Education and the relevance of national identities: Responses to post-war curricula in two local settings in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Marita Eastmond, Melita Cukur

Introduction

Education is a key institution to the modern nation state. Apart from the task of producing new and competent members of society through transmitting knowledge, it is a major socialisation agent. Through a standardised curriculum, it plays a central role in the reproduction of society’s ideology and normative systems. As such, it is also at the heart of the formation of national identity and the constructing an ‘imagined community’ especially in periods of active nation-building (Anderson, 1983).

To whom education is provided and what is being taught – whose social reality is being promoted - is therefore never a trivial matter. It is a potentially contentious issue in any multi-ethnic society as it concerns “participation in the control and distribution of knowledge and power at the state’s core”(Kostic, 2003:2), and poses an extra-ordinary challenge in states such as Bosnia-Hercegovina (BiH) recovering from a violent war fought in the names of ethnic identities. In the re-structured ethnic demography following the war and the lack of a clearly defined and legitimate State with functioning central institutions, issues of recognition and security are complex, not least for those who are minority populations in their areas. The lack of common institutions, of which education is only one in BiH today, provides an unstable framework that directly affects the lives of ordinary people (Lindvall, 2003). This link between education and identity security was thus expected to be an important concern for the participants of this study.

Another important but less recognised facet which this study brought to light but which needs further research has to do with the social meaning of education and its role in recovering what Bosnians refer to as ‘normal life’ (normalan zivot). In former Yugoslavia, education was a key issue in the social transformation to a modern society...
in the 1950s and on. For the population it was also a prime component in the construction of material security and social status (and part of the welfare which the State provided). The notion of ‘normal life’ epitomises, as Stefansson makes clear, an idea of social progress and the creation of the modern, cultured social person, modelled on the urban middle-class (Stefansson, 2003). Education, as a key to such a cultural ideal of welfare and status is a forceful political and symbolic component in people’s post-war lives and can be expected to affect the kinds of choices they make for themselves and their families. Given the cultural importance attached to education, what are the responses of those directly concerned to the recent ethnification of education in the politically highly uncertain situation in post-war BiH?

Is a multi-ethnic social order in BiH the pre-requisite to its survival and sustainable social recovery? If so, what are the implications over time of separate education in crucial subjects such as history and language? The dilemma, as formulated by Weinstein et al. (forthcoming) is a principal tension between conflicting imperatives played out in public education: The need on the one hand of creating a common civic identity as Bosnians, and the protection and promotion of national identities of its constituent groups, on the other (e.g. Weinstein et al. forthcoming). With a State that lacks mechanisms for resolving common Bosnian problems (Lindvall, 2003) education so far appears to remain hijacked as the affair of separate national interests. Has Bosnia’s historical advantage – its ethnic composition – as Sokolovic suggests (2003) been transformed into its weakness?

The aim of this study has been to try to pinpoint some of these dilemmas of this de-centralised education system in post-Dayton Bosnia and examine how they are experienced by the principal users, that is parents, pupils and teachers. Are new national-specific programmes for each of the three constituent groups seen as legitimate and worthy of support? If so, how do such assessments resonate with actors experiences and how can we account for them in social, political, economic and cultural terms?

Another purpose is to use education as a ‘strategic window’ to help make more visible the challenges of institution-building and legitimacy in today’s BiH, connecting, as education does, macropolitical issues with the concerns and strategies of individuals in everyday life.
The Politics of Education

Following from the war, a priority for the political elites of all three constituent groups in BiH has been to transform education. Three parallel education systems are in place today, each with its own curriculum and textbooks, promoting its own language and version of history, including that of the recent war. So far, attempts to create a common curriculum and textbooks have failed (Lindvall, 2003:68). Schools thus reflect continued ethno-political divisions and act as an arena where continued competition for control between ethnic groups and their political elites are played out (Kolouh-Westin, 2002, Kostic, 2003)\(^1\). In her analysis of curricula and text-books in BiH, Kolouh-Westin notes the tendency to glorify one’s own nation and to demonise 'the Other'; they portray a defensive world-view which also pays scant attention to ”democracy” (mentioned only once and not further explained, \textit{ibid}).\(^2\) Cukur finds the same tendencies in her review of textbooks in the so called national subjects (national language, literature and history), where the emerging ‘national narratives’, true to nationalist discourse, are grounded in and promote notions of essential difference (Cukur, 2002). At the same time, the international community is pressing for educational reform. The reworking of educational material as a first step in response to the call of the international community’s (in this case, the UN Office of the High Representative, OHR) call for educational reform to ‘get politics out of the classroom’ has been a slow process and many textbooks continue to retain a strong ethnic bias\(^3\). In 1999, OSCE took over responsibility for the educational reform.

