the personality and developing the skills of youth. As a science, education entails systematic efforts to deliver knowledge and values among the members of the nation it refers to. The majority of constitutions worldwide include provisions that define as educational aims to produce citizens and transmit national identity to the next generations.

National identity is not an innate quality and, like any identity, it has to be learned within the society it exists. Hence, the failure to reproduce and diffuse national identity can be attributed to incomplete or flawed components in the education system. The quality of education can be measured by the impact on the students and, in a changing socioeconomic environment, it can be considered a dynamic concept able to evolve and adapt over time (Fazilah et al., 2012, p. 445). The main learning instruments in the “school of national identity” are national symbols (flags, anthems etc.), given that students are encouraged to participate in flag parades and national ceremonies (Kolstø, 2006, p. 676).

History textbooks are the main media through which states can promote the official narratives, but since the end of Cold War rose other channels that interact with the aforementioned narratives. Mass media, religious leaders and artists frequently deploy narratives that act antagonistically or supplementary to the official ones, thus

carrying the potential to soften the impact of history textbooks. Post-conflict Kosovo is a notable case because the Serbs living in its territory abstain from the Kosovar educational system and are exposed to the narratives from their kin-state through Serbian TV channels (RTS1, Pink TV) and history textbooks edited by Belgrade (Fort, 2019, pp. 10–11).

Education in post-conflict countries presupposes major reforms, which are part of the wider process of reconstructing the state institutions and accomplishing reconciliation among the belligerent ethnic groups. Kosovo benefited by the vast funds channeled through UNMIK (UN Interim Mission to Kosovo) and education was selected as one of the main fields for immediate reconstruction. However, UNMIK had to contest with local actors, mainly Kosovar Albanians and secondary Serbians, who wanted to use education as a means to promote their own version of Kosovo's nationhood. In this context, the international community decided that an appropriate system should emphasize multiculturalism and decentralization along ethnic lines (Ervjola, 2018, p. 240). The reconstruction of education began well in September 2000, but the integration of the Serbian community was halted because of its highly politicized nature and due to the unwillingness of the Kosovar government (Bartlett et al., 2004, p. 487).

This manuscript examines the history textbooks in the Albanian and Serbian education systems in Kosovo, in order to manifest the lack of interethnic reconciliation and explain the resilience of hatred among the two ethnic groups. It analyses the historical memory and collective historical consciousness as factors impeding the stability and peace in Kosovo, and recently have led to suggestions about the secession of Kosovar Serbs' territory and annexation to Serbia.

2. National Narration and Historiography

Ernest Gellner has shown that the development of mass education systems, during the second half of the 19th century, reinforced the unification and democratization of Western nations, e.g., British schools diffused state traditions and history and schools in USA were part of the creation of America citizens through the fusing of migrant communities (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, p. 6). The promulgation of history is accomplished through narratives that political societies produce and are consciously subjected to, which means that societies accept the fact that are treated both as actors and subjects to historical narratives. Historiography, therefore, has emerged as the science tasked to offer a coherent and transmittable version of history (Pocock, 2011, p. 2).

Certeau holds the opinion that historiography is an oxymoron term, because it entails the antinomic terms of the real (History) and of the discourse (graphy) and undertakes to combine them and join them. Historiography, thus, is composed of mechanisms by which discourse can invade the real and organize the selected narratives in a way that appropriates them (Jürgen, 2000, p. 35). Certeau's thesis implies that history is constructed since historiography highlights some events and minimizes or silences other; this process stems from the need for state approval and its essence is the selection among various interpretations of events. Critical historiography recognizes the existence of competing set of facts, even the existence of "anti-history": the latter term refers to the attempts to nullify empirically verifiable events, like the politicians and academics who deny the Holocaust (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, p. 12).

