

ВИШЕ ОД ЗАЈЕДНИЧКОГ НАРАТИВА ПРОШЛОСТИ: ОДВОЈЕНЕ И ИНТЕГРИСАНЕ ШКОЛЕ У ИСТОЧНОЈ СЛАВОНИЈИ

BEYOND JOINT NARRATIVE OF THE PAST: SEGREGATED AND INTEGRATED SCHOOLS IN EASTERN SLAVONIA



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ABSTRACT

Educational systems in post-conflict societies often serve as loci where historical narratives of different groups clash and cause contention. The issue of which or whose version of the past is taught in schools may become, for different communities, a question of their cultural and social survival. Eastern Slavonia serves as a case study to explore how the youths in segregated and integrated schools have been affected by the master historical narratives of the 1990s' war in Croatia and how this translates into their views of the Self and the Other. It particularly focuses on the official narratives as presented in history textbooks and their interplay with the individual historical narratives of school youths in Eastern Slavonia, Croatia. The findings of the study show that history is relevant to participants' present lives while production and reproduction of history are not only the purview of historians and elites, but it also happens at the grassroots. Individual narratives about recent history show dissent from official narratives, which is evident in the questioning of the in-group's responsibility for the wrongs committed against the relevant Other. The purpose of this study is to learn from the grassroots about the ways of dealing with the legacy of contentious past, and how this local knowledge can be used to promote interethnic understanding and tolerance as well as prevention of future violence. This study aims to contribute to the furthering of conflict resolution capacities through a better understanding of key dynamics of memorialization and reception of historical narratives at the communal level.

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Образовни системи у постконфликтним друштвима често служе као места где се наративи различитих група сукобљавају и узрокују конфликт. Питање која се или чија верзија прошлости учи у школама, може постати за различите заједнице, питање њиховог културног и социјалног опстанка. Источна Славонија је фокус овог истраживања кроз које ће се истражити утицај историјских мастер наратива о рату из 1990-их у Хрватској на младе у одвојеним и интегрисаним школама, и какав је утицај тих наратива на њихово виђење себе и других. Ова студија такође истражује званичне наративе из уџбеника историје и њихов утицај на појединачне историјске наративе младих у Источној Славонији. Налази студије показују да је историја битна за животе учесника истраживања, док креирање и репродукција историје није само делокруг историчара и елита, него и појединаца у најширим слојевима друштва. Наративи појединца о скоријој историји показују неслагања са званичним нарративима, што се види у испитивању одговорности за недела које је једна група починила према другој групи. Циљ студије је да се сазна како се обични људи суочавају са наслеђем конфликтне прошлости и како се то локално знање може користити за промоцију међуетничког разумевања и толеранције, као и превенције насиља у будућности. Ова студија има за циљ да допринесе усавршавању стратегија за решавање конфликта кроз боље разумевање кључне динамике меморијализације и пријема историјских наратива на нивоу заједница.

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on historical narratives that emerged from the processes of Croatian state formation, war and transition towards peace and their influence on the views about Self and Other among youth in schools of Eastern Slavonia. The region of Eastern Slavonia, situated in the north-east of Croatia, witnessed some of the worst fighting and atrocities during the 1991–95 war, and nowadays, its Croat and Serb communities live in conditions of distrust, interethnic divisions, and segregation. The politics of memory operationalized through competing versions of the same historical events is used as a tool to assert, maintain or challenge the action, status, and legitimacy of different agents. Grievances and traumas of the war are reflected in historical narratives that tend to be contentious and divisive.

The struggle over meanings of the past is really a struggle for either maintaining or challenging legitimacy, that ultimately translates into having or not having more access to benefits, status, agency and freedom in general.

In the context of Croatia, there are two major ethnic groups that have struggled over the access to resources, power, and legitimacy throughout history. Croats and Serbs had a status of nations within former Yugoslavia, which gave them similar access to political and economic resources. In the newly independent Croatia, Serbs' status has changed and dwindled to that of a minority, with almost two-thirds of the Serb population exiled from Croatia as a consequence of the military operations *Storm* and *Lightning*. However, debates over history persist not only in Eastern Slavonia, but also in the wider regional space in which these two groups live in different constellations trying to cope with the consequences of war and their interconnected destiny.

History has particularly been at the center of debates pertaining to education, history textbooks and schooling models in Croatia. Educational systems are loci where competing historical narratives often clash, and therefore the way those competing histories are dealt with, can determine if educational systems are

to become repositories of conflict or of peace. This study will particularly examine the interplay between the official and individual narratives related to the 1990s' war of independence/civil war in Croatia. The youth members of school communities belonging to two former adversary groups are deeply involved in the construction of meanings about history trying to make sense of themselves and others in a new national, regional and global contexts.

