

37.016:94]:316.48.063.24(497.7)(083.94)

316.48.063.24(497.7):37(083.94) Review scientific article

SHARING HISTORY IN A POST-CONFLICT SOCIETY –
THE CASE OF MACEDONIA

ПОДЕЛЕНА ИСТОРИЈА ВО ПОСТКОНФЛИКТНИТЕ ОПШТЕСТВА –
СЛУЧАЈОТ НА МАКЕДОНИЈА

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about sharing history in a post-conflict society, as viewed from the perspective of the teaching of history. Through analyses of the referenced articles and reports, it discusses history teaching as one of the tools of transitional justice. It goes on to review the successful case of sharing history through the Franco-German textbook project, but only from the aspect of the media coverage and comment. Finally, the paper examines the Macedonian case related to the topic, drawing on the findings of other scholars, the response of Macedonian media to the joint history textbook project of the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation of Southeast Europe, as well as materials from interviews conducted by the author of this paper.

Key words – reconciliation history teaching, unite, divide, coexistence

АПСТРАКТ

Овој труд ја обработува темата за споделување на заедничка историја во едно пост конфликтно општество видено преку призмата на наставата по историја. Преку анализи на написи и извештаи во трудот се дискутира за наставата по историја како една од алатките на транзиционата правда. Трудот дава еден преглед на успешен случај на споделување на историја изразен низ француско – германскиот проект за учебниците по историја, но само во поглед на медиумската покриеност и нивните коментари. На крај, во трудот се прави преглед на македонскиот случај поврзан со темата, преку истражувањата на други научни работници, реакцијата на медиумите во однос на проектот за заеднички учебник по историја на Центарот за демократија и реконсилација на Југоисточна Европа, како и материјалите од интервјуата спроведени од авторот на овој труд.

Клучни зборови – реконсилијација, настава по историја, обединува, раздвојува, коегзистенција

INTRODUCTION

The theoretical part of this paper is based on the special report on the conference organized by the United States Institute for Peace (USIP), the article “Rewriting School Textbooks as a Tool of Understanding and Stability” by Mirela- Luminita Murgescu, the article “Transitional justice and reform in history education” by Elisabeth Cole, since they deal with the teaching of history as one of the mechanisms of transitional justice. Also, the interviewees for the research part of the paper were selected from among the participants in the Macedonian project presented at the USIP conference.

UNITE OR DIVIDE?

Elizabeth Cole and Judy Barsalou argue that the way schools navigate and promote historical narratives in the classroom partly determines the roles they and those who control the schools play in promoting conflict or social reconstruction.

Actually, it is the pedagogy, i.e., the way the teacher teaches which is very important for the success of reform. Very often pedagogy is inseparable from content in history education reform, but it sometimes receives less attention than curriculum.

This is especially the case in resource-poor settings. Methodologies which emphasize students’ critical thinking skills and which expose them to multiple historical narratives can strengthen the democratic and peaceful tendencies in transitional societies that are emerging from conflict. Therefore, helping history teachers promote critical analysis may be more urgent than reforming history textbooks.

Structural issues in the education system are crucial when determining the role of education in post-conflict social reconstruction. Such issues include: funding,

ethnic segregation, access and equity, the choice of language for classroom instruction in

ethnically divided societies, the system of national examinations, and the relative value given to history in comparison with other subjects.

The often neglected mechanism of history education should be understood as an integral part of transitional justice and social reconstruction. It can support or undermine the goals of tribunals, truth commissions and memorials, and other transitional justice mechanisms.

In societies recovering from violent conflict, questions of how to deal with the past are sensitive, especially when they involve memories of widespread victimization, death, and destruction.

After episodes of violent conflict, political leaders and others often seem to prefer social amnesia, as they try to “move ahead” and promote stability.

