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Representation of history and geography in divided societies: The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

MA Thesis

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Tartu 2026

Authorship Declaration

I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited. Artificial intelligence was used for correcting and structuring text.

Word count of the thesis: 38 685 words

Dmytro Brytskyi 18/05/2026

Abstract:

This thesis examines how history and geography textbooks in Bosnia and Herzegovina construct competing spatial identities and collective memories in a divided post-conflict society. While prior research has focused on institutional fragmentation or conflicting historical narratives, little attention has been given to how temporal (history) and spatial (geography) representations jointly shape socio-spatial socialization. Through textual analysis of Bosniak, Croat, and Serb textbooks, the study shows how each system constructs its own vision of territory, belonging, and national identity. These narratives reproduce parallel histories, naturalize competing territorial imaginaries, and sustain fragmented cognitive maps that hinder shared socio-spatial consciousness and reconciliation.

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Introduction:

In post-conflict societies, education plays a crucial role in shaping collective memory, identity, and interethnic relations. Bosnia and Herzegovina represents a case where ethnic fragmentation has become deeply institutionalized, and the education system functions not only as a reflection of these divisions but also as an instrument for their reproduction. Schools, curricula, and textbooks operate within ethno-national frameworks, complicating reconciliation and significantly shaping identity formation.

Historically, Bosnia and Herzegovina has been characterized by the coexistence of three main ethnic groups: Bosniaks (Muslims), Serbs (Orthodox), and Croats (Catholics). However, the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s profoundly disrupted this coexistence. The war was marked not only by territorial fragmentation and ethnically motivated violence, but also by the breakdown of shared historical narratives, collective memory, and common symbols.

The Dayton Peace Agreement created a framework for post-conflict governance and raised hopes for reconciliation. It established institutions intended to foster civic cohesion and a shared national identity. In practice, however, ethno-national divisions have been institutionalized and continue to be reproduced, particularly through the education system. Competing national narratives are embedded in separate educational programs, where three distinct interpretations of history coexist. Each narrative emphasizes its own group's victimhood and political legitimacy, often excluding or distorting alternative perspectives.

In regions with mixed populations, this division is further reinforced by the practice of "two schools under one roof," in which students from different ethnic groups are educated separately, both institutionally and physically. Although such practices have been declared unconstitutional, they persist in various forms (Balkan Insight, 2014).

In this context, the construction of a shared national space remains limited. The process of spatial socialization is particularly complex in post-conflict societies emerging from the collapse of a multicultural state. Competing groups struggle to define territory, belonging, and collective memory, resulting in fragmented spatial identities (Veemaa, Jaanus & Jauhiainen, 2016).

Existing research on divided education in Bosnia and Herzegovina has extensively documented the political fragmentation of the school system, the persistence of segregated schooling, and the role of curricula in reproducing ethno-national divisions (Perry, 2015; Hromadžić, 2011). Scholars have analyzed the Dayton Agreement's institutional consequences, the phenomenon of "two schools under one roof," and the political dynamics that shape educational governance. Previous studies have also examined how history textbooks construct conflicting interpretations of the war and of national identity (Papić, 2002; Bringa & Tošić, 2006). However, this scholarship has tended to focus either on institutional arrangements or on historical narratives alone, without considering how history and geography textbooks jointly shape competing spatial identities and collective memories.

This study addresses this gap by analyzing historical and geographical textbooks simultaneously and treating them as interconnected mechanisms of socio-spatial socialization. It demonstrates that the reproduction of division in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not only institutional or political but also deeply embedded in the spatial and temporal narratives transmitted through schooling. By examining how ethno-national narratives structure the content of both history and geography textbooks, the study reveals how young people's collective memory, territorial imaginaries, and perceptions of belonging are shaped within three parallel educational systems. It also shows that, three decades after

the war, school narratives continue to influence the experiences and worldviews of a new generation growing up in a society marked by persistent interethnic divisions.

The structure of this dissertation is organized as follows. The next section outlines the theoretical framework, introduces the concept of socio-spatial socialization, and examines its application to the process in Estonia, Austria, and Australia. The third section examines the contemporary system of knowledge reproduction in Bosnian school education, followed by an analysis of history textbooks from the early twentieth century to the present. This is followed by an analysis of geography textbooks. Each textbook analysis is accompanied by a presentation and discussion of the results obtained. The dissertation concludes with a concluding section that synthesizes the main findings and discusses their broader implications.

Theoretical framing:

1. Socio-spatial constructions at work

With the emergence of modern nation-states, it became increasingly important to reproduce, on a large scale, shared visions of “self” and “other.” Nations are often understood as communities defined by common language, history, culture, and territory (Eller 1997). Nationalism, in this context, functions as a form of territoriality, linking identity to space and shaping what Paasi (1999) describes as “socio-spatial consciousness.” Through this process, territory becomes associated with culture, memory, and belonging.

State institutions play a central role in transforming space into a perceived homogeneous “home.” National identity is therefore not only a political construct, but also an everyday practice. Education is one of the key mechanisms through which this identity is produced and reproduced. Through curricula, textbooks, and teaching practices, the state transmits official knowledge and shapes how individuals interpret the world and their place within it.

Textbooks, in particular, serve both educational and political functions (Häkli, 2001). They do not merely present neutral information; rather, they select, structure, and interpret knowledge in ways that reflect official narratives. Through maps, images, and written texts, textbooks construct an “image of the homeland,” reinforcing shared symbols, histories, and spatial boundaries (Paasi, 1999). In doing so, they contribute to processes of spatial socialization, through which individuals develop a sense of belonging to a particular territory.

This process also involves mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Textbooks define what constitutes “our” space while simultaneously constructing the “other” beyond national borders. External spaces are often represented as different, distant, or even threatening, reinforcing a dichotomy between “us” and “them.” Such representations help stabilize national memory and create what Anderson (1991) conceptualizes as imagined communities.

At the institutional level, the production of educational knowledge operates across multiple stages (Veemaa, 1996). At the regulatory level, the state defines general curricular frameworks. At the production level, publishers and authors construct the content, often introducing variation and interpretation. Finally, at the implementation level, teachers interpret and transmit this knowledge in the classroom. As a result, the formation of national identity through education is not entirely uniform, but shaped by a combination of state guidance, institutional practices, and individual agency.

2. The role of History and Geography study in socio-spatial socialization

Geography and history are fundamental subjects in school curricula because they play a central role in spatial socialization. Together, they define both the territorial boundaries within which individuals are located and the temporal narratives that explain their presence in a given space (Veemaa & Jauhiainen, 2016). Through these subjects, students acquire structured knowledge about territory, identity, and belonging. Geography contributes to the formation of spatial consciousness by connecting individuals to a named territory defined by borders, landscapes, and material features. These borders are never neutral; they reflect geopolitical perspectives, power relations, and historically constructed narratives about who belongs to them and who does not. As Vanemaa (1996) points out, geographical representations reinforce socio-spatial unity and loyalty to the state by naturalizing the idea that a nation occupies a coherent, bounded space. In this sense, geography constructs the “body” of the nation, providing the material and spatial basis for identity to be imagined, practiced, and reproduced. Geography does this by mapping the external Other—neighboring states, rival regions, contested borders—while history constructs the internal Other through narratives of conflict, exclusion, or difference. These borders are then reproduced daily in mundane ways through everyday symbols and reminders such as flags, media, and political discourse (Paasi 1998). Over time, such practices become taken for granted as assumptions about the nation and its territory's naturalness.

History, meanwhile, functions as the “memory” or “soul” of this territorial structure. It provides the depth through which an “ancient” continuity is created, in which the nation

is conceived as a single community that connects the past (ancestors) and the future (descendants), making them meaningful and legitimate (Anderson, 1991). By selecting, emphasizing, or silencing certain events, history constructs a temporal horizon that anchors the nation in a shared past and projects it into a desired future. This process shapes how communities imagine their origins, interpret ruptures, and justify their presence within certain boundaries, thereby forming the community's national memory. As Smith (1996, in Paasi 1998) points out, the meaning of a territory derives not only from military or economic factors but also from the emotional experiences—joys and traumas—associated with it. Through rituals of commemoration, descriptions of heroic events, and stories of sacrifice, history transforms physical space into a symbolic homeland. It actively ties people to a place and cultivates the understanding that “we” have always been here, that “our” presence is natural, legitimate, and continuous. This temporal anchoring is crucial for nation-building: it provides a population with a sense of time and positions the nation within a broader civilizational narrative.

Together, geography and history shape collective memory and contribute to the construction of a national identity. This identity emerges when people begin to internalize territorial boundaries as part of their sense of self, distinguishing between “us” (inside) and “them” (outside) (Paasi 1999). In this process, the nation becomes what Anderson (1991) calls an “imagined community,” sustained by shared narratives, symbols, and practices that allow people who will never meet to imagine themselves as part of a single collective.

School textbooks play a crucial role in this process, transforming abstract information into meaningful narratives. Using maps, images, and textual representations, they construct emotionally charged interpretations of territory and history. These representations create an emotional connection to territory through the notion of continuity of time and memory that underlies national identity (Anderson, 1991). As a result, territory is perceived not only as a physical space, but as a valued and protected homeland.

However, in divided societies, this process becomes contradictory. Competing narratives in textbooks can generate multiple and contradictory visions of the same territory and historical events, reinforcing divergence rather than unity. In such contexts, spatial socialization leads not to a unified national identity but to fragmented, competing cognitive maps of belonging.

3. Socio-spatial constructions applied in practice.

3.1. School education and the formation of competing spatial identities in Estonia

During a period of profound social transformation from the early 1990s to the early 2000s, Estonia used geographical and historical education as a key tool in forming a new national identity and spatial consciousness (Veemaa & Jauhiainen, 2016). After the collapse of the USSR, the country faced a sharp shift in its domestic and foreign policy and in its ethnic structure. A significant portion of the population was Russian-speaking, creating a challenge for the construction of a common national space (Veemaa & Jauhiainen, 2016).

