

Teaching the future's past History education from division to reconciliation in the "new countries" of Southeast Europe.

Federico Giulio Sicurella¹

fedesicu@gmail.com

Abstract

According to the constructivist approach to nationalism, mass education systems not only constitute a key marker of modern state-ness, but also perform a crucial function within the nation-building process itself. Namely, state education is the apparatus through which a state's societal culture is inculcated into the new generations of citizens. The teaching of history in schools, in this respect, takes up the vital task of disseminating a state's national, or official, history. An eloquent illustration is that of the 'new' countries emerged from the dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation. Here, the willingness to do away with the socialist legacy, and the need to construct 'new' national memories to uphold each country's engagement in the nation-building process, have resulted in deep changes in the content of education. In particular, the contents of history teaching – that is, what is written in the textbooks – have been rearranged according to markedly ethno-centric perspectives, through both the retrieval and re-formulation of past events in a new national narrative and the endorsement of stereotyping. As a result, history teaching is very likely to promote intolerance and foster animosity between national groups. Remarkably, such phenomenon has found marked disapproval within the human rights discourse. International documents articulating the right to education, in fact, ascribe to the educational enterprise the fundamental task of promoting tolerance and mutual understanding among peoples and nations. Drawing on this principle, the international community has carried out a number of initiatives aiming at reforming history education in the region of South Eastern Europe, in particular through the revision of the textbooks.

¹ Federico Sicurella graduated in Science of Communications (from the University of Bologna, 2005) and holds an MA in Democracy and Human Rights in Southeast Europe (University of Sarajevo and University of Bologna, 2007). He lives and works in Sarajevo since 2006. He currently works as academic tutor in the above-mentioned master's programme.

1. Educating the nation

Mass education is not a neutral enterprise. The features of its historical emergence substantiate the idea that education systems are instrumental both to the creation of modern states and to their functioning. From a human rights perspective, however, education can also be turned into an instrument for the achievement of reconciliation and international peace.

1.1 State education, national identity and the uses of history

1.1.1 Mass education, modernity and nationalism

Much of our further discussion about the social and political dimensions of history teaching would lack foundation unless we pinpoint a set of theoretical premises. Namely, we should be able to answer these questions: is there a connection between mass education and the nation-building process? To what extent does the educational process perform functions that are beneficial to the maintenance of modern societies? In what terms is the educational enterprise connected to nationalism?

In order to clarify these points, we will look into the theories of nationalism that belong to the ‘constructivist’ perspective, since they offer a valuable insight on the role of state education in forging national identities. The constructivist approach hinges on the basic assumption that nationalism is a ‘cultural artefact’,² and builds on that to explain the mechanisms by which nationalism is historically generated, collectively engineered, routinely transmitted and deliberately taken on by individuals and social groups.

Broadly speaking, the emergence of the cultural artefact of nationalism is a key marker of modernity. As Gellner contends, the epochal transition from agrarian to industrial societies has brought about the establishment of a new social order, which requires universal literacy as an indispensable precondition for its functioning³. Nationalism made its appearance in the bosom of modernisation, Gellner claims, precisely because it was the ideology that could best meet the needs of this new social order.⁴

The chief feature of modern industrial societies is the division of labour, which necessitates sustained and precise communication among workers. Modern states have tackled this need through the establishment of mass education systems,

² The definition of nationalism as ‘cultural artefact’ was devised by Benedict Anderson. See: Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1983. 4.

³ Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1983.

⁴ Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1983.

which provide for citizens to be trained into skilled workers by specialists. Hence, modern industrial societies are fundamentally exo-educational, meaning that the formative process has been ‘outsourced’ from its traditional milieu – mainly, the family – to a state institution. Such institutionalised transmission of expert knowledge – a process that Gellner defined as the ‘imposition of a high culture on people’ – is precisely the template of modern nationalism.

This is a first indication of the crucial function of mass education within the modern nation-building process. The modern state, in fact, exerts a monopoly over legitimate education, which can rightfully be said to have replaced the monopoly of violence as the key marker of modern state-ness.⁵

Anderson has widely explored the evolution of nationalism as a cultural artefact, ultimately condensing the complex character of nationalism in the well-known definition of the nation as an “imagined political community”.⁶ According to him, the historical circumstances that engendered the possibility of ‘imagining the nation’ correspond to the vanishing of three key cultural conceptions that had had a great grip on human minds until then.⁷ These conceptions are the belief in script-languages offering privileged access to the truth, the immutability of the hierarchical organisation of society, and the overlap of cosmology and history. Their disappearance created the right conditions for the emergence of print-capitalism, which “made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways”.⁸ Specifically, the possibility emerged for the people to think about themselves as a collective – and ‘simultaneous’ – community, which is a precondition to the emergence of a national consciousness.

In historical terms, such circumstances made their first appearance in seventeenth-century Europe, when the Reformation opened the way to overt inter-religious competition, thus breaking the monopoly of the Roman Church. Crucial to the opening of the “colossal religious propaganda war that raged across Europe for the next century”⁹ was the coalition between Protestantism and print-capitalism, which made it possible to disseminate the new religious ideas among a vast public, through cheap popular editions printed in vernacular languages. This circumstance, coupled with the gradual spread of specific vernaculars as administrative languages, created the conditions for the development of an extended network of schools, reading rooms and universities, which began to promote the diffusion of

⁵ Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1983.

⁶ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1983. 6.

⁷ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1983.

⁸ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1983. 36.

⁹ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1983. 40.

print-languages and vernacularizing activities, thus giving great impetus to the rise of national consciousness.¹⁰

Significantly, the primary ‘consumers’ of these new print-languages, as Anderson points out, were the emerging reading-classes (a category that encompasses also school-age children). Hence, “in world-historical terms bourgeoisies were the first classes to achieve solidarities on an essentially imagined basis”,¹¹ and such new middle-class intelligentsia undertook the duty to “invite the masses into history”,¹² which it did also by means of the education system. As Smith put it, “[t]he creation of secular, mass nations was ultimately the outcome of a vigorous programme of political socialization through the public, mass education system”,¹³ or in Hobsbawm’s words, “the progress of schools and universities measures that of nationalism”.¹⁴ Smith’s account of the emergence of nationalism is not dissimilar from Anderson’s, since he also locates the origin of the phenomenon in a set of historical circumstances that allowed the emergence of national intelligentsias.¹⁵ Specifically, he refers to a ‘triple revolution’ that started with the Renaissance period, which consisted in a rationalisation of the administrative sphere, in the gradual appearance of market economy, and in the decline of the role of ecclesiastical authorities in the cultural domain. The triple revolution resulted in the rise of new dominant classes – made up of intellectuals and professionals – who soon became the main agents of nationalism, and whom Smith expressively defines as the “new priesthood”.¹⁶ This category includes all the decision-makers and opinion-leaders that support, articulate and manage the nationalist project in a given society in a certain period. They act in order for the institutional machinery of the society to be conducive to the nationalist venture, by shaping the processes of education, socialisation and political participation of the citizens. Crucially, it is in the wake of the emergence of the new priesthood that the state progressively assumed the role of mass educator that it retains still today.

1.1.2 School and state culture

In his renowned exposition of a liberal approach to multiculturalism, Kymlicka propounds a definition of the state as a ‘societal culture’.¹⁷ Modern states, he ex-

¹⁰ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1983.

¹¹ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1983. 77.

¹² Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1983. 80.

¹³ Smith, Anthony D. *National Identity*. Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1991. 61.