Therefore, the question arises as to whether the teaching of history can help transitional societies become more democratic and whether it can contribute to the development of empathy for, or even social cohesion among, former enemies in societies in which some groups were marginalized or were deprived of certain rights. An additional issue is whether history classes reinforce other transitional justice processes, such as truth telling and legal accountability for crimes committed during the conflict. Finally, there is the question of whether the history curriculum can promote belief in the rule of law, resistance to a culture of impunity, and greater trust in public institutions, including schools themselves. The institute conference raised a number of specific concerns about the development and adoption of post-conflict history curricula. These include: Who decides what version(s) of history will be taught? What impact do those choices have on promoting stable, cohesive, and tolerant societies? What is the relationship between the (re)writing of history by academic historians and the development of

secondary-school history textbooks? What impact do transitional justice processes have on the development of new secondary-school history textbooks and the way history is actually taught in schools?

The pedagogic issues that need to be considered are as follows: What challenges do teachers face in the classroom when addressing controversial historical subjects, and what are some of the different approaches they use? How can teachers be trained or prepared to address these subjects, and how can they be supported and protected in environments where disagreements over history might

give rise to violence? Given limited resources, should teacher training take priority over curricular reform?

One of the particularly problematic issues for post-conflict school systems in divided, multiethnic, and multilingual societies is determining which languages will be used to instruct schoolchildren. Although it is important for children of a multilingual country to learn the language (and, by extension, culture) of other main groups of citizens in addition to their own mother tongue, having too many official languages in the schools can promote semi-literacy,

poor performance, high repetition, and dropout rates (as seen in many African countries). At the same time, the rising importance of English as the language of the global marketplace is increasingly influencing language policies. Ethnic segregation or integration of schools also is an important structural aspect of education. When different ethnic groups are educated separately within the national education system, and especially when one ethnic (or gender) group receives more educational resources than another, such arrangements can convey important overt or hidden messages to students. The report notes that some educational systems (such as Macedonia's) permit the use of different history texts in ethnically segregated classrooms. In this case, history instruction in Macedonia is the same for Albanians and Slavs—but only in the sense that each group separately learns a remarkably similar history of victimization by the other, and each claims the same distinctions, such as a longer presence in the region. State and national examination systems, are a nearly universal challenge for history education reform. For example, in East Asia, school systems stress memorization to improve students' chances on exams that reward this type of pedagogy. Such exam systems usually do not encourage innovation in history education. In many regions, including Europe and, increasingly, the United States, the pressure on teachers to "teach to the exam" makes it difficult for them to use supplementary materials beyond the state-approved textbooks. While the compulsory textbooks may have education ministry approval and are less likely to be innovative, supplemental texts can avoid politically-charged approval processes more easily and address controversial historical subjects in new ways. Another challenge is the decreasing priority given to the teaching of history and the humanities by post-conflict societies' intent on preparing their students to compete in the global marketplace, with more emphasis on subjects seen to have practical value, such as foreign languages, math, science, technology, and vocational training.

Thus the potential for schools to promote social reconstruction through history education in post-conflict societies is not being fully realized.

In post-conflict countries receiving substantial foreign attention, postconflict reconstruction increasingly tends to be transnational, although "insiders," or locals, are the ones who will have to live with, and take responsibility for, the longterm results of reconstruction and reform work. Outsiders who work on historyeducation reform tend to be from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) rather than transnational organizations or foreign governments; some academics from foreign universities also are becoming involved. Often, however, powerful outside actors, particularly funders, view education as a domestic issue that "insiders" are best qualified to tackle. They consider other transitional justice processes, such as trials and elections, worthier of their time and support. On the positive side, outsiders can get insiders engaged in reform processes that are too touchy for locals to handle on their own, by bringing together groups otherwise disinclined to work together.