Historical narratives begin at the moment when the state determines the political ends history should accomplish, within an open-ended context since we accept that states have the jurisdiction to adapt narratives to the new goals erupting in a rapidly changing world (Pocock, 2011, p. 5). The open-ended context entails a

dialogical relationship between past and present: modern historians weren't present when the historic events occurred and have to rely on texts that narrate multiple versions of the truth. Historic texts often include narrations of the "Other", which exclusively are diminishing, and have been the products of mechanisms of silencing. Narratives prove problematic when they lead to the position that the present, either perfect or full of frustrations, is a product of the structures of the past, since the presentation of the past is scrutinized through the same mechanisms of emphasis and silencing (Jürgen, 2000, pp. 35–36). Education systems reproduce these narratives and legitimize them through the mechanism of internalization of its rules, e.g., the Nazi regime used the education system to internalize the idea of the racial superiority of the "Aryan" state and encouraged extermination of the excluded groups. However, the legitimization of such appalling ideas is generally proven short-term, because the process of subverting education to the ends of an authoritarian regime erodes when the regime collapses (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, p. 12).

Historians use two main approaches, which coexist to a varying degree each, in order to organize the national narratives. The first approach is *narrativist historicism*, whose main representative is Michel Foucault, and tries to understand the past as if the historian was present, instead of examining the past in view of their current era. This approach is mainly descriptive, is based on sciences like archaeology and genealogy, and intends to show the heterogeneity of historical periods. The second approach is called *heterological historicism* and is deployed by Michel de Certeau, who focuses on the mechanisms of silencing historic events. Certeau uses a psychoanalytic method to understand the criteria which led to the selection of certain interpretations of events. The object of this method is the interpretations that were left out, as a consequence of a political decision, and the conception of the attributes responsible for this exclusion (Jürgen, 2000, pp. 28–29). The starting point for modern historiography is the narration of outstanding actions — victories and sacrifices — by national heroes and these actions are valued according to their positive and negative abilities: they can either be admired and imitated or despised and condemned. Romantic historicism, that is dominant in the Balkans, used poetry and rhetoric to reinforce the exemplary power of national narratives, exacerbating though the problem of history's veracity and the manipulation of myth-making (Pocock, 2011, p. 2).

Education and historiography in communist Yugoslavia was of great importance for the ethnic groups in Kosovo, because it was connected to the province's autonomy. Albanian Kosovars advocated in favor of the elevation of Kosovo's status to a Socialist Republic as the only way to fully enjoy their cultural and language rights. The 1974 Constitution meant that Albanians escaped from the Serbian oppression and were recognized as the politically dominant group in Kosovo (Božić, 2010, p. 281). However, the constitutional change wasn't accompanied by the discussion about the events preceding the building of Yugoslavia; the tendency to ignore history was integral to communist ideology that delegitimized nationalism as outdated. The death of Tito (1980) manifested the institutional crisis in Yugoslavia and the vacuum in terms of dialogue about history. The field of public discourse was captured by leaders that preached hatred and were determined to discuss past crimes, with most prominent being Slobodan Milošević, creating the conditions for the identity crisis that eventually challenged the *raison d'être* of Yugoslavia (Harzl, 2010, p. 42).

3. Education as a Symbol in Kosovo: The Creation of Parallel Systems

Education systems are the main components for achieving the "naturalization" of each state's citizens and the outcome can be a liberal society based on tolerance or a xenophobic society based on the rejection of difference. Even the most integrative and multicultural society desires the fictive image of cultural homogeneity and the main

policies adopted are the canonization of “national literature” and the teaching of a common national language. The recognition of cultural and linguistic differences doesn’t exclude a shared sense of history or common attitudes that result to a sense of citizens’ solidarity and the embedment of civic loyalty (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, p. 6). In the context of conflict-torn societies, education is used by ruling elites as a means to legitimize and reproduce conflict and, thus, is linked to the formation of identities. Many international actors have undertaken to supplement or substitute the state in delivering education, especially during the peace building phase, aiming to establish a system inclusive for all ethnicities; this process, as is to be expected, has to set aside the nationalizing state (Ervjola, 2018, p. 242).