¹⁴ Hobsbawm, Eric. *The Age of Revolution*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962. 166.

¹⁵ Smith, Anthony D. *National Identity*. Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1991.

¹⁶ Smith, Anthony D. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1986. 157.

¹⁷ Kymlicka, Will. “Western Political Theory and Ethnic Relations in Eastern Europe.” *Can Liberal Pluralism Be Exported? Western Political Theory and Ethnic Relations in Eastern Europe*. Kymlicka, Will and Magda Opalski, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

plains, are far from being neutral institutions, as they are constantly engaged in integrating their citizens into a specific societal culture, a process commonly referred to as 'nation-building'. Remarkably, a societal culture does not consist of common religious beliefs or family customs, but it is rather the promotion of an official language and a sense of common membership in, and equal access to, the institutions operating in that language. Kymlicka's conclusion, therefore, is that the widely proclaimed ethno-cultural neutrality of the state is nothing but a captivating myth. In light of Kymlicka's thought, it is beyond doubt that the public educational system is eminently consistent with, and conducive to, the nation-building project. In addition, unlike other social institutions, which only operate in the public language, public schooling actually generates it, by supporting its use in everyday life. At the same time, education raises a sense of common membership in the society, by disseminating a shared knowledge that is inevitably infused with the state's 'official culture'. Therefore, since the modern state is by no means ethno-culturally neutral, *a fortiori* education cannot be deemed neutral, either.

Of course, Kymlicka's theory is meant to apply to all modern states, be they liberal democracies or non-democratic regimes. Remarkably enough, an analysis of the principles that governed education systems in communist countries in the second half of the twentieth century clearly shows the fundamental function performed by the educational enterprise within the socialist modernising project. In addition, it makes it plausible to affirm that the potential of the education system, in terms of transmission of an official culture, has found greater recognition within socialist ideology than within liberal thought.

In general terms, education as a study in ideology has a long tradition, mainly upheld by scholars such as Bourdieu, Bernstein, Lundgren and Young, who have raised questions about the function of schools as social and economic institutions. Their common conviction, as Apple points out in *Ideology and Curriculum*, is that "the school is situated within a nexus of power relations in the wider society and that it functions so as to transmit those values, norms, dispositions, and types of knowledge that provide the ideological bedrock for existing institutional arrangements".¹⁸

Apart from bringing different approaches together into a coherent theoretical synthesis, Apple also proposed his own paradigm, which puts forth a neo-Marxist critique of modern schooling systems,¹⁹ which contains a few interesting hypotheses. In his view, schools are hegemonic institutions designed for reproducing the principles of social control dictated by the dominant ideology. Such process is medi-

¹⁸ Quotation found in: Giroux, Henry A. "Review of Ideology and Curriculum." *Journal of Education* 161.4 (1979). Academic Search Premier. 31 Mar. 2007. <<http://search.ebscohost.com>> 89.

¹⁹ Warner, K. Michael. "Review of Ideology and Curriculum." *Qualitative Sociology* 6.1 (1983). Academic Search Premier. 31 Mar. 2007. <<http://search.ebscohost.com>>

ated by the so-called 'hidden curriculum', which consists of all those values, dispositions, and problem-solving techniques that are encouraged and awarded within the educational process, to the detriment of alternative and more openly critical types of information, which are instead systematically dismissed. Such subtle selectivity serves the purpose of perpetuating particular forms of power, knowledge and ignorance among pupils and students, and thus helps to legitimate existing social patterns.²⁰

Even though Apple's approach might appear to overemphasize the presence of logics of social domination, one could hardly deny that the educational system is a powerful instrument in the hands of the state. In fact, states are the main agents in education, and, by 'shaping' the curricula, political elites can inspire consensus and achieve wide support for their policies. In other words, the national curriculum can be regarded as a mechanism for the political control of knowledge. It has a significant place within the state's armoury of cultural reproduction, and should therefore be considered in this light.

1.1.3 Imagining the nation: the rewriting of history

Let us retake the idea, put forth by Anderson, of the duty of the new national elites to "invite the masses into history".²¹ According to Smith, such 'invitation' has a very peculiar character. As he claims, "[t]he main task of an ethnic intelligentsia is to mobilize a formerly passive community into forming a nation around the new vernacular historical culture that it has rediscovered",²² which means that the educators – the intellectuals, the 'new priesthood' – have to construct coherent 'maps and moralities' for the new generations.

Such process of retrieval and reformulation of a nation's ethno-history so lucidly described by Smith finds full recognition in Hobsbawm's theory of the 'invention of tradition', which accounts for the ways in which nationalism draws on invented traditions (sets of practices that seek to inculcate values and norms of behaviour by repetition) to gain legitimacy.²³ Invented traditions, in Hobsbawm's view, are "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past".²⁴

Generally, all major social transformations – and the historical emergence of nation-states is certainly like that – demand the creation of invented traditions. What

²⁰ Warner, K. Michael. "Review of Ideology and Curriculum." *Qualitative Sociology* 6.1 (1983): 89. Academic Search Premier. 31 Mar. 2007. <<http://search.ebscohost.com>>

²¹ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1983. 80.

²² Smith, Anthony D. *National Identity*. Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1991. 64.

²³ Hobsbawm, Eric, ed. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

²⁴ Hobsbawm, Eric, ed. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983. 1.

is peculiar is that insofar as they include references to a historical past, the assumed continuity with it is largely factitious.²⁵ Crucially, although in many domains invented traditions have only partially replaced old ‘natural’ traditions and customs, within what Hobsbawm calls ‘the public life of the citizen’ – and school is a key element of it – the former play a considerably more important role than the latter.²⁶ Arguably, when Hobsbawm refers to school as a source of invented historical traditions, what he has in mind is primarily history teaching. Indeed, history education can be rightfully considered as the cradle of a nation’s ‘official history’, that is, the history that has become “part of the fund of knowledge or the ideology of a nation”.²⁷ Official history, in fact, is precisely the end-result of that process of selection, popularisation and institutionalisation of historical contents which we have referred to as ‘invention of tradition’.²⁸

As illustrated here, the nationalist project – that is, the ideological apparatus underlying the endeavour to constitute the nation as a political entity – incorporates the activity of rediscovering, reconstructing and rewriting history, with the aim of emphasising the ‘unified’ common past and destiny of the nation itself. In Smith’s view, the task of modern history is precisely to stage a ‘historical drama’, which is such as to *define* the entity of which it narrates the drama and *direct* it to a sort of visionary goal.²⁹ Such dramas, with their constant reference to past ‘golden ages’, concur to create proper ‘national mythologies’, thus establishing the nation as a “community of myths”.³⁰

A conclusion of what has been said so far is that historical memory can be – and actually is – a powerful instrument in the hands of the national elites. Consequently, nationalisms are by definition adverse to any attempt to institutionalise versions of history different from the official one, since “divergent readings of ‘history’, the chance of multiple histories, can only weaken and stifle a sense of identity which external events have succeeded in ‘awakening’”.³¹

1.2 Education and reconciliation

1.2.1 The highest goals of education

Within the scope of international standards of human rights protection, as well as within the broader sphere of the global discourse on human rights, the right to education enjoys a prominent position. Given the extensive meaning of the term

²⁵ Hobsbawm, Eric, ed. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

²⁶ Hobsbawm, Eric, ed. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

²⁷ Hobsbawm, Eric, ed. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

²⁸ Hobsbawm, Eric, ed. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

²⁹ Smith, Anthony D. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1986.