In these conditions, geography and history became central subjects in school, through which the state sought to rethink the past, build a sustainable civic identity, and consolidate the country's European orientation. The main goal of school geography and history education was to ensure that textbooks constructed a narrative that separated Estonia from the Soviet past and integrated it into the European and Baltic region, rejecting links with Russia (Veemaa & Jauhiainen, 2016). Estonian national identity in history textbooks was constructed through a sense of historical continuity, while geography textbooks defined Estonia's "natural" place in the Baltic region, Northern Europe, and the wider Western cultural and political space.

Russia was increasingly portrayed as an external, unwanted, or problematic space, in contrast to Europe, which was portrayed as its natural space. This reorientation was not accidental, as Estonia was at that time involved in the EU and NATO integration process and wanted to portray itself as an integral part of the West, rather than the post-Soviet space. Estonia reinterpreted its historical space, rejecting the idea of belonging to the "Russian civilization" and constructing a new regional identity through historical narratives, maps, and visual images (Päabo, 2014). Relevant information about the Baltic Sea and Europe increasingly appeared in textbooks, while space for the East disappeared or was negatively marked. Institutions do not simply transmit knowledge, but spatially mark the world, creating symbolic boundaries between "us" and "others" (Paasi, 1998). Thus, geography and history in Estonian education became not just academic subjects, but tools for a political and cultural reinterpretation of space.

They created a new worldview in which Estonia belonged to Europe. As a result, the education system played a key role in shaping Estonian identity but also contributed to the reproduction of ethnic divisions, as different groups of the population received different versions of the national space-time. As Veemaa (1996) noted, the problem occurred due to weak state regulation in the 1990s and early 2000s, the lack of proper control over textbook production, and the linguistic isolation of teachers; Russian-language schools fostered an alternative socio-spatial consciousness that did not align with the state's national project. This created two parallel representations of Estonian history

and territory, where the concepts of “own/foreign” undermined the unity of the Estonian national space. Accordingly, the state apparatus is the central mechanism through which institutions and society determine who we are, where we are, and with whom we are – together or separately. Weak state control over the process of socio-spatial integration is becoming a source of new disagreements, despite efforts to the contrary.

3.2. Australian dilemma between London and South-East Asia

Australia has long experienced a mental split between its London-European orientation and its geographical position in Southeast Asia, producing a deep cultural-historical dilemma rooted in imperial memory and the practical demands of foreign policy. Centuries of British rule shaped Australia’s self-identification as part of the Anglo-Saxon world through symbols, language, military traditions, and legal institutions (Dijkink, 2002), making London a natural point of reference. At the same time, Australia has historically imagined itself as a “western outpost” on the edge of Asia, territorially connected to the region through the northern archipelagos. Proximity to Asia and the security shocks of the 20th century—especially the Second World War—gradually eroded Australia’s purely imperial orientation. When Britain reoriented toward Europe in the 1960s–70s and withdrew its forces from east of Suez, Australia was forced to confront the reality that the “mother empire” would no longer guarantee its security (Curran & Ward, 2010).

As a result, the practical logic of foreign policy began to diverge from inherited identity, pushing Australia to seek new partnerships. Political elites continued to operate within Anglo-Saxon networks, yet increasingly directed attention toward the Asian region. On the symbolic level, imperial markers—the crown, the Union Jack, and British administrative traditions—remained powerful mental anchors (Ward, 2001), but they also became more vulnerable to republican critiques, as debates over abolishing the monarchy challenged Britain’s historically rooted place in Australian identity (Dijkink, 2002).

Generational differences further reinforce this divide: while older Australians retain a strong symbolic attachment to Britain, younger generations increasingly orient toward the Asia-Pacific. Surveys show that contemporary youth in Australia and New Zealand still know Europe better than their own region, yet their geopolitical imagination is shifting (Dijkink, 2002).

School textbooks play a central role in shaping these mental maps. Through topic selection, narrative framing (loyalty to London versus narratives of vulnerability), and visual tools such as maps and captions, they guide how successive generations imagine where the country “should” look—toward London, Europe, or Asia. This dynamic aligns

with broader scholarship showing that curricula long reinforced Australia's cultural alignment with Britain and the "British world," embedding imperial loyalties into the educational imagination (Curran & Ward, 2010). As Australia's strategic environment shifted toward Asia, textbooks increasingly exposed students to regional perspectives, generating tension between inherited imperial frameworks and emerging Asia-oriented understandings of Australia's place in the world.

Yet despite Australia's internal efforts to cultivate an Asian identity, Southeast Asian leaders remain skeptical of its claims to "Asianness" (Dijkink, 2002). This suggests that Australia continues to be perceived externally as a symbol of "European civilization," highlighting the persistent gap between internal identity transformations and external regional perceptions.

3.3 Austrian national identity building through the vision of the first victim of National Socialism

In the interwar period, attempts to create an autonomous Austrian national identity failed due to pan-German sentiment and political divisions, which hindered the formation of unity (Tschiggerl, 2021). After World War II, Austria, which officially proclaimed a new government in 1945 that annulled the Anschluss, began to distance itself from Germany in order to demonstrate to the world—and to itself—that Austrians were a separate nation, not merely "another German state."

Austrian nation-building was grounded in a specific memory of the Nazi period, dominated by two interrelated narratives: the belief that "Austrians are not Germans" and the belief that Austria was the "first victim" of Nazism (Uhl, 2006). Within this framework, the Anschluss of 1938 was interpreted solely as an armed attack by Nazi Germany. The interruption of Austrian statehood was used to absolve modern Austria of responsibility for the crimes of the Third Reich. Consequently, the population, including supporters of the NSDAP, was portrayed as unwilling victims of the Nazi regime who bore no responsibility for its crimes (Uhl, 2006). This narrative facilitated the overcoming of interwar divisions and the creation of a collective memory that silenced more complex aspects of cooperation and complicity. Early steps toward denazification were quickly undermined by political compromises and amnesties, which limited critical engagement with the Nazi past (Tschiggerl, 2021).

Politically and culturally, these processes contributed to the restoration of Austrian statehood and the declaration of permanent neutrality in 1955. The Holocaust and the role of Austrians in the Nazi apparatus were largely excluded from the public sphere. In

education, this took the form of a new state doctrine that prescribed how the past should be represented. In the context of the Cold War and the integration of former Nazis, the victim myth was transformed into a domestic political tool: the status of “victim” was extended to the entire population, including those who had supported the regime (Uhl, 2006). Thus, Austrian memory policy not only externalized the Nazi past as “un-Austrian,” but also became the foundation for constructing a new national identity built on the denial of responsibility and the suppression of traumatic aspects of history.

School textbooks played a central role in this process. They consistently emphasized that the Anschluss was an occupation rather than a voluntary unification, which contributed to the rejection of collective responsibility for the events of 1938–1945 (Tschiggerl, 2021). Compared to the pre-war and interwar periods, historical narratives in textbooks changed radically: instead of deriving Austrian identity from Germanic tribes, they traced it back to the Holy Roman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy, emphasizing multi-ethnicity (Tschiggerl, 2021). Austrian history was depicted as “ending” in 1938 and “restored” only in 1945, allowing Nazism to be externalized as an alien force. Textbooks reinforced the image of collective sacrifice, popularizing motifs such as “broken chains” and the heroic return of prisoners of war, while normalizing the thesis of compulsory service in the Wehrmacht—repeating the formula that Austrians were “deprived of free will” and “pressed into service under compulsion” (Uhl, 2006). As a result, educational discourse became a mechanism of political integration that reinforced the official victim myth and shaped intergenerational memory, presenting Nazism as a “non-Austrian” history and responsibility as external.

At the same time, the official state narrative contrasted sharply with veterans' memories, who retained pride in their military service and recreated frontline solidarity in veterans' associations. As Berg (1997) convincingly demonstrates, veterans became a major challenge to the memory policy of the Second Republic: their rituals, symbols, and practices supported a positive interpretation of combat experience and reproduced alternative, often German-national readings of the past. In this sense, veterans embodied an unwanted, repressed memory that undermined the consensus model of political culture, which deliberately avoided conflict and critical reflection on the Nazi period.

The development of Austria after 1945 illustrates that socialization through textbooks often occurs by defining who “we are not.” In the Austrian case, this was achieved through the active promotion of the “doctrine of victimhood,” which served as an instrument for consolidating power and legitimizing the new state. The selective presentation of historical interpretations supported state-building goals and fostered the socio-spatial

socialization of postwar generations. As a result, modern Austrian identity is characterized by a strong, independent national feeling, clearly distinguished from the German one, while still undergoing critical re-evaluation of its own history (Tschiggerl, 2021; Berg, 1997).

Methodology:

1) Research design:

The research will conduct a textual analysis of three sets of history and geography textbooks used in the final grades of primary schools in the Republika Srpska and the cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The research focuses on the mechanisms of knowledge reproduction in the curricula for Bosnian Croats, Bosnian Serbs, and Bosniaks, as well as the ways these curricula construct narratives about the state's historical development, its recent past, and geography. The analytical strategy involves empirically verifying socio-spatial socialization by determining how the textbooks influence the formation of the ethno-national identities of the three constituent peoples and their relationships. In parallel, latent semantic structures are explicated: the authors' intentions, cross-cutting concepts, and cognitive models that define the profile of each group. The deconstruction of spatial representations includes analyzing geographical concepts and how they are reproduced within historical and political contexts. The chosen methodology allows us to distinguish the authors' axiological tone and key connotations, assess the level of antagonism between identities, and trace how collective memory is projected onto contemporary inter-social relations. In this study, narrative is viewed as a structured interpretation of history and space — a tool for developing national identity, demarcating intergroup boundaries, and legitimizing territorial claims through the selective reconstruction of the past and the dichotomization of space into “ours” and “alien.”

2) Key aspects of the analysis of textbooks:

The analysis of history textbooks for the three constituent peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina is conducted using five analytical categories to identify mechanisms for constructing collective memory, national identity, and intergroup relations. These categories allow us to trace how school narratives shape perceptions of “their own” and “others,” how they construct the causality of historical events, and how they legitimize certain political positions.

