EDUCATION AFTER GENOCIDE: THE CASE OF BOSNIA

Tine Brøndum holds a MA in the Sociology of Religion from University of Copenhagen. She currently works as head of section at the Danish Institute for International Studies, where she works with Holocaust and genocide education. This article is based on her master thesis that analysed the current politics of education in Bosnia-Herzegovina and how this politic influences the narratives on identity and belonging of Bosnian youth in Mostar.

ABSTRACT

Schools are important arenas for the development of identity, basic values and the notion of belonging. Social identities are negotiated and developed through education and interaction in schools. Due to the close relationship between education and identity, politics of education and the content of curricula can be important political tools for national identity building in multiethnic societies. This is especially true in multiethnic societies with a recent history of genocide or identity-based violence.

This article examines how education in post-genocide Bosnia-Herzegovina is influenced by the nationalistic logic of the war, and how this has resulted in three ethnically based school systems where students are divided according to ethnic or national background. Furthermore, the article shows how the Holocaust, the war in Bosnia[1] and the concept of genocide are dealt with in Bosnian history books. In conclusion, through an analysis based on fieldwork done in the multiethnic city Mostar, the article sketches out ways in which Bosnian youths are influenced by these segregated politics in the educational system.[2]

AN INSTRUMENTALIZED HISTORY

History education played a profound role in the formation of a common multiethnic identity in former Yugoslavia. As a part of the Tito slogan "Brotherhood and Unity", solidarity and political loyalty were favoured, while ethnically based conflicts in the region were censored. This was the case when teaching about the Holocaust and the immense ethnic conflicts in the Balkan area during the Second World War. Hence, teaching about those subjects was either taboo or was presented and reinvented in mythical terms.[3]

During the brake up of Yugoslavia, insecurity and nationalistic sentiments increased and a new form of extreme nationalism arose in each of the republics as the state unravelled. An important element in the nationalistic propaganda, which was especially strong in the Serbian media controlled by Slobodan Milosevic, were the atrocities in the region during the Second World War and the mythical battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389 that were invoked and commemorated as being directly connected to the contemporary conflict. Perhaps facilitated by the fact that the common public understanding of historical events in the area was rather weak, historical narratives and myths were used to develop an identity based on feelings of danger and the need for protection. The effect, according to Mary Kaldor, was, that "the Serbian public experienced a virtual war long before the real war was to take place – a virtual war, that made it difficult to distinguish truth from fiction so that war became a continuum in which the 1389 battle of Kosovo, the Second World War and the war in Bosnia were all part of the same phenomenon."[4]

WAR AND PEACE IN BOSNIA

A short outline of the war is necessary in order to understand the connection between the logic of the war and the logic of the current Bosnian educational system. The Bosnian war ran from 1992 to 1995 and was fought by the Serb dominated Yugoslavian National Army (JNA) against various paramilitary Bosniac[5] and Croat armies. In the beginning, Croat and Bosniac forces fought side by side against Serbia-dominated JNA and Bosnian Serb Army. In 1993 this balance changed, as Croat paramilitary troops

"The consequence of the Bosnian state structure is that Bosnia today holds no less than 13 ministers of education."

turned against their former allies, the Muslim Bosniac troops. During the war, atrocities were committed by each of the three ethnic groups. However, the vast majority of civilians casualties were Muslim Bosniacs.[6] The war culminated in the 1995 Srebrenica genocide, where more than 8000 Muslim Bosniacs were killed while under the protection of UN troops in the Srebrenica "safe area".

In 1994, the signing of the Washington Agreement ended the war between the Croat and Bosniac forces. This agreement established the Bosniac-Croat Federation, consisting of ten cantons, each with a clear mono-ethnic composition. Since the cantons were based on the ethnic divisions, the agreement has been widely accused of recognizing and awarding the ethnic cleansing that took place during the war. Furthermore, the agreement has served to perpetuate the power structures that grew from the war in the current administration of the federation.[7] The Dayton Peace Agreement that ended the war in 1995 also established the new state Bosnia and Herzegovina. The establishment of a Croat Bosniac federation and a Serb republic has served to make the peace and reconciliation process extremely difficult.[8] The severe problems with education can be linked back to the peace agreements, to the ethnic composition of the state and to the simple fact that education was not explicitly mentioned as a part of the peace and reconciliation process. Education has been widely neglected and left to nationalistic politics in each of the ten cantons and the mono-ethnic Serb Republic.[9]