³⁰ Kizilyurek, Niyazi. “History Textbooks and Nationalism.” *Teaching the History of Southeastern Europe*. Koulouri, Christina, ed. Thessaloniki: Petros Th.Ballidis & Co., 2001. 69.

³¹ Smith, Anthony D. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1986. 192.

‘education’, a preliminary step is to ascertain whether any of the relevant international documents include a working definition of it. A quite ample explanation is contained in Article 1 of the ‘UNESCO Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms’: “[t]he word ‘education’ implies the entire process of social life by means of which individuals and social groups learn to develop consciously within, and for the benefit of, the national and international communities, the whole of their personal capacities, attitudes, aptitudes and knowledge. This process is not limited to any specific activities”.³²

Considering such a broad definition, it is not surprising that the right to education is given such a wide recognition within the human rights discourse. In addition, as declared in General Comment no.11 to the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), “[t]he right to education [...] has been variously classified as an economic right, a social right and a cultural right. It is all of these. It is also [...] a civil right and a political right, since it is central to the full and effective realization of those rights as well. [It] epitomizes the indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights”.³³

For the purpose of our analysis, we shall now consider how human rights instruments conceive the very goals of the educational process, as it is in view of them that the implementation of the right to education finds its *raison d’être*. Significantly, almost all international documents draw from the definition of the highest goals of education contained in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which claims that “[e]ducation shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace”.³⁴ Indeed, such formulation ‘burdens’ the educational process with very ambitious goals, and extends the significance of the right to education well beyond the simple availability of a functioning education system.

³² UNESCO. “Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms - Article 1.” *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Homepage*. 21 Mar. 2007. <<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/77.htm>>

³³ “General Comment No.11 to ICESCR – Paragraph 2”. *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Homepage*. 21 Mar. 2007. <[http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(symbol\)/E.C.12.1999.4.En?OpenDocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(symbol)/E.C.12.1999.4.En?OpenDocument)>

³⁴ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights - Article 26(2),” *United Nations*. 22 Mar. 2007. <<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>>

Taking into consideration the intrinsic non-neutrality of the educational enterprise illustrated above, our primary concern is to look into how international documents articulate the high goals of education into specific provisions concerning the content of the teaching process. For our main claim, here, is that the content of education, besides its 'form', is a crucial dimension to the realization of its proclaimed highest goals. To put it boldly, the extensive reach of the aims of education requires the very substance of education – not only its formal arrangements – to be consistent with them, since only in this way can the exercise of the right to education be conducive to its chief goals.

A useful operational definition of the 'substance of education' is found in General Comment no.13 to the ICESCR, which equates it with "curricula and teaching methods".³⁵ Further on in the same document, a set of 'minimum educational standards' – that is, benchmarks against which the implementation of the right to education by a certain country is assessed – are spelled out, which also encompass the curricula.³⁶ Finally, the General Comment elaborates on the requirement of 'acceptability of education', which provides that the form and substance of education – including curricula and teaching methods – be relevant, culturally appropriate and of good quality.³⁷

Quite surprisingly, the point is developed rather briefly in the General Comment, which leaves room for a range of thorny issues to be raised, such as: what should be deemed 'relevant' in education? What is 'culturally appropriate', and to what culture(s)? The only document that articulates the goals of education into specific principles intended to guide states' educational policies is the UNESCO 'Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms'. However, its character of recommendation causes it to have only a limited influence on states' educational policies.

The provisions it contains, however, are of great relevance for the present work, especially the following one: "[e]ducation should include critical analysis of the historical and contemporary factors of an economic and political nature underlying

³⁵ "General Comment No.13 – Paragraph 6(c)". *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Homepage*. 21 Mar. 2007.

<[http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(symbol\)E.C.12.1999.10.En?OpenDocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(symbol)E.C.12.1999.10.En?OpenDocument)>

³⁶ "General Comment No.13 – Paragraph 29". *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Homepage*. 21 Mar. 2007.

<[http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(symbol\)/E.C.12.1999.10.En?OpenDocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(symbol)/E.C.12.1999.10.En?OpenDocument)>

³⁷ "General Comment No.13 – Paragraph 6(c)". *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Homepage*. 21 Mar. 2007.

<[http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(symbol\)/E.C.12.1999.10.En?OpenDocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(symbol)/E.C.12.1999.10.En?OpenDocument)>

the contradictions and tensions between countries, together with study of ways of overcoming these contradictions, which are the real impediments to understanding, true international co-operation and the development of world peace”.³⁸ The Recommendation also states that the content of education shall be such as to promote “study of different cultures [...] on order to encourage mutual appreciation of the differences between them”.³⁹ Finally, education must necessarily be of an interdisciplinary approach in order to relate to problems as the equality of rights of peoples and the right of peoples to self-determination, the maintenance of peace, as well as the possible actions to ensure the exercise and observance of human rights.⁴⁰

The conclusion that should be drawn from this brief exploration is that international documents enshrining the right to education and the goals of its implementation designate the state as the main agent in education. In fact, the state is responsible for drafting the curricula and setting the minimum standards of education, whereby it can exercise a decisive control over the content it transmits. It is precisely because of such capacity that education shall not be considered as a neutral enterprise.

1.2.2 History education and reconciliation

The idea that education should be such as to promote reciprocal understanding and peaceful co-existence, as it is solemnly proclaimed in the international standards of human rights, has already gained substantial ground within the international community. However, in spite of plenty of noteworthy initiatives, the potential of education as a means for encouraging reconciliation in divided and post-conflict societies – a dimension that is very coherent with the highest goals of education – cannot be said to have been fully explored yet.

³⁸ UNESCO. “Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms – Paragraph 14”. *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Homepage*. 21 Mar. 2007. <<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/77.htm>>

³⁹ UNESCO. “Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms – Paragraph 17”. *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Homepage*. 21 Mar. 2007. <<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/77.htm>>

⁴⁰ UNESCO. “Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms – Paragraph 18”. *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Homepage*. 21 Mar. 2007. <<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/77.htm>>

In general terms, history teaching, as seen above, helps constructing the perceptions of the ‘national self’ and the ‘national other’, thus influencing the possibilities of mutual understanding among nations and peoples. In this light, it would be hard to deny that the ‘substance’ of history teaching – that is, the history curricula and the methods in which history is taught – is probably one of the most critical components of school education in the case of post-conflict contexts and divided societies in general. More specifically, if history education could be freed from ethno-centric approaches, this would be likely to increase the chances of reconciliation, be it internal (in case of divided societies) or external (in case of hostile relations with other countries), thus upholding the pursuit of the proclaimed highest goals of education. Besides the unquestionable benefits that such approach would bring about, there are serious obstacles on the way to its realisation. It is the fact that the willingness to interfere with a country’s official history would be perceived by the national elites as a threat to the identity of their own country, and subsequently dismissed as a deplorable attempt to revise history for political goals. The issue has aroused a specific historiographic debate, which revolves around the question whether, in such cases, one can rightfully speak of ‘good’ history revision. The growing number of international and local initiatives of textbook revision implemented with the aim of facilitating reconciliation seems to suggest a positive answer. However, the content of textbooks is only one dimension of the educational process. Theoretically, all aspects of education – i.e. the teaching and learning methods, let alone the educational policies of each country – should be tackled. Nevertheless, due to the inherent complexity of the educational process, the present dissertation will focus primarily on the very content of the textbooks – and on the possible advantages of textbook revision.. This, at a closer look, is not a so severe limitation to the scope of the analysis, as what is written in the textbooks is both the end result of the politically driven process of selection of the curricula and the material upon which the teaching and learning activities are set in motion.