In the wake of war and trauma, they tap into the past collective narratives seeking an explanation of present events, which inevitably shape their lives, actions, orientations and the world around them. However, this study posits that historical narratives should not only be seen as collective structures or scripts that individuals tap into to get a sense of themselves and others. People's personal histories are equally important in the production of meanings, identities and relationships. Historical narratives operate at different levels and they represent structures that are not only constitutive of our individual selves influencing our present and future relationships and actions, but they are constantly constituted by us. Moreover, this study posits that individuals are able to construct, imagine and live their own histories by retelling the past in various relational contexts, and in this retelling, it may be possible not only to find clues and answers for dealing with present issues but also for preventing future conflicts.

This study tackles the question of how the official historical narratives influence the youths' individual stories about past and how this translates into the youths' sense of themselves and others. It particularly focuses on the official narratives as presented in history textbooks and their interplay with the individual historical narratives of school youths in Eastern Slavonia, Croatia.

Education in Post-Conflict Societies

Schools in post-conflict societies may serve as "a battleground and a repository of conflict where different communities compete over history and the society's narrative" [1]. History education in post-conflict societies is often

characterized by segregation, and divisions. According to Aall et al. [1] such a situation can be reversed through various approaches that enable exposure to multifaceted historical narratives, which can contribute to gaining a more holistic picture of the past. The importance of education for securing long-term peace is also emphasized by Davis [2] and Harb [3] who see teachers and students as agents of social change. The education can play a key role in shaping perceptions, feelings and the development of awareness of the other ethnic groups, which was emphasized in a study conducted by the OSCE in Macedonia [4]. The findings of that study identified the connection between teachers' comments and students' views about other ethnic communities.

An extensive attitudinal study with children, parents and teachers in Vukovar, Eastern Slavonia that examined the interplay between education in Vukovar and attitudes of majority and minority communities towards assimilation, integration and multiculturalism, raised an important question about whether the students' negative attitude towards integration is a result of the segregated schooling or other forms of social divisions outside the school [5]. The proposition is that such a gap can be overcome by reaching beyond quantitative measures of a number of contacts and attitudinal estimations [5] and uncovering meanings and patterns of relationships through people's narratives not only in schools but also in wider contexts. The untested assumption is that perceptions toward the other ethnic group are not only shaped in classrooms but also reflect deep divisions and cleavages that persist within the communities and society on the whole. The study, looking at the school communities that represent the microcosm of youth's engagement and interaction with peers, parents, and teachers, in trying to make sense of the past is, therefore, a missing link in understanding the dynamics of relationships on the ground as well as possibilities of their transformation.

The important role of education in post-conflict societies has also been the focus of an ethnographic research, conducted by Azra Hromadžić, into the tension between the

international community's discourses of integration and the local ethno-nationalist quest for separate schooling in post-conflict Bosnia & Herzegovina. This study has focused particularly on the Mostar gymnasium, pointing to the conclusion that more research needs to be done to identify key factors of contention between macro and micro level discourses. The assumption of the local communities that they can achieve protection of their community, culture, and language through segregation in education, collides with the assumption of the international community that is advocating the idea of integrated schools. Hromadžić claims that "the exercise of the right to cultural autonomy led to the shrinking of public places that nurture interaction, exchange, and exercise of democracy across ethnic groups" [6]. While the students are sharing the same premises in schools, they each go to their part of the town after school; they do not associate with each other, not because they are not given the opportunity for interaction, but because they are part of the social structures that are permeated by divisions, segregation, and ethnic hatred. Education is the locus of such tensions in Eastern Slavonia, too, but to address those tensions, there is a need to focus our exploration not only on schools and education systems but also on the communities.

Peace education programs and initiatives based on contact theory and the creation of shared identities as rooted in Western traditions are critically assessed as not having a lasting impact in the context of Palestinian-Israeli education system because of youths' embeddedness in a constraining communal enmity system [7]. Hammack emphasizes the need to explore the relationship between master and personal narratives in order to obtain insights into the mutual constitution of culture and mind through the process of narration on the ground. More specifically, to understand the individual choices and relationships in educational systems, we need to examine the interplay between master narratives and individual stories embedded in such systems. There is a need for a more comprehensive and integrative approach to analyzing processes that are taking place at the communal level.

The importance of historical narratives

Grievances and traumas of war are reflected in contentious historical narratives that increase tensions, mobilize nationalist sentiments and cause social divisions. As Rouhana and Bar-Tal [8] argue, collective narratives gain their centrality in response to the political events while serving, among other functions, as a coping mechanism to strengthen the community's resolve in the face of adverse or traumatic events. When narratives of past collective traumas are challenged by the existence of alternative narratives, those alternative narratives are perceived as a threat to the national identity that as a result becomes entrenched, more salient and often evoked to reflect the past traumas [9]. For example, when a group of authors, Snježana Koren, Magdalena Najbar-Agičić and Tvrtko Jakovina, published a history textbook supplement to be used in Eastern Slavonia's schools that presented a diverse and complex narrative about the war talking about suffering of both Serbs and Croats, this caused a public outrage and was subsequently withdrawn [10]. The supplement included the narrative about Serbian victims of Croatian military operations *Bljesak* (Lightening) and *Oluja* (Storm), as well as ethnic cleansing of Serbs from Croatia in the aftermath of these operations.

