



WER IST WALTER?

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Edited by

Elma Hašimbegović, Nicolas Moll and Ivo Pejaković

Approaches to Reading the Competing Narratives of World War II Resistance in Schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mirna Jančić Doyle

Introduction

Primary education about local resistance to Nazism during World War II (WWII) represents a contested epistemic space in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), with schools teaching competing historical interpretations of who were the forces of resistance, the local collaborators, and the biggest victims.¹ This phenomenon is a consequence of the Bosnian War of 1992 to 1995, from which BiH emerged as an independent country, but politically and culturally divided between three dominant national groups: Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks. This included a split in what used to be their shared official history, which has continued to impact politics² and public discourse,³ and has especially affected compulsory education in BiH.

Before the 1990s war, as a constitutive republic within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina promoted a strictly controlled narrative of WWII.⁴ This narrative was presented through

- 1 See Pilvi Torsti, *Divergent Stories, Convergent Attitudes* (Helsinki: Kustannus Oy Taifuuni, 2003); and Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc and Tamara Pavasović Trošt, "Who Were the Anti-Fascists? Divergent Interpretations of WWII in Contemporary Post-Yugoslav History Textbooks", in *The Use and Abuse of Memory: Interpreting World War II in Contemporary European Politics*, ed. Christian Karner and Bram Mertens (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2013), 173-192, DOI:10.4324/9781351296564-9.
- 2 For an introduction to the key challenges to BiH's democracy, see Tihomir Cipek, "Crisis of Democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Is Direct Democracy the Answer?" *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Sklodowska, sectio M – Balceniensis* 1(1-2) (February 2017), 87-101, <https://journals.umcs.pl/bc/article/view/4696>.
- 3 Vjeran Pavlaković, "Memory politics in the Former Yugoslavia", *Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej* 18, no. 2 (December 2020), 9-32, <https://doi.org/10.36874/RIESW.2020.2.1>.
- 4 See Wolfgang Hoepken, "War, Memory, and Education in a Fragmented Society: the Case of Yugoslavia", *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 13, no. 1 (December 1999), 190-227,

a single history textbook authorised for use in the final grade of primary school. During the breakup of Yugoslavia, as a contested “memoryscape” emerged among the country’s national groups,⁵ the strictly controlled, single historical narrative diverged into multiple, antagonistic official interpretations. These became separately inscribed in new, revised school textbooks. With the start of the war in BiH in 1992, students began studying from revised, imported textbooks from Serbia if they went to school in Serb-army controlled areas of BiH, or from Croatia if they lived in majority Croat areas; students in schools under Bosnian Army control continued using the socialist-era textbook for another two years. After 2003, when all textbooks were again being published in BiH, history remained a so-called national subject, whereby each national group continued the wartime practice of learning exclusively according to their own textbook(s).⁶ This system was enabled by the fragmentation of the educational administration⁷ and the consolidation of three curricula in BiH, independently serving the Bosniak, Croat or Serb majority areas of the country. This paper therefore refers to the authorised history textbooks in BiH as the Bosnian-language, Croatian-language, and Serbian-language narratives (the latter two include the textbooks imported from neighbouring Croatia and Serbia that were used in BiH from 1992).

The history textbook holds a prominent role in the education systems in BiH, where it is used by the majority of teachers as the primary teaching tool in the classroom.⁸ The international community organisations in BiH

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325499013001>; Torsti, *Divergent Stories*; Tamara Pavasović Trošt and Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc, “History textbooks in war-time: The use of Second World War narratives in 1990s war propaganda in the former Yugoslavia”, *War & Society* 39, no. 4 (October 2020), 290-309, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07292473.2020.1811472>.

5 Pavlaković, “Memory politics”, 9.

6 For an overview of the development of the post-war textbook policy in BiH, see Melisa Forić Plasto, “Historiografija o Bosni i Hercegovini u bosanskohercegovačkim udžbenicima historije (2000–2017)”, in *Prilozi o historiografiji Bosne i Hercegovine (2001-2017) II*, ed. Dževad Juzbašić and Zijad Šehić (Sarajevo: Akademija nauka i umjetnosti Bosne i Hercegovine, 2020), 277-300, <https://doi.org/10.5644/pi2020.186.26>.

7 Following the 1992-1995 war, BiH was administratively divided into two entities: Republika Srpska (with its own education ministry) and the Federation BiH (whose ministry of education had limited powers). The Federation BiH entity was further divided into ten cantons, each with its own education ministry. The area around the northern town of Brčko became a special district shared by both entities but with its own self-government and education department.

8 Heike Karge and Katarina Batarilo, *Reform in the Field of History in Education Bosnia and Herzegovina* (July 2008), https://repository.gei.de/bitstream/handle/11428/264/Karge_Batarilo_Reform.pdf

spearheaded numerous efforts to address antagonistic schoolbook content.⁹ Despite marked progress, the content of all authorised textbooks continues to “contribute to the politicisation and instrumentalisation of the past”,¹⁰ and two of the curricula explicitly link their objectives with the students’ national identity.¹¹ The opening of the textbook markets in other countries of former Yugoslavia in 2013 was heralded as a sign of the democratisation of history teaching in schools,¹² while two of the three curricula in BiH currently authorise the use of only a single history textbook for the final grade of primary school.¹³

There exist extensive studies of the revisions of school history textbooks in BiH and the former Yugoslavia since the 1980s.¹⁴ The next section