2 History education in the ‘new states’ of South Eastern Europe

The character of history education in the “new states” that emerged from the dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation could hardly be analysed without referring to the wider regional context, for two reasons. Firstly, a common socialist educational system was in place in all the ex-Yugoslav countries for more than four decades. Secondly, specific features of history education, as we will see, transcend the national borders, being found in many countries of Southeast Europe.

2.1 The rise of ethno-centric education in the former Yugoslav Republics

2.1.1 From the Yugoslav education system to the creation of new national identities

The most peculiar trait of the socialist education system is the willingness to embrace all the contents and the aims of education within socialist ideology, with the aim of preparing young generations to conform to a framework that comes to determine the way of thinking and feeling human relations in general.⁴¹ In fact, the socialist project essentially consisted of instilling into the people a ‘socialist morale’ that could sustain the overarching plan to lead society to its ‘ideal realisation’ by means of fast-paced industrialisation and an equitable social development – a fully-fledged project of ‘modernisation’. Hence, the education system could not be conceived but as a driving power of that project, if not even the primary one. Accordingly, the integration between education and labour was complete, and education had no other function than to prepare the pupils to efficiently incorporate into the socialist society.⁴²

In the case of the Yugoslav Federation, the socialist educational agenda was coupled with the political doctrine of ‘brotherhood and unity’, a slogan that encapsulated the peculiar arrangement for the accommodation – and the ‘neutralisation’ – of the different national interests within the Federation. The influence of such idea on history writing has been considerable, to the point that inter-ethnic rivalry came to be viewed as a ‘bourgeois’ feature that was said to have disappeared under communism.⁴³

After 1989, when the socialist edifice crumbled, the ideological framework of the educational enterprise illustrated above also ceased to exist, and the necessity of a radical change in terms of strategies and concrete arrangements rapidly caught on. How to reform the education system became an impending strategic choice, and heated debates sprung out of the many uncertainties affecting the new decision-makers. Besides tackling questions such as the Europeanisation or nationalisation of the education systems, privatisation or state-management, mono-cultural or multi-cultural education, centralised or de-centralised schooling,⁴⁴ the main effort was done in implementing measures aimed at ridding the curricula of the Marxist approach – the so-called ‘de-ideologisation’.

Actually, in Yugoslavia a wave of historical revisionism had come about already in the 1980s, due to the failure to address the ‘national question’ in an open manner in most of the republics. As Koulouri contends referring to that period, “official

⁴¹ Russo, Francesco. *Una Scuola per Entrare in Europa. I Sistemi Educativi nei Balcani dal Comunismo alla Democrazia*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005.

⁴² Russo, Francesco. *Una Scuola per Entrare in Europa. I Sistemi Educativi nei Balcani dal Comunismo alla Democrazia*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005.

⁴³ Höpken, Wolfgang. “History Education and Yugoslav (Dis-)Integration.” *Oil in Fire? Textbooks, Stereotypes, and Violence in Southeastern Europe*. Höpken, Wolfgang, ed. Hannover: Verlag Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1996.

⁴⁴ Russo, Francesco. *Una Scuola per Entrare in Europa. I Sistemi Educativi nei Balcani dal Comunismo alla Democrazia*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005.

historiography [...] was not in line with social memory and the perception of the past”.⁴⁵ However, the process of ‘re-nationalisation’ of history teaching gained momentum during and after the dissolution of the Yugoslavia,⁴⁶ when the ‘new’ states rising from the ashes of the Federation resorted to history to provide the ideological armour necessary to uphold their nation-building process, as well as their wartime engagement.

The process of ‘re-nationalisation’ of history in the Yugoslav countries is a sound illustration of the theoretical considerations put forward in chapter one, for it is entirely traceable to the pattern of the nation-building enterprise, which typically implies the ‘making up’ of a shared national memory. As pointed out before, such process – by which the narration of historical events is fashioned in such a way as to validate the idea that the nation has always been engaged in a conscious effort of self-determination – is heterodirected. The ‘makers’ of the official history are in fact the national intelligentsias (the new priesthood), who resort to the cultural sphere to legitimise the nationalist political project.

In the case of Yugoslavia, the broader process of ‘de-ideologisation’ of culture, which also concerned history teaching and history textbooks, gave further impetus to the nationalist strive, since it gave the national political elites a chance to turn it into an instrument to achieve their own aims, mostly by replacing former interpretations with new, sheer ethno-centric perspectives.⁴⁷ This passage from de-ideologisation to ethno-centrism, however, did not hinder a few positive developments, such as the emergence of alternative textbooks and real competition among publishers, as happened in Slovenia and Croatia.⁴⁸ Yet, besides the fact that in the other countries alternative textbooks appeared very late, the possibility to choose among them has little significance when it is not accompanied by substantial changes in the curricula, according to which textbooks are prepared. Indeed, curriculum reforms in all newly independent states were characterised by slowness and reluctance to innovate.

As previously noted, it is in the collective perception of history that the mould of a state-building enterprise is most detectable. In Koulouri’s evocative description, post-communist Balkan societies “gradually ‘remembered’ their ‘new’, unforeseen

⁴⁵ Koulouri, Christina, ed. *Clio in the Balkans. The Politics of History Education*. Thessaloniki: Petros Th.Ballidis & Co., 2002.

⁴⁶ Roudometof, Victor. *Nationalism, Globalization, and Orthodoxy. The Social Origins of Ethnic Conflict in the Balkans*. London: Greenwood Press, 2001.

⁴⁷ Koren, Snježana. “Yugoslavia: a Look in the Broken Mirror. Who is the ‘Other?’” *Clio in the Balkans. The Politics of History Education*. Koulouri, Christina, ed. Thessaloniki: Petros Th.Ballidis & Co., 2002. 193-202.

⁴⁸ Koren, Snježana. “Yugoslavia: a Look in the Broken Mirror. Who is the ‘Other?’” *Clio in the Balkans. The Politics of History Education*. Koulouri, Christina, ed. Thessaloniki: Petros Th.Ballidis & Co., 2002. 193-202.

past. The communist period went into a parenthesis of oblivion or rejection [...]. Symbols and monuments were torn down in cathartic violence and theatrical rituals, and new *topoi* of memory were (re)discovered”.⁴⁹ Such passionate restructuring of historical memory changed profoundly the ways of writing history, and its effects are still visible today: “[h]istory in the Balkans is rewritten, and the process is an open one”,⁵⁰ Koulouri maintains.

A key dimension of the re-writing of history in SEE is the necessity, and the wish, to do away with the socialist legacy and to finally accomplish the yearned “return to Europe”. This deeply influenced the way national histories were looked upon in the aftermath of the transition to post-communism. Koulouri efficaciously condensed such process of re-interpretation of the past according to the planning of the future in the expression “the future’s past”.⁵¹

2.1.2 Historical memory as a source of conflict

The fact that all former Yugoslav countries engaged in a process of history re-writing obviously does not imply that they did so in the same manner, and even less that the outcome of such activity, in terms of historical contents, was analogous. It is pretty much the contrary, given that the basic assumption of any ethnocentric approach to history is that of an implicit monopoly of truth by those who write it. Moreover, national self-definition works predominantly through ‘us-them’ dichotomies, which often imply the dismissal of others’ perspectives in favour of one’s own.