2.1. *Markers of national identity* - stable features important for three nations that form the consciousness of "friend-stranger" and unite people into a sense of belonging to a community. Markers of national identity, manifested through stable characteristics:

language, religion, territory, symbols, “historical rights,” etc. While reading the text, I will note cases in which the features of the three ethnic groups are presented as mutually exclusive, thereby systematically denying the shared foundations of the “Other.” I also track moments when one nation includes the territories of others in its “historical space.”

- a) The key markers of national identity in the three ethnic groups are presented as mutually exclusive, leading to a systematic denial of the identity foundations of the “Other”.
- b) Points of intersection where one nation incorporates the territories of others into its "historical space."
- c) The presentation of the image of the other nation as threatening and negative, while one’s own image is presented through the prism of victimization.

2.2. *The way of presenting historical knowledge* - the overall tone and style of the presentation, to determine how objective the presentation is, and whether it is emotionally patriotic or conflictual. The ways of presenting information are distinguished as a neutral-academic style of presenting information, which is characterized by factuality, accuracy of dates, and the absence of evaluative adjectives; a patriotic-emotional style, which uses elevated vocabulary such as “glorious,” “heroic,” and “indomitable”; and a conflict-hostile style, which manifests itself through aggressive rhetoric and elements of hate speech.

- a) Neutral-academic: Facts, dates, lack of evaluative adjectives.
- b) Justifying tone: mitigating the responsibility of “one’s” group.
- c) Patriotic: coverage of history that focuses on prominent figures, their exploits, and fateful events. Use of words: "glorious", "heroic"
- d) Conflict-hostile: Aggressive rhetoric, use of hate speech.

2.3. *"Plot lines"* that run throughout historical periods and through which any events of the past are interpreted and explained. Repetitive plot structures through which textbooks interpret historical periods. I record a narrative of a civilizational mission, a heroic self-portrait, sacrifice, struggle for survival, and the restoration of statehood, among others. These motifs are, in fact, generalizations, which allow us to reveal the deep semantic schemes that structure the national narrative.

- a. civilizational mission

- b. heroic self-image
- c. concealment of negative events
- d. victim/martyrs
- e. struggle for survival
- f. restoration of statehood

2.4. *Differentiation between “us” and “them”* – This category captures the linguistic and narrative mechanisms through which the textbook constructs an image of “one’s” group in opposition to “the others.” It encompasses linguistic markers that distinguish collective identity (“we”) and delineate boundaries with other communities (“them”), as well as statements that form negative characteristics of “others,” attribute collective responsibility to them, or portray them as a threat. It also includes rhetorical strategies of victimization that present one’s own group as victimized, oppressed, or unfairly limited, thereby reinforcing the contrast between “us” and “them” and perpetuating asymmetries in perceptions of group roles.

- a) Explicit us/them language “we”, “they”, “our people”, “their people”.
- b) Negative portrayal of the Other aggressor, occupier, threat, “hostile actions”.
- c) Victimization of the Self, emphasizing suffering, injustice.
- d) Collective blame
- e) Showing Cooperation.
- f) Generalization: “they are always”, “they are all”.

2.5. *Interpretation of shared and divergent historical experiences* - It analyzes how textbooks present events that are important to all three peoples, but receive opposing evaluations. This includes mutually exclusive interpretations of historical figures, opposing evaluations of key events (e.g., “occupation” versus “liberation”), and the ignoring or denial of facts fundamental to the other group's national history. Comparing such interpretations allows us to identify mechanisms for legitimizing territorial or political claims. Mutually exclusive historical figures;

- a) Key events that have opposing evaluations (e.g., “occupation” versus “liberation”).
- b) Complete disregard or denial of facts that are fundamental to the national history of the other side.

Textual analysis of geography textbooks aims to show how, through the description of territory, population and regional features, each national group in Bosnia and Herzegovina builds its own national identity, outlines the boundaries of "its" space and forms an idea of the entire territory of the country. Thus, the analysis allows us to trace how school materials reproduce the ideas of space, belonging and difference that underlie contemporary ethno-political divisions.

2.1. Symbolic borders

Symbolic borders are discursive mechanisms through which space is presented as divided into “civilized” and “problematic”, “safe” and “dangerous” zones. These boundaries are not geographical – they are created through evaluative characteristics, metaphors and recurring images that form a hierarchy of territories and peoples.

Key indicators:

- Describing the region as “unstable”, “dangerous”, “anomalous”;
- Contrasting “normal” and “problematic”;
- Clash of civilizations.

2.2. Demographic Representation

This indicator concerns how the textbook represents other ethnic and religious groups and how it presents demographic data. It captures both images of the Other (through stereotypes, generalizations, negative characterizations, or invisibility) and historical representations of the population (who is included in “historical peoples,” who is excluded, who is attributed “indigenous” or “arrival”). Both dimensions work together to shape the hierarchy of groups, determine their legitimacy in space, and influence perceptions of interethnic relations.

Key indicators:

- Exclusion or minimization of certain groups in demographic descriptions
- Attribution of the status of “indigenous” to one group and “late” or “irrelevant” to others.
- The image of a particular group as problematic.
- Reduction of the group's historical role or its complete invisibility in the narrative.

- Using demography to legitimize political claims or territorial rights.

2.3. Historical causality & narrative

How the textbook constructs causal relationships in history: whether events are explained linearly and ethnocentrically, and whether complexity, multifactoriality, and the responsibility of specific actors are recognized.

Key indicators:

- Simplified formulas
- Reduction of conflicts to abstract motives
- conflict-sensitive presentation.

2.4. Way of Presenting Geographical Knowledge:

The way in which the textbook presents space, territory and geographical data - as a neutral object of description or as a tool of political interpretation. This code captures whether geographical knowledge is used for description or to legitimize a certain narrative (ethno-national, historical, political). It is divided into:

- o Manipulative style: space is presented as "naturally" belonging to one group; geography is used to justify borders, claims, and divisions.
- o Integrative style: emphasis on common space, mixed population, historical interconnection of regions.

The analysis is conducted through a sequential reading of the textbooks, section by section, accompanied by a parallel examination of captions to illustrations, exercises, and supplementary materials that frame or reinforce the main text. The study covers history and geography textbooks used by the three constituent peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the final grades of primary school. In the case of history textbooks, the analysis focuses primarily on the twentieth century, tracing narratives from the interwar period and the creation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia through the wars of the 1990s and into contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina. These periods constitute the core of all three national narratives, yet each group interprets them differently. The aim is to identify how textbooks depict intergroup relations across historical periods and how they construct collective memory, political legitimacy, and perceptions of coexistence within the shared framework of Yugoslavia.

Analysis of geography textbooks will follow the same logic but is adapted to geography's role in socio-spatial socialization: it examines which geographical facts and representations are selected, how they are structured and visualized, and how maps, place names, and spatial narratives construct territorial identities, mark symbolic boundaries, and naturalize particular visions of space. Special attention is paid to chapters on Bosnia and Herzegovina and to passages that link population groups to territory, to show how geography textbooks help produce competing spatial imaginaries that either reinforce or challenge the fragmented socio-spatial consciousness of post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina.

3) Expectation:

- Despite peacebuilding and postwar reconstruction efforts, integration of three constituent nations into one coherent socio-political entity remains elusive.
- The educational system, especially in the fields of reproducing knowledge in history and geography, is fractured- it hinders inter-ethnic dialogue and reconciliation.

4) Research questions:

- How are the three constituent nations, their recent histories and geographies, represented by three sets of textbooks used in Bosnia and Herzegovina?
- What do these narratives tell about memory politics and socio-spatial identity-building of these three constituent nations?
- What do these textbook narratives tell us about the integration of three constituent nations in post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Analysis:

1) Education situation in the divided society of Bosnia and Herzegovina

In the case of Bosnia, even before the declaration of the independent state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the country was a nominal state without a de facto nation, with a population whose self-differentiated ethnicity prevented the formation of a sovereign political community (Hayden, 2005). After the war, the division persisted, resulting in three distinct groups studying three distinct visions of themselves and their territory. Therefore, in Bosnia, different Ministries of Education produce different textbooks, which create different memories. This is dedicated to the creation of a divided society in Bosnia.

A divided society forms in an environment where ethnic, religious, or other intra-group contradictions are deeply rooted and shape political preferences. Due to various crises and factors, these societies have divided into separate groups along the borders between the warring groups (Lustick, 1979). Segregation in education and work among divided societies is often the result of a trade-off between minorities' desire for self-preservation and the dominant group's expectations for cultural homogenization of the territory (Brubaker, 1996). This creates conditions under which each group internalizes its own territorial vision, transforming the common space into a set of isolated ethnic enclaves (Paasi, 1996). Because of this, each group in a divided existence forms its own historical memory, perception of the territory, and vision of itself and others, resulting in the once-common space becoming an arena of identity conflict. At the moment, divided groups demonstrate low levels of trust, have physical and mental disunity, and a clash of identities due to different pasts, presents, and futures in time and space (Sontag, S. 2004). In such cases, textbooks become tools for the "break" of cognitive maps. They can do both unite and divide, since it is there that narratives that support and justify division are formed. In divided communities, conflict exists along a deep-seated fault line that is recurrent and endemic, with the potential for violence between segments (Guelke, 2012). For Bosnia, this is largely a physical barrier created by the war. Today's entity borders and the boundaries of the 'citizens' settlements of different nationalities are yesterday's front lines that were frozen by the Dayton Agreement.

Before the 1990s war, Bosnia and Herzegovina was marked by deep ethnic and religious diversity, with no single dominant state-forming group. Despite this diversity, all communities shared a strong sense of national identity. However, during the socialist era, national consciousness was both limited and unintentionally reinforced: while the official ideology sought to suppress nationalist manifestations, the federation's constitutional-territorial structure and broader modernization processes unintentionally reinforced ideas of statehood, territorial attachment, and collective belonging (Kostovicova, 2004).

In multiethnic socialist federations such as the USSR and Yugoslavia, the presence of competing ethno-territorial identities, in the context of the collapse of the single federal center, made conflicts over political control over geographical space almost inevitable (Ginkel, 2002, in Kostovicova, 2004). The desire to dominate shared territories became a catalyst for ethnic clashes, as images of national space, imprinted in the collective consciousness, were often accompanied by a sense of national exclusivity, in which "one's" land was perceived as belonging only to a selected group (Kostovicova 2004).