The “education conflict” in Kosovo revolves around the University of Pristina, which has its own political and symbolical importance. The University of Pristina was founded after the mass demonstrations in 1968 and the autonomy of Kosovo after 1974 reinforced the character of the university as the most politicized place in the province. The main vehicle was the inter-Albanian cultural exchanges, e.g., the appointment of 224 professors from Albania over the next years and the arrival of Albanian textbooks (Sommers & Buckland, 2004, pp. 61–62). University of Pristina, therefore, consolidated the identity of Albanian Kosovars and was linked to their self-esteem. The reversal of Kosovo’s autonomy during the 1990s was accompanied by the Serbian control over the University of Pristina, which meant the imposition of Serbian history, language and literature. Albanian Kosovars responded by creating a “parallel” education system teaching non-approved textbooks and the existence of a secret university still enhances their national pride, since it is considered as the first act of resistance against the Milošević regime, even though the quality of higher education was poor. A notable example quoted is the fact that university diplomas during the 1990s carried the stamp “Republic of Kosova” (Baliqi, 2019, p. 92). Moreover, the University of Pristina was the main source of ruling elites and among them were members of the academic staff that were involved in the war. UNMIK tried after 2000 to make the University of Pristina inclusive and multi-ethnic, integrating Kosovo Serbs, but its political and symbolic significance compelled the local elites to reject this plan (Ervjola, 2018, p. 250).

Serbia, still invoking a claim on Kosovo’s territory, urged its compatriots to claim ownership on the name of the University of Pristina. The university in the Serbian language is relocated since 2001 in northern Mitrovica and the Serbs call it “University of Prishtina temporarily settled in Kosovska Mitrovica”. UNMIK tried to reverse the reality of an ethnically divided higher education, but failed because the existence of two parallel universities still reflects the lack of consent among ethno-political elites to further interethnic cohabitation and reconciliation (Baliqi, 2019, pp. 91, 93). Equally important is the fact that the University of Pristina functions as the main domain of Albanian nationalism, whereas the University in northern Mitrovica symbolizes the Serbian struggle to maintain the territorial integrity of Serbia, especially after the unilateral declaration of Kosovo’s independence in 2008. The reestablished University of Prizren (2010) has undertaken the task to provide higher education for the other ethnic and linguistic minorities, but the Serbs continue studying exclusively in their university in northern Mitrovica (Ervjola, 2018, pp. 249–251).

The ethnically divided higher education is mirrored to the educational situation in Kosovo, as a result of the conflict during the 1990s. The necessities of the 1999 war required all students over 14 years old to participate in the conflict, given that many school buildings were targeted and many teachers were killed. This chaotic situation topped the poor educational services already provided in communist Yugoslavia: education was highly centralized and controlled by the bureaucracy and, at the same time, financial hardships during the 1980s resulted to the reduction of attendance (Bartlett et al., 2004, pp. 487–488).

The parallel system bears political and symbolical significance for Kosovo Albanians, since Milošević's regime in 1988 introduced a series of laws that led to the dismissal of approximately six thousand Albanian teachers, who resisted the implementation of an education law that made compulsory the teaching according to the Serbian curriculum (Božić, 2010, p. 282). Ethnic tensions increased substantially after the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991 and the Albanian Kosovars established unofficial schools and many private houses and shops served as classrooms. This parallel system was perceived as crucial for the survival of the Albanian identity and in 1999, before the outbreak of the war, the estimated number of students and teachers at the primary level was 267.000 and 14.000 respectively (Bartlett et al., 2004, p. 489). Parallel education and state structures encouraged Kosovar leader Ibrahim Rugova to further the claim of an independent Kosovo. The existence of a parallel state offered the necessary credentials for the viability of the independent Kosovo while Rugova used his non-violent policy to show that Albanians were civilized, in contrast to the bellicose Serbs, and that the new state would be democratic. However, by 1999, the nationalistic views of Kosovo Liberation Army prevailed and the participants in the parallel education were considered heroes, alongside with the heroes from Albanian history (Harzl, 2010, p. 51).