Despite the state efforts to address the interethnic diversity, the people on the ground were not ready to recognize historical discourses of the Other because those discourses delegitimize their own views of the past. Therefore, it is important to explore views that people attach to contested historical discourses on the ground through which threats and meanings that undermine peace circulate, which will provide insights into the ways of how these contentious meanings can be renegotiated. As Margaret Smith points out, understanding the multiperspectival nature of history and realization that different groups experience the same events differently, may be more important than searching for common narratives of history, possibly imposed from the outside [11]. Nevertheless, the school communities represent

the key sites for having difficult conversations about history and exploration of how change can be introduced into the conflict cycle that could lead to sustainable peace.

For conflict scholars, narrative as such is particularly important when examining how people deal with the contentious past in post-conflict contexts, which past events they identify as important and how they orient themselves towards those events. Education in post-conflict societies is extremely political – it is a place where narratives of different groups clash and cause contention, so the issue of which or whose version of history is taught may become, for different communities, a question of their cultural and social survival, i.e., it becomes a key for preservation of their identity. Different groups have different stories to tell. The people's choice of a particular historical narrative is heavily ideological and political while reflecting not only views or beliefs of the speakers but also of their communities and the larger societal contexts.

The rules governing production and interpretation of historical narratives serve as scripts that regulate and inform people's action and identity that is deeply connected with people's primeval need for knowing where they come from and how past action of their collectivities influences their present and future lives. Shotton and Gergen argue that, in the postmodern world, "persons are largely ascribed identities according to the manner of their embedding within a discourse – in their own or in the discourses of others" [12]. Examining these narratives, therefore, becomes key to understanding people's present views of themselves and the relevant others with whom they shared the historical stage.

This overview of the studies that have been done previously on the topics of history education and its impact on post-conflict societies as well as the importance of historical discourses that influence identities and relationships of the people on the ground, confirm the need to examine and learn from discursive practices on the ground, which will enable exploration of new avenues for addressing the very roots

of the conflicts that result in negative peace. More research is needed into the approaches to education, particularly the role of communities, parents and teachers, in post-conflict settings because education might hold the key to conflict transformation and promotion of much-needed empathy towards the Other, which can significantly influence the future relationships between former adversaries.

Methodologically, narratives in this study provide a comprehensive framework for research of the individual Self through people's stories as well as master narratives reflected in those individual stories. Narratives are systems in which different texts intersect, where protagonists and events are not devoid of historical continuity and embeddedness in context, thereby linking the immediate telling of a situation with larger social and cultural processes. Recent research on narratives has emphasized the situatedness of storytelling and its embedding in social life [13]. McAdams has argued that "people carry with them and bring into the conversation a wide range of self-stories, and these stories are nested in larger and overlapping stories, creating ultimately a kind of anthology of the self" [14]. According to the claims of poststructuralist, constructivist, and critical theory, language as such is not just a system of signs through which we communicate with each other but carries within itself historical, cultural, mythical and political meanings. Therefore, narratives are considered as proper loci for analysis of the interplay between wider social context and individual identities, relationships and belief systems.

Taking a social constructivist theory as a lens in approaching the subject matter, this study is largely indebted to Foucault [15] and Hall [16] and their views of discourse, which informed my understanding of how discourses influence and shape individual actions and intergroup relationships at the grassroots. For Foucault, discourse is about the production of knowledge and power through language. While physical objects and actions exist separately from discourse, we can only have knowledge

about them if they have a meaning and it is a discourse that gives them meaning [15]. All social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence our actions [17].

While discourses give meaning to what we do and how we make sense of the world, there is a lack of knowledge to what extent certain discourses or elements of those discourses have influenced perceptions and relationships between groups and individuals in post-conflict societies. This study is an attempt to add knowledge about the reception of discourses at the grassroots and if there is a space for the subject's agency.

While Foucault emphasizes the primacy of structure over the agency, Fairclough's critical discourse theory allows a certain space for an agency of individuals and groups, which is closer to the view of discourse in this study. Fairclough argues that the balance between the subject as ideological effect and the subject as an active agent is a variable, which depends upon social conditions [18]. If one focuses only on production and creation of discourses, one would be taking a single-sided perspective, which would not answer the questions of how students in this study are dealing with a particular discourse in their classrooms and communities, or how this shapes their view of the Other. By exploring how communities at the grassroots view and make sense of the contentious past, we will be able to develop a deeper understanding of how to use context-specific and local knowledge to promote positive peace in post-conflict societies.

Although historical narratives are troublingly biased, they are undoubtedly very relevant for human lives. They acquire even more potency in the contexts of conflict and post-violent conflict societies in which the politics of memory and history have very concrete goals and impacts. On the one hand, historical accounts attain their intelligibility and relevance through narrative form, enabling closure, transmission of values and coherence that people need. On the other hand, they can be deeply flawed, causing perpetuation of unjust

practices and relations on the ground. The key point of this article is to advocate for an awareness of the workings of history or, more accurately, historical narratives in post-conflict educational systems. Rather than imagining uniformity or the creation of joint historical narratives as a remedy, which is, according to the findings of this study, a priori deemed to fail, this study proposes raising consciousness about the use of history in order to deal with the contentious past more effectively.