At the beginning of the conflict, neither side had clearly defined boundaries for the settlement of the various groups. As the political elites of the three groups sought control over a certain geographical space, they were confronted with the reality of a “checkerboard”—the mixed residence of different groups, which prevented the creation of an ideal “map” of the nation (Björkdahl, 2018). This created a “spatial ambiguity”: neither side could clearly say where “their own” ended and “the others” began. Since the logic of the nation-state demanded clear spatial boundaries, the reality of settlement was brought into line with the ideological map by force of arms. Such an intervention aimed to eliminate the presence of the “other” and to make the established borders irreversible. As a result, shared geographical space was transformed into conflicting places of memory, where the national self-affirmation of one group inevitably led to the erasure or traumatic displacement of the memory of another (Nora, 1989).

The fighting and ethnic cleansing created material barriers and new lines of demarcation, which, after the Dayton Agreement, were fixed as administrative borders between entities. These lines became the basis for the subsequent ethno-territorial organization of Bosnian society. After the Dayton Peace Accords, the parties needed to establish and institutionalize new boundaries of reality. Postwar maps and textbooks in educational institutions established new borders as “official” and “natural,” and political institutions incorporated these spatial conquests into administrative and legal structures.

Visual representations (maps, textbooks) and textual narratives (political discourses, education) worked in synchrony to legitimize ethno territorial projects (Žuljević, 2025). The war became an instrument for the radical reconfiguration of space and people's socialization. In addition to the physical destruction of the environment, it was accompanied by its ideological reformatting. Once inclusive and mixed territories underwent forced homogenization, becoming mono-ethnic. As part of this process, the topography of geographical objects was endowed with new symbolic codes, where ruins and newly created memorials began to reflect mono-national but contradictory narratives. Thus, space ceased to be a neutral background, turning into a means of visualizing and consolidating new ideological borders. School textbooks and segregated education have become one of the main instruments of socio-spatial segregation and the ethnic consolidation of the results of the 1992–1995 war.

On the one hand, after the collapse of the former SFRY, each side sought to strengthen its own national characteristics, which, in turn, would reinforce its sense of difference from its neighbors. On the other hand, schools became predominantly mono-ethnic, and the processes of refugee returns to their former places of residence actualized the traumatic

memory of the war, which made the idea of coexistence problematic (Kreso, 2008, p. 356, p. 364). Therefore, instead of assimilation or reintegration, the strategy of mutual segregation prevailed. Three separate educational systems (Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian) produced parallel geographies and histories, forming monolithic notions of space, presenting the territory as part of a wider “Serbian or Croatian world”, as a cultural and historical periphery of neighboring states, or as a single but constantly threatened Bosnian state, under pressure from two neighbors. In mixed regions, where possible, “two schools under one roof” were organized, with two separate educational systems operating in the same building (Kreso, 2008, p. 355). Each ethnic group presents its own version of history, often portraying the other side as the aggressor, which is why history lessons often reinforce ethnic narratives, shaping how young people perceive their own identity in relation to others. This approach allowed each community to protect its symbolic space and its own version of national memory, ultimately entrenching the split on a mental level.

In Bosnia, there are 13-14 ministries of education and similar bodies responsible for educational policy, which are divided along administrative and ethnic lines. The educational process in this case is also divided along ethnic lines. In these contexts, the formation of holistic ideas about territory, community, and belonging becomes problematic, as competing groups vie to shape the content of collective memory and spatial identities (Veemaa, Jaanus & Jauhiainen 2016). The decentralized structure established by the Dayton Agreement administratively transferred responsibility for the content of the textbooks to the entities, Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with its cantons and the Department of Education of the Brčko District. In the country, since 2007, the Agency for Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education has been established at the level of the entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with headquarters in Mostar and two branches in Sarajevo and Banja Luka, one of the goals of which is to develop common core curricula for pre-school, primary and secondary education, and to supervise content of textbook and curricula (APOS0). Also, several international organizations present in Bosnia and Herzegovina, namely the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and the Office of the High Representative, have worked to neutralize textbook content after the war. They established a committee in 1998 to review textbooks and exclude offensive content (Karge & Batarilo, 2008, p. 10-11). This committee was responsible for removing from educational literature hate speech and interpretations of events that might be considered offensive or unacceptable to representatives of other ethnic groups in Bosnia.

There are also local initiatives to bridge the educational divide and bring the three ethnic groups closer together. But despite all this and criticism from international organizations,

there is no result due to political resistance and the conflicting interests of ethno-political elites, while the younger generation continues to grow up in parallel educational worlds, which complicates the formation of a common civic identity and undermines the long-term social cohesion of the country (Kreso, 2008).

The main argument in defense of this system is the claim of preserving cultural and linguistic heritage, and according to this point of view, integrated education is seen as a threat: if all children attend the same classes, the language, history, or religion of one group may dominate, blurring the identity of another (Tolomelli, 2015, p. 90). One of the achievements was the ban on the import of textbooks from abroad and the requirement to print textbooks in Bosnia. This ban came into effect after 2000, as before that, Serbs and Croats used textbooks printed in neighboring Serbia and Croatia, respectively, with minor differences (Kreso, 2008). However, the problem of what is written in textbooks remains relevant. Since 2017, the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of the Sarajevo Canton allowed primary and secondary school students to study in more depth the 1992-1995 war, especially the siege of Sarajevo and crimes against humanity during that period, but the new paragraphs have been criticized as making Bosniaks the main victims and being too Sarajevo-centric (Muminović, 2018). A more recent example of conflict over textbooks: Radio Liberty (2024) reported that new history textbooks had been prepared in Republika Srpska, the content of which, according to the publication, is presented in a form that radically differs from internationally recognized facts. It also has biographies of Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić, individuals convicted by the Yugoslav tribunal, but does not describe their roles in the events of the Bosnian War. This sparked a heated public debate, with international organizations criticizing the changes as leading to a politicized, ethnocentric, and revisionist history, so the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina declared the textbook unconstitutional (Balkan Insight, 2025). The Constitutional Court found unconstitutional certain parts of the textbook that do not comply with the principle of neutrality and inclusiveness, because, according to the court: “they present a one-sided version of history that insults the dignity of other peoples and is not based on facts established by international courts”, therefore the Government of the Republika Srpska was obliged to change the content or remove these pages from the educational process. Currently, I have not found information about Republika Srpska's official reaction to this decision, but I was able to buy this textbook, and the controversial pages about the Bosnian War are still present. This means that the content of my version of the book has either been corrected, or Republika Srpska is ignoring the court decision. The very fact of using controversial textbooks in schools, which provoke public reaction, including from the Constitutional Court, indicates attempts at “militarization” or

“weaponization of memory”. In the case of Republika Srpska, the textbooks are part of their broader confrontation with the central government of Bosnia. In general, international organizations reported limited progress in education and socialization. They point out that the Republic of Serbia and the cantons of the Federation “often refuse common curricula and international assessments, preserving outdated and fragmented approaches”. Reports claim that: “Students still face ethnic segregation and the practice of 'two schools under one roof,' and refugee returnees additionally face hate speech and discrimination in educational institutions, which undermines reconciliation efforts and hinders the creation of social cohesion” (European Commission, 2025; HRW, 2024; UNICEF, 2024)

2) Analysis of History Textbook:

All constituent nations began their storytelling in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, except Croats and Bosniaks. The grade 9 curriculum in Croatian schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina begins with the end of World War I. Bosniaks' textbooks began their domestic storytelling from the beginning of WWI. Bosnian and Serbian textbooks are divided into two parts: World/European History and National History, whereas Croatian textbooks often combine them.

I. Interwar period in Kingdom of Yugoslavia

1. Serbian Perspective:

The section on the interwar period in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia covers 16 pages and is divided into three parts. The first is "The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918–1929)", which takes up 5 pages. The second is "The Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929–1941)", also 5 pages long. The whole is concluded by the part "Yugoslav society, economy and culture", which has 4 pages.

Plot lines:

The textbook portrays the collapse of the four empires as an opportunity that allowed South Slavic national projects to materialize into concrete state-building initiatives. Serbia is positioned as the central integrating force, justified by Serbian financial support of the Yugoslav Committee¹ and the claim that the Yugoslav idea already existed among South Slavic intellectuals. According to this idea: Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs were one nation, with one language and a similar culture, regardless of religion, and therefore South Slavs

¹ The Yugoslav Committee was a political group created by representatives of the South Slavic lands of Austria-Hungary during World War I with the aim of uniting them into a single independent state.

should be politically united around Serbia, as Italians are around Piedmont (Васич, 2024, p. 66). The unification is presented as natural, historically justified, and practically necessary: Unification with Serbia put the southern Slavs on the side of the victors and provided the military potential to stabilize the borders of the new country. The State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs could not control its internal situation or its borders with neighboring countries without Serbia (Васич, 2024, p. 67).

The further proclamation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918 is depicted as the fulfillment of Serbia's long-term goals and a stabilizing factor in European security: In December 1918, a new country, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, was proclaimed in Belgrade, which became a barrier to German penetration to the east (Васич, 2024, p.68). While Subsequent political events – the adoption of unitary versions of the constitutions, the royal dictatorship of 6 January. Explained as a reaction to internal instability and external threats, which culminated in the creation of the Autonomous “Banovina of Croatia” as an attempt to prevent further escalation: The king used the dictatorship to destroy the forces that sought to destroy Yugoslavia: The Communists, Macedonian and Croatian separatists (Васич, 2024, p.91)

Yugoslavia itself is portrayed as a progressive, democratic country in which the pluralism of political views was guaranteed: the newly adopted Vidovdan Constitution guaranteed its people free development and freedom from foreign oppression. As a sign of political freedom, there were political parties advocating greater federalism and a communist party defending workers' rights (Васич, 2024, p. 87). Economic and cultural development took place, particularly in the countryside: “For the peasants, the Agrarian Reform was a great boon that the liberation and unification of 1918 brought” (Васич, 2024, p. 96). The country experienced significant development in culture, education, and religion: “Between 1921 and 1931, the illiteracy rate fell from 51% to 44%, the number of schools doubled, and the number of teachers tripled” (Васич, 2024, p.97)

The author summarizes that the Possibilities provided by Yugoslavia were not sufficiently recognized or used (Васич, 2024, p. 85).