In the post-conflict Kosovo, UNMIK engaged in the reconstruction of education infrastructures and UNICEF was put in charge of curriculum reform, whereas other international organizations (European Commission, OSCE, World Bank) were assigned the task to bring education closer to the Western standards. As was anticipated, various overlaps of competences occurred among the involved actors, who sidelined the local actors who ran the Kosovo parallel system, cultivating a sense of frustration among the latter (Ervjola, 2018, p. 246). The immediate accomplishment of UNMIK was that Albanian and Serbian Kosovar teachers and students returned to the classrooms, but the two groups remained separated (Bartlett et al., 2004, p. 486). The new education system grants the right to non-Albanian students, in primary and secondary grade, to learn in their language and many minorities (Turks, Roma, Bosniaks et al.) have participated in these ethnically mixed schools. Theoretically, Albanian students have the right to enroll in a Serb-administered school, and vice versa, but the harsh reality is that each ethnic group has decided to avoid interaction with the other (Arraiza, 2014, p. 25). The Kosovar government never really committed to integrate the Serbs in the formal education system, while Serbs view this integration as a de facto recognition of Kosovo's independence, which Serbia is still contesting (Baliqi, 2019, p. 91).

The absence of interethnic communication materialized into the Serbian parallel education system after 2004; UNMIK decided to promote the territorial decentralization of Kosovo, in the wake of Albanian Kosovar attacks against Serbian sites in March of 2004, and included education in the competences granted to the Serbian municipalities. The Ahtisaari Proposal (2007) provided the legal framework for the decentralization and elevated the status of Serbian language as equal to the Albanian, despite the fact that Serbs consist only 5% of the Kosovar population. Even more significant proved the provision stating that Kosovar Serbs could create mechanisms for support, in terms of finance and curriculum, from their kin-state. The result was the municipality of North Mitrovica to acquire formal competences over higher education and established privileged relations with Serbia (Arraiza, 2014, pp. 22, 24).

The Serb parallel education system bears its own political and symbolical importance, firstly because it was established in the aftermath of 2004 attacks. The Serbian community viewed these attacks as a new episode in the systematic oppression imposed by the Albanian majority after 2000 and lost their trust in state institutions, since they were considered Albanian-dominated. Secondly, parallel institutions show the failure of UNMIK to establish its presence across Kosovo; the Serbs didn't have access to public education and addressed to Belgrade to fill this

vacuum, establishing thus privileged relations (Božić, 2010, pp. 282–283). Thirdly, the parallel system is considered the main pillar of the survival of Serbian Kosovars and as a means to promulgate Serbian identity, given that Kosovo is the cradle of modern Serbian nationalism. The aforementioned points are highlighted by the fact that Kosovo's curriculum and textbooks aren't translated into Serbian, suggesting the acceptance of the current situation by the Albanian majority (Ervjola, 2018, p. 248).

4. Manipulating History Textbooks

History textbooks are one of the main instruments that multiethnic states can use in order to achieve reconciliation and inclusive education. The term “inclusive education” is essentially an oxymoron: on the one hand, it refers to ideals like participation, equal access and democratization and, on the other hand, the ethnic majorities decide both the content of each of these principles and the ways they are realized in the classrooms (Joubert & Harrington, 2020, p. 2). The state education system undertakes the task to socialize young people to its dominant values, aiming to instill patriotism and civic loyalty to the future generations. Textbooks, therefore, are composed by the official versions of the ideals and values the central state expects from its citizens to endorse. History textbooks, specifically, are the primary vehicle for the transmission of “approved” narratives, since official history is the product of a long procedure that entails selection of those events and collective memories that praise the nation's past (Wang, 2008, p. 786).