THE CASE STUDY OF EASTERN SLAVONIA

The case study of Eastern Slavonia, a geographical region in Croatia, was selected because of its demographic composition and history. Namely, a large Serbian minority inhabits that region (around 15%), and some of the worst fighting between Serbs and Croats in the 1990's war took place in that region, including the battle of Vukovar in 1991 [19]. This study focuses on the interplay between official master narrative related to the war of independence/civil war in Croatia as presented in history textbooks and the individual historical narratives of students. The traces of the official historical narratives are sought in the participants' individual stories to see how much they comply or deviate from the official national historical narrative. While historical narratives are reproduced, circulated and mainstreamed through media, newspapers, the Internet and other mass media outlets, the primary source of the official historical narrative are history books because they are approved and regulated by the structures of the state such as the ministry of education, school councils, and eventually, teachers themselves.

The spatial variation in Eastern Slavonia provides an opportunity for comparisons across educational models and ethnicities. The spatial variation is based on the fact that in some schools in Eastern Slavonia, students belonging to Serbian and Croatian communities have chosen *the integrated schooling model*, while in the other schools, the students belonging to Serbian and Croatian communities have

chosen *the segregated schooling model*, even though they live within the same geographical space with a population of similar ethnic composition.¹

SHORT HISTORY OF CONFLICT

Yugoslavia's disintegration took a bloody turn as the representatives of the six Yugoslav republics were unable to agree on the future of the state. The series of conflicts in Yugoslavia started with the Slovenian short confrontation in 1991, followed by wars in Croatia and Bosnia and ending with the war in Kosovo in 1999. Croatian and Serbian nationalist elites had very different concepts about the ideal states for their nations that came to the forefront as Yugoslavia weakened. Those concepts clashed most notably in President Tudjman's discourse of a "one-thousand-year long dream" of independent Croatia as well as President Milošević's claim that "all Serbs should live in one state". Inability to reach an agreement on the future of Yugoslavia, led Croatia and Slovenia to seek greater autonomy within Yugoslavia later transformed into requests for confederal status and independence. The multiparty system brought very few alternatives to the nationalist party of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ – Hrvatska demokratska zajednica), led by Croatian nationalist Franjo Tudjman. The major opponent of HDZ was the former communist party

of Croatia called the Social Democratic Party (SDP) led by Ivica Račan that did not stand a chance in the overall climate of the collapse of communism in Europe.

Franjo Tudjman's political platform was based on anti-Yugoslav and anti-Serb rhetoric as well as a promise of Croatian independence. The HDZ was massively supported in Croatia and abroad in the diaspora that provided much of the funding for implementation of Tudjman's political program. Tudjman won the elections on April 22, 1990, and a new constitution was ratified that proclaimed Croatia a nation of the Croatian people, thereby degrading the status of Serbs from a nation into a minority [20]. The Serb population held a referendum on their future in the areas that would later become SAO Krajina (Serbian Autonomous Region of Krajina). The Croatian government tried to stop the referendum by sending their police forces into those areas, but the Serbs blocked the roads with wooden logs. This incident was named the "balvan revolucija" or the "log revolution", which marked the beginning of the formation of SAO Krajina. Early recognition of Croatia and Slovenia by Germany without reaching a political solution precipitated violence that led to bloody, fratricidal wars that are often described as Europe's deadliest conflicts since World War II. The war in Croatia lasted from 1991 to 1995, and it involved Croat forces loyal to the government of Croatia and the Serb-controlled Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) and local Serb forces in Croatia. The conflict escalated and the bombing of towns and villages became an everyday reality, resulting in numerous civilian casualties. After the ceasefire of January 1992, the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) was deployed² and open violence was stopped. In 1995, the Croatian army supported by NATO implemented operations Flash and Storm 'liberating' the territories of Serb Krajina, which resulted in hundreds of people killed, thousands of homes burned and destroyed, and approximately 200,000 to 250,000 of Serbs driven out of Croatia [21].

¹ The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, Constitutional Law on national Minorities' Rights and Law on Education in Languages and Letters of National Minorities specify three types of minority schooling in Croatia. The first type (Model A) provides for establishing schools in which all subjects are taught in the language of a particular minority, with the Croatian language being just one of the school subjects. In the second type (Model B), the subjects relevant to minority cultural heritage are taught in their mother tongue, and the other school subjects (i.e., math and science) are taught in Croatian. In the third type (Model C), the whole standard curriculum is taught in the Croatian language, with the possibility that *additional classes* relevant for the minority cultural heritage can be introduced in the minority's mother tongue. Students belonging to the Serbian community in some schools in Eastern Slavonia have chosen *the integrated model of schooling (type three)*, opting to learn the whole standard curriculum in the Croatian language together with their Croatian peers, while in the other schools, the students belonging to the Serbian community have chosen *the segregated model of schooling (type one)*, opting to study all of their subjects separately in the Serbian language and alphabet.