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- 9 Falk Pingel, “From Ownership to Intervention – or Vice Versa? Textbook Revision in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, in *Transition and the Politics of History Education in Southeastern Europe*, ed. Augusta Dimou (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2009), 251-306.
- 10 Heike Karge, *History Teaching Materials on 1992-1995 in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Building Trust or Deepening Divides?* (Sarajevo: OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2022), iv, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/1/541980.pdf>; also see Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists”.
- 11 See BiH, Federacija BiH, Županija Zapadnohercegovačka, Ministarstvo prosvjete, znanosti, kulture i športa, *Nastavni plan i program za devetogodišnje osnovne škole na hrvatskome jeziku u Bosni i Hercegovini* (July 2008), <https://mozks-ksb.ba/dokumenti/nastavni-plan-i-program/>; Republika Srpska, Ministarstvo prosvjete i kulture, Republički pedagoški zavod, *Nastavni plan i program za osnovno obrazovanje i vaspitanje* (Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva: Istočno Sarajevo, 2014), <https://www.rpz-rs.org/7/NPP>.
- 12 Tamara Pavasović Trošt, “War crimes as political tools: Bleiburg and Jasenovac in history textbooks”, in *History and politics in the Western Balkans: changes at the turn of the millennium*, ed. Srđan Jovanović (Center for Good Governance Studies, 2013), 13-41, https://www.academia.edu/4097311/War_Crimes_as_Political_Tools_Bleiburg_and_Jasenovac_in_History_Textbooks_1973_2012.
- 13 For the 2022/23 school year, the RS Ministry of Education and Culture authorised a single history textbook, published by the RS entity Institute for Textbooks. Since 2011, the Federation entity Ministry of Education and Science has selected and approved a single history textbook for use in the Bosnian language, following an open call; the ministries of education of cantons with large populations of children belonging to the Croatian national group, authorised three history textbooks for use by children following the Croatian-language programme (two of which were available to the author on the open market).
- 14 Some examples include Hoepken, “War, Memory, and Education”; Pingel, “From Ownership to Intervention”; Torsti, *Divergent Stories*; Emir Filipović et al., *Zloupotreba istorije u procesima koji su doveli do posljednjeg rata u Bosni i Hercegovini: Okvir za promjenu paradigme u izučavanju istorije u školama BiH*, ed. Edin Radušić (Sarajevo: EUROCLIO HIP BiH, 2015), <http://cliohipbih.ba/materijali-3/>; Karge and Batarilo, *Reform in the Field*; Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists”; Trošt and Trbovc, “History textbooks”; Fond otvoreno društvo BiH and proMENTE socijalna istraživanja, *Obrazovanje u BiH: Čemu (ne)učimo djecu? Analiza sadržaja udžbenika nacionalne grupe predmeta u osnovnim školama* (Sarajevo: Mas Media Sarajevo and Fond otvoreno društvo BiH, 2017), <https://www.promente.org/downloads/cemuucimodjecu.pdf>; Heike Karge, *History Teaching*; Plasto, “Historiografija”; Vera Katz, “Analiza udžbenika historije u Bosni i Hercegovini (8. i 9. razred osnovne škole, 4. razred gimnazije i 1. i 2. razred stručnih škola)”, *Forum za tranzicionu pravdu* 5

underlines the main points on which the narratives of local WWII resistance diverged in the textbooks for the final year of primary school in the country, building on the existing research, and presenting this author's primary observations of the socialist-era and most recent textbooks used in BiH. In the third section, the paper reviews the discussion about BiH's competing schoolbook narratives and explores alternative entry points for approaching the history textbook itself as part of a historical and cultural archive.

The diverging narratives of WWII resistance in BiH textbooks

Summary of the socialist-era textbook narrative in BiH

The main patterns of the narrative of WWII resistance within socialist-era textbooks in BiH can be found in two editions published by the same authors in 1990 and 1991.¹⁵ Their focus was on presenting the Partisans' multi-ethnic, "people's liberation struggle" against fascism,¹⁶ in pursuit of national equality and a socialist Yugoslavia. The books also emphasised the Partisans' contribution to ordinary people's agency in determining their political future without the interference of foreign powers. The narrative presented that the Partisans (and the Communist Party as their political organiser) represented the true will of the people and led an independent, grassroots resistance against the bourgeoisie, the Axis occupying forces, and the political influence of the Allies. It posited how this newfound sense

(December 2015), 52-63, https://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Forum_5.pdf. For more scholarship on the diverging history textbook narratives published in Serbia and Croatia, see for example Magdalena Najbar-Agičić and Damir Agičić, "The Use and Misuse of History Teaching in 1990s Croatia", in *Democratic Transition in Croatia. Value Transformation, Education & Media*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet and Davorka Matic (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 193-223; Dubravka Stojanović, "Slow Burning: History Textbooks in Serbia, 1993 – 2008", in *Transition and the Politics of History Education in Southeastern Europe*, ed. Augusta Dimou (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2009), 141-158, <https://www.gei.de/en/research/publications>; Snježana Koren and Branislava Baranović, "What Kind of History Education Do We Have After Eighteen Years of Democracy in Croatia? Transition, Intervention, and History Education Politics (1990 – 2008)", in *Transition and the Politics of History Education in Southeastern Europe*, ed. Augusta Dimou (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2009), 91-140, <https://www.gei.de/en/research/publications>.

15 Stanko Perazić and Husein Serdarević, *Istorija-Povijest udžbenik za VIII razred osnovne škole*, 1st ed. (Sarajevo: IP Svjetlost, d.d. Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 1991); Stanko Perazić and Husein Serdarević, *Istorija za 8. razred osnovne škole* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, Zavod za udžbenike, 1990).