A useful catchphrase that encapsulates the divergence of Balkan national narratives in the 1990s is “Balkanisation of memory”. Coined by Ditchev and taken up by Dimitras,⁵² it refers to the attitude of ‘taking revenge on the past’ in symbolic battles with the intent to subjugate history to one’s (mainly) political objectives. Notwithstanding the diffidence inspired by a term too frequently misused,⁵³ the phrase catches well the essence of the phenomenon, namely, the absolute lack of unitary and harmonious accounts of a number of ‘burning’ facts in Balkan history.

⁴⁹ Koulouri, Christina, ed. *Clio in the Balkans. The Politics of History Education*. Thessaloniki: Petros Th.Ballidis & Co., 2002. 26-27.

⁵⁰ Koulouri, Christina, ed. *Clio in the Balkans. The Politics of History Education*. Thessaloniki: Petros Th.Ballidis & Co., 2002. 21.

⁵¹ Koulouri, Christina. “The Tyranny of History.” *Teaching the History of Southeastern Europe*. Koulouri, Christina, ed. Thessaloniki: Petros Th.Ballidis & Co., 2001. 19.

⁵² Ditchev, Ivaylo, in an article published by *Libération* on November 4th, 1994, as reported in: Dimitras, Panayote E. “Writing and Rewriting History in the Context of Balkan Nationalisms.” *Southeast European Politics Online*. Oct. 2000. 13 Jul. 2007. <<http://www.seep.ceu.hu/volume11/dimitras.pdf>> 50.

⁵³ Maria Todorova, a profound connoisseur of the Balkans, has often raised her voice against the unscrupulous and often inappropriate use of the term ‘Balkanisation’. See: Grujić, Jelena. “Drugačiji Balkan.” *Vreme*. 7 Jun. 2007.

Of course, one should not be surprised at such disharmony. The need of the ‘new’ Balkan nations to create a national past by definition could not have resulted in an even little homogeneity, precisely because the purpose of fabricating national narratives was (is) to differentiate oneself from the ‘national other’. Coherently, history education in the Balkans in the 1990s fully conformed to the pattern of ‘Balkanisation of memory’, doing little to discourage ill utilisations of history. On the contrary, a number of regional researches conducted at the end of the 1990s confirm that history education at the time was significantly ethno-centric.⁵⁴ According to Roudometof, post-1990 Serbian textbooks provide the paradigmatic case for such trend, although Macedonian textbooks also provide strong evidence of an acute ethno-centric cultural turn.⁵⁵

A trend in Balkan school history writing is the utilisation of antiquity as a source of national documentation, which, after the obliteration of Marxist ideology, has been greatly revived with the unequivocal purpose to “serve the need to form a new collective identity and to offer a theoretical foundation for the ideological prerequisites of the national idea”.⁵⁶ The willingness to reconstruct a historical continuity through the retrieval of past events and their elevation to ‘founding myths’ of a community is consistent with a romantic, and primordialist, approach to the nation. As Vouri contends, the integration of ancient history in the body of national history – which is particularly evident in Macedonian textbooks – attests the willingness to rehabilitate ‘downgraded histories’ into powerful national narratives, thus filling, so to say, all the “*lacunae* in the theory of the nation’s longevity”.⁵⁷

How is this achieved? Vouri identified some of the techniques used in history education,⁵⁸ which will be briefly listed here. A first technique is an evocative presentation of the motherland, usually coupled with an accent on the cultural and linguistic links with antiquity – Macedonia being probably the best illustration of this. Another facet is the assumption of the existence of an independent state life since

⁵⁴ Dragonas, Thalia and Anna Frangoudaki. “The Persistence of Ethnocentric School History.” *Teaching the History of Southeastern Europe*. Koulouri, Christina, ed. Thessaloniki: Petros Th.Ballidis & Co., 2001. 37-47.

⁵⁵ Roudometof, Victor. *Nationalism, Globalization, and Orthodoxy. The Social Origins of Ethnic Conflict in the Balkans*. London: Greenwood Press, 2001.

⁵⁶ Vouri, Sofia. “Antiquity as a Source of National Documentation in Balkan History Textbooks (1991-1996).” *The Image of the ‘Other’ / Neighbour in the School Textbooks of the Balkan Countries*. Xochellis, Panos D. and Fotini I. Toloudi, eds. Athens: Tipothito, 2001. 76-77.

⁵⁷ Vouri, Sofia. “Antiquity as a Source of National Documentation in Balkan History Textbooks (1991-1996).” *The Image of the ‘Other’ / Neighbour in the School Textbooks of the Balkan Countries*. Xochellis, Panos D. and Fotini I. Toloudi, eds. Athens: Tipothito, 2001. 79.

⁵⁸ Vouri, Sofia. “Antiquity as a Source of National Documentation in Balkan History Textbooks (1991-1996).” *The Image of the ‘Other’ / Neighbour in the School Textbooks of the Balkan Countries*. Xochellis, Panos D. and Fotini I. Toloudi, eds. Athens: Tipothito, 2001. 75-90.

ancient times. A further technique consists of the ideological representations of the so-called 'national other', which in turn feeds the 'national self'.

Hence, Vouri concludes, the utilisation of antiquity hinges on myths of common origin, cultural homogeneity, common tradition and language, and upholds "the nation's readiness to fight for political autonomy and state independence".⁵⁹ These findings, along with the consideration of the revived presence of religion in the textbooks as a key marker of national identity,⁶⁰ substantiate the following central assertion: the manipulation of historical memory for nationalistic aims – a widespread attitude in post-communist countries and especially in newly independent ones – creates the conditions for the resurgence of old conflicts and the emergence of new ones. Thus, when history education is receptive to such approach – as it is the case in SEE – it is likely to nourish hostile and intolerant attitudes towards the 'other'.

This claim finds further evidence if one looks into the ways in which in the textbooks historical memories are 're-worked' into ready-to-use arguments for political disputes. A common narrative pattern is that of lingering over memories of collective wrongs and cruelties suffered from another national or ethnic groups, which loads present-day clashes with resentment and makes them appear as a redress.⁶¹ Another exemplary expedient, tackled by Stojanović, is that of 'victimisation': a country is depicted as the target of unremitting territorial aspirations on the part of the bordering countries, which nourishes its self-perception as a 'historical victim' and its fear of neighbouring nations.⁶²

The fostering of resentment and victimisation is probably the most problematic aspect of history teaching in the Balkans. Other crucial drawbacks, according to Simoska, are the predominance of a purely one-sided factography, the glorification of military feats and the omission of elements of common cultural heritage.⁶³ Considering the combined effect of all these narrative expedients, and bearing in mind

⁵⁹ Vouri, Sofia. "Antiquity as a Source of National Documentation in Balkan History Textbooks (1991-1996)." *The Image of the 'Other' / Neighbour in the School Textbooks of the Balkan Countries*. Xochellis, Panos D. and Fotini I. Toloudi, eds. Athens: Tipothito, 2001. 89.

⁶⁰ Murgescu, Mirela-Luminita. "Religious Education and the View of the 'Other'." *Clio in the Balkans. The Politics of History Education*. Koulouri, Christina, ed. Thessaloniki: Petros Th.Ballidis & Co., 2002. 295-299.