Education also reflects the contradictions and tensions that exist between political levels in Bosnian society. Multi-ethnic or integrated education is the official policy adopted at State and Federal levels, and is actively promoted by the international community (OHR). In the decentralised state structure, however, responsibility for

---
\(^1\)The ‘cleansing’ of education materials from the influences of ‘others’ particularly in language and history after the war has been described as the symbolic replication of the more violent territorial purging of people and cultural heritages that characterised the war (Kostic, 2003).

\(^2\) The same tendency has been noted in other parts of former Yugoslavia. See for instance Alexandra Petrovic's study on text-books in post-war Serbia.

\(^3\) OHR reference (date).
education rests with the Canton. The ten cantons in the Federation today reflect, (as does Republika Srpska), the ethnically restructured demography, five are Bosniac and three are Croat dominated (to which return of members of the minority population to their former homes are often resisted). The remaining two are mixed (Croat-Bosniac). In these mixed cantons local governance is often an ethnically polarised and conflict-ridden process and the tensions between a local, ethnically segregated practice and a federal multi-ethnic policy become most evident and problematic there. Cantonal governments guard their autonomy also in the area of education and use their right to devise legislation, adopt and develop its own curriculum and text books. Following the ethnic structure, three cantons have adopted the Croat programme and the five with Bosniac majority have adopted the Federal programme. Minorities who do not accept to enter the majority programme in their area sometimes resort to bussing children to another canton, or may seek private schooling where available. The two mixed cantons use both programmes, but provided through separate schools or in separate classrooms in so called 'two schools under one roof'. Thus, not only separate curricula, but also the social and spatial segregation into separate classrooms, school entrances, breaks and teaching shifts symbolically underline and promote differentiation.

Responses to Education in two local contexts

Given this political context, the study examines the organisation of education and the role it plays to parents, pupils and teachers: What are their perceptions and expectations of new separate national programmes? The study also takes some account of the great local variations in the unfolding of the war in Bosnia and its aftermath in terms of ethnic demography, boundaries and trust. Local histories are thus one important facet in

---

4 Note As per the Dayton Agreement, the State government has limited powers which allows it to act on the international arena; furthermore, most of governmental powers are vested in the two Entities (Federation of Croats and Bosniacs) and Republica Srpska (RS), respectively

5 Naming it the ‘Federal programme’ reflects an aim to have it adopted across the Federation (see e.g Federalno ministarstvo, 2001) and is thus potentially offensive to non-Bosniacs.

6 In principle, a municipality within a canton with a different ethnic majority than the canton as a whole can, legally, adopt a different programme but this is not been implemented, and the cantons maintain control.

7 The ethnically divided education, and the concerns over representation and assimilation that it generates, has also spawned the revitalisation of private religious and cultural educational institutions, familiar from times before SFRY and historically promoting communal education interests. Today many are being established in areas where a minority seeks alternative to the majority education programme (Kostic, 2003).
examining the legitimacy of separate education. The experiences of primary and secondary education are drawn from two different local contexts, with different history of war and current socio-political and economic situation. One of these is Sarajevo, where the large majority of the population are Bosniacs, and the schools have adopted the Federal school programme. The second setting of this study is a small town in a mixed canton in central Bosnia where Croat and Bosniac pupils attend their separate programmes in separate class rooms. Interviews were made with parents, teachers and pupils (31 in-depth interviews as well as a host of informal conversations in two settings) and where possible, headmasters of the schools visited. As an exploratory study, limited to the Federation and a rather small number of informants it makes no claim to be conclusive. Rather, it has sought to capture the range of views on the subject, and the ways in which people reason around their views and choices given their present situation.

A small town in a mixed canton: Ethnic polarisation

This small town in located in a mixed canton in central Bosnia. There are two Ministers of Education in the canton, one Croat, the other Bosniac. The enquiry focussed on one of its primary schools where children attend their separate programmes in separate class rooms. However, the school is one administrative unit, and maintains common breaks, entrances and other facilities, thus differing from many other segregated schools often referred to as “two schools under one roof” (Dvije skole, jedan krov).