16 Perazić and Serdarević, *Istorija za 8.razred*, 139.

of grassroots agency both attracted and served the majority of people in BiH. This was illustrated through descriptions of Partisans educating local people as they struggled with widespread illiteracy in the 1940s and through the lack of agency people felt when they found themselves in the WWII crossfire between the Ustasha and Chetniks fight for control over territory.

The narrative explicitly condemned the Ustasha and Chetniks as local military formations that directly collaborated with the Axis powers and committed “mass crimes against the people, especially over Muslims, Croats and Serb patriots”¹⁷ in pursuit of “a pure nation”.¹⁸ The Chetniks were presented as a nationalist and a monarchist movement. Meanwhile, the Ustasha were shown as fascists who in 1941 established the Axis puppet state called the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) across most of modern Croatia, BiH and Srem (part of modern Serbia). The narrative stated that the Partisans, having reached eastern Bosnia in the early period of the war, had to “explain to the people the Chetnik betrayal”¹⁹ in order to win them over to their side. It presented the Allies as ignorant of the Chetniks’ collaboration with the Axis, supporting them as the armed units of the exiled Yugoslav King Peter II, and hoping through 1944 that the Chetniks would enable the “return of the bourgeoisie to power in Yugoslavia”.²⁰

The socialist-era narrative maintained that the Partisans had united the people of different nationalities in BiH as an antidote to the “fratricidal war” instigated by the Ustasha and Chetniks: it was through the “huge sacrifice as part of the people’s liberation struggle, that [Serbs, Croats and Muslims] broke down all those forces that had separated them and which had planted hatred among them”.²¹ The narrative prominently presented the establishment of the civilian government of BiH as part of the Partisan political conventions known as ZAVNOBIH (State Antifascist Council for the People’s Liberation of BiH), and of the new Yugoslav state foundations laid at AVNOJ (Antifascist Council for the People’s Liberation of Yugoslavia) conventions. It also presented a detailed account of the key Partisan military battles and successes. In a tone of rightful vengeance, the textbook described the Yugoslav Army at the close of the war “destroying tens of

17 Ibid., 105.

18 Ibid., 104.

19 Ibid., 105.

20 Perazić and Serdarević, *Istorija-Povijest*, 112.

21 Perazić and Serdarević, *Istorija za 8.razred*, 104, 139.

thousands of Ustasha, Chetniks, White Guardists and others” for their war-time collaboration and crimes.²²

Bosnian-language textbooks: Key changes from the socialist-era narrative

From the first revised textbook published in 1994 to the present, research has shown that Bosnian-language textbooks have continued the socialist-era narrative’s positive treatment of the Partisans, retaining the overall focus on their multiethnic resistance and military victories during the war, without any negative connotations of the movement.²³ Textbooks from 2007²⁴ and the contemporary textbook published in 2012²⁵ do not mention the Partisan executions of prisoners of war who had been captured at Bleiburg, near the Slovenian-Austrian border in 1945. Intrinsic to the resistance narrative of the contemporary textbook is the unity of the Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks as they “renewed the statehood of BiH” as part of the Partisan political conventions of ZAVNOBIH,²⁶ and the importance of the AVNOJ conventions. This narrative mentions that the initial composition of the Partisans was largely Serbs, where the Serb population in east Herzegovina was the first to engage in resistance in response to the “mass terror” by Ustasha in NDH.²⁷

Researchers noted the first key changes in the Bosnian-language narrative on resistance in the first revised textbook published in 1994.²⁸ For example, it ascribed Serbs’ support for the Chetniks during WWII as a consequence of their embedded hostility towards non-Serbs,²⁹ and argued that the Muslims³⁰ were the biggest victims of and fighters against WWII “genocide” as a percentage of their total population.³¹ Researchers noted how this

22 Perazić and Serdarević, *Istorija-Povijest*, 122.

23 Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascist?”

24 Ibid.

25 Izet Šabotić and Mirza Čehajić, *Historija: udžbenik za deveti razred devetogodišnje osnovne škole* (NAM Tuzla, Vrijeme Zenica, 2012).

26 Ibid., 162.

27 Ibid., 157.

28 Trošt and Trbovc, “History textbooks”.

29 Ibid., 300.

30 The terms “Muslims”, “Bosnian Muslims” and “Bosniaks” are used in different Bosnian language textbooks to denote the same national group.

31 Trošt and Trbovc, “History textbooks”, 303; Torsti, *Divergent Stories*, 205.

textbook argued that the NDH appropriated Muslim identity³² and avoided labelling WWII Muslim military groups and citizens who had collaborated with the fascists as collaborators.³³ Only the last of these revisions remains in the textbook authorised for use since 2012. That textbook argues that “one smaller part of Bosniak citizens” supported the NDH Ustasha regime, while the rest sought “autonomy under German protection” and formed self-organised units, most of which joined the Partisans from the end of 1942.³⁴ The narrative mentions the existence of an SS division composed of Bosnian Muslims, but remains silent about its crimes, presenting it only in a positive light – that its members staged “the only example of a mutiny in the German army during the Second World War”.³⁵

Echoing the socialist-era narrative, the textbooks published in the late 2000s presented the Chetniks’ character as nationalistic and collaborationist, with the key aim of creating a Greater Serbia.³⁶ In the 2012 textbook, Chetniks are presented as having wanted to “renew Yugoslavia and within it create a ‘homogenous Serbia’, which would be ethnically pure Serbian”. Because of this, they conducted “mass slaughter” of Bosniaks.³⁷ The Ustasha are presented in the context of their co-opting of BiH territory and their persecution of Serbs, Jews, Roma, communists, including anti-regime Croats and Bosniaks. The textbook states that “a large number of innocent people” died at the NDH concentration camp of Jasenovac and other camps.³⁸

Serbian-language textbooks: Key changes from the socialist-era narrative

The revised Serbian-language textbooks present a critical case against the Partisans. Researchers noted how the 2009 textbook criticised the Partisans for their ideological and Soviet-linked aspects and for wanting to split Serb territory.³⁹ The 2022 edition does not mention the latter, but still presents the Partisan resistance as a direct result of a “call from Moscow”, where their

32 Torsti, *Divergent Stories*, 205.

33 Trošt and Trbovc, “History textbooks”, 298.

34 Šabotić and Čehajić, *Historija*, 155.