For more details on schooling models see: <http://public.mzos.hr/Default.aspx?sec=3154>

² United Nations Security Council. 1992. Resolution 743 S-RES-743, February 21, 1992. Retrieved on Feb. 20, 2013.

METHODOLOGY

Data collection

Data were collected from multiple sources: three history textbooks³ and forty semi-structured interviews⁴ with youth. The process of recruiting the participants started after presenting the recruitment letter and consent forms to the participants, explaining the nature and ethical aspects of research and what the interview entails. Each interview was audiotaped, transcribed verbatim and then translated into English by the researcher. To ensure anonymity of the participants, codes were used instead of names on each interview transcript.

Participants

The participants of this study included 40 high school youths, 18–19 years old, and among the interviewees, twenty youths had selected the integrated model of schooling, in contrast to twenty students who had selected the segregated model of schooling. In terms of demographic characteristics, such as ethnicity and gender, the participants were distributed almost identically within their respective groups of participants. Students in the integrated model amounted to eleven females and nine males, while students in the segregated model included twelve males and eight females. There were ten student respondents who identified themselves as Croats and ten as Serbs in each of the models.

3 The textbooks analyzed for the purposes of this study are as follows:

- 1) Erdelja, Krešimir & Igor, Stojaković. 2009. *Koraci kroz vrijeme IV*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga (Erdelja, Krešimir & Igor, Stojaković. 2009. *Steps Through Time*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga; history textbook for the 4th grade of grammar schools);
- 2) Dukić, Ivan, Krešimir Erdelja & Igor Stojaković. 2005. *Hrvatska povijest*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga (Dukić, Ivan, Krešimir Erdelja & Igor Stojaković. 2005. *Croatian History*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga; history textbook for the 1st grade of vocational schools);
- 3) Erdelja, Krešimir & Igor, Stojaković. 2007. *Tragom prošlosti 8*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga. (Erdelja, Krešimir & Igor, Stojaković. 2007. *Tracing the Past 8*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga. History textbook for the 8th grade of primary schools).

4 Semi-structured interviews combine a pre-determined set of open questions that prompt discussion with the opportunity for the interviewer to explore particular themes or responses further. Retrieved on 03/15/2013 from: http://evaluationtoolbox.net.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=31&Itemid=137

Data analysis

Thematic discourse analysis [22] and interviews were used to examine history textbooks used in secondary schools in the region as well as interview transcripts. The data analysis started by looking into the history textbooks as primary sources of the official historical narrative in Croatia. The objective in analyzing history textbooks was to identify the content and structure of official historical discourse regarding the war of independence/civil war in Croatia, which enabled examination of the traces of that narrative in the individual stories of the participants.

The thematic discourse analysis used in this study is grounded in constructivist and critical theories, which focus on both larger discourses and individual meanings attached to those discourses. It implies theorizing wider ideologies, contextual nuances and latent meanings in which the surface meanings and explicit structures are grounded. Themes within data were explored through an inductive or “bottom-up” approach, which implied that the themes were data- rather than theory-driven [23]. Thematic discourse analysis in this study allowed the researcher to make claims not only about the explicit structure of narratives but also about their functionality and connections with wider discourses and context.

By establishing structure of the wider historical discourse, it was possible to determine how certain patterns and conventions within official narratives that were circulated by an entity of power and authority operated on the ground; if they were modified, challenged or fully accepted, and how people’s views of themselves and their relevant Others varied in relation to the official historical narrative.

The first stage of data analysis consisted of reading through all the collected texts (textbooks and interview transcripts) to get an overall sense of the data. While reading through the data, the researcher was making notes about certain topics, putting down ideas, puzzles and questions as they came along. In certain instances, the researcher was also recording her

impressions so that she did not forget them. It was researcher's intention not only to explore the explicit structure of narratives but also get to the latent, implicit meanings for which thematic discourse analysis seemed to provide tools and resources. For the purposes of coding, it was important to identify what represented a theme and how much of data in terms of size should be encompassed within a theme.

Identification of thematic clusters or some general predominant themes depends on the research question. However, these thematic clusters are not mutually exclusive since certain meanings may appear in different clusters. The prevalence of a certain theme in terms of frequency of specific content markers is an important factor in determining the ranking of themes, but it is not the only criterion pointing to the relevance and the choice of a particular theme. Thematic discourse analysis cannot ignore instances of dissent, counter-themes and counter-narratives that appear in rare cases and with only a small percentage of participants. These are exactly the cases that defy the rule and it is important to capture them and learn why they appear with certain respondents, and not with the others.

So the importance of a theme does not have to depend on "quantifiable measures [of specific content markers], but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question" [24]. Codes represent "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" [25]. Themes were collected by always having in mind their connection to the research question. As the analysis progressed, the researcher started to connect those themes to certain explanations through a reflective process of questioning and interpreting the meanings, themes, subthemes and underlying assumptions.