In this town, Bosniacs and Croats had fought one another in the last war; large numbers of Croats had fled the town but have later returned. With the addition of internally displaced Bosniacs from surrounding areas, Croats make up the minority population. Unemployment is high and job prospects are bleak. In this community, the memory of war remains highly present. The Bosniac parents and students interviewed clearly felt and asserted their roles as victims of the conflict. Croat respondents took a more cautious and neutral position, but both groups of respondents including teachers seemed to accept separate education as the correct or the only possible solution, given the rifts created by war in this community. The mutual distrust was also reflected in and
reinforced by the cantonal administration of education and the ability of the shared leadership to agree on and effectively coordinate their duties.

The primary school staff. The Bosniac director of this primary school strives to maintain some shared social space between groups, such as having common breaks and only one entrance. The Bosniac staff lamented the segregated system and advocated that all pupils enroll in ‘the Federal programme’ as they put it. They did not seem to recognise the Croat population’s rejection of such encompassment as justified. Croat staff declined to be interviewed, probably feeling uncertain of the identity of the interviewer, as she was introduced to them by the Bosniac headmaster.

Parents supported the segregated education. Particularly, experiences of war and personal losses seemed to be significant in a more hard-line position: A Bosniac father, who had lost two close members of family in combat with Croat forces was the most outspoken proponent of the segregated curricula:

"One cannot forget what they did to us in this town. One knows exactly who did what during the war. I never want to have anything to do with them again, one cannot trust them. Now, we have ours and they have theirs..and this is good.. Had there been a purely Bosniac school nearby I would have sent my son there."

Croat parents, as the ethnic minority, were much more cautious in their statements. They appeared to be content with the schooling of their children in the Croat curriculum, but referred to ‘political reality’ of division rather than a personal choice.

One woman, an engineer, with a 7-year old in the Croatian programme, said

"My daughter’s situation at school is good. She is learning Croatian, but I suppose the difference between the two languages is not that great..Some people claim they should be taught as two separate languages, but I don’t know. Anyhow, this is how it is now – after all, it’s politics, all of it.

Croatian parents, overall, more than Bosniacs, stressed the need to retain one’s language and national identity. However, for both categories, the multi-ethnic past was also remembered, not only the divisions of the war.
Pupils. The secondary school students appeared to approve of separate instruction, each on their own floor in the building, although most were hesitant to develop their views. One of the more outspoken youths, a 17 year old Bosniac who had lost close relatives, asserted:

"We have ours and they have theirs. They have, all the time, asserted their Croat identity. Only us Muslims did not, we did not maintain our religion, which is why Serbs and Croats thought they could either destroy us or assimilate us. It is easy to assimilate people who do not have 'their own' isn’t it? They will never again be able to do that, for now we have our religion, our language and our history”

This lack of a socially valid identity in the recent past is a common expression of the vulnerability felt by many Bosniacs interviewed and can be linked to the fear of its implications for the future. The others interviewed made less assertive statements, and often referred to 'the way things are’. A girl of 16, was diplomatic but clear in her assessment when she said:

"This is perhaps the best way. Nobody is forced to learn something which he (sic) does not like, for instance me learning the Bosniac language when I want to learn the Croatian one”.

Few said they interacted with youths from the 'other group’. Social pressure from one’s own group to observe the ethnic boundary may be strong in a small community, where there is little anonymity. Adolescents would be more expected to respond to such pressure than the younger pupils. In the primary school, the children were playing with one another in the school yard during the common breaks. Still, their more unreflected acceptance of separate instruction as something 'natural' was captured by a 7-year old girl who matter-of-factly declared,

"They have their teachers and their class-rooms and we have ours. They learn Croatian and we learn Bosnian. The have a priest coming to them and we have a hodza”.
Sarajevo: Ambivalence and the multi-ethnic ethos

The circumstance most consistently invoked by respondents in framing their views on the school system was, firstly, their particular experiences of the war – their own and that of their ethnic group. Secondly, present ethno-political relations in which respondents find themselves (whether in minority or not). Thirdly, a concern with their poor economic prospects in post-war BiH affected how the present educational system was evaluated.