Differentiation Us/Them:

The textbook presents a positive image of Serbia and the Yugoslav state as rational, stabilizing, and historically justified. Serbia is portrayed as the main architect and stabilizing force of the South Slavic unification, providing leadership, resources, and legitimacy. The South Slavs should be politically united around Serbia, like the Italians around Piedmont (Васич, 2024, p. 66).

"They" consist of external enemies—Albania, Bulgaria, Italy, Hungary, and the Vatican—presented as actors seeking to destabilize Yugoslavia and supporting separatist terrorist groups. Internal opposition from radical minorities (IMRO², Ustaše³) is depicted as manipulated by foreign states, reinforcing the dichotomy between the legitimate state and illegitimate extremists: Albania sought to annex Yugoslav territories populated by Albanians. Bulgaria supported the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization in Macedonia, while Italy and Hungary supported the Croatian Ustaše. Roman Catholics, who, in obedience to the Pope, took a hostile stance towards the Kingdom, fearing the Orthodox majority (Васич, 2024, p. 89).

Bosnian Muslims are positioned ambiguously: they were politically neutral and did not have a clearly defined national identity (Васич, 2024). On the other hand, it is argued that Muslims resented the administrative division of Bosnia (Васич, 2024, p. 93). This interpretation emphasizes the case for Yugoslav integration while reducing their political weight and serving as a rationale for Bosnia's inclusion in Yugoslavia. At the same time, it shows them as destabilizers, similar to other minorities who wanted the division of Yugoslavia.

Interpretation of Shared and Divergent Historical Experiences:

The Serbian textbook presents the events of interwar Yugoslavia through a strongly Serb centric framework, in which Serbia becomes the main integrator and savior of the South Slavs. Its victory in World War I is presented as the moral basis of leadership, and its protection from foreign powers as proof of its historical mission (Васич, 2024, p.66). Therefore, the formation of Yugoslavia is described as a justified historical process that was not fully appreciated by all others.

The new state is presented as a logical continuation of Serbian statehood: the constitution was adopted on Vidovdan⁴, the king is a Serb, and the Serbian population was dominant, creating the image of Yugoslavia as a continuation of Serbia.

Other peoples are portrayed as problem groups that desired the disintegration of Yugoslavia: Croats are victims of external influence, Muslims are a community without a

² The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization was a secret movement in Macedonia that (1918–1941) proclaimed the goal of gaining independence for Vardar Macedonia from the Yugoslav state and protecting the local population.

³ The Ustaše was a Croatian far-right and ethno-nationalist organization that sought to create an ethnically pure independent Croatian state.

⁴ Vidovan or St. Vitus' Day is a national and religious holiday in Serbia, which celebrates and honors three main events: the memory of the early Christian martyr Saint Vitus and the feat of the heroes of the Battle of Kosovo.

clear national identity, and Bosnia is a territory without political subjectivity (Васич, 2024).

Internal conflicts are explained not by structural problems of the state, but by internal intrigues from different political forces:

Parliamentary life in the kingdom was characterized by constant crises due to differing views on political, national, and socio-economic issues. In the political struggle in parliament, no decisions were made (Васич, 2024, p. 91).

And foreign powers' intervention: Albania sought to annex Yugoslav territories inhabited by Albanians. Bulgaria supported the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization in Macedonia, while Italy and Hungary supported the Croatian Ustaše. Roman Catholics, who, obeying the Pope, took a hostile position towards the Kingdom, fearing the Orthodox majority (Васич, 2024, p.89)

This required a reaction from the country's leadership: the parliament was dissolved, the constitution was suspended, the political opposition was isolated, and the entire population was declared Yugoslavs; the dictatorship calmed political passions (Васич, 2024, p.91).

Thus, common problems are shifted to external forces, the Great Depression, foreign powers, and Serbia's responsibility for the interwar instability is minimized, allowing the textbook to present the Serbian role in Yugoslavia as good and historically justified.

In the spheres of economy, culture, education, and science, Yugoslavia is depicted as a largely progressive country undergoing transformation in these areas. All problems could have been solved over time, but they were prevented by guilt: Due to World War II, further reorganization of Yugoslavia was postponed (Васич, 2024, p.93).

Markers of National Identity:

Markers of Serbian national identity in the interwar period are constructed around several mutually reinforcing elements. The first marker is the idea that the Yugoslav Kingdom represented a natural continuation of the Serbian state-building tradition. This continuity is emphasized through symbolic and institutional choices: the constitution was adopted on the Orthodox holiday of Vidovdan, the king was a Serb, the capital was located in Belgrade, and Serbian symbols dominated the flag and coat of arms. In this narrative, Yugoslavia appears not as a new multinational project but as an expanded Serbian state framework.

A second marker is the notion of Serbian political maturity and organizational superiority. Serbs are portrayed as a politically responsible and fully formed nation, unlike others who

are either junior partners influenced by foreign powers or communities lacking a clear national identity. Although the official ideology promoted the idea that all South Slavs constituted a single nation with one language—an idea also codified in the constitution (Васич, 2024, p. 91)—the textbook acknowledges that this project could not overcome structural differences: “However, the ideology of Yugoslavism did not correspond to reality, since Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were developed as separate nations” (Васич, 2024, p. 91). Within this framework, Serbs are implicitly positioned as the group entitled to lead others into a common state.

A third marker is the narrative of victimhood and protective responsibility. Serbs are depicted as the community that bore the burden of defending the state from hostile forces—such as the Ustaše, VMRO, the Vatican, and neighboring states allegedly seeking to destabilize or partition Yugoslavia. This framing reinforces the idea that Serbs were both the primary victims of external aggression and the principal defenders of Yugoslav unity.

The final marker is Orthodoxy, presented not merely as a religious tradition but as a core pillar of Serbian national identity. The textbook highlights that “the unification of the Serbian Orthodox Church was completed, which was loyal to the state and the monarch” (Васич, 2024, p. 99). The Church thus appears as a central institution of the national project, symbolizing both the consolidation of Serbian lands after World War I and the spiritual integration of the nation within the Yugoslav framework. Its unity and loyalty reinforce the idea of an organic connection between political authority, cultural heritage, and religious life

Presentation style/tone:

The style of the Serbian textbook is predominantly apologetic and Yugoslavian-centric, with a tone that legitimizes the Serbian political leadership and presents the formation of Yugoslavia as a historically logical and morally justified process. The textbook creates the impression of objectivity and, at the same time, subtly embeds value judgments that elevate Serbia and the Serbs among the South Slavs. The text is colored by symbolic references such as the Vidovan Constitution, Piedmont, Dam, and the like. Internal crises are described in a defensive tone, relieving Serbia of responsibility and reinforcing its image as a state besieged by enemies. The author combines documentary narration with subtle national legitimation, presenting Serbia as the natural core of the Yugoslav project and the main carrier of political order and historical continuity.

2. Bosniak perspective:

The section on Bosnia and Herzegovina in the interwar period comprises 19 pages and is divided into 4 parts. 4 pages are devoted to the section titled "Establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes" and to the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina until 1929. 4 pages are devoted to the section entitled "Bosnia and Herzegovina during the January 6th dictatorship". 3 pages are devoted to the section "The end of the January 6th dictatorship and the Cvetković-Maček understanding" and another 3 pages to the part entitled "Economic and cultural-educational life between the two wars."

Plot:

Bosnia at the end of the First World War was a space where different groups sought to redefine their identities. There were forces supporting the new South Slavic country, as well as those who supported the autonomy of Bosnia within the Habsburg Empire (Šabotić, I. 2012, p. 131). This again shows that the region did not have a single national program, but was a place of intersection of competing visions of potential Bosnian statehood. But at the same time, it should be noted that Bosnian Muslims did not consider representatives of other nationalities and religions to be their enemies, but on the contrary, sought cooperation in any of the options.

The war ended with the dissolution of Austro-Hungary; the last imperial administrator of Bosnia officially transferred all power to the first Bosnian-Herzegovinian national government (Šabotić, I. 2012). This later became part of Yugoslavia.

The first storyline is the creation of Yugoslavia as a compromise political entity, but it was marked by internal conflict from the very beginning. The textbook argues that the creation of Yugoslavia was part of a dual strategy: legitimizing the political project of unifying the South Slavic lands on the international stage and mobilizing the military-political support of the South Slavs (Šabotic, I., 2012). Thus, the creation of Yugoslavia was a joint project of all participants. Despite the signing of the Corfu Declaration, the fear of the representatives of the South Slavs regarding the true intentions of Serbia in the future common state is emphasized" (Šabotic, I., 2012, p.129). This forms the plot of an unequal union, in which equality was more a matter of declaration than reality.

The second storyline revolves around the situation in Bosnia, caught between three competing projects: Serbian centralism, Croatian federalism, and Bosniaks' desire to maintain territorial integrity within Yugoslavia (Šabotic, 2012, p. 134). This creates a line of constant political maneuvering by Bosniak politicians, in which they seek to minimize losses for the Muslim population and maintain their subjectivity (Šabotic, 2012, p. 137). But this political triangular configuration made it difficult to find any stable model for resolving the problem, which became more complicated with the creation of the

autonomous Banovina of Croatia. After the king was assassinated, the new state leadership sought to stabilize the situation by creating a Croatian autonomous unit to satisfy Croat demands (Šabotic, 2012, p. 144). But granting autonomy to one group triggered a domino effect, as others began to demand their own. Bosniaks, meanwhile, also demanded an administrative unit within the historical borders of Bosnia; additionally, the Bosnian Serbs and Croats who found themselves in the new banovina did not support the agreement (Šabotic, 2012, p.146). This showed solidarity with the Muslim population and acknowledged that only together can the three groups exist in peace. Kingdom of Yugoslavia was unable to create an inclusive model that would integrate various national projects.