EDUCATION IN BOSNIA TODAY

A consequence of the Bosnian state structure is that Bosnia now has 13 ministers of education. Since they each represent a certain ethno-national enclave, regional politics are dominated by a highly politicized nationalistic discourse and major differences in education exist between the three ethno-national groups. Furthermore, the system has let three different educational systems develop, in which children and youths are divided according to their ethnic group. Children from mixed marriages are forced to choose one identity.[10] This means that Bosnia's Serb, Bosniac and Croat young generations attend different schools and follow different curricula, each with pedagogical materaial designated to that specific ethno-national group. In fact, until recently several of the school books used in the Serb and Croat curricula was developed for pupils in the neighbouring countries Serbia and Croatia, and have Serbia and Croatia as their point of reference in subjects as history and geography.

The main argument for the three program school system is the three languages that have developed from the former Serbo-Croatian since 1996. The three program school system that was developed in 1996 was inspired from the Swiss bilingual school system.[11] However, the divided schools and different curricula are highly problematic because they allow nationalistic and hostile agendas to thrive.

CONTENT OF THE EDUCATION: HIDDEN MESSAGES AND INSTRUMENTALIZED WARS

Dealing with the break up of Yugoslavia and the war in Bosnia is highly sensitive and politicized throughout Bosnia today. This is reflected in Bosnian schoolbooks in two ways. Due to the controversial nature of the subject, many school books make no mention of the war in Bosnia. The recommendations from the Counsel of Europe in 2000 suggest a moratorium on teaching about the period from 1992 to 1995 until historians in Bosnia have reached a common approach towards the teaching of this period.[12] Where school books do include the subject, the war is most often described in an unbalanced way. The suffering, atrocities and actions described only reflect one group's perspective. In an analysis of seven of the most often used books, Heike Karge concludes that the war in Bosnia is present in some books through "hidden messages" even if the book does not explicitly cover the subject.[13]

While the recent war in Bosnia is left out of many Bosnian school books, all deal with the Second World War, which also is viewed very differently by the Bosnian population. It has thus become relevant to investigate the role of the Second World War and the Holocaust in these books. In many countries, Holocaust education is seen as a way to introduce human rights education to students and promote tolerance, while also serving to help prevent prevent future atrocities. A different approach seems apparent in several Bosnian school books. Here the Holocaust is described in the same hostile way as during the brake-up of Yugoslavia, narrated through detailed descriptions of mass killings, the perpetrator group and the suffering of one particular group. From this Karge concludes that the analysed books "serve the aim not of delivering a historic account, but of denouncing 'the other', the perpetrator, as a brutal enemy".[14] In the same way, he points out the existence of "hidden messages" in several of the books that relate to the term "genocide". In some of the books the term is used only with reference to the national

group to which the book is directed and without any historical explanation of the term. In other examples, references to genocide committed against European Jews by the Nazi regime are marginal or absent. Hence, Karge concludes that: "These narratives obviously are developed to serve the purpose of establishing a hierarchy of victims, whereby their own group is presented as having suffered the most from the crimes committed by the other".[15]

Since 1996, the international community has been widely involved in pushing for various reforms in the area. However, there is no minister for education at the state level, and each of the canton or republic level ministers are interested in maintaining the status quo, so adopted agreements on school book reforms and the like are not necessarily implemented.[16] This has been confirmed by the 2008 school book study, that investigated whether the history school books approved for the 2007/2008 school year met the standards formulated in the "Guidelines for writing and evaluation of history school books in BiH" from 2006. Karge concludes that only two out of seven books analyzed met the standards, and that even though notable progress has occurred in the recent years, numerous examples of hate speech and hidden messages denouncing "the other" still occurs in some of the most widely used books.[17]