In Sarajevo, not surprisingly given its size and history, attitudes to separate education were not so clear-cut compared to the smaller town. The majority in Sarajevo is Bosniac (about 87%, including the influx internally displaced Bosniacs from other areas) which influences both the organisation of and attitudes to education. Only a small minority of Croatian students (and even fewer Serbs) are in fact enrolled in the Federal programme. There are also private schools such as the Catholic School Center that has a good reputation for quality education and recruit students from all ethnic backgrounds. Bosniacs and Croats from two primary schools, two secondary schools, and from the Catholic education centre were interviewed.

Perhaps as a result (but also characteristic of the Sarajevan self-image as modern, urban and multi-ethnic), teachers’ interest was more directed to issues of the modernisation of education. That often made them appear unaware of or avoiding the kinds of dilemmas of minority parents of students enrolled in the Federal programme.

Many Bosniac parents and teachers expressed an ambivalence to separate education. Thus, they could be critical of the national changes made in their curriculum and textbooks, and still recognise the need to strengthen the identity of their own group. Even those who claimed that the new languages are an absurdity, pointed to their political significance and seemed to give them support as such. Many referred, on the one hand, to the multi-ethnic tradition of Sarajevo [‘the only logical but forever lost way of life’] and the shared experiences during the war, affecting all Sarajevans irrespective of identity. Promoted by the international community this multi-ethnic position is of course also the politically correct one. On the other hand, the lessons of war, a sense of victimisation and betrayal, had created a need to have and promote ‘their own’.
As a Bosniac parent in Sarajevo put it,

"Nobody can say today that 'Bosniacs’ are really this or that instead We have our own language , we have our own history now … no more misunderstandings, that cost Bosnia 250 000 lives…”

References to the past, often cited to validate one’s position, often rely on two different narratives, not necessarily mutually exclusive, among the Bosniac respondents. Stefansson (1997) refers to them as 'the good and the evil narrative’ – one is the past of ‘multi-ethnic harmony’ and the other is the history of having been 'duped' by more devious political aims of the Others.

A pride in the ethnic tolerance in today’s Sarajevo, could be combined with situating one’s self as victim, as one female Bosnia teacher did:

"So much has happened, and it is painful to realise that one has been completely fooled- We are the one’s who should be insulted, bitter, revengeful… but look at Sarajevo today and its mix of people, look at the different names of people that call in on TV programmes…!

A 15 year old Bosniac male student echoed the voice of many adults when he said,

"It is only here in Sarajevo that one can see all names [of all groups] represented – for instance I have three Croats in my class, you won’t find that in Republika Srpska… But I also like that we, Bosniacs, have our own language and history. One must never forget what has happened, it must be written in the history books so that future generations will know what this country has gone through. One must never forget.”

The Croat parent, a sociologist before the war and today a construction worker, provided a minority perspective on education in Sarajevo: Critical of the multi-ethnic ethos as a neat facade and the new languages as only confusing he felt minority pupils are easily stigmatised as 'different’ in the education system. He was concerned by the one-sided version history imposed on minority students in the federal programme and felt his responsibility to give a different view. He also draws attention to the reduction of all
other social identities to the national one: "Before I used to be a sociologist, now I am a Croat!" 

An ‘ethnically mixed’ couple was the only instance of rejecting outright the ethnically divided schools, and emphasised instead the importance of quality education. 

Parents of academic background (Bosniacs as well as Croats) tended to forward the multi-ethnic view more often than others, stressing the importance of being positive to diversity and welcoming it in some of the new text-books. In some cases the children themselves were showing increased involvement in their national identity, even where parents did not, for instance in religious matters. They were active in religion as a subject at school and young Bosniac girls were observed to be fasting (fieldwork was carried out during Ramadan). Parents did not oppose this and sometimes actively encouraged it. These observations suggest the complex interplay between the multi-ethnic ideal, representing the past, and the reality of the present, the demands of which called for a more defensive and perhaps pragmatic position. Education is not only about identity but perhaps (still) more so about achievement: Unless the stuff of textbooks were accepted, grades would not be passed. 

Pupils As in the small town, a few older pupils in Sarajevo came out in support of their own curriculum, but mostly avoided the controversial subject and simply referred to "this is the way things are now". All of these older students, however, in either location, were concerned about their future prospects after finished school. 