35 Ibid., 155. On the different interpretations of the mutiny in Villefranche-de-Rouergue in 1943, see Xavier Bougarel’s contribution in the present publication. [Editor’s note]

36 Trbovc and Trošt, “Were the Anti-Fascists”.

37 Šabotić and Čehajić, *Historija*, 155-156.

38 Ibid., 155.

39 Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists”, 177.

“freedom fighting” went hand in hand with their anti-monarchist and anti-capitalist “socialist revolution” along the Soviet model.⁴⁰ Simultaneously, it presents the dominance of Serbs within Partisan resistance until 1943, noting that Serbs experienced the highest wartime losses. It portrays Serbs as the first antifascists, who self-organised into local, unaffiliated uprisings in villages, ignorant of politics, and who were “torn” between the Partisans and the Chetniks.⁴¹ The 2009 edition did not explain what happened after the Partisans’ capture of several hundred thousand “German and quisling soldiers...[and] parts of the Chetnik army” in 1945,⁴² while the textbook published in 2022 explicitly states that the Partisans “executed...thousands, mostly Ustasha” prisoners of war, which included “the remains of the German, quisling, and Chetnik forces.”⁴³

Researchers noted how the revised textbooks published in 1993 and 1994 began describing the Chetniks as antifascists,⁴⁴ in direct contrast to the socialist-era narrative. In later textbook editions, researchers found that the Chetniks were presented as complete equals to the Partisans in the context of antifascist resistance. These editions portrayed the two movements initially fighting together against the Axis occupiers before splitting over different war strategies.⁴⁵ The researchers noted that the 2009 edition remained silent about Chetnik war crimes, and that it mentioned the Chetniks’ collaboration with the occupying forces only in the context that the Partisans blamed them for it.⁴⁶ The textbook published in 2022⁴⁷ explicitly states that the Chetnik units collaborated with the Axis occupiers, but does not further contextualise this information within claims that Chetniks were an *antifascist* movement, nor beyond the time-specificity of the year 1942. Collaboration is ascribed to the low “fighting spirit” of Chetnik soldiers, brought on by their leader’s strategy of refraining from battle while “waiting out the outcomes of the war on the main fronts.”⁴⁸ This textbook also

40 Dragiša Vasić, *Istorija za 9. razred osnovne škole* (Istočno Novo Sarajevo: JP Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva a.d., 2022), 129.

41 *Ibid.*, 129.

42 Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists”, 183.

43 Vasić, *Istorija*, 135.

44 See Stojanović, “Slow Burning”, 151, and Trošt and Trbovc, “History Textbooks”, 301.

45 Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists”.

46 *Ibid.*, 178.

47 Vasić, *Istorija*.

48 *Ibid.*, 130.

briefly notes the Chetniks' "crimes" against Muslims and Croats, motivated by "revenge because of the crimes against Serbs within NDH".⁴⁹

The contemporary textbook presents the character of the Chetnik movement also as "national and civic", aiming at the "liberation of Yugoslavia, a renewal of the monarchy [...] and of the prewar capitalist order".⁵⁰ It underlines the Western powers' initial support for the Chetniks as an antifascist resistance force, as the army of the exiled Yugoslav King, and contextualises the fighting between Chetniks and Partisans as a "fratricidal war".⁵¹ Alongside the Partisan military successes and the 1943 AVNOJ convention, the narrative introduces the equal significance of the 1944 Chetnik political congress for the future political organisation of Yugoslavia. It presents a visually marginal (in smaller font, at the edge of a page) brief mention of the first ZAVNOBIH convention.⁵² The textbook argues that from 1943 onwards, with the anticipated advance of the Soviet Red Army into Eastern Europe, the British pressured the exiled King to reject the Chetniks in favour of the Partisans, calculating that such a move would provide the Allies with some degree of future influence in the region.

An analysis of the first revised Serbian-language textbooks noted their intensified portrayal of Serbs' suffering at the NDH's Jasenovac concentration camp, which was endorsed by the Catholic Church.⁵³ The 2022 edition continues this approach: it refers to Ustasha crimes as "genocidal politics" against Jews, Roma, and Serbs, with mass killing of up to 600,000 people in the NDH concentration camp of Jasenovac, and notes the persecution of the Serbian Orthodox clergy.⁵⁴ It presents the Catholic Church and its archbishop as among the chief supporters of Ustasha crimes and the citizens of Zagreb as having welcomed their German occupiers "with delight".⁵⁵ It further states that the Bosniaks in some parts of the country joined the Ustasha units "en masse...and committed crimes" but that otherwise the majority of Muslims remained "passive" during the war.⁵⁶

49 Ibid., 131.

50 Ibid., 128.

51 Ibid., 128.

52 Ibid., 134.

53 Tamara Pavasović Trošt, "Ruptures and Continuities in Nationhood Narratives: Reconstructing the Nation through History Textbooks in Serbia and Croatia", *Nations and Nationalism* 24, no.3 (June 2018), 716-740, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12433>.