A number of participants at the conference stressed the importance of focusing on pedagogy, noting that the most devastated educational systems may lack even basic textbooks, and the time and money to produce them quickly. If so, the immediate focus should be on helping teachers gain the necessary skills and confidence to help their students address the past through open analysis and critical thinking, even without new textbooks. In that case, the teachers can use old texts to produce “teachable moments” by helping students understand how the

texts promoted narrow historical interpretations that directly or indirectly incited violent conflict. In addition it is important to remember that much of history depends on the viewpoint of those writing it. Although post-conflict societies can benefit from accounts of history that play down the differences between former enemies, some truths do exist: the so-called forensic truths, the “who did what to whom” facts that human rights investigators seek to illuminate. The challenge in these situations is to teach history that acknowledges these facts while finding enough common ground for former enemies to work toward a shared future. Thus, pedagogical reform is attractive as a strategy because it may be less controversial or threatening than attempts immediately after conflict to change historical narratives through curriculum reform. But pedagogy reform is most effective when combined with curriculum reform. Violeta Petroska-Beshka, a

Macedonian educator at Sts. Cyril and Methodius University, developed one such experimental program. She has been working with teachers from the Albanian and Slav communities to design curricular materials that present each group’s historical perspectives, with similarities and differences offered for analysis and discussion. Petroska-Beshka also has been breaking new ground by mixing the two ethnic groups in professional teacher-training workshops. Her goal has been to open teachers’ minds to accepting the presentation of different historical perspectives in the classroom, even when the teachers do not agree with the contending historical narratives.

Those pushing for reform should understand that teachers and school administrators willing to embrace change often do so at the risk of strong public criticism, or worse. For example, a recent edition of the website *Balkan Insight* (No. 20, February 20, 2006) described a “storm” of controversy that erupted over Petroska-Beshka's efforts to reform the teaching of history in Macedonia. In a typical comment, Blazhe Ristevski, the director of the Macedonian Academy of Science and Arts, said, “As a scientist, I can’t allow that truth can be found through this kind of ‘partnership.’ It just adds more petrol to the fire between the two sides.” Ljupcho Jordanovski, Speaker of the Macedonian parliament, said not enough time had passed since the recent conflict between Macedonian Slavs and Albanians, and objectivity is impossible because “we were all either direct or indirect participants.” Countering that such reforms are hard to undertake at any time, Petroska- Beshka argued, “If we don’t speak openly about these painful

issues, we leave a space to create ethnically colored, opposing versions that will affect the definition of official history.” Teachers need strong support from parents, school administrators, and other authorities to teach new curricula and use new pedagogies. Such support must be ongoing, as teachers suffer from burnout, especially in high-stress situations. It is this group of teachers from Petroska-Beshka's project that is the target population of the research part of this paper. They have been trained and enough time has passed for us to learn something from their experience.

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND REFORM IN HISTORY EDUCATION

Elizabeth Cole's article considers why history education matters, what conditions complicate its reform and what recommendations can begin to be offered with regard to the relationship between history education and transitional justice.

Cole points out there are many pressing reasons to identify and analyze the connections between the various processes and goals of transitional justice, broadly defined, as well as the ways that young people learn about the past and the content of what they learn. A strong argument can be made for the promotion of closer collaboration between transitional justice actors and educators. It should be stated at the outset that there are significant obstacles to the ability of history education to support the work of transitional justice, to contribute to such desired necessities as accountability, the rule of law, truth, repair, reconciliation between deeply divided groups, democracy and ultimately, to greater respect for human rights. But those obstacles should not be taken to mean that there is no role for education, including history education, in transitional justice. Just as history education can potentially contribute to the goals of transitional justice, so also can it undermine them if reform of this sector is left unaddressed. The last 10 to 15 years have produced a rich collection of writings on transitional justice, and there is a growing body of work on history education and its relation to political change, democratic citizenship, international relations and globalization. A growing understanding of transitional justice has opened space for other types of discourse about political and social problems that need to be addressed, such as how the history of a conflict and its background are perceived by different actors. Barkan, one of the authors Cole refers to in her article, writes that history used to be a largely factual (and largely uninspiring) victors' history. Increasingly, however, we recognize the growing elasticity of history and that it is anything but fixed. More recently, as history has become increasingly malleable, it has simultaneously become more central to our daily life. It informs our identity more intimately today, and being subject to interpretation, it has also become a space for contesting perspectives. While most historians would argue that interpretation has always been a central part of the historian's craft, there is widespread agreement that collective memories of suffering have become a major part of group identity and group politics and that popular and political pressure has increased to make sure that nationally accepted historical narratives do not whitewash acts