The third storyline describes the gradual escalation of the conflict through authoritarian policies and the transition to dictatorship. Belgrade began dismantling the old structures through "decrees" and building a unitary state; the Vidovan Constitution consolidated centralism and gave the king extremely broad powers (Šabotić, 2012, pp. 134-135). This deepened interethnic tensions, which culminated in a murder in the parliament building, an event which the king used as a pretext for establishing a dictatorship (Šabotić, 2012, p.139). The dictatorship destroyed the existing political system and contributed to the radicalization of the opposition. Additionally, "the entire population of Yugoslavia was declared Yugoslavs" (Šabotić, 2012, p.136). This was an attempt to impose a single identity after the failure of political integration. As evidence, the author says: from the very beginning, from day one, the national question dominated; it was understood that, officially, Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes are three tribes of one nation (Šabotic, 2012, p. 138).

The Last storyline portrays Bosnia as economically underdeveloped and heavily reliant on agriculture. Bosniaks constituted the majority of landowners, owning 62% of private land (Šabotić, 2012, p. 147). The situation was worsened by agrarian reforms that deprived Bosniaks of land and the Great Depression. Additionally, the region was characterized by low educational attainment and a weak cultural infrastructure (Šabotić, 2012, p. 148). This hindered the formation of a single national identity and deepened the feeling of marginalization.

Differentiation Us/Them:

The textbook constructs differentiation between groups through the distribution of political subjectivity, responsibility, and ability to act within the interwar Yugoslavia political system. Self-perception is formed mainly around Bosniaks (Slavic Muslims), who are depicted as a community striving to preserve the territorial integrity of Bosnia

and Herzegovina within Yugoslavia, while maintaining interethnic solidarity. “The people of Bosnia feel themselves blood brothers with Croats, Serbs, and Slovenes” (Šabotić, 2012, p. 131). According to this self-positioning, they try to act rationally under conditions of limited opportunities. Their position is presented as moderately pragmatic, aiming to minimize harm in a situation where stronger actors determine the rules of the game.

Instead, “they” refers to two distinct groups. The Serbian political center emerges as the dominant force, imposing its will through authoritarian methods and establishing a dictatorship that unites the population under the artificial identity of “Yugoslavs” (Šabotić, 2012, p. 131). At the same time, Bosnian Serbs are separated from other Serbs in Yugoslavia. For example, it is noted that Bosnia was represented in the Yugoslav Committee by three Bosnian Serb politicians (Šabotić, 2012, p. 129). This indicates that they sought, above all, to protect Bosnia's territorial interests rather than to serve as leaders of Serbian interests.

Croatian political actors are portrayed as the dominant opposition force, which has become increasingly radicalized over time. Despite the desire of moderate Croats for the federalization of Yugoslavia, the Croats pose no less of a threat, as they sought to include Bosnian territory within Croatian autonomy (Šabotić, I. 2012, p. 145). Moreover, Bosnian Croats, like Bosnian Serbs, are separated from the rest. As evidence, the author cites a letter from Bosnian-Herzegovinian students of all nationalities, directed against the partition of Bosnia: Serbs, Bosniaks, and Croats are nationally intertwined, and it is impossible to draw a border between them that would not become a heavy burden for each of them (Šabotić, I. 2012, p.146).

As a result, the differentiation of “us/them” is built around who dominates: Bosniaks, as a community striving for equality and territorial preservation, resist those who determine political dynamics that run counter to their interests.

Interpretation of Shared and Divergent Historical Experiences:

In the Bosnian textbook, the common historical events of interwar Yugoslavia are interpreted through the prism of the asymmetric experience and the particular vulnerability of Bosnia as a territory without its own statehood. Although, in principle, all South Slavs participated in the creation of a common state, the textbook emphasizes that the practical experience of these processes varied. For Bosniaks, the initial stage of unification is presented primarily as a moment of interethnic solidarity and, only secondarily, as a matter of practical calculation. “The people of Bosnia feel themselves blood brothers with Croats, Serbs and Slovenes” (Šabotić, 2012, p. 131). This is

interpreted as evidence that Bosniaks perceived unification not as a threat but as a chance for equal coexistence in a democratic state.

However, subsequent events – the centralization of power, the establishment of a dictatorship, the administrative-territorial division of Bosnia – are shown as having radically different consequences for different groups. And for Bosniaks, it was an experience of unfulfilled desires. For the Serbian political center, centralization was a tool for state formation and stabilization, while for Bosniaks it was a loss of subjectivity, as the political center sought to resolve its problems with the Croats at the expense of the Bosniaks. The centralized state structure hindered the country's development, creating conflicts. Bosniaks were deprived of their autonomous government, which they received after World War I from a representative of Austria-Hungary. At a time when opposition parties advocated federalization, the current government did not want to compromise but responded with increased repression, which only heightened interethnic tensions. As a result, this led to systemic crises in the country's life. The dictatorship itself led to the dominance of some over others and exacerbated the national question (Šabotic, 2012, p. 142). Bosniaks here found themselves caught between two state-building projects that directly affected the entire population and hindered the development of a common identity among the three peoples across the territory. The Bosniaks' support at times for one side or another was not an act of consent but an attempt to minimize their own losses in a hopeless situation.

In the socio-economic sphere, it is emphasized that Yugoslavia was unable to solve its citizens' problems but, rather, created additional points of tension. As a result of the agrarian reform, which abolished the feudal system, Bosnian landowners were destroyed (Šabotic, 2012, p.147). The lack of education and cultural institutions hindered the spread of literacy among the masses and made cultural life low (Šabotić, 2012, p. 148). Thus, the development of a Yugoslav or Bosnian national identity was also hampered.

As a result, the Bosnian textbook interprets common historical events not as creating a shared experience but as exposing deep divisions within the population. For Bosniaks, interwar Yugoslavia appears not as a realization of the idea of equality and unity, but as a period in which their hopes for equality and territorial preservation were systematically destroyed by the political projects of others. Interwar Yugoslavia failed to become an inclusive state; instead, it was a repressive, authoritarian country that created different residence permits for the three groups.

Markers of National Identity:

Bosniak national identity in the interwar period is constructed around several interconnected markers. The central marker is territorial affiliation, as Bosniaks consistently advocate the preservation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a single, indivisible, and autonomous administrative unit within its historical borders. Their political engagement, demands for autonomy, and criticism of centralist policies are interpreted as efforts to assert their own national subjectivity within a state dominated by the interests of stronger neighboring peoples.

A second key marker is interethnic solidarity, presented as a long-standing characteristic of Bosnian society. The textbook emphasizes that “the people of Bosnia feel themselves blood brothers with Croats, Serbs, and Slovenes” (Šabotić, 2012, p. 131), reinforcing the idea of a shared cultural space and mutual closeness among Bosnia’s confessional communities. This narrative positions Bosniaks as natural mediators and contributors to a supra-ethnic Bosnian identity.

The third marker is vulnerability and the struggle for equality. Bosniaks are depicted as a community situated “between the stronger subjects – Serbs and Croats” (Šabotić, 2012, p. 136), whose interests were repeatedly marginalized during administrative reforms that partitioned Bosnia into several units (Šabotić, 2012, p. 140). This experience of political weakness becomes part of their collective memory and identity, shaping a narrative of persistent efforts to secure recognition and equality.

The fourth marker is Islam, portrayed as a historically embedded component of Bosnia’s social fabric. The religious community provides the institutional basis for political organization, exemplified by the “Union of Muslims of Yugoslavia,” which articulated Bosniak interests. References to the Grand Mufti as a moral and political authority highlight the role of religious leadership in moments of crisis, while the narrative that Muslims would suffer most from the division of Bosnia underscores the link between religious identity, territorial integrity, and political vulnerability.

Presentation style/tone:

The style of presentation of information about Bosniaks in the textbook is predominantly analytical, critical, and empathetic, with an emphasis on the structural inequality and political vulnerability of Bosnia and its Muslim population, making them the central victim.

Narrative is presented without emotionally charged language, making it calm, documentary, and factual. However, the author consistently emphasizes the asymmetry of power in favor of Bosniaks. The author attempts to frame sentences in an explanatory and

defensive manner regarding Bosniaks. In contrast, the tone towards the Serbian political center is restrainedly critical, emphasizing its dominance, one-sidedness, and unwillingness to cooperate.

The tone towards the Croatian actors oscillates between sympathy and criticism (in the case of the Ustaše). Overall, the style combines factual narrative with moral judgment, presenting Bosniaks as a community striving for equality and territorial preservation, while portraying the interwar Yugoslav state as biased and unable to account for Bosnia's specific identity and interests.

3. Croat perspective:

The section on the interwar period in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia occupies 32 pages in the Croatian textbook. 19 pages are devoted to the section entitled "Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of the First Yugoslavia", and 13 pages to the section "Education and Culture in the World and in Croatia in the First Half of the 20th Century". The first section is divided into 6 parts, with the following title: "Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs" -2 pages. The Kingdom of "Serbs, Croats and Slovenes" - 5 pages, "The Adriatic Question" - 2 pages, "The Kingdom of Yugoslavia" - 3 pages, "The Croatian Economy between the Two World Wars" - 2 pages, and the last part "Resistance to the Dictatorship and the Solution of the Croatian Question" – 4 pages. The second section is divided into two parts: "Education and Culture in the World in the First Half of the 20th Century" and "Education, Culture and Sports in Croatia between the Two World Wars", which takes up 4 pages.

Plot:

The textbook presents a concise narrative of the loss of Croatian statehood, political subordination, and resistance to Serbian centralism. Interwar Yugoslavia is presented as the realization of the “Greater Serbian idea,” while Croatia, despite its formal restoration of statehood after the war, is depicted as having been forced under Italian pressure to join Yugoslavia (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 43). The king’s refusal to sign a treaty of equal unification, followed by the brutal suppression of peaceful protests in Zagreb, establishes a storyline of broken promises and the rise of Serbian dominance. Croats are depicted as the group that lost the most from unification: deprived of their state, treated as bargaining chips in external negotiations, and left defenseless against foreign pressure (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 46). Hopes for change through elections are dashed as the Croatian opposition faces systematic repression, culminating in a royal dictatorship, the abolition of civil rights, and the imposition of an artificial “Yugoslav” identity—events that

radicalize the Croatian movement and fuel the rise of the Ustaše, who argue that only independence can resolve the crisis (pp. 51, 55). The assassination of the king exposes the regime's instability and leads to reluctant concessions, including the creation of the Autonomous Banovina of Croatia, which is portrayed as a fragile compromise blocked by Serbian parliamentary dominance and ultimately thwarted by World War II (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 52). Meanwhile, Bosnia is portrayed as a secondary, politically passive space, mired in anarchy and interethnic conflict, without a coherent identity, and situated between the Croatian and Serbian national projects. Its future is shown as dependent on decisions made by Croatian and Serbian politicians, which reinforces Croatia's argument that political subjectivity at the time belonged to Croatia, not to Bosnia (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 42).