54 Vasić, *Istorija*, 124-126.

55 Ibid., 121.

56 Ibid., 125.

Croatian-language textbooks: Key changes from the socialist-era narrative

The two contemporary textbooks⁵⁷ portray the Partisans in a conflicted manner. They critically focus on their quest for power (also noted in research about textbooks published in the late 2000s⁵⁸), their Soviet-inspired socialist victory, and their war crimes. However, they also positively present the Croatians' role in the origins of Partisan resistance, emphasising the Croatian Partisans' contribution to the European antifascist struggle. Although both textbooks reference the Croatian Partisans as having been part of the pan-Yugoslav resistance movement, one of them stresses the significance of the Partisan resistance and related events primarily within the geographic parameters of modern Croatia⁵⁹; the same observation had been made of the textbook used in 1999.⁶⁰ The contemporary textbooks positively treat the confirmation of civilian governments of BiH and Croatia at the ZAVNOBIH and ZAVNOH (State Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Croatia) conventions and of a new Yugoslavia at the AVNOJ conventions.

Researchers noted that the first Croatian-language textbooks published in the 1990s already built a critical case against the Partisans through a heavy emphasis on their reprisals against Croat civilians and prisoners of war at Bleiburg in 1945.⁶¹ The 1995 edition described the Partisans at Bleiburg as having been predominantly Serbs⁶²; one of the currently used textbooks calls them "Yugoslav soldiers".⁶³ The two contemporary textbooks have continued a narrative from an earlier generation of books (analysed in 2013⁶⁴). This narrative holds that at Bleiburg, the Partisans killed a part of the "fugitives from the area of NDH (including some Chetniks and Slovenians)"⁶⁵ or "Croat soldiers and civilians",⁶⁶ and forced the rest of them on a

57 Stjepan Bekavac, Mario Jareb and Miroslav Rozić, *Povijest 9: udžbenik za 9. razred devetogodišnje osnovne škole*, 4th ed. (Mostar: Alfa Mostar, 2022); Krešimir Erdelja, Igor Stojaković, Ivan Madžar, Nikola Lovrinović, *Povijest 9: udžbenik povijesti za deveti razred devetogodišnje osnovne škole* (Mostar: Školska naklada, 2018).

58 Trbovc and Trošt, "Who Were the Anti-Fascists".

59 Bekavac, Jareb and Rozić, *Povijest 9*.

60 Torsti, *Divergent Stories*.

61 Trošt and Trbovc, "History textbooks", 300.

62 Torsti, *Divergent Stories*, 222.

63 Bekavac, Jareb and Rozić, *Povijest 9*, 107.

64 Trbovc and Trošt, "Who Were the Anti-Fascists".

65 Bekavac, Jareb and Rozić, *Povijest 9*, 106.

66 *Ibid.*, 106.

march across the country, during which they were either killed, or died of thirst and starvation. The cited number of total victims is from “several tens of thousands of people”⁶⁷ in one textbook to “70,000 Croats” in another.⁶⁸ Partisans are presented to have also killed Catholic clergy and prominent people across the country.⁶⁹

Both contemporary textbooks echo the socialist-era narrative of the Ustasha’s pursuit of a pure Croat nation. Their crimes are described as “terror”⁷⁰ and “repressive politics”⁷¹ against Jews, Roma, Serbs and anti-regime Croats. Continuing from observations in the earlier generation of textbooks,⁷² the 2018 edition ascribes the majority of Croats’ initial support for the establishment of the Ustasha-led NDH, to the people’s “bad memories” from the time of the former Yugoslav kingdom. It explains how this support then waned under Ustasha terror and the regime’s gifting of Croatian territory to Italy.⁷³ The Catholic Church and its archbishop are presented as important opponents of Ustasha crimes, which included the killing of 83,000,⁷⁴ or up to 100,000 people⁷⁵ at the Jasenovac concentration camp.

Contemporary textbooks echo the socialist-era narrative also when presenting the Chetniks’ aims of renewing the monarchy and establishing Serb domination and their collaboration with the occupying forces from the early days of the war. They argue that Chetniks committed grave crimes against non-Serb civilians and turned against the Partisans, perceiving them as a “greater enemy than the occupying forces due to plans for bringing down the monarchy and creating a communist Yugoslavia”.⁷⁶ They claim that the Allies mistakenly supported the Chetniks as the “only” antifascists until 1943,⁷⁷ ignorant of their collaboration with the occupying forces, until realising that only the Partisans were fighting against the Axis.⁷⁸

67 Erdelja et al., *Povijest* 9, 155.

68 Bekavac, Jareb and Rozić, *Povijest* 9, 106.

69 Erdelja et al., *Povijest* 9.

70 *Ibid.*, 128.

71 Bekavac, Jareb and Rozić, *Povijest* 9, 85.

72 Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists”.

73 Erdelja et al., *Povijest* 9, 127.

74 Bekavac, Jareb and Rozić, *Povijest* 9, 85.

75 Erdelja et al., *Povijest* 9, 130.

76 *Ibid.*, 131.

77 Bekavac, Jareb and Rozić, *Povijest* 9, 100.

78 Erdelja et al., *Povijest* 9, 146.

Approaches to reading the diverging WWII narratives

Review of discussion on the revision of textbook narratives

Since the 1990s war, research on history textbooks and education systems in the region brought important insights into the strategies and implications of the revised narratives of local WWII resistance and the broader twentieth century history. This section looks at some of the main findings of a number of studies that have analysed the key drivers of differences between the competing narratives in BiH history textbooks, as well as their pedagogical and broader social implications.