History and collective memory are the main components in the nation-building process that usually precedes the state-building process. All the states around the world, both democratic and illiberal, use national narratives to prove and consolidate the relation between the population and the territory/homeland it inhabits. The manipulation of national narratives is imperative in countries that experience interethnic conflicts or a major political transition: history is used to effectively mobilize popular support and to create the vision of a future where the nation would dominate on the homeland. These narratives necessarily stigmatize other ethnic groups as uncivilized and morally inferior, making reconciliation practically impossible; moreover, the rewriting of history textbooks is a difficult task because it is resisted by the elites that emerged victorious from the conflict or the transition (Wang, 2008, pp. 783, 786–787).

Historical memory is manipulated because it offers political legitimacy to the newly-established state or regime and commemoration rituals are used to remind the common past and stress the determination for a shared future; Anthony Smith emphasized this point with his quote “one might almost say: no memory, no identity; no identity, no nation”. The difficult task in every identity-formation process is defining the criteria for inclusion in the nation, thus excluding those who don't fulfill these criteria and hereafter might be considered as enemies. The consequence is that history books rely on historical myths and dominant identities, like the religious one, and are full of stereotypes and ethnocentric views. In the context of post-communist Yugoslavia, all the new states have rewritten their history in order to de-legitimize the previous regime and raise their self-esteem (Wang, 2008, pp. 785, 787).

The states that emerged from the disintegration of Yugoslavia needed to rewrite history because of its teaching during the communist regime. The Communist Party under Tito discredited nationalism and patriotism as ideologies that could undermine its power and stressed the common history of Yugoslav nations, silencing the interethnic crimes committed since the beginning of the 20th century (Crawford, 2003, p. 44). That was the case for Kosovo as well: the Constitution of 1974 allowed the Kosovar authorities to establish their own Educational

Council and, according to Serbian textbooks, approached the kin-state of Albania in order to avoid Serbian control (Gacesa et al., 1992, p. 317). The truth is that the League of Communists didn't allow any deviation from the Yugoslav curriculum, but the academic changes with Albania facilitated the teaching of Enverist Albanian historiography, which included many stories from the Second World War that stigmatized Serbians as war criminals (Di Lellio et al., 2017, p. 16).

The death of Tito paved the way for nationalist leaders to initiate a "battle over history" and Serbia was the most ruthless participant in this battle. Apart from the purges against the Albanian Kosovars, Serbian authorities rewrote history in 1982 and the new textbooks included a plethora of stories about the Second World War. These stories depicted as Serbian enemies the Croat Fascist Ustaše and the Albanian nationalist ballists, alongside with heroes from different nationalities of Yugoslavia; the textbooks issued in 1988 were less balanced and mentioned Albanian ballists as advocates of the Greater Albania. The establishment of the parallel education system in Kosovo allowed Albanian Kosovars to construct their own national narrative: Serbia is the historic enemy against whom Albanians constantly fight for independence, the Yugoslav form of communism is rejected and part of the glorious past is the unification of Albanian lands under occupation of 1941–1943 by the fascist Italia (Di Lellio et al., pp. 18, 20). In the post-conflict Kosovo, "sacrifice for education" was included in the national narrative, given the political and symbolical importance the parallel structures had already acquired (Sommers & Buckland, 2004, p. 41).

5. Myth over History?

The teaching of national history in schools is important for maintaining a strong sense of national identity, since we accept that nationalism is an identity culture anchored to the past; the canonization of history in the Balkans is essentially a process that relies primarily on myths and dresses them up as history (Low-Beer, 2003, p. 4). Kosovo is a prominent case in the Balkan Peninsula where history can't be separated from the legend: the story of the Serbs' last stand against Ottomans on the fields of Kosovo in 1389 includes the appearance of Saint Elijah to Prince Lazar and narratives that refer directly to the Last Supper. This myth is more important than the battle itself, since it has a life and a reality of its own, and Serbs rely on their centuries-long oral tradition to discredit anyone who challenges its veracity (Emmert, 1999, pp. 217–218).