Differentiation us/them:

The textbook builds a clear opposition in which the Croats appear as rational actors who strive for democracy, parliamentary mechanisms, and the rule of law, but become victims of repression, violence, and assimilation policies that radicalize some of them (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015).

The Serbs, in contrast, appear as antagonists, a dominant force that uses state institutions, the king's support, and force to suppress opposition and establish its own political project (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015). Accordingly, they benefit the most from the creation of a new state.

Bosniaks are depicted as a community without a clear national orientation and are accordingly portrayed as politically uncertain and unable to act as a full-fledged actor, given the claim that the fate of Bosnia depended entirely on Croatian and Serbian politicians (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 42).

All these oppositions create a structure in which Croats appear as a single group with legitimate political goals, while Serbs are seen as a source of threat, domination and violence, and Muslims as an element dependent on the decisions of Serbs and Croats. Accordingly, an “us/them” system is formed, where Croats are the victim and bearer of justice, and Serbs are the dominant and repressive “other”.

Interpretation of Shared and Divergent Historical Experiences:

For Croats, the common events of the Yugoslav interwar period are interpreted through the prism of the loss of Croatian statehood, which existed in various forms for a long time, and of the unequal unification that did not correspond to their political expectations at the

moment. This, in the end, led to systematic attempts at political subordination and assimilation.

The creation of the Union state is presented not as a natural act of national unification, but as a forced step under external pressure, primarily from Italy. At the same time, there were politicians who were skeptical of Serbia and demanded a more detailed discussion of the unification process, seeking to ensure the equality of the peoples (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p.42- 43).

The refusal to sign the equal unification treaty is the first evidence that the new state was being formed according to a Serbian political project, and not as a joint creation of the three peoples: «Under pressure from Serbian politicians, the Prime Minister of Serbia withdrew his signature because its provisions contradicted the Serbian concept of unification (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p.42). Therefore, Serbia did not seek an equal federation, but insisted on the annexation of the State SHS to Serbia, which was implementation of the of a Greater Serbia project by Croats.

Croats are the only ones of the three groups who mention the dispersal of the anti-unification demonstration in Zagreb. The dispersal of this demonstration in Zagreb is important because it symbolizes the violent establishment of an unequal state and legitimizes further resistance. The new government clearly showed its character and how it would deal with opponents of the new regime in the future. (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 45).

Due to Italy's expansion into Croatia's territories, the Croats considered that unification with Serbia did not provide them with security or territorial integrity, as Yugoslavia lacked the forces to resist. As a result, Yugoslavia recognized the status quo (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 46). By this, the textbook reinforces the vision that the Croats became not only victims of repression at home but also objects of external bargaining, while the Serbs were the main beneficiaries of the unification.

The adoption of the Vidovan Constitution, the murder in parliament, the dictatorship, and economic inequality were successive stages of Serbian domination, which deprived the Croats of the opportunity to peacefully realize their political project. This is reinforced by the mention: “The King considered the Croatian political parties his enemies, and directed the blade of pressure at them” (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p.52). The textbook admits Ustaše in the context of interwar Yugoslavia, recognizing their radicalism, violent methods of struggle, and reliance on foreign support. But at the same time, they present them as consequences of political repression and Croatia's unequal position within the Yugoslav state. The Ustaše was not a legitimate national movement or representatives of all Croats

at the time, but it was a radical reaction that arose in the absence of democratic dialogue and amid state violence.

Economic discontinuity and economic inequality are depicted as a deliberate continuation of the policy of dominance and the extraction of economic resources in favor of the center (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 58). For Croats, this economic policy of interwar Yugoslavia was an instrument of political advantage for the chosen ones. Uneven development and the lack of support during the crisis reinforced national differences and prepared the ground for further radicalization and conflicts. Thus, common historical events are a history of divergent experiences, where Croats appear as victims of an unequal union, and interwar Yugoslavia as a Serbian state aimed at absorbing Croats.

Markers of National Identity:

The central marker is their own statehood, presented as the natural and legitimate state of the Croatian people, lost as a result of an unequal unification. In descriptions of the names of cultural and sports organizations of the time, the word Croatia is marked as central, for example, the publishing House “Matica Hrvatska” (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 68). The most important books of this time were the encyclopedia “History of the Croats under the National Rulers”. According to the textbook's author, the publication of these two books preserved the national identity of the Croats (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 68). As an important event of that time, the author underlines the celebration of the 1000-year anniversary of the creation of the Croatian Kingdom.

Added to this is a political culture that portrays Croats as supporters of democracy, parliamentary mechanisms, and peaceful protest—in opposition to the repressive actions of the central government (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015). Such opposition reinforces the rhetoric of sacrifice, which becomes a key element of self-description. Linguistic and symbolic markers – the imposition of a single language, the dominance of Serbian state symbols – are presented as a threat to Croatian cultural separateness: “The coat of arms featured the Serbian white eagle on its chest, with a shield bearing the combined coats of arms of Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia” (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 48). Since the visual dominance remained Serbian, it reinforced the visual representation of Serbia's priority in the new state. Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian was recognized as the only official language.

Finally, territoriality and the idea of “their own lands” reinforce the image of the Croats as a historical subject fighting to preserve their own space and political autonomy. Textbook highlight: the importance of own land through the creation of Croat autonomy: The autonomy independently took care of all important internal affairs on its territory, and

the Croatian State Emblem and Flag could be used without hindrance, and in fact they became symbols of Croatian autonomy (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p.58).

Presentation style/tone

The text's style is predominantly accusatory and explanatory, combining a narrative of political victimhood with a tone of moral accusation directed at the central Yugoslav authorities and Serbian political figures. The text is emotionally charged, emphasizing injustice, repression, and asymmetry in the interwar state. This is conveyed through the choice of words: Blade, Greater Serbia, Bloodshed in Zagreb, solution of the Croatian question, true nature etc. The text constructs a coherent plot of structural discontent, presenting each historical episode as yet another piece of evidence of the systemic inequality faced by Croats. The presentation of events is evaluative rather than neutral, using cause-and-effect explanations to justify Croatian political positions and emphasize the illegitimacy of the state's actions. The author combines factual narrative with moral reasoning, creating a tone that is both documentary and accusatory, aimed at demonstrating the inevitability of Croatian political disillusionment within the Yugoslav project.

II. WW II

1. Serbian Perspective

The section on World War II is titled "Yugoslavia in World War II (1941-1945)" and spans 22 pages. Of these, 4 pages are devoted to the part "May War and its consequences", 4 pages to the part "Independent State of Croatia and its genocidal policy towards Serbs, Jews and Gypsies", 5 pages to the part "Anti-fascist Resistance Movement and the War in Yugoslavia (1941-1943)", 3 pages to the part "War in Yugoslavia (1943-1945)", 4 pages to the part "Character and consequences of the war in Yugoslavia".

Plot:

The Serbian textbook constructs the Second World War through a storyline that frames the conflict as both an internal Yugoslav struggle and a morally unambiguous confrontation in which Serbs occupy the position of primary victims and principal defenders of the state. The opening assertion that "Serbs and Jews were subjected to complete or partial destruction" (Васич, 2024, p. 119) establishes a moral hierarchy in which Serbs are placed on the "right side of history" from the outset. Their refusal to support accession to the Tripartite Pact is contrasted with the alleged disloyalty of others: "The Yugoslav government was abandoned by Prime Minister Vlatko Maček (a Croat). German troops

entered Zagreb, greeted enthusiastically by its inhabitants” (Васич, 2024, p. 121). The collapse of the state is thus attributed to the unwillingness of non-Serb groups to defend Yugoslavia.

The central plotline emphasizes the Serbs as the main victims of occupation and interethnic violence. The crimes of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) and the Ustaše receive extensive attention and are depicted as a systematic, totalitarian project aimed at the destruction of Serbs: “Serbs were exterminated through a system of concentration camps, Catholicization, the ban on the Cyrillic alphabet” (Васич, 2024, pp. 125–126). The Catholic Church and Muslims are portrayed as complicit, though the author partially mitigates Muslim responsibility by noting that “most of them were neutral” (Васич, 2024, p. 125).

A third storyline centers on the two Serbian resistance movements—the Chetniks and the Partisans. The Chetniks are presented as the legitimate “Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland,” whose collaboration with the occupiers is attributed to strategic miscalculations rather than ideological affinity (Васич, 2024, p. 130). Their violence against Bosnian Muslims and Croats is portrayed as reactive rather than systematic: “this was a response to the actions of the NDH” (Васич, 2024, p. 130). The Partisans are initially described as a predominantly Serbian movement that emerged from Ustaše terror, and their radicalization is explained through external factors, such as expectations of the Red Army’s arrival. Over time, however, they are said to have transformed into a genuine national liberation force operating under the slogan “Death to Fascism! Freedom to the peoples!” (Васич, 2024, p. 131). Both movements are ultimately depicted as contributing to liberation, reinforcing the idea that Serbs “fought the most.”

In the concluding section, the textbook highlights the Partisans’ military successes and international recognition, which enabled them to establish a new state while the king was compelled to transfer power (Васич, 2024, p. 134). This transition is framed as a continuation of Serbian statehood from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to Socialist Yugoslavia. The author explicitly labels the conflict a “fratricidal war,” emphasizing that it was not merely an occupation but a civil war among “fraternal peoples.” This framing underscores the alleged betrayal by non-Serb groups, internal divisions among Serbs, and the justification of violence as a defensive reaction to existential threats. The final statement—“World War II in Yugoslavia was a civil war in which Chetniks and Partisans fought among themselves, and they fought individually against armed quislings” (Васич, 2024, p. 136)—cements the narrative of Serbs as the principal victims of both external aggression and the collapse of the Yugoslav project.