To the extent that it was neglected in the socialist-era textbooks,⁷⁹ the ethnic or national dimension has driven the revision of WWII narratives in post-socialist history textbooks. Researchers Tamara Pavasović Trošt and Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc noted how, already in the 1980s, the textbooks in neighbouring Serbia and Croatia started adding ethnic (Serb or Croat) labelling to the historical mentions of the Chetniks and the Ustasha.⁸⁰ They described how the textbook narratives in the 1990s were strategically reinforcing the in-group victim mentality among the national groups, with highly emotional references to their WWII suffering.⁸¹ Research into the history textbooks of the late 1990s⁸² and 2000s⁸³ concluded that by this point the nation and nation-statehood⁸⁴ had become established as the key new protagonists within the competing interpretations of twentieth century history, as either the Serbs, the Croats or the Bosniaks/Bosnian Muslims.⁸⁵ Other national groups such as Jews and Roma were mentioned briefly, only in the context of their persecution.⁸⁶ The exception is the 2012

79 Hoepken, "War, Memory, and Education"; Najbar-Agičić and Agičić, "The Use and Misuse".

80 Trošt and Trbovc, "History textbooks".

81 Ibid. See also Najbar-Agičić and Agičić, "The Use and Misuse".

82 Torsti, *Divergent Stories*; Najbar-Agičić and Agičić, "The Use and Misuse".

83 Karge and Batarilo, *Reform in the Field*; Trbovc and Trošt, "Who Were the Anti-Fascists".

84 Najbar-Agičić and Agičić, "The Use and Misuse".

85 Further complexities emerged in the Bosnian-language textbooks of the late 1990s, where the *nation* was portrayed as the Bosniaks/Bosnian Muslims, but also as the "territorial Bosnian nation" – see Torsti, *Divergent Stories*, 198.

86 For a study of how the History textbooks treat marginalised groups, see Melisa Forić Plašto, "Marginalne grupe na stranicama savremenih bosanskohercegovačkih udžbenika historije", in *Na margini povijesti: zbornik radova*, ed. Amir Duranović (Sarajevo: Udruženje za modernu historiju, 2018), 135-169.

Bosnian-language textbook⁸⁷ in which the multiethnic Partisans lead the WWII narrative even as Serbs are mentioned as the first Partisans and the Bosnian Muslims are singled out for broader treatment. Historian Pilvi Torsti showed how the nation had become the driver of auto and hetero-stereotypes in the three narratives, of “us” and “them”, precisely defining how each national group was perceived by the other and by themselves.⁸⁸

As the nation became central to the narrative, any period of locally shared history, such as the period of WWII, reportedly became “difficult to teach throughout BiH”.⁸⁹ Contemporary textbooks share the positive presentation of the concept of resistance to Nazism. However, they have continued to follow the “imagined [contemporary] national interest” when interpreting who were the true local antifascists and which local groups were the collaborators,⁹⁰ and when determining the geographic focus of the resistance narrative, such as the territory of modern Croatia,⁹¹ or modern BiH,⁹² or the territory of former Yugoslavia.⁹³ In the context of the national interest, researchers noted the continuing similarities between the interpretations in the locally published Croatian- and Serbian-language history textbooks and those used in Croatia and Serbia, respectively.⁹⁴

The changing interpretations across generations of post-socialist textbooks point at the somewhat temporary position of each textbook as part of the decades-long process of revision, reflecting the changing political agendas.⁹⁵ Trošt and Trbovc noted the manipulation of WWII memories in the 1990s textbooks to fit the needs of the new war, and the “haphazard”, frequent revisions in Croatian and Serbian textbooks during this time, suggestive of “a lack of a...coherent idea of the preferred historical narrative”.⁹⁶ Researchers Magdalena Najbar-Agičić and Damir Agičić ascribed this to the proliferation of an unscientific approach to the writing of history

87 Šabotić and Čehajić, *Historija*.

88 Torsti, *Divergent Stories*, 248.

89 Karge and Batarilo, *Reform in the Field*, 6; see also Najbar-Agičić and Agičić, “The Use and Misuse”.

90 Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists”, 188.

91 Bekavac, Jareb and Rozić, *Povijest* 9.

92 Šabotić and Čehajić, *Historija*, 157.

93 Vasić, *Istorija*.

94 Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists”.

95 See Koren and Baranović, “What Kind of History Education”; Stojanović, “Slow Burning”; Trošt and Trbovc, “History textbooks”; Trošt, “Ruptures and Continuities”.

96 Trošt and Trbovc, “History textbooks”, 291-295.

textbooks during this period.⁹⁷ In a separate study, Trošt and Trbovc have pointed to the continuing “unsettled historical revisions” in the region,⁹⁸

In her research on the pedagogical and social implications of the most recent history textbooks for the final grade of primary school in BiH, historian Heike Karge found that the national “ethnocentric” perspectives were still present in these latest editions.⁹⁹ Karge established that the textbooks were continuing to forge a “problematic connection” between WWII and the 1990s war, towards “reinforc[ing] victim identity” of their readers’ national group.¹⁰⁰ As a critical reflection on the textbooks’ negative social role, Karge established that none of them met “the standard of contributing to mutual understanding and reconciliation” in the context of post-war BiH.¹⁰¹ She presented these textbooks as “monumental histories”,¹⁰² drawing on the concept that assumed a fixed and biased understanding of “us” as victims and “them” as the “essential enemy” and that was missing a critical approach to the crimes committed by “us”.¹⁰³ Although noting improvements across the textbooks compared to previous generations, Karge emphasised the need for a “fundamental change” in how twentieth century history was taught to students in BiH,¹⁰⁴ and especially the need for multiperspectivity. An earlier report found that the multi-perspectival approach was found in only five percent of the overall primary school history textbook content across BiH.¹⁰⁵

An earlier call for a “change in paradigm” in how twentieth century history was taught in BiH schools¹⁰⁶ had led to the production of the Alternative History Curriculum¹⁰⁷ by the Association of History Teachers in BiH

97 Najbar-Agičić and Agičić, “The Use and Misuse”.

98 Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists”, 189.