Post-conflict Kosovo, as a new entity without previous stateness, had to create a national identity based on the "raw materials" of symbols (e.g., flag) and myths; the existing patriotism referred to the Albanian people as a whole and the Kosovar government initiated the process of creating allegiance to the new state (Kolstø, 2006, p. 679). The first myth that history textbooks in Kosovo teach refers to the ancient origins of Albanians, in order to promulgate the idea that Albanians had constant presence in the Balkans since the ancient times. Albanians trace their origin from ancient Illyrians (13th century BC), but the Kosovar textbooks claim that ancient Pelasgians (19th century BC) were the ancestors of Illyrians, despite the absence of any substantial evidence. One of the textbooks refers to the kingdom of Dardania (4th century BC) as the ancient homeland of Kosovo and emphasizes the heroism and solidarity of the Dardanian warriors (Gashi, 2016, pp. 10–11). The idea of continuous presence in Kosovo's lands is used to contradict the Slav presence in the Balkans, which dates to the 6th century AD, and resulted to the displacement of the Albanian populations inhabiting modern Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia. The territory where Albanians managed to retain their ancient culture coincides with the one depicted on the maps of Great Albania: Albania, Kosovo and some regions of Northern Macedonia, Montenegro and Greece

(Gashi, 2016, p. 22).

The Kosovar textbook History 7 entails a different version of the Kosovo battle in 1389 in order to discredit the part of the Serbian narrations that present Albanians as allies and collaborators of the Ottomans. According to this version, Prince Lazar was the leader of a military alliance, consisted of Albanians, Bulgarians, Romanians and Serbs, that tried to stop the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans. Albanian prince Teodor Muzaka was also killed in the battle and the Albanian fighter Millosh Kopiliq is mentioned as the one who killed Sultan Murat I, while the Serbian myth mentions young knight Miloš Obilić; the same textbook acknowledges that the evidence about Kopiliq is insufficient and the same applies about the components of the Serbian myth. The textbook doesn't make any other reference to the Serbian rule of Kosovo, despite the fact that it lasted until 1415 (Gashi, 2016, p. 33). The textbook, in the same context, maintains that the Ottomans forced Islamization on Albanian nobility and urban population, but the population in the mountainous areas of Kosovo managed to escape from this process (Gashi, 2016, p. 48). As a proof, the textbook supports that Albanians were in open revolt against the Ottoman Empire from the 1830s, because the administrative and military reforms of the Tanzimat period worsened the already bad conditions under which Albanians were living (Gashi, 2016, p. 61).

Another major theme in the Kosovar textbooks is Albania's state-building process and the "trauma" caused when Kosovo and other lands were not included in the newly-established state in 1912. This narrative speaks about the constant battle of Albanians against neighboring countries (Greece, Montenegro and Bulgaria) and focuses on Serbia, since Kosovo was conquered by the Serbian army during the Second Balkan War (1912). Serbia is depicted as the main enemy and is stigmatized as "uncivilized" in a textbook filled with stories about acts of genocide against all Albanians during the Second Serbian-Turkish War (1877–1878), after the integration of Kosovo in 1912 and after the reconquering in 1918, following the defeat of Austro-Hungarian forces by the Serbian army (Gashi, 2016, pp. 61, 76, 83).

Even more interesting is the narrative included in the textbooks about the period 1981–2000: the political leadership in Kosovo is pictured as naïve enough to ignore the Serbian intention to suppress the municipality's autonomy. The outbreak of massive demonstrations in 1989 signaled the awakening from the lethargy and had two main consequences: firstly, the Serbian suppression created martyrs, i.e., the 30 people killed during the demonstrations and, secondly, made imperative the foundation of the Democratic League of Kosovo under the leadership of Rugova. Thereafter, all the events mentioned — the creation of parallel state structures, the Serbian attacks in 1998, the emergence of KLA and the NATO bombings — are used to morally legitimize the Kosovar claim for self-determination and serve as a proof that the independence of Kosovo was the fulfilment of a destiny of a nation with ancient roots (Gashi, 2016, pp. 105–106).