Age makes a difference in how pupils embrace the new education system: 
To primary school children in both places, not having the experience of a non-segregated system, separate education seems to become the natural order of things. When they started school, the new programmes were already in place, and they embraced new language and history (including the ’we’/’they’ dichotomy they presented) as natural. They were also more open about it than their parents, probably less aware of what was politically correct to say. At least, in the smaller town, the

---

8 Many of the statements in the Sarajevan population, affirmed one's own group identity and history in a way which did not preclude interaction with others, suggest co-existence rather than reconciliation - the only realistic option in the post-war generation? (utveckla)
primary school children were seen to be playing with one another in the school yard during the common breaks, although this was reported to change when they entered secondary school.

As indicated above, minority position also makes a difference to one’s perspective: While there was open or tacit support from the Bosniac students, Croat students were critical and felt uneasy in the Federal curriculum. Their dilemma was obvious: While the diversity of views was said to be encouraged in the class-room, the text book stuff was the basis of performance and grades. A history teacher in the federal programme primary school claimed that he avoids discussing ‘the other versions’ of history, and instead refers Croat students in class to other literature, parental guidance, and the fact that there are other curricula available in Sarajevo (the Catholic Center)- motivating this, somewhat defensively, with the fact that 'the country is actually divided'.

At the same time, a group of students of mixed ethnicity in a Sarajevan high school that provided the most openly critical rejection of the ethnically divided system:

"It is quite ridiculous, the whole thing, and everyone knows what it is really about. The text-books revised in black ink is a typical example, it must be a joke! More important to us is the fact that we have no future in this country.. you go to school, you learn and there still is no job after you graduate. What difference does it make then what language you speak or programme you attend [when they are all useless]?"

Parents and pupils: Dilemmas and strategies
Responses of parents, pupils and teachers ranged from resigned acceptance of separate education to active support of it. With the exception of the mixed groups or homes, there were few critical voices and little active orientation to get involved (Cf Dani). As we saw, Variations in local history of the war and its legacy in different places, especially personal experiences, modified such support. In the small town, responses clearly followed ethnic division permeating much of community life - social control in a small town probably made other positions difficult. In Sarajevo, there was greater

---

9 The students refer to the directive, after OHR’s critique of textbooks containing ethnically offensive material, to black out such paragraphs until new books could be printed, which of course only served to highlight it.
ambivalence about segregated education, often with reference to a multi-ethnic past (but one not envisaged as possible for the future). Also, social background similarly modified positions somewhat: Parents of academic background tended to be more open to diversity, but also seemed to see the strategic advantages of children’s involvement in affirming national identity through school. In the small community, such parents tried to send their youngsters abroad to study.

The common dilemma was one of lacking a sense of security and control. First, it was related to informants’ identity position, in geopolitical terms, as majority or minority in one’s community: In both places, the minority feared loss of identity and assimilation. Particularly, if the minority was perceived as the perpetrators (as in the smaller community, but also in other places, (see Weinstein et al, forthcoming), they were less inclined to support integration, for fear of their version of history not being correctly represented. For the majority, Bosniacs in both communities studied, a strong sense of victimisation in both places insisting that their history be told and never forgotten. In Sarajevo, with an overwhelming majority, Bosniacs were largely positive to an integrated system, but in the polarised smaller community, where victims and perpetrators were known, this was much less prominent. Especially those with personal experience of loss were clearly against integration. Not surprisingly, perhaps, more than others, ethnically mixed families came out in favour of multi-ethnic order.

Secondly, livelihood issues in the current economic situation, was a strong basis for compounded insecurity. Apart from unemployment, there was also uncertainty about the transition to a liberal market economy, its rules and how to navigate within this system (cf Kostic, WP 4). Parents worried about jobs and retirement for themselves, and about the career chances of their children. Young students in Sarajevo or the smaller town said they lacked hope for the future. Given this situation, the attitudes reported often reflected very pragmatic strategies to deal with the situation. Thus, connecting education to ethnicity might be seen to provide better prospects for jobs and advancement (including the chances of higher education in Croatia/Serbia for non-Bosniac pupils). As jobs and advancement are often acquired through personal contacts in a situation where personal networks have become increasingly ethnically exclusive, ethnicity may well be a pathway to connections and jobs in a society where such loyalties will prevail. Even
parents wishing for less divided schools, came to passively accept these as the only realistic option.

A Bosniac parent in Sarajevo, while ambivalent to the many changes in the contents of education, still took a pragmatic stance:

"Whatever we might think about what the history books may say (and I don’t write them, the government does) she must accept the texts to pass her exams. That is what matters. In this country, one does not think one can change much, why waste words and even risk one’s life for it?"