99 Karge, *History Teaching*, 13. Karge’s research examined how the textbooks were applying the Council of Europe’s guidelines on history education from 2018 and 2006, the latter having been adopted by all education ministries in BiH. Karge’s analysis focused on the textbook narratives of the 1990s war, but it is crucially addressed in this section for its broader lens in reading the school textbooks for the final grade of primary school, on twentieth century conflicts.

100 *Ibid.*, 27.

101 *Ibid.*, 13.

102 *Ibid.*, iv.

103 Karina V. Korostelina, “History Education in the Midst of Post-conflict Recovery: Lessons Learned”, in *History Can Bite*, eds. Denise Bentrovato, Karina V. Korostelina, Martina Schulze (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016), 295-296, <https://doi.org/10.14220/9783737006088.289>.

104 Karge, *History Teaching*, 54.

105 Fond otvoreno društvo BiH, *Obrazovanje u BiH*.

106 Filipović et al, *Zloupotreba istorije*.

107 Slavojka Beštić Bronza et al, *Alternativni kurikulum za Historiju/Istoriju/Povijest u Bosni i Hercegovini*, ed. Edin Veladžić (Sarajevo: EUROCLIO HIP BIH, 2019), <http://cliohipbih.ba/materijali-3/>.

– EuroclioHIP. Disregarded by the BiH authorities, this curriculum did not specifically name fascism or the main local historical actors in relation to WWII, but focused on developing the students’ understanding and skills about how to “avoid [a war] in the future”.¹⁰⁸ It called for students to develop critical thinking skills through a multi-perspectival approach to examining “propaganda” and how it “alludes to or negates universal human values”.¹⁰⁹ The importance for students to develop critical thinking skills had also been underlined by researchers Najbar-Agičić and Agičić,¹¹⁰ and by Vjeran Pavlaković, who called it a key towards regional peace.¹¹¹ Other historians noted a challenge, however, to the pursuit of multi-perspectival history teaching in the region. As part of the Joint History Project of the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe, and their Alternative Educational Materials: World War II,¹¹² historians observed that multi-perspectival teaching through the presentation of contradictory sources was a novelty in some countries in the region, which may lead to “disorientation, even rejection” among teachers and students.¹¹³ Nonetheless, as the authors pointed out, the multi-perspective approach was the only gateway to achieving “real, high quality study, comprehension and knowledge of history”.¹¹⁴

Alternative entry points for reading the textbooks

This section picks up on alternative ways of reading the history textbooks’ narratives of local resistance to Nazism during WWII as part of a contemporary archive. Comparative research into generations of textbooks in BiH and the region points at the particular and temporary position of each textbook within the bigger scope of changing narratives and changing political agendas.¹¹⁵ The entire body of textbooks can therefore arguably be viewed

108 Ibid., 83-84.

109 Ibid., 83.

110 Najbar-Agičić and Agičić, “The Use and Misuse”.

111 Pavlaković, “Memory politics”.

112 *Teaching Modern Southeast European History: Alternative Educational Materials. Workbook 4: The Second World War*, ed. Krešimir Erdelja, Series ed. Christina Koulouri. 2nd ed. (Thessaloniki: Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe CDRSEE, 2009), https://www.jointhis-tory.net/download/eng/workbook4_eng.pdf.

113 Ibid., 16.

114 Ibid., 16.

115 See Koren and Baranović, “What Kind of History Education”; Stojanović, “Slow Burning”; Trošt and Trbovc, “History textbooks”; Karge, *History Teaching*.

as a primary cultural archival record of the diverging perceptions of BiH history (and relative to the region) during a particular time period. Looking at textbooks as part of a cultural archive opens them to evaluation through new entry points. Within the field of artistic research, for example, the competing textbooks have been addressed as a historically significant cultural phenomenon, as cultural artefacts, in the context of knowledge production.¹¹⁶

As a cultural archive, the history textbooks in BiH could also be approached through an anthropological or critical theory lens. Ann Laura Stoler's writing in decolonial critical theory provides one such alternative set of concepts.¹¹⁷ Stoler examined archives from the period of Dutch colonial rule, asking that we read not "against" the archive,¹¹⁸ looking for deliberate bias, but rather that we read "along the archival grain", seeking evidence of "epistemic uncertainty".¹¹⁹ Stoler posited that colonial archivists faced such "uncertainty" when challenged to reformulate their prior, established understanding of the "essence" of specific archival categories.¹²⁰ She argued that the production process of these archives was governed by a colonial "common sense", representative of an "emotional economy" where sentiments such as "attachment" or "contempt" would be applied to ascertain the archivist's racial position in relation to the archival categories.¹²¹

In the contemporary context of BiH, Stoler's colonial "common sense" can arguably be replaced with nationalist "common sense". Researchers could apply Stoler's concept of "epistemic uncertainty" to explore to what extent the authors of the contemporary editions of textbooks continue to be uncertain about their interpretations of the "essence" of WWII historical

116 The art installation titled "Into Which Narrative Was I Born?" was exhibited by the author of this paper at the History Museum of BiH, during July and August 2023. Building on a childhood experience under a socialist-era narrative and wartime education from a revised history textbook, the author questioned the competing textbooks through visually interweaving and juxtaposing their WWII resistance narratives. As another example, in the 2000s, artist Vahida Ramujkić started building a library of all the textbooks from the former Yugoslav region, titled "Disputed Histories", and running community workshops to produce alternative history booklets, including through collage cutouts of the competing textbooks.