To facilitate analysis and comparison of data obtained in interviews with different groups of participants and in different educational contexts, the researcher developed 2 x 2 matrix. The matrix was used for initial sorting of qualitative data. The data was collected from respondents that were part of either integrated

or segregated educational models: Integrated Model (I) and Segregated Model (S), and Serb (Ethnicity (Sb)) and Croat (Ethnicity (C)) ethnicities. The clustering of data into four initial categories is presented as follows:

Table 1. Matrix for initial sorting of qualitative data

	Ethnicity (Sb)	Ethnicity(C)
Model (I)	Data (ISb)	Data (IC)
Model (S)	Data (SSb)	Data (SC)

FINDINGS

Analysis of history textbooks

Textbooks, as main sources of the official historical narrative, have a role of communicating politically correct versions of history, values and the national identity that are aimed at creating followers or loyal citizens. The objective in analyzing three textbooks currently used in schools in Eastern Slavonia was to identify the structure of the "formal representations", official mainstream historical narrative, which would enable examination of the traces of that narrative in the individual narratives of the participants. One of the major issues in post-conflict societies is the question of how to avoid "replication of educational structures that may have contributed to the conflict [26]. By establishing the structure of a wider historical narrative, we will be able to see how such a narrative operates on the ground; if it is modified, challenged or fully accepted, and how people's views of themselves and their relevant Others vary in relation to their accepted historical narrative.

Based on the analysis of the three history textbooks, with particular emphasis on the textbook used in the 4th grade of grammar schools in Eastern Slavonia, three major themes were identified in the official narrative related to the war of independence/civil war in Croatia: 1) *ingroup reconciliation*, 2) *sites of memory and nation building*, and 3) *victimhood and hegemony*.

Ingroup reconciliation

The theme of ingroup reconciliation is one of the dominant themes in the textbooks and it refers to the reconciliation of all Croats, 'sons

of former fascist Ustaša and former communist partisans', which was promoted by the political elites led by President Franjo Tuđman. Croats, as an ingroup, have been deeply divided from the time of the Second World War, and the Croatian leadership has tried to overcome this division for the sake of the establishment of a unified and independent Croatian state as the common goal of all Croats, regardless of their political views. However, this reconciliation only included Croats, while the other citizens of Croatia, primarily Serbs, were excluded from that process [27].

History education and history textbooks played an important role in facilitating the ingroup reconciliation. For the ingroup reconciliation to take place, a narrative that positions different factions within a framework of victimhood became increasingly important as well as the politics of numbers. For example, the numbers of victims of Ustaša and partisans' crimes were almost equalized in the textbooks. The number of the victims of Bleiburg is inflated to 70,000 in the textbooks [28] while the majority of the sources have argued that the actual number cannot be determined, and the estimates have usually been between 20,000 to 40,000 people [29, 30]. The number of the victims of Jasenovac in the textbooks was said to be also around 70,000 or from "60,000 to 100,000" [41], which according to the genocide memorial archives, are only the identified victims, while the list of all the victims is not complete as the gathering of names is still ongoing⁵.

Minimalization and relativization of the Ustaša's extermination policies towards 'minorities', as they are called in the textbooks, particularly Serbs, Jews, Roma, is not only done through minimizing the numbers of victims, but also by placing the majority of victims that were targeted solely because of their ethnic origin together with the small percentage of victims that were targeted due to their

political beliefs: "The Ustaša government was in support of the Nazi program. Soon, the deportation of Jews to the concentration camps started... Serbs and Roma were also deported to concentration camps, together with Croats that were members of the HSS party, communists and other contenders of the regime" [31].

At the same time, the role of Croats in the anti-fascist movement, and thereupon, in the formation of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia is portrayed in the textbooks with the emphasis on political moments and entities such as the highest governing organ of the anti-fascist movement in Croatia during World War II, *Zemaljsko antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Hrvatske* (ZAVNOH) later to become the National Parliament of Croatia [28, 32] stressing the creation of a Croatian republic within the Yugoslav federation. Such a narrative once again reconciled the contentious ideologies of communism and fascism under the umbrella of continuation of Croatian statehood. The narrative also frames the initial support of Croatian citizenry for the independent state and its Ustaša regime as progressively declining due to difficult economic conditions and Ustaša terror against Serbs, Jews, Roma and Croatian political opponents [32]. All of the textbooks are critical of the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, NDH) and its racial and anti-Semitic policies against 'minorities', but this discourse is framed in such a way that it was the Italians and Germans who had the real power and mentored their implementation, which in turn implies a denial of responsibility.