⁶¹ Jedlicki, Jerzy. "Historical memory as a source of conflicts in Eastern Europe." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 32 (1999). 225–232
<<http://www.elsevier.com/locate/postcomstud>>

⁶² Stojanović, Dubravka. "History Textbooks and the Creation of National Identity." *Teaching the History of Southeastern Europe*. Koulouri, Christina, ed. Thessaloniki: Petros Th.Ballidis & Co., 2001. 27-32.

⁶³ Simoska, Emilija. "General Problems in the History Textbooks of the Balkans." *Teaching the History of Southeastern Europe*. Koulouri, Christina, ed. Thessaloniki: Petros Th.Ballidis & Co., 2001. 97-102.

the potentiality for animosity embedded in historical reminiscence, one could hardly deny that ethno-centric history teaching has a highly detrimental impact on the chances of reconciliation of divided or post-conflict societies, especially in South Eastern Europe.

In the specific situation of Macedonia, where dividedness between the Albanian and the Macedonian community is combined with the presence of latent conflicts with the neighbouring countries, the consequences of ethno-centric history teaching should be deemed more deleterious than in many other contexts. Here, ethno-centric history education is likely to impinge deeply on the chances of internal and external reconciliation, especially in view of the high extent to which local political and cultural disputes revolve around historical issues.

Can the negative effects of ethno-centric history teaching be reduced through textbook revision? Jedlicki's pessimistic assertion that "vivid and deliberately inflamed historical reminiscences make it virtually impossible to negotiate a compromise solution of a crisis"⁶⁴ is somehow disproved by the growing international commitment in the field of textbook revision. The spirit of such initiatives has been better epitomised by Dimitras, who claims that although "it may have been understandable that in the formative years of each nation history was written in ways to strengthen the at the time weak national feeling",⁶⁵ it is intolerable that, "at the end of the twentieth century, when all states officially have no territorial claims, and strive at joining the broad European family", they still "mould national consciousness along more or less the same lines".⁶⁶

2.2 History teaching: from division to reconciliation.

2.2.1 Towards reconciliation: textbook revision in South Eastern Europe

For the reasons explained above, with time education has become one of the major fields of international interventionism in divided and post-conflict societies, and especially in societies in transition, where little sophisticated educational capacities and resources engendered by the disappearance of the dominant ideology

⁶⁴ Jedlicki, Jerzy. "Historical memory as a source of conflicts in Eastern Europe." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 32 (1999). 225–232

<<http://www.elsevier.com/locate/postcomstud>> 225.

⁶⁵ Dimitras, Panayote E. "Writing and Rewriting History in the Context of Balkan Nationalisms." *Southeast European Politics Online*. Oct. 2000. 13 Jul. 2007.

<<http://www.seep.ceu.hu/volume11/dimitras.pdf>> 57.

⁶⁶ Dimitras, Panayote E. "Writing and Rewriting History in the Context of Balkan Nationalisms." *Southeast European Politics Online*. Oct. 2000. 13 Jul. 2007.

<<http://www.seep.ceu.hu/volume11/dimitras.pdf>> 57.

trigger off external intervention.⁶⁷ Within education, textbooks – especially in history, language, civics, and religion – are usually seen as key instruments to promote values that may favour social reintegration, stabilisation of internal and external peace, and reconciliation of the former opponents.

The idea to make use of textbooks as a means for reconciliation is not a recent one. Already in the inter-war period, some attempts were made to remove such negative approaches as nationalism-chauvinism, revanchism and intolerance from the textbooks in use in the countries involved in the First World War, and a debate on textbook reform was initiated in the Balkan countries under the auspices of the League of Nations. However, it is only after the Second World War that textbook revision became a customary trend, when a few bilateral initiatives between Germany and some of the countries that suffered from Nazi rule (namely France, Poland and Israel) were launched.⁶⁸

Nowadays, the tendency of modern armed conflicts to turn into ethnic ones has set new conditions and new challenges for textbook revision intended as an instrument of reconciliation. Inevitably, past-time bilateral initiatives have given ground to a textbook work that now takes place mostly *within* societies, not *between* them.⁶⁹ This is precisely what happened in the former Yugoslav countries, where the ethnic dimension largely permeated the transition process from communism to democracy during the 1990s.

In general terms, the decade of 1990-2000 was a period of major reforms in SEE education systems. The effort to engage in a regeneration of both the substance of schooling and its formal arrangements was supported by a considerable mobilisation of international actors. The reason for that is that SEE education systems had been somehow ‘reset to zero’ by the disappearance of the dominant ideology and, often, by the material destruction of the facilities and the decimation of the teach-

⁶⁷ Höpken, Wolfgang. “Textbooks and Conflicts. Experiences from the Work of the Georg-Eckert-Institute for International Textbook Research.” *World Bank Website*. 9 Jul. 2007. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/2782001121703274255/1439264-1126807073059/World_Bank.pdf>

⁶⁸ Höpken, Wolfgang. “Textbooks and Conflicts. Experiences from the Work of the Georg-Eckert-Institute for International Textbook Research.” *World Bank Website*. 9 Jul. 2007. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/2782001121703274255/1439264-1126807073059/World_Bank.pdf>

⁶⁹ Höpken, Wolfgang. “Textbooks and Conflicts. Experiences from the Work of the Georg-Eckert-Institute for International Textbook Research.” *World Bank Website*. 9 Jul. 2007. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/2782001121703274255/1439264-1126807073059/World_Bank.pdf>

ing staff. Indeed, nowhere in the world was an attempt of thorough institutional re-designing ever experimented in such a short time.⁷⁰

The synergic interplay of a striking number of national and international, public and private, profit and non-profit organisations active in the educational field⁷¹ reached a synthesis in the launching of the Graz Process, which since 1998 functions as a mechanism of co-ordination of the initiatives concerning education in the region. Remarkably enough, the European Union, traditionally hesitant – or incapable – to pursue any effective strategy of harmonisation in the educational sector among the member states, has assumed the crucial task of supervising and directing the leading initiatives in SEE.⁷² Such commitment testifies to the growing awareness, among the international community, that valuable educational policies are conducive to the spreading of a culture of peaceful and democratic co-existence, as well as to the promotion of social and economic development. In fact, with almost no exceptions, all the chief international initiatives for SEE – the Royaumont Process and the Stability Pact for SEE in the lead – include a set of actions concerning school education.

What is worth underlining is that in the agenda of these initiatives textbook revision is often included, when not even prioritised. In the 1998 Graz Conference entitled ‘European Educational Co-operation of Peace, Stability and Democracy’ that launched the Graz Process, history teaching figured as one of the main issues of concern in the field of education in SEE. The establishment of the Stability Pact for SEE in 1999 has further prioritised education, by entrusting the Graz Process itself with the coordination of the Task Force ‘Education and Youth’, thus starting the Enhanced Graz Process (EGP). Again, history teaching was granted great consideration, to the point that it was included among the six thematic *foci* of the EGP.

In late 1999, a second international conference on educational co-operation in SEE was held in Sofia. The Action Plan devised thereby included a specific action, the aim of which was to develop projects aiming to encourage an ever-increasing understanding of SEE’s regional history through a multi-dimensional approach. Yet, it is in 2003 that the co-operative effort in the region experienced its most significant advance: the governments of the SEE countries launched the Education Reform Initiative for South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE). Among the nine high priorities around which the joint initiative revolved, one was curriculum reform.