The textbooks used by Kosovar Serbs are produced by the Serbian state publishing house, since the Ahtisaari Plan included a provision for educational cooperation with the kin-state, and cover the period from the prehistoric age until the disintegration of Yugoslavia (Fort, 2019, p. 6). We have to mention briefly the content of Serbian textbooks during the 1990s, since these new textbooks are produced among 2008 and 2016. History textbooks used for 5th to 8th Grade were dominated by stories for Serbian national sovereignty, about the bravery and patriotism of Serbian soldiers when they fought wars with the sole aim the liberation of their compatriots, which contradicts the Albanian narratives about Serbian wars of expansion (Crawford, 2003, p. 48). The new textbooks maintain this emphasis on the glorious past of Serbia, but focus also on the religious aspect of the Serbian identity; Serbian Orthodox Church is considered as the guardian of Serbian identity after the Ottoman conquest and retains this role because Serbs view Kosovo's independence as the reactivation of the traumatic collective memory of

1389 (Fort, 2019, p. 9).

Serbian textbooks, when they analyze ancient Balkans, acknowledge that Illyrians were living on the Adriatic coast and within the Peninsula, but never mention them as the ancestors of Albanians (Gashi, 2016, p. 13). The enduring theme, however, is the constant suffering and submission of Serbs to other nations, but always after bloody wars that the Serbian army fought with bravery, and defeat is presented either as a result of treason or because the enemy was numerically superior. This theme emerged after the disintegration of Yugoslavia and emphasizes the delimitation of Serbian borders, given that communist rule had imposed a façade of unity. The textbook taught to 6th Grade uses the term “forced” in order to demonstrate the suffering of Serbians during the Arab conquest (556 AD), under the Bulgarian state (19th century) and under the Croatian and German forces during World War II. The 6th Grade textbook mentions as the onset of the period of domination the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, because the defeat signified the end of the Serbian Golden Age and the “Muslim Turks” were thereafter the “Other” against whom the Serbian identity was defined; this is made obvious if we consider that the image of Stefan Nemanja, the first King of Serbia (12th century) is on the cover of the textbook. The Serbian Orthodox Church is depicted as the only institution that escaped from submission and domination, but there isn’t any narration about sacrifice because the Church highlights the survival of the Serbian nation (Fort, 2019, p. 8).

The new textbook used for 7th Grade doesn’t mention the collaboration of Albanians with the Ottomans against the Austrian forces in 1690, but highlights the fact that only Serbians were disposed from Kosovo when the Ottoman army reconquered the territory. This emphasis intends to show that the ethnic structure of Kosovo changed because the Ottoman Empire initiated a project of massive emigration of Islamized Albanians from present-day Albania (Gashi, 2016, pp. 57–58). In this context, the Serbian army liberated Kosovo on 23 October 1912, fulfilling a centuries-long expectation, but there is no mention about crimes against the Albanian population. The same textbook presents Albanians as the new “Other” through the narrative known as the “Albanian Golgotha”: the Serbian army and civilians, under King Peter Karađorđević, were forced to retreat when the combined Bulgarian and Austrian forces entered Serbia in the autumn of 1915. They withdrew to the mountains of Albania, in order to reach the troops of their British and French allies stationed on the Adriatic Sea, but were attacked by local Albanian bands. This narrative ends with a new liberation of Serbia and Kosovo, in November 1918, but there isn’t any mention about atrocities by Serb forces, neither about armed uprising of Albanians against the Serbian army between 1918 and 1924 (Gashi, 2016, pp. 77–78, 85).