that inflicted major suffering nor exclude the experiences of non-victors, including minorities, women, the economically marginalized and, in the case of international conflicts, citizens of other states who were victims of historical violence perpetrated by the in-group's

state. Maier, another author cited by Cole in her article, summarizes the changed significance of history and memory thus: 'Increasingly, the fabric of civic life in modern democracies involves a politics of recognition, and at the basis of this politics in modern democracies, for better or worse, is usually the acknowledgment of collective suffering.

Calls for new approaches to the historical narrative produced by professional historians and consumed by societies have an abstract quality and apply mainly to the work of the intellectual elites. One place where history becomes more concrete and relevant to non-elites is in schools: in history classrooms but also potentially in related subjects such as civics (most often taught by history teachers) and in literature. Engaging schools as a part of the transitional justice process can expand the range of institutional and individual actors involved in transitional justice to include ministries of education and education officials at various levels, parentteacher- type councils, curriculum experts, teacher-training institutions, principals, teachers, parents and students themselves.

History education at the secondary school level, however, also conceptually fits into some aspects of the work of transitional justice, which is another reason why Cole argues that it should have 'a place at the table' of transitional justice, meaning that it should be a part of transitional justice planning.

Schools also present an important vehicle to carry the work of transitional justice instruments beyond the original period of their activity and scope of influence, a challenge that has plagued truth commissions and trials. Transitional justice mechanisms have ambitious goals to change societies, but have been limited in their impact for a variety of reasons. Courts and trials, for example, are covered in difficult legal language and theory, and ad-hoc tribunals such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) have by necessity taken place outside the societies where the human rights violations took place.

Beyond the possibility that educational initiatives, school-based and nonschool- based (the latter would include museums, monuments and other cultural projects) can help to carry forward the work of transitional justice mechanisms and allow ordinary people to take ownership of the transitional justice processes. How does creating new approaches to history education relate to the specific goals of transitional justice? The purpose of history education in the modern state has

generally been to transmit ideas of citizenship and both the idealized past and the promised future of the community. History and civics textbooks in most societies present an 'official' story highlighting narratives that shape contemporary patriotism. Education helps articulate relations between state and society and sets the boundaries and terms of citizenship.

If the representation of a group's past is now recognized as an integral part of identity, and identity includes not only how one views one's own group but also the groups designated as 'other' or enemies, then understandings of history are crucial to a society's ability to reckon with the difficult past for the sake of a more just future.

Working with teachers to change their pedagogical methods may be more realistic than expecting them to be agents of social change through new content; the challenge is to provide them with appropriate pre- and in-service training and with strong and consistent support for transitional justice processes - tend to belong to the recent past. Secondary school history is much more politically sensitive than university level history or the work of academic historians and often lags behind them in terms of progressiveness and risk taking, because younger students are seen as highly impressionable and politically 'pure'. It is partially for this reason, although also for more practical reasons such as limited resources and the complex procedures of program and curriculum reforms, textbook creation, production and distribution, that the reformation of history textbooks in the aftermath of massive human rights abuses tends to take a long time. Jelin, another scholar cited by Cole, suggests that the processes of incorporation of difficult issues into the education system have a very strong institutional component, since they require reaching a minimum consensus and an institutionally legitimized version of what took place. If the political conflict is not yet resolved, it is impossible to elaborate such a version of past events. Other obstacles to reforming history education are more practical than political but no less important to consider. One such obstacle is the low priority placed on history as well as literature, arts and social studies, in favor of math, science, technology and vocational training in many parts of the world. This is true for developing countries with scarce resources for education as much as for developed.