⁷⁰ Russo, Francesco. *Una Scuola per Entrare in Europa. I Sistemi Educativi nei Balcani dal Comunismo alla Democrazia*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005.

⁷¹ The most prominent ones being the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United Nations, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the World Bank and the Open Society Institute.

⁷² Russo, Francesco. *Una Scuola per Entrare in Europa. I Sistemi Educativi nei Balcani dal Comunismo alla Democrazia*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005.

Alongside the course of the Graz Process and the Enhanced Graz Process, it is worth underlining the role that the Council of Europe (CoE) has played – and still plays – in the field of education in SEE. The CoE boasts a long-drawn-out commitment in the field of the revision of history teaching, to which it has remained faithful with regard to the difficult transition to post-communism in the SEE countries.

The affirmation of the necessity to improve history teaching through the elimination of prejudice and the promotion of inter-cultural dialogue, contained in the final declaration of the 1993 Vienna summit,⁷³ has been followed by a number of concrete steps. Among them, the 1994-1996 project named ‘The Teaching of History in the New Europe’, re-launched in 1997-2000, and eleven ‘Quick Start Projects’ implemented all over South East Europe.

CoE’s activity in the field has culminated in 2001, with the adoption of the ‘Recommendation on History Teaching in the Twenty-first-century Europe’, “the first text adopted at pan-European level to set clear methodological principles on the objectives of history teaching in a democratic and pluralist Europe”.⁷⁴ This fundamental document criticises the misuse of history as an instrument of ideological manipulation, and spells out the central tasks of history teaching in the European context, i.e. to be a decisive factor in reconciliation and to promote fundamental values such as tolerance, mutual understanding, human rights and democracy.⁷⁵

2.2.2 Nature of textbook revision initiatives and lessons learned

The substantial transformations occurred in Europe in the last five decades have modified the context in which textbook revision initiatives are carried out in such a deep way that it would be unrealistic to expect current initiatives in SEE to have such positive and prompt results as those achieved in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Of all the differences between post-war Europe and SEE in the 1990s that one could single out, the one that stands out is probably the absence, as regards the break-up of Yugoslavia, of such a widely shared commitment to a peaceful reconciliation as the one experienced by post-war Europe. Nevertheless, there is an ongoing, although slow, process of appeasement among the former Yugoslav republics, and textbook revision, as shown above, is a crucial dimension of that process. Indeed, as Cole and Barsalou have argued, “history education should be under-

⁷³ Russo, Francesco. *Una Scuola per Entrare in Europa. I Sistemi Educativi nei Balcani dal Comunismo alla Democrazia*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005.

⁷⁴ Council of Europe. “History Teaching.” *Council of Europe*. 3 Jul. 2007. <http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Co-operation/education/History_Teaching/>

⁷⁵ Council of Europe. “Recommendation Rec (2001) 15 on History Teaching in Twenty-first-century Europe.” *Council of Europe*. 31 Oct. 2001. 13 Sep. 2007. <<http://www.coe.int>>

stood as an integral but underutilized part of transitional justice”,⁷⁶ in the sense that it can either support or undermine its functioning. Such awareness should accompany us in our exploration of the nature of textbook revision.

As we will see, many commentators and experts do actually agree on the idea that the broader political settings should be taken into great consideration when assessing the potential impact of a project of textbook revision. What should not be disregarded is a key theoretical consideration formulated by Pingel, a prominent name in the field of textbook research and deputy director of the Georg Eckert Institute, who wrote:

[T]he political climate plays an important role for any potential changes in textbooks concerning international understanding. [...] It is impossible [...] to teach insights or disseminate knowledge through textbooks that do not correspond to the general political context. The relationship between politics and education, however, is not one-sided. They influence each other. Education can supply new aims that will be propagated in schools and textbooks before they are implemented and fully realized on the political level. Education can lay the foundations for forming attitudes and opinions that are essential to policies that promote peace and mutual understanding.⁷⁷

Hence, the two key questions are: what are the environmental conditions necessary for textbook revision initiatives to effectively engender reconciliation in divided or post-conflict societies? What should the substance of textbook revision be like in order to have a positive impact on the political level, particularly in SEE? As for the first question, Höpken’s learned exploration of the influence of the context on the success of textbook revision offers some valuable standpoints.⁷⁸ In his view, there are six environmental conditions to be met in order for textbook revision to have an impact on the process of reconciliation: firstly, in a post-conflict society, violence has to be ended. Secondly, fundamental political ques-

⁷⁶ Cole, Elizabeth A. and Judy Barsalou. “Special Report: Unite or Divide? The Challenges of Teaching History in Societies Emerging from Violent Conflict.” *United States Institute of Peace*. Jun. 2006. 4 Jul. 2007. <<http://www.usip.org>> 2.

⁷⁷ UNESCO. “Guidelines and Criteria for the Development, Evaluation and Revision of Curricula, Textbooks and other Educational Materials in International Education in Order to Promote an International Dimension in Education.” *UNESCO Website*. 10 Jul. 2007. <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org>> 37.

⁷⁸ Höpken, Wolfgang. “Textbooks and Conflicts. Experiences from the Work of the Georg-Eckert-Institute for International Textbook Research.” *World Bank Website*. 9 Jul. 2007. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/2782001121703274255/1439264-1126807073059/World_Bank.pdf>

tions (such as status, sovereignty, territory, minority rights) have to be settled. Thirdly, the undoubted commitment of the political elites, the absence of which is likely to prevent initiatives of textbook improvement from being successful, as the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina clearly shows. Fourthly, society has to agree on the basic values on which it intends to found its education system, and thus its collective identity; of course, an understanding of school education as a means to foster the identity of the majority ethnic group and to legitimise the nation-state is a great obstacle to reconciliation. Interestingly enough, in societies with a high level of dividedness, an 'improved' and difference-sensitive education might prove counterproductive, according to Höpken, until that society has not stabilised to a certain degree. The fifth condition listed by Höpken is the existence of an adequate academic and educational infrastructure that promotes a 'good' historiography, by discarding monolithic 'national narratives'. Finally, the sixth condition is a favourable 'mental condition' of a post-conflict society, namely, its inclination to elaborate on war experiences and relative traumas, the negotiability of which within the textbooks, in Höpken's view, remains an open question.

This is, in a way, a résumé of the lessons learned in several decades of textbook revision initiatives, and, at the same time, a useful reminder of the tough challenges those who engage in the promotion of reconciliation through textbook improvement are faced with. Höpken's conditions, however, should not be interpreted as a *conditio sine qua non* for the implementation of projects of textbook revision. Rather, textbook improvement, when put into practice in circumstances where those conditions are not (yet) fully met, can have a positive influence on the broader context, thus contributing to the achievement of the 'conditions' themselves. In short, the interplay between history revision initiatives and the broader social and political context should not be interpreted as a one-way process, but as a circular one.

As regards the second question, which revolves around the very substance of textbook improvement in the context of the Balkan region, Pingel has extrapolated from past and current experiences a set of measures concerning the content of history textbooks that should be taken to ease tensions in SEE.⁷⁹ Here we will focus on those that are most relevant for our case study, attempting to come to a synthesis of the different contributions coming from other scholars in the field.

Pingel's first proposal is to amend the 'misuse of history', that is, to detect and correct the propensity to determine the future through history, through the equation of the past with the present and the future. As the author points out, this is precisely the case of the textbooks in use in the former Yugoslav republics, which lack of a future perspective, as if history was doomed to repeat itself endlessly.

⁷⁹ UNESCO. *Disarming History. International Conference on Combating Stereotypes and Prejudice in History Textbooks of South-East Europe*. Stockholm: UNESCO, 1999.

A second suggestion refers to the balance between national, regional, European and global history within the textbooks, which should be such as to cover adequately all of the segments, thus resisting the ‘temptation’ of devoting too much space to the national history. Following this line of reasoning, several scholars have propounded the idea of a ‘joint history’ of the Balkan region as a way to overcome the prevalent nation-centred understanding of history, by preclude the use of past events to nourish future animosity.

Among Murgescu’s ‘suggestions for the teaching of a non-conflictual history’, an increased share of South East European regional history in the economy of SEE curricula and textbooks occupies a prominent position.⁸⁰ She also reminds us that a ‘regional history’ should not only encompass common aspects, but also underline diversity. How to do so without relapsing into the error of sanctioning a nation-centred image of the past is a problem that can be overcome, she claims, through the introduction of multi-cultural views.

Another convinced advocate of this approach is Robertson. He takes the example of twentieth-century Scotland to assert the importance of ‘restoring regional history’, as he puts it, as a necessary precondition for reciprocal respect.⁸¹ History teaching, he claims, has the potential to contribute to the development of mature democracies. To make it a reality, history teaching should first validate local and regional histories, then facilitate the comprehension of the constructed nature and the complexity of history itself, and finally encourage scepticism towards definite narratives. Remarkably, Robertson includes among the ‘suspicious’ narratives that of ‘Europe’, thus swimming against the stream of all those who indicate the so-called ‘European dimension’ as a crucial ingredient of any textbook revision carried out within Europe, and especially within South Eastern Europe. Leclercq, for instance, contends that the introduction of the ‘European dimension’ in the textbooks of the European countries, “far from compromising the chances of continuing to fulfil the requirements of satisfactory historical methodology, can offer wide opportunities for enriching it with new approaches that are vital to a better understanding and appreciation of our own age”.⁸²

⁸⁰ Murgescu, Mirela-Luminita. “Suggestions for the Teaching of a Non-Conflictual History.” *Teaching the History of Southeastern Europe*. Koulouri, Christina, ed. Thessaloniki: Petros Th.Ballidis & Co., 2001. 81-87.

⁸¹ Robertson, John W., and John N. S. Hall. “Restoring ‘Regional’ History Education: a Pre-requisite in Promoting Respect for Other European and World Histories.” *Intercultural Education* 13.3 (2002): 331-339. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO. 29 Jun. 2007. <<http://search.ebscohost.com>>

⁸² Leclercq, Jean-Michel. “The European Dimension in History Teaching: Plural Images and Multiple Standpoints.” *Association for Historical Dialogue and Research*. 19 Jul. 2007. <http://www.hisdialresearch.org/CoE/JM_Leclercq_La_dim_eur_EN.doc> 30.

Neither author makes specific references to the context of SEE, however Robertson's standpoint seems to be largely based on a perception of Europe 'from the inside', characterised by a sort of resistance to the narrative of a unifying Europe, that Scotland, his case study, represents well. Hence, since most SEE countries embody the opposite perspective, one of a strong strive for inclusion, Leclercq's propensity for the introduction of the 'European dimension' into history textbooks appears much more reasonable.

On the other hand, Robertson's claim that history teaching should encourage the apprehension of the constructed nature of history itself is confirmed by the wide acceptance, both in the broader area of education and within the discourse of textbook revision, of the so-called 'multi-perspective approach'. Multi-perspectivity, Stradling maintains, is both a strategy of understanding that takes into account others' perspective and a predisposition to acknowledge that one's own perspective is filtered through a certain cultural context, too.⁸³ Crucially, a 'multi-perspective' and pluralist approach is – or should be – 'by definition' firmly rooted in the historical method, and consequently suffuse history education. An effort to promote its thorough embracing within history teaching in SEE countries appears to be due, besides being highly recommendable.

Quite clearly, both the introduction of a regional, or European, dimension, and the adoption of a multi-perspective approach concur to the gradual eradication of SEE history teaching's major predicament, that is, its 'ethno-centricity', which is precisely Pingel's central concern (see above). In concrete terms, it implies a thorough restructuring of the image of oneself and of the other, i.e. the neighbour, aimed at neutralising prejudices between peoples, social groups and minorities.⁸⁴

The last of Pingel's insightful suggestions has to do with a topic that is "unfortunately central to the European, and the Balkan history of the twentieth century",⁸⁵ namely, with wars. Given the impossibility to write recent history without referring to wars, his advice is to look at the different 'faces' that wars have, namely, to underline their appalling impact on human life avoiding any kind of glorification or exaltation.

Conclusion

The general purpose of this analysis was to investigate the social and political significance of historical memory, by unveiling the inherent non-neutrality of the

⁸³ Stradling, Robert. "Multiperspectivity in History Teaching: a Guide for Teachers." *Council of Europe*. 3 Jul. 2007. <http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Cooperation/education/History_Teaching>

⁸⁴ Xochellis, Panos D. and Fotini I. Toloudi, eds. *The Image of the 'Other' / Neighbour in the School Textbooks of the Balkan Countries*. Athens: Tipothito, 2001.

⁸⁵ UNESCO. *Disarming History. International Conference on Combating Stereotypes and Prejudice in History Textbooks of South-East Europe*. Stockholm: UNESCO, 1999. 45.

educational enterprise – and of history teaching in particular – within the framework of the modern state. In more detail, our aim was to assess the extent to which the national education systems of the “new countries” of Southeast Europe contribute to the transmission of national identity values to the pupils, and to appraise the potentiality of initiatives of history revision in reducing the detrimental effect of ethno-centric education on the prospects of reconciliation in the region.

In order to do so, a broadening of the scope of this study was needed, at least in three directions. Firstly, we needed to construct a solid theoretical background about the essential functions that the educational process plays within modern states, the absence of which would have invalidated, or at least weakened, many findings of our research. Secondly, the willingness to explore the potential of education in serving superordinate goals such as the promotion of peace, tolerance and reconciliation – thus escaping its subjection to the nationalist cause – entailed a consideration of the idea of education and of its goals as devised within the human rights discourse. Thirdly, a broad ‘geographical’ scope was deemed useful for of our research because of the many commonalities that the countries of the region share, especially in terms of their common socialist past and the similar pattern of their post-war nation-building engagement.

The three main points elucidated through the investigation of these three fields, respectively, are the following. The first point is the understanding of the non-neutrality of education, and of its functional role within the nationalist project. Specifically, state education is the apparatus through which a state’s societal culture and national identity are inculcated into the new generations, and the teaching of history in schools, in this respect, takes up the vital task of disseminating the gist of the state’s national, or official, history. The second tenet is that, according to the global human rights discourse, education can (and should) be turned into an instrument to promote mutual understanding, peace and reconciliation, these being the highest goals of education solemnly proclaimed in many relevant international documents.

The third standpoint of our reasoning refers to the emergence of ethno-centric education in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. Here, the willingness of every country to do away with the socialist legacy and fulfil the need to construct ‘new’ national memories to uphold its engagement in the nation-building process has caused a re-arrangement of history education according to markedly one-sided and ethno-centric perspectives. This, in turn, is likely to promote intolerance and foster animosity between national groups, thus hampering the achievement of the highest goals of education.

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