Especially interesting is the narration included in the Serbian textbooks about the events of the Kosovo War of 1999. There is no mention about the Kosovar civil resistance during the 1980s and the 1990s and the narration begins with the armed resistance by KLA in 1998, which is characterized as terrorist attacks that targeted civilians. Western intervention is depicted as a perversion, since it caused many civilian casualties and vast infrastructure damages but, primarily, because it allowed to Albanian Kosovars to force the disposition of more than 220 thousand Serbs and other non-Albanian civilians from Kosovo. The textbook openly blames KFOR and invokes the report by Jiří Dienstbier (5 October 2000) to the UN Secretary General, claiming that UN and KFOR were tolerating the ethnic cleansing of Serbs in Kosovo (Gashi, 2016, pp. 108–109).

6. Conclusion

Reconstruction of the education system in a state that faced an interethnic conflict is a quite difficult task, especially since the international community conditions the recognition of the winning side on its ability to

achieve reconciliation with the losing ethnic group. Education in post-conflict Kosovo has proven to be a domain that faces many challenges, which have their roots on the communist past and on the recent violent “interaction” between the Albanians and the Serbs living in Kosovo.

The Yugoslav state under Tito aimed to instill the communist ideal to the population, but the institutional design of Yugoslavia made it impossible to overcome ethnic and cultural differences: the territorial division was executed in accordance with the principle of ethno-federalism, where each Republic was composed by a numerically superior ethnic group and the minorities enjoyed cultural rights. The Republic of Serbia was a unique case, because it was the only one that hosted two autonomous provinces, Kosovo and Vojvodina, according to the Constitution of 1974. This “uniqueness” was a source of frustration for Serbs, firstly because their compatriots didn’t enjoy the same status in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina and, secondly, because the communist system prohibited any discussion about the events preceding the formation of Yugoslavia. Serbs felt that the federal system was designed to contain them, despite the fact that they were the main victims, during World War II, in the hands of German forces and Croat fascists. This “moral ingratitude” was coupled with the insecurity caused by the Albanian domination of Kosovo after 1974, which revived the traumatic collective memory of 1389. Kosovar Albanians felt the same insecurity after 1982, when the autonomy of Kosovo was elevated and revived the memories of Serbian oppression during the 1960s; education was of great significance because it functioned as the main vehicle for the preservation of identity under conditions of cultural persecution.

Kosovar Albanians created parallel state structures and the University of Pristina gained symbolical importance as the main site of resistance against the Serbia of Milošević and as the “intellectual birthplace” of Kosovo’s leaders. The end of the 1999 war marked the stationing of UNMIK, which saw education as the field that could bring mutual understanding among the ethnic groups in Kosovo. However, organizing shared facilities and curricula for Albanians and Serbs was reduced to wishful thinking, especially when the Ahtisaari plan allowed Serbs to establish their own parallel education structures in the new municipalities where they form the majority.

The educational situation in present-day Kosovo is far from achieving the goal of interethnic reconciliation, firstly, because it segregates students into Serb and Albanian schools. Furthermore, students of each community are taught different history textbooks, which are used to achieve political goals. Kosovar textbooks highlight the continuous presence of Albanians in the Balkans and reproduce narratives that depict Serbs as the historic enemy and oppressor, against whom they must gain their independence. Kosovo’s Serbs use history textbooks approved by their kin-state and promote the idea of Serbs as a unique and united nation through the notion that Kosovar Serbs aren’t a distinct category. These textbooks present Muslim Turks as the historic “Other” from 1389 until 1878 and, thereafter, Albanians become the main enemy. The textbooks of both of the ethnic groups confuse myth and reality and the former has infiltrated and dominated over the latter.

The answer to the question if there can be ethnic reconciliation in Kosovo seems easier as the years pass by: the most viable solution, given the territorial isolation of Albanians and Serbs along with the unwillingness for cooperation, is the federalization of Kosovo. Serbs in Kosovo have proposed their secession and unification with Serbia, but the international community is afraid that such an evolution would encourage nationalistic leaders to pursue border changes and could result to new ethnic wars. Equally important is the concern that the democratic ideals of participation, dialogue and peaceful resolution of conflicts would be overcome by the destructive forces of hypernationalism.

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