Finally, Cole points out that some surveys indicate that history as a school subject is one of the most unpopular subjects with students, and in the memory of adults – despite the fact that nonacademic vehicles for history, such as movies, popular histories, the creation of family genealogy and historical sites are popular.

This may indicate that reforming the history classroom to support the work of transitional justice will be a very hard – but may also show that the problem is not that the past cannot be made compelling for students, but rather that it has rarely been done thus far.

New technological approaches to history teaching, fortunately, are not the only sources of hope for a wider role for history education in transitional justice.

Two globalizing tendencies in history education, although not without problems of their own, may contribute to a history education that can better complement the work of transitional justice processes. These are ‘social-scientization (an increasing focus on contemporary history and on society as opposed to the state) and a steady globalization.’ The global spread of these two tendencies is well attested by a recent report on dramatic changes in Chinese history textbooks. The new books focus more on society, economics, culture and international history, and less on ideology, leaders, wars and political history. In his comments on the new books, education professor and textbook author Zhou Chunsheng refers to global trends in history education: ‘History does not belong to emperors or generals ... it belongs to the people. It may take some time for others to accept this, naturally, but a similar process has long been underway in Europe and the United States.’ As the article points out, gains in the area of giving students access to the voices and experiences of many new actors are offset by other problems: Chinese history text-books do not yet grapple with periods of mass political disasters in the history of the People’s Republic and may in fact deflect students’ attention from recent political events. But the new approaches to history may allow Chinese students to gain some of the skills and perspectives to approach, at some later point in their lives, the difficult past their parents and grandparents lived through.

One prime topic might be to investigate what the relationship between historical/history textbooks commissions and history education reform can tell us about truth commissions and history education, since more is known about changes in history education in the aftermath of historical commissions. Although historical commissions are not yet counted among mainstream transitional justice

mechanisms, they have been used in long-term reckoning with the past, particularly in Europe, and are currently being tried in the context of several historical conflicts. Textbooks have been revised as a result of the findings of historical commissions and are often cited as important components of furthering long-term reconciliation between Germany and several World War II-era victim groups, particularly France, Poland and the Czech Republic. There is ample documentation of the changes in narratives that young people in Germany, France, Poland and the

Czech Republic have learnt as a result of history education reform, particularly through the studies done by the Georg Eckert Institute, which both consults on history education reform as well as carries out research on history textbooks as they relate to conflict and democracy. The

evidence from European historical commissions and history education reform may well be useful in trying to assess the effects that history education revision, as a long-term follow up to TRCs, may have on intergroup relations.

Finally, this is a field still in its infancy. More research is needed to understand such specifics as how the education division of Peru's TRC worked and what obstacles it faced, and how truth commissions and trials are reflected, if at all, in classrooms in places where different transitional justice mechanisms have been held. Greater general understanding is needed of how young people's historical and moral consciousness develops in transitional societies, in history classes per se, but also in religion and literature classes and outside the classroom as well. In addition to the work that academic researchers can contribute to this field, voices from the classrooms are crucial to hear in order to better understand the experiences, needs, fears and hopes of both students and teachers in transitional, post-violence societies as they prepare for the future in the shadow of difficult pasts. It is the voices of the teachers that are expressed in the research part of this whole paper.

THE CASE OF MACEDONIA

Finally, how does the foregoing translate to Macedonia's post-conflict society? This paper has already noted the work of Prof. Petroska-Beshka with history teachers in the Republic of Macedonia. It has also been mentioned that for the research part of this paper the interviewed teachers were selected from among the participants in Prof. Petroska-Beshka's project, "Understanding history", which led to development of a lesson on the 2001 armed conflict in the Republic of