A minority parent put it drastically: "I don’t care if my son was being taught Japanese at school, as long as it would land him a job afterwards!"

Older students, in both places were particularly concerned with their poor prospects after school. Seemingly resigned they pointed to corruption and mismanagement of the country. Many saw emigration as their only chance and it was a recurring theme in our conversations.

As these strategies suggest, education is also closely connected to cultural notions of ‘normal life’. In former Yugoslavia, education held a strong cultural value as a means to achievement, as the epitomy of progress and modernisation. It was the prime avenue to creating the ideal life of: material security and social status, as represented primarily by the modern, urban middle-class. As war demolished the secure bases of what can be referred to as ‘the family welfare project’ (Eastmond, 1998) the aspirations to recover them and the ‘normality’ they represent remain a strong focus and, in the post-war context of extreme uncertainty, the source of much anxiety as well. To the parents and students of this study the relevance of education was not only to preserve their national identity in a vulnerable post-war State. It was also, and this is important to reconstruction, concerned with their prospects of the future of the younger generation, as a means to livelihood and key to a ‘proper’ life. Thus, education and livelihood issues, seen in its their material and symbolic significance, may well be, as Stefansson suggests (2003, WP10), an important force in the reconstruction of Bosnian society.
Thirdly, a fundamental factor behind the sense of insecurity was the **general lack of trust in politics**. This confirms Koluh-Westin’s study of perceptions of democracy (2002). Institutions of the state and its political representatives, including the international community, have low legitimacy. Especially in mixed cantons, there was a competition for power that was reflected not least in the ministries of education.

These circumstances combine to create a sense of being at risk, underpinning the need to stick to “one’s own” in the choice of education. Offe refers the tendency that, when there are no trustworthy prospects or ideologies that provide compelling hope for the future, a sense of security and pride may be sought in the past (Offe, 1996). However, there was little active engagement with nationalism as a political-ideological strategy. Rather, it was a form of defensive nationalism, to counter insecurity. However, lack of security is not sufficient to understand the position, whether actively or passively taken, in favour of a nationally segregated system. A considerable factor is also the force of moral claims, the sense of having been wronged and the need for redress, which runs as an undercurrent in many respondents’ accounts. The ‘right’ to tell one’s own version of history and of the war, to stand up for one’s own group identity, was a common response to a sense of victimisation. The lack of effective steps to redress and reconciliation at macro-political levels and the limited trust in the judicial process (national or international, especially the YRCT) set to ‘settle accounts’ (also reported by Weinstein and Halpern, forthcoming), means that this sense of victimisation remains unresolved.

**Teachers’ dilemma: Avoidance strategies**

It is obvious that the role of teaching staff in the present system is difficult, mediating between political, educational and parental demands. A survey of teachers’ attitudes to democracy in education in BiH edited by Kolouh-Westin draws attention to the scant support to teachers in their new and difficult task of new and controversial teaching materials. The syllabus for history in the federal curricula has only one, rather sinister, comment to teachers asking them “to be extra cautious when implementing the subject of history” (2002:135). The Curriculum also stresses that ”…the guarantee for the scientific interpretation of history depends on the professional skills of the teacher, only in this way can we eliminate the weakness that has occurred related to this subject in the
previous system” (ibid: 135). (Democracy, as Koluh-Westin points out, is only mentioned once in the entire curriculum, and is not explained).

In the small town, with its different experiences of war in fresh memory, teachers saw division as the only possible solution, especially in the subject of history. In Sarajevo, with its overwhelming majority of Bosniac students, classes held few minority students and could more easily be ignored. In either case, teachers’ strategy to deal with their difficult position seemed to be one of avoidance: Most also avoided discussing their views of new text books in national subjects and some referred to the parental responsibility of providing central norms and values, including ethnic tolerance and respect, rather than that of the State.

In Sarajevo, teachers’ focus was very much on the modernisation of education. Westin’s study also found that teachers did not perceive themselves or schools to have an impact on developing democratic attitudes among pupils, and when asked of their professional opinions, their focus was on the teaching-learning process. For teachers, an accommodating attitude might also be connected to job security: Whether in Sarajevo or outside, teachers worried about not getting next month’s salary. There were some indications that such professional and economic concerns might provide a platform for promoting interests along other lines than ethnicity. These issues also suggest other areas of importance, having to do with resources, pedagogy and other aspects of the quality of education.