Differentiation us/them:

The textbook consistently portrays the Serbs as the main victim, the main resistance force, and the only group that remained loyal to the state, while other peoples are portrayed as traitors, collaborators, or accomplices in crimes. The author begins by arguing that "Yugoslavia's entry into the Tripartite Pact was a forced act that was not supported by the largest ethnic group – the Serbs" (Васич, 2024, p. 120). This thereby identifies the Serbs as the most loyal and those on the right side. The contrast is then intensified by describing the reactions of different peoples to the occupation and return of Yugoslavia: "The Slovenes declared National Government and demanded the withdrawal of Yugoslav troops" (Васич, 2024.p.121), while "The Albanians rebelled against Yugoslav authority in Kosovo and Metohija" (Васич, 2024.p.135), creating an image of non-Serb groups as disloyal and ready to collaborate with the enemy.

The NDH is presented as a totalitarian apparatus for the destruction of Serbs: "The state program of Pavelić Croatia was the creation of a Croatian living space, by the destruction of Serbs, Jews, Roma, and politically unreliable Croats" (Васич, 2024, p.132)

Muslims and the Roman Catholic Church are those who joined the Ustaše and committed crimes. Although the responsibility of Muslims is partially mitigated, the Catholic Church is depicted as an institution that unconditionally supported the crimes: "The Roman Catholic Church did not vote against the genocide in the NDH. A large number of its priests and monks participated in the crimes" (Васич, 2024, p.130), which strengthens the religious dimension of the opposition.

In contrast, the Partisans and Chetniks, despite internal conflicts, are presented as movements that contributed to the liberation, and the Serbs, respectively, are those who suffer for their homeland. Thus, a clear dichotomy is built in the text: "we" - Serbs - victims, fighters, loyalists; "They" - Croats, Muslims, Albanians, Catholics - are traitors, collaborators, or participants in crimes, which forms a morally asymmetrical interpretation of the war and interethnic relations.

Interpretation of Shared and Divergent Historical Experiences:

Yugoslavia's entry into the Tripartite Pact was a forced act in difficult political conditions, as Yugoslavia was surrounded by the pact's member states and could not count on the support of the Allies (Васич, 2024, p. 120). The military coup against the signing of the pact was led by officers of the Serbian army, who were supported by the predominantly Serbian population: "Demonstrations in support of the king and the new government with a Serbian majority took place in Belgrade and other major cities" (Васич, 2024, p.120).

In contrast, the author describes the reaction of various non-Serbian peoples to the arrival of the Axis powers, creating an image of non-Serbs as disloyal and immediately willing to collaborate with the enemy. Regarding the reasons, it is argued that: “The war revealed the weakness of the royal power and the entire state, which grew out of unhealthy relations that had existed since the founding of the state” (Васич, 2024, p.121). It suggests that Yugoslavia disintegrated not because of an institutional crisis that had existed for a long time beforehand, but because, from the very beginning, it was built on conflicting interethnic relations stemming from disloyalty to Yugoslavia, and the war only exposed this internal crisis.

The NDH is presented as a genocidal project aimed at the genocide of the Serbs, making it the central event of the Second World War in Yugoslavia. Accordingly, all who collaborated with the Ustaše were accomplices of this regime. At the same time, the traumatic experience of others during the NDH is minimized by indicating that others were subjected to repression for political reasons and the Serbs were the primary goal of genocide in the NDH within the framework of the Ideology of Ethnically Pure Croatia (Васич, 2024, p.125). Accordingly, all who collaborated with the Ustaše were criminals. For example, the figure of the Catholic Archbishop of Zagreb, Alojzije Stepinac, is presented as a person who, according to the textbook, was responsible for crimes against Serbs (Васич, 2024, p.126). However, collaborationism is described asymmetrically: while the NDH is presented in detail as a criminal regime, the Serbian “government of national salvation” under General Nedić is mentioned briefly, and its collaboration is minimized. Its actions are framed as constrained and well-intentioned: “The government of Nedić aimed to defend the national interests of the Serbs within the framework of Hitler’s order; however, its legitimacy and influence were limited by the will of the German occupiers” (Васич, 2024, p. 125). This framing reduces Serbian responsibility and reinforces the victim narrative.

In Serbian textbooks, the activities of the Chetniks are interpreted as a legitimate struggle, since they represented the official government in exile. It is noted that some Chetniks units collaborated with the occupying forces, but this is attributed to Drago Mihajlovic's passive tactics (Васич, 2024). By doing so, they removed strategic responsibility from the movement. Their actions are viewed primarily as self-defense against crimes against the Serbian population (Васич, 2024, p. 128). The author notes that the Chetniks' attempts to organize resistance in non-Serb regions were unsuccessful (Васич, 2024, p.129). In parallel, the partisan movement is presented at the initial stage as purely Serbian, and only later as a Pan-Yugoslav liberation movement. It is emphasized that the bulk of both groups consisted of the rural population, which was often unaware of the strategic ideological

goals of both movements (Васич, 2024, p. 128). The role of Croats and Bosniaks in the partisan resistance is practically not mentioned, and the facts of the creation of their own partisan governments are completely ignored. Recognition of Tito's Yugoslavia and the refusal to support the Chetniks occurred under pressure from Great Britain (Васич, 2024, p. 128). Britain did this so that the USSR would not claim a zone of interests in other regions.

At the end it states that Yugoslavia made a disproportionately high contribution to the victory over fascism thanks to the activities of the anti-fascist movements- the Chetniks and Partisans (Васич, 2024, p.138). This argument reinforces the centrality of the Serbian resistance and justifies the actions of the Partisans and Chetniks.

Markers of National Identity:

The identity of the Serbs in World War II is built on the image of a people who became victims of ethnically motivated violence, primarily in the context of the genocidal policies of the NDH, which shapes the perception of the vulnerability of the Serbian community and its martyrdom for its faith, language, alphabet, and right to be Serbs. This experience of victimhood served as the moral justification of the Serbian role in World War II and the political justification of Serbian actions in the 20th century.

Secondly, there is a representation of the Serbs as the only loyal community that did not betray the state, unlike other peoples of Yugoslavia, who are presented in the textbook as prone to collaboration. This establishes the idea that, outside the single Serbian state, they are vulnerable, and that Yugoslavia, as an extension of the Serbian state, was a natural guarantor of their unity. It also reinforces their moral superiority in the conflict.

Thirdly, the Orthodox civilizational affiliation serves as a cultural boundary and a means of preserving national identity. The Ustaše pursued a policy of Catholicization that shaped Serbs' image of the martyred church as the only true protector of the people in difficult times (Васич, 2024).

Presentation style/tone:

The text of the Serbian textbook is written in a distinctly ethnocentric and conflict-hostile style, built on the systemic opposition of "Serbs - others". The author uses an emotionally charged presentation of information that establishes a clear moral hierarchy, portraying the Serbs as a single, loyal, and morally right community, while neighboring peoples are generalized into categories of betrayal, collaboration, and aggression.

The dramatization of the text is enhanced by the emphasis on historical trauma and the Serbs' status as the main victims, which legitimizes their exclusive role in the liberation

struggle. At the same time, an excusatory tone is used regarding one's own mistakes or collaboration, which reduces responsibility through arguments about "forcedness" or "lack of real autonomy," or by explaining it as unsuccessful tactics.

2. Bosniaks' perspective:

The section on Bosnia in World War II consists of 14 pages, of which the section entitled Bosnia and Herzegovina in World War II takes up 4 pages, the section entitled "People's Liberation Movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina" is devoted to 4 pages, and the section "Restoration of Bosnian-Herzegovinian Statehood; AVNOJ and ZAVNOBiH" is devoted to 5 pages.

Plot:

The textbook's storyline is built around the idea of Bosnia as an object of external aggression and a subject of further liberation. The first plot is the collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia due to external intervention and internal political crisis. The author shifts the responsibility for the state's collapse to "the paralysis of power caused by the flight of the King and the government to London" (Šabotić, 2012, p. 153). By doing this, he avoids accusations against specific ethnic groups and portrays the citizens and the army as left to their own devices.

The second storyline concerns the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) and the relationship of Bosniaks with this entity. The NDH in their textbook is presented as a radical ethno-nationalist project that denied the multi-ethnicity of Bosnia and implemented systematic violence against Serbs, Jews, and Roma, as well as opposition-minded Croats and Bosniaks (Šabotić, 2012, p.155). This regime also sought to assimilate Bosniaks through the administrative division of Bosnia's historical space, "to install by iron the Croatian State right to Bosnia" (Šabotić, 2012, p. 154). The text is dominated by a strategy of distancing and forced pragmatism, explaining the collaboration of individual Bosniaks with anti-Yugoslav sentiments while emphasizing that the majority of the population opposed terror, as evidenced by "protest resolutions".

The third line is the partisan struggle against the occupation forces and collaborators appear as the only truly liberation force that united the peoples and gave the Bosniaks the opportunity to restore their own statehood in opposition to the Chetniks: The main goal of the Partisans was to unite all democratic and anti-fascist forces regardless of their origin (Šabotic, 2012, p.157). Their opposition, the Chetniks, are portrayed as a radically hostile force, whose ideology was "Ethnically clean Serbia," which makes them identical to the Nazis (Šabotic, 2012, p.156). The author emphasizes the systematic crimes of the

Chetniks against the Muslim population and Croats, which serves to completely delegitimize this movement in the eyes of the reader. Bosnia itself was the center of the people's liberation warfare, as it had the largest number of free territories. Based on this, in 1943, members of three ethnic groups of the Bosniak Partisan government were able to “restore Bosnian-Herzegovinian statehood” and proclaim the equality and multinational character of Bosnia (Šabotić, 2012, p. 157, 162). With the establishment of the socialist federal Yugoslavia, the king was forbidden to return, which is a hint at the logical end of his reign