117 Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), Kindle.

118 *Ibid.*, 46.

119 *Ibid.*, 43.

120 *Ibid.*, 4.

121 *Ibid.*, 35, 3, 41, 40.

actors. Stoler recommended that such unclear “epistemic spaces”¹²² within archives provided an “ethnographic entry”¹²³ for researchers from which to begin studying the process of archival production. Relative to the scope of this paper, a few brief examples are presented of what such unclear “epistemic spaces” look like within the contemporary textbooks, in the context of the monumental narrative of the nation.

For example, in the latest Serbian-language textbook, the “essence” of the Chetniks’ character is presented as having been “antifascist”.¹²⁴ This narrative is critically interrupted by two brief sentences (that were reportedly absent from the textbook a generation prior¹²⁵) – that the Chetniks collaborated with the occupying Axis forces, and committed crimes against Muslim and Croat civilians.¹²⁶ This suggests an uncertain “epistemic space”, as the rest of the narrative then proceeds unaffected by these two critical interruptions, continuing to present the Chetniks’ “essence” as antifascist.

Within the Croatian-language narrative, a confusing “epistemic space” has persisted in many textbooks since 1992 concerning the “essence” of the Partisan movement through the lens of the nation.¹²⁷ Both contemporary textbooks seek to distance Croats’ membership in the Partisans as an antifascist movement from the Partisans’ communist ideology, leadership and war crimes. One textbook presents Partisans as “Croatian partisans”¹²⁸ in the context of antifascism, but then as “Yugoslav soldiers”¹²⁹ during executions of Croats at Bleiburg. Another invites student-readers to look up local monuments to the “antifascist struggle” and separately monuments to the “communist crimes”.¹³⁰

The contemporary Bosnian-language textbook¹³¹ presents its narrative of resistance with a complete “attachment” to the Partisans who fought the occupying forces. The confusing “epistemic space” emerges in how the authors then introduce “attachment” to the Bosnian Muslims within the concept of resistance. The textbook accentuates their protests against the NDH,

122 Ibid., 43.

123 Ibid., 185.

124 Vasić, *Istorija*, 128.

125 Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists”, 178.

126 Vasić, *Istorija*, 131.

127 See Koren and Baranović, “What Kind of History Education”.

128 Bekavac, Jareb and Rozić, *Povijest* 9, 89.

129 Ibid., 106.

130 Erdelja et al., *Povijest* 9, 159.

131 Šabotić and Čehajić, *Historija*.

but maintains complete silence about crimes committed by an SS division composed of Bosnian Muslims. It further celebrates it as the only German Army unit that mutinied during the war.

Conclusion

Scholars have read the BiH history textbooks for the final grade of primary school for various aspects of their competing narratives, and have pointed at their politicisation, revisionism, and their contribution to social divisions. They established that the competing interpretations have been driven by the emergence of the nation as the leading historical actor in the narratives. For this reason, while all the contemporary History textbooks in BiH positively present the concept of resistance to Nazism, they disagree about which historical actors embodied such resistance, based on contemporary national interests.¹³² Depending on the narrative, the main resistance appears either in the form of the multiethnic, Serb, or Croat Partisans, or as intrinsic to the Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks/Muslims as a nation, or through actions of the Catholic clergy, or as the Chetniks. The collaborators appear either as the Chetniks, and as Ustasha, or as the Catholic clergy, or Muslim military units, or as the Serbian quisling war government. Applying alternative conceptual approaches such as Stoler's to reading the textbooks highlights the confusing, uncertain "epistemic spaces" on WWII resistance, within narratives that are governed by the "emotional economy" of a nationalist "common sense" and recommends these spaces as the starting point for ethnographic research into the production of history textbooks. As another alternative example, artists have approached the textbooks as cultural objects that embody contemporary thinking. Borrowing from Stoler's words, therefore, history textbooks in BiH should be approached less as educational sites of knowledge about resistance, but rather as "sites of contested cultural knowledge".¹³³

The findings identified in this paper raise questions about the purpose of history textbooks as sites of knowledge within the educational system. Should they serve the transmission of limited, authorised historical interpretations? More broadly, should the public education system, through the

¹³² Trbovc and Trošt, "Who Were the Anti-Fascists".

¹³³ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 35.

history curriculum and textbooks, participate in defining the students' national identity and in "rationaliz[ing their] historical consciousness"?¹³⁴ Alternatively, scholars have argued that history teaching should focus on the development of skills needed for students to become critical thinkers who are able to consider competing sources as well as absent voices when interpreting the past. The development of a multi-perspectival approach (especially when considering the actions of "us") has been underlined as crucial in achieving this. What critical skills would the primary school students gain, for example, by reading in parallel all the competing textbooks' chapters on WWII resistance? If the educational objective remains the teaching of exclusive interpretations, history textbooks in BiH may necessarily remain outputs of contemporary nationalist "common sense", primary cultural archival material reflecting the contemporary contest for ownership over the narrative of local resistance to fascism.

134 Najbar-Agičić and Agičić, "The Use and Misuse", 215.

WER IST WALTER?

Resistance against Nazism, fascism, occupation and collaboration occurred throughout Europe during World War II. But how much do we know about this history in other European countries? Gathering 32 contributions and case studies on the history of this resistance, as well as on its transmission after 1945, especially in museums, the present book is an invitation to look at resistance in Europe in an interdisciplinary, international, transnational and comparative perspective. It is the result of the international research project “Wer ist Walter? Resistance against Nazism in Europe” which gathered historians, curators and other researchers mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, France and Germany.



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