Macedonia. It is noteworthy that the selected teachers were from some of the scenes of the conflict (Kumanovo, Tetovo and Skopje) and some of them even belonged to the category of conflict-vulnerable citizens. The fact that they had undergone training in understanding and resolving conflict also made them ideal subjects for this study. My aim was to see whether their perceptions have changed and how they actually see history teaching in the Republic of Macedonia. As one of the Macedonian respondents who had the role of expert in Prof. Beshka's project

emphasized the projects "Clio in the Balkan", "Joint history textbook project" "The Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe" I believe that it is a good idea to talk about the work of the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe (CDRSEE) as a starting point for the Macedonian case. The Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in

Southeast Europe is a nongovernmental, non-profit organization that seeks to foster democratic, pluralist, and peaceful societies in Southeast Europe by advocating principles of social responsibility, sustainable development, and reconciliation among the peoples in the region. These goals are accomplished via seminars, conferences, research projects, exchange programs, opinion polls, and publications.

Macedonia has been a contributor to that work through its scholars. One of the Center's publications titled "Clio in the Balkans" includes contributions from Macedonian scholars. I shall refer to two articles. The first was written by Nikola Jordanovski. The second is by Emilija Simovska. Their analyses should give a global picture of history teaching in Macedonia and raise some issues for consideration.

In an article entitled "FYR Macedonia", Simovska (Clio in the Balkans, the Politics of History Education, pp 495-497) says that national history is not a separate subject in any school and is only taught as a part of world history. The main method of teaching is based on pure presentation of historical information, with almost no evaluation and very little additional information, an approach which sometimes makes the subject very difficult for the children to understand. She says that the Pedagogical Office, which is an expert body of the Ministry for Education, approves all textbooks. Textbook writers are selected by an open-bidding process. Simovska goes on to say that the biggest problem is that the same circle of people write the textbooks and approve them, which makes it difficult to break this relation and establish normal competition, something that would definitively result in better

quality. The novelty has been in amending the laws on primary and secondary education, giving schools the right to choose supplemental textbooks.

Nikola Jordanovski (Clio in the Balkans, the Politics of History Education, pp.265-276) analyses the treatment of the common Yugoslav history in the textbooks, with the intention of showing how some crucial questions of recent history were addressed. The vocabulary and the style used in the new books are inherited from the old ones. Also the message has remained the same. Jordanovski says that interethnic violence is a subject one might think would be given more space in the textbooks; in fact, there is only one passage on that issue, in the book for the 4th year of gymnasium, which will speak for itself when quoted in its entirety: In the books the occupier is to be blamed for everything!

Jordanovski says that the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991 and the 1991- 1995 wars do not form a part of the history textbooks. The final two sentences in the unit about Yugoslavia are as follows: "Because of the ongoing crisis, the republics which constituted the federal state SFRJ had no interest in remaining in it. So, by the end of the '80s and the beginning of '90s dissolution of the federation took place and more sovereign and independent states were created. As for what preceded the crisis itself, the books describe it as a combination of the

ineffectiveness of the system of self-management and enterprises not being able to survive and pay salaries to the workers, all this provoking a general crisis of the state. This "... resulting with demands for changes in the political and economic system...", or in other words – "pluralism in the political sphere and privatization of the state-owned property and introduction of market economy". With this, the narrative about Yugoslavia actually ends. (For more details see the full article.)

CONCLUSIONS

Considerable effort has been invested in Macedonia in the teaching history. But it seems that it gets neglected when it comes to the actual application in practice. Albanians seem to see the teaching related in percents. Some of them use additional materials to teach about Albanian history and use books from Albania (Albanian respondent, expert in the project). The Ministry of Education allows use of additional materials, but it seems that teachers are not very eager to use them.

Sometimes, both Macedonian and Albanian history teachers form their opinion based on hearsay rather than on reading books. They all agree that silence

is a preferred practice instead of hot debates. It took them a year to write a few pages as one joint lesson on the recent past. And it still had to contain three versions (Macedonian, Albanian and a consensual one). Sometimes, the joint work lasts as long as the project, and it seems as if there is no initiative for sustainability.

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To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/14683850208454674

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14683850208454674>

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