The teachers in Sarajevo were more keen to discuss the modernisation of education, in terms of technical resources, management and pedagogies than its politics. Most research and international reform efforts, on the other hand, have been primarily directed at the political contents and organisation of education, sometimes with rather idealistic aspirations of change not well grounded locally. Thus, as Parry (2003) points out, other important aspects of education and social change seem to have been neglected. She draws attention to the needs of structural and technical reform (e.g. functional administration, technical resources such as computers. Further, it is important also to distinguish between post-war and general transition reform needs. For instance, educational contents must be relevant to life in a new and different system (such as liberal market economy). Not least, it must also address pedagogics: and the
authoritarian mode of teaching, encouraging critical dialogue and multiple perspectives, in itself part of the political culture.

Implications for the future

It is very difficult to assess the developments, if any, of educational reform and the prospects for the future. There is very little substantial information about the real implementation of the reform in the different parts of the country. Newspaper reports give an indication of mixed areas being most problematic, where there was no great support from local political establishment. The role of the international community pushing for and promoting change, often with aggressive and unrealistic time frames, has been an important challenge in the reconstruction process but has also been counter-productive, creating resistance both political and popular. Since 2003, the international community through OSCE has been pushing to abolish the form of segregated education known of “two schools under one roof”. Instead schools are to form one legal and administrative unit (one budget, principal, administration and a multi-ethnic council of parents and pupils). They are also working to establish a common core curriculum, consisting of joint education of a number of non-national subjects, which according to OSCE will lay the basis for a joint education throughout Bosnia. (Dani, 22 Aug 2003).  

Perhaps as a result of feeling that unclear reforms are being imposed upon them from above, without much real support by local politicians, protests and strikes by parents, teachers and pupils have been widespread in a number of areas in response to integrating schooling.

---

10 Mostar is a site mentioned for this reform during 2003 but there is no information on progress so far.

11 The independent Dani magazine reports on this policy in the second half of 2003 and the responses to it. The official approval of the policy proposed by the OSCE was given by “… the same politicians who participated in creating the segregated school system” and that “the national curricula are not a matter of education or culture, but tools of oligarchical politics and material interests of a political elite”. There was no indications that local politicians would actually accept the orders of the OSCE via the Federal Ministry. It was also very unclear to the population what a common core curriculum really means and what the new textbooks in the national subjects will consist of.

12 For instance, Some 50 parents of Croatian children in the canton of Zenica-Doboj kidnap the minister of education (Croat) and four OSCE employees, protesting the decision that their children must attend the same schools as Bosniak children. Parents of Croatian children in Novi Seher set part of the school on fire for the same
The creation of a common civic identity as Bosnians while protecting national identities is a structural challenge that may appear impossible in the present circumstances. The de-centralised education system reveals the weakness of the State institutions in the post-Dayton constitution, pressed between the international community’s insistence on educational reform, and the divisionary ethnic politics at cantonal level. The interdependence on other institutional reforms, not least the judiciary, is apparent: War crimes remain largely unaccounted for by judicial process. Accountability, the process of bringing those responsible to justice, settling accounts, (Borneman, 2003) must be seen as a basic provision for reconciliation. The identity discourse (grounded in the Dayton agreement and reflected in the country’s ethnic demography) appears to remain the strongest political tool for most leading political parties in the country. In other words, as Lindvall points out (2003), the State lacks mechanisms for resolving common Bosnian problems (Lindvall, 2003) and education so far appears to remain hijacked as the affair of separate national interests.

reason. The problems almost always occur in the mixed Cantons - the lack of protest probably reflect the the fact that most areas are today ethnically homogeneous.
References


Anderson, B 1983. The Imagined Community.


Federalno ministarstvo obrazovanja, nauke, kulture i sporta “Informacija a stanju i problemima u osnovnim i srednjim mskolama”, Federacija Bosne i Hercegovine, Bosna i Hercegovina, verzija na hrvatskom jeziku, Sarajevo lipnja 2001.

Kolouh-Westin, L (ed). 2002  ”Natoinal Survey: Bosnia and Herzegovina and Its Tripartite Education System” in

Kostic, R. 2003. ”Education movements, Power and Identity in Bosnia and Herzegovina” Paper, Department of Peace and Conflict, Uppsala University.

Lindvall, Daniel 2003  “The Resurrection of Bosnia on the Dayton-Respirator”