The representations of the Second World War play an important role in the textbooks not only in framing ingroup political reconciliation but also in legitimizing and delegitimizing certain positions towards events of the recent war of the 1990's. The subtheme of breaking with communism is evident in the textbooks describing the events that led to the break-up of Yugoslavia. In 1990, the Croatian Parliament (Sabor) changed the official name of the state from the Socialist Republic of Croatia to the Republic of Croatia "by which the

⁵ The list of names of Jasenovac victims can be found at <http://www.jusp-jasenovac.hr/Default.aspx?sid=6711>. It is noted on the website that the list of individual victims of the Jasenovac Concentration Camp is the result of work done so far by experts from the Jasenovac Memorial Site, and it is not complete. Until 18 April 2010, a list of dates, names and details for 80,914 victims was collected and it is still ongoing.

new government marked their break-up with the socialist heritage” [28]. A more problematic change happened when the new nationalist government led by President Tudjman and his HDZ party (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica or the Croatian Democratic Union) introduced a flag with *šahovnica* (checkered board) and a new currency called *kuna*, that were both used under Pavelić’s Ustaša regime. Rehabilitation of fascist imagery definitely reinforced the break up with a socialist legacy for Croats, but it also heightened tensions and fear among the Serb population who saw the new Croatian establishment as the extension of Pavelić’s state.

Nation building sites of memory

The sites of memory and their relevance for the Croatian nation building narrative feature as some of the key themes in the textbooks. Separate sections in the history textbooks are dedicated to the sites of collective memory such as Vukovar, Jasenovac and Bleiburg and their analysis proved to be crucial for understanding discourses of the recent war and postwar dynamics. Those sites do not have only symbolic but also mythical meaning within the collective historical narrative of the key protagonists. They are also perpetual subjects of debate and collision between Serbs and Croats to this very day.

In the books, the town of Vukovar is represented as “a hero city” and a victim of Serb aggression. Aggression is a term particularly used in depicting Serbian fighting against Croats who are mostly portrayed as heroes and victims. The discourse around aggression and aggressors in this context implies that the other or the enemy is actually coming from the outside. This narrative excludes the large portion of indigenous Serb population and their suffering, positioning them in this narrative as strangers, occupiers and outsiders. “This was a rebirth of Serbian imperialist politics from the 19th century, and their aspiration that ‘all Serbs live in one state’, regardless of aspirations of other peoples... Particularly tragic was the destiny of Vukovar. The Serb forces killed several thousands of Croatian civilians... non-Serbs

were forced to leave their homes...” [28]. There is no mention of Serbs killed and exiled from their homes in Vukovar, Osijek, Zagreb and other cities that were under Croatian control.

The narratives of Bleiburg and Jasenovac in this context are very relevant in their interconnectedness with the story of Vukovar. These stories have particular emotional relevance for the two nations and were used in the 1990’s to stir up the memory of atrocities, to provoke outrage, fear, and hatred that were manipulated by political elites to escalate the conflict. Although a scientific comparative study of Jasenovac and Bleiburg as sites of collective memory does not exist, I will try to use a narrative lens to deconstruct the major storylines in their presentations in history textbooks, which can be the beginning of a scholarly discussion about these two sites of memory and their use for political purposes.

The topic of Bleiburg and the Way of the Cross, or the so called, ‘death marches’, is covered within the separate sections of textbooks such as *Croatia at the End of the Second World War* and in the *Post-War Period*. The very name “the way of the cross” and its reference to Jesus’ suffering, implies religious, mythical and an almost sacred nature of this site of memory. The narrative in the book starts with the advancement of partisan units and withdrawal of the German army from the eastern parts of the NDH, and – along with it – withdrawal of the NDH troops and of numerous civilians, primarily families of Ustaša’s collaborators, who were fleeing possible partisan retribution. The textbooks mention that this was a prepared withdrawal, ‘clarifying’ that partisans did not only want retribution against those who committed crimes but also to get rid of their possible class and political contenders. The people in the convoy wanted to surrender to the British, but the British refused. In the aftermath, mass retribution took place against the former soldiers by the Yugoslav army in the area near the Austrian town of Bleiburg as well as Dravograd and Maribor in Slovenia. The number of people in the convoys was estimated at around 100,000 to 150,000, while the

number of killed could not be accurately determined, although the book in brackets mentions the estimate of the controversial Vladimir Žerjavić, who has been notorious for reducing the number of victims and proclaiming that the scope of the Holocaust in World War II-era territory of Yugoslavia was intentionally exaggerated. His estimate of 70,000 people having been killed, was, however, mentioned in the book for the fourth grade of grammar schools [28]. The rest of the prisoners and civilians were then sent back to Croatia on foot with the partisan escort – an event called “the way of the cross”. This event was depicted in terms of exhausting death marches “...on that journey many prisoners died of hunger and exhaustion while a number of them was killed...” [28]. The textbooks’ authors mostly agree that there are a lot of inconsistencies in describing that event as well as the politicization of the number of casualties in various textbooks due to the lack of historiographic research as well as secondary literature and sources [33].