THE EFFECT OF SEPARATE SCHOOL PROGRAMS ON PUPILS

While examining school books can give an indication about the messages that are being delivered in the classroom, analysing the actual effect on the students is a much more difficult task. How can one measure how education is being perceived by the pupils? Is it possible to identify the actual effect on students? Regardless of the methodological challenges, it is highly relevant to ask how Bosnian students are influenced by their education, and how lessons in "identity based" subjects such as history and religion are reflected in their thoughts on identity and belonging. While researching in the multiethnic but now highly divided city Mostar, I conducted interviews with, and collected questionnaires from, Croat and Bosniac pupils. As these students attended three different types of high schools, including the most common "mono-ethnic" schools, a "semi-integrated" gymnasium as well as the first fully integrated high school program in Bosnia, it was possible to compare student responses across the different school types and across their ethno-national groupings.[18]

The student's narratives are complex and reflect ordinary problems of youth, such as thoughts on identity, as well as concerns for the future. It must be mentioned that it is not possible to state one single source for the narratives, since the students are influenced by family, friends and society in different ways. However, tendencies in the 10 interviews and 111 questionnaires indicate certain similarities in the narratives expressed that cross national and educational boundaries.

An analysis of the student responses suggests that the differences in student perception of national and religious identity as well as their view on history are related to the school they attend. In the answers from the Croat school, the importance of separate classes, separate languages, and the differences in history are stressed. Several students in the Croat school express rather nationalistic tendencies and almost all understand the term "multicultural" as something undesirable. Some students said that they always present themselves as coming from Croatia and not from Bosnia. The majority of the students do not wish to integrate with the Bosniacs and reject the possibility of integration. As is also the case with the Bosniac mono-ethnic school, most of them rarely or never cross the river to the part of town where "the other" group lives.[19] It seems as if the ongoing division in society is something that the students live with, and have become accustomed to, without giving it much attention. Many students wish to integrate with Croatia and move on without having to worry about Bosnia's troubled past. At the Bosniac mono-ethnic school, the students do not express the same desire to move on. The students give more importance to history as a source of identity and express more interest in learning from the past. Here, just as at the Croat school, it is evident that there is a lack of interaction with "the others" that has led to a lack of knowledge and understanding of the war in the 1990's as well as the current situation.. Many do not know the facts of the war and those who do have only heard about the conflict from family or friends. Likewise, some do not know why the schools are separate, but hold strong personal opinions on the matter. As an explanation of the separation of the schools, one Bosniac respondent said "I don't know, maybe it is due to the war. Maybe the Croatians and Serbians hate us. Because *they* made this war. We didn't. *They* wanted to

> "When analysing the answers of the students, several factors points to the tendency that differences in the students perceptions on national and religious identity and in their general view on history are related to the school they attend."

take everything from us. They wanted to take all the Muslim places". After examining all the schools, it has become clear that the majority of the Bosniacs wish, unlike the Croat students, to have integrated classes and more interaction with others. These findings are supported by recent research showing that students who have been taught by the Croat curriculum have an increased tendency to develop nationalistic and exclusive attitudes. This contrasts with the students studying under the Bosniac program. Interestingly, this is also the case when Bosniac students follow the Croat curriculum. In those cases, the Bosniac students expressed stronger Bosnian nationalistic orientation than the students following the Bosniac program.[20]

The students who show the strongest wish to integrate and interact with students from the other group are the students at the integrated and international United World College, that opened in 2007 with a program for youths from all national groups. Due to the international curriculum, they use different school books than their peers and are expected to express independent thought and demonstrate critical thinking. This seems to be reflected in their responses which show an open, positive and reflexive attitude towards their relationship with their peers from the other group. Furthermore, those students are amongst the strongest voices against the separation of the schools and the general division of society. Instead, many of them express a strong belief in the integration of Bosnian schools. On another note, it is also worth mentioning that these students express strong ties to their national group and they show the strongest responses in religious affiliation. These answers indicate that school integration will not undermine national identity. This is important since it often is precisely this fear of losing national identity and national rights that serves as the main arguments in favour of separate schools.[21]

CONCLUDING REMARKS – EDUCATION TOWARDS PEACE

The immense political focus on differences and the division of the school systems has intensified and hardened the contendgin positions of the ethnic groups that developed in former Yugoslavia during the 1980's. Furthermore, the situation in the Bosnian schools creates severe problems for the future integration of younger generations. The seriousness of the present situation in Bosnia is evident. Some scholars report that the ethnic tensions between the groups are as immense today, fourteen years after the war ended, as just before the war. Several reports state that education and the segregated school system plays a significant role in this tension.