Jasenovac was Croatia’s largest concentration and extermination camp that consisted of a network of several sub-camps, established in August 1941, and dissolved in April 1945. It was run by the Ustaša that annihilated more than 100,000 people including Serbs, Jews, Roma and Croats deemed as opponents of the Ustaša regime.⁶ When they saw that Germany was losing the war, Jasenovac’s administration decided to blow up much of the camp and kill most of the prisoners in an attempt to conceal evidence of the mass murders. This concentration camp represents a key symbol of Serb suffering and victimhood in Croatia, and an important ‘site of memory’ that was used by both Serbs and Croats for political purposes before, during and after the recent war. For example,

⁶ According to the entry in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, edited by Israel Gutman, vol. 1, 1995, pp. 739–740 around six hundred thousand people were murdered at Jasenovac, mostly Serbs, Jews, Gypsies, and opponents of the Ustaša regime. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum assessed that the Ustaša regime murdered between 77,000 and 99,000 people of all ethnicities (but mostly Serbs) in Jasenovac between 1941 and 1945, and that during the period of Ustaša rule, a total of between 320,000 and 340,000 ethnic Serbs and more than 30,000 Croatian Jews were killed either in Croatia or at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Retrieved from: <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005449>

President Tudjman had an idea to repurpose the Jasenovac memorial site into a site of Croatian national reconciliation, whereby the victims of Bleiburg would be buried together with victims of Jasenovac [34]. This would mean, in the simplest terms, that the perpetrators of genocide in Jasenovac would be buried together with their victims, thereby equalizing the crimes and proclaiming all sides victims.

Dukić, Erdelja & Stojaković frame the narrative of Jasenovac and implementation of race politics around the discourses of the Ustaša’s repression towards its political opponents, and pressure from its fascist allies [32]. For example, in the narrative about Jasenovac, the authors first mention Vladko Maček, a Croatian politician, as one of the political prisoners of Jasenovac [32]. After that, they describe the deportation of Croatian Jews to the concentration camps, mentioning that Serbs and Roma populations were also taken to the concentration camps. It is interesting that even though Dukić, Erdelja & Stojaković talk about ‘tens of thousands of victims’ that were murdered in those concentration camps, they also point out that “the increase in numbers of victims by the Serbian historians have led to Serbian revenge and hatred that resulted in war in the 1990’s” [32].

The textbooks’ narratives of all three sites have very simplistic, dichotomous storylines located within narratives of *victimhood and aggression, us and them*, with an emphasis on legitimizing and justifying the atrocities of the ingroup and demonizing the atrocities of the outgroup, which go hand in hand with the ideology of national reconciliation and state-building. Bleiburg is framed as a ‘partisan crime’, Jasenovac as a consequence of Serbian imperialist politics and Vukovar as a victim of Serbian aggression. All have their place and role in the ideological system of Croatian nation building. What is interesting is not the one-sidedness and simplicity of narratives about Vukovar, Jasenovac, and Bleiburg, which was to be expected, but seemingly moderate and cleverly framed patterns and discourses that echo the 1990’s ideologies of ingroup reconciliation and nation building laid out by President Tudjman and his elites.

Victimhood and hegemony

The story of Croatian participation in the Yugoslav state was presented through the discourse of Croatian victimhood and Serbian hegemony. The idea that the continuity of the Croatian state has been obstructed within Yugoslavia contributes to the discourse of Croatian victimhood whose independence and sovereignty has been constantly threatened by Serb hegemony and imperialism.

The theme of Serbian hegemony is prevalent in the textbooks in framing the narrative of the recent war. It is evident in the discursive formations coined by the late President Tudjman and his elites about Serbian rebellion and Great Serbian aggression. For example, “Serbs wanted to succeed from Croatia the so-called Serb autonomous regions (where Serbs were a majority). This was actually a renewal of the Great Serbian politics from the 19th century, i.e. the aspiration that ‘all Serbs live in one state’, regardless of the aspirations of other nations” [28]. This theme is closely related to the nation-building theme and Tudjman’s political integration and reconciliation ideology.

The textbooks lay out several factors as causes of war: the Serb nationalist’s idea of the creation of Greater Serbia, Serb media and

agitators frightening Serbs in Croatia that Croatia is becoming similar to the Ustaša state of NDH and statements of some of the Croatian politicians that only contributed to Serb propaganda [32]. They continue to explain that “the killing and driving out of non-Serbian population from the areas controlled by rebel Serbs was intended to create ethnically clean areas, inhabited solely by Serbs” [32]. On the other hand, the book portrays ethnic cleansing of 250,000 Serbs in Croatia, in the aftermath of Operation Storm, as a willful act of leaving: “Being called by the leadership of the Republic of Serbian Krajina, and partly because of the fear of facing consequences of committed crimes, the majority of Serb population has left this region and went to Serbia. Their return is still ongoing” [32]. The one-sided portrayals fit within a framework of Croatian nation building where key protagonists are seen through a black-and-white lens with the ingroup being characterized as a victim or a liberator and the outgroup as an aggressor and a hegemon.

* The article will be continued with the cross-comparison between individual and official narratives of the recent past with emphasis on the 1990’s conflict.

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