Needless to say, the war in Bosnia is of high importance for the educational situation in the country today. However, I find evidence for the fact that the war is also used as an argument for dividing the Bosnian society in order to resist future integration. Thus, the war was the culmination of an extreme nationalism and also serves as an argument for the continuation of the exact same nationalism. Following this argument, there seems to be a danger of creating a self-fulfilling argument where ethnically neutral interaction becomes impossible.

Results from my fieldwork indicate that younger generations express no reasons for disliking each other but do not find ways to interact with each other or express themselves in ethnically neutral ways. The findings from my interviews with young Bosnians stress the urgent need to neutralize this politicized area and to work more actively towards an anthropology of multiple identities that can coexist instead of being seen as mutually exclusive. One important way of obtaining these results can be through an approach to education where Holocaust education as well as teaching about the Bosnian war is used in an inclusive manner to promote tolerance, understanding and empathy instead of exclusiveness and hostility.

NOTES

1 For simplicity's sake I will use the name Bosnia as a synonym for the official name of the country, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

2 The article is based on the master thesis "separate identities. An analysis of school politics and identity in Bosnia". The thesis, written in Danish can be found at the webpage: http://diis.dk/sw29903.asp.

3 Levy 2004, 8.

4 Kaldor 2001, 39-40.

5 The term Bosniac is the official name for Bosnias Muslim population. Due to the fact that this group also includes a great number of secular Muslims, the term is in general viewed as referring to nationality and ethnicity as well as religion.

6 Weiss 2008.

7 Ficher 2006, 301. Campbell 1998, 151.

8 Kaldor 2001, 63-64, Torsti 2003, Campbell 1998.

9 Torsti 2003.

10 Karge, 2008, chapter 3. Torsti 2003.

11 Torsti 2003.

12 Karge 2008, 7.

13 Karge 2008, 27-33.

14 Karge 2008, 14.

15 Karge 2008, 15.

16 OSCE 2005, 1-5. Kaldor 2003, 169.

[17] The 7 books examined in the OSCE study are the most often used books for primary schools in both the Serb republic, and in the Croat and the Bosniac programs in the federation.

[18] Since almost al of the Serb population living in Mostar before the war left the city during or after the war, my focus was only on the Croat and Bosniac population in Mostar.

[19] Mostar is separated in two parts by the Neretva river. During the war and in the years following many inhabitants moved or fled to the other side. This means that the city today is divided in a Croat western side and a Bosniac eastern side. For many, there is almost no interaction between the two.

[20] Levi 2007.

[21] Levi 2007, Friedmann 2004.

REFERENCES

Campbell, David, National Deconstruction. *Violence, Identity, and Justice in Bosnia*. University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

Freedman, Sarah Warshauer et. al., Public education and social reconstruction in Bosnia and Hercegovina and Croatia. In: Stover, Eric and Weinstein, Harvey M. (Eds.): *My Neighbor, My Enemy. Justice and Community in the Aftermath of Mass Atrocity*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Kaldor, Mary, New and Old Wars. *Organized Violence in a Global Era*. Polity, Cambridge, 2001.

Karge, Heike, *20th Century History in the Textbooks of Bosnia and Hercegovina: An analysis of books used for the final grades of primary school.* The Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, Braunschweig, Germany 2008.

Levi, Naomi, *Learning Identity: A Structural Equation Model of Secondary School Students' State and Ethno-National Identities in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia.* 2007. (At the time of research, unpublished part of the future Ph.d. of the auther).

OSCE: "Raising Debate: Is BiH Respecting its International Commitments in the Field of Education Questions for the Citizens of BiH". OSCE, Sarajevo 2005.

OSCE: Compendium of Selected Reports on Education in Bosnia-Herzegovina 2004-2005. OSCE, Sarajevo 2005.

Torsti, Pilvi, *Divergent Stories, Convergent Attitudes. A study on the presence of history, History textbooks and the thinking of youth in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina.* Taifuuni, Helsinki, 2003.

Weiss, Birte, Krigens arvinger. Gyldendal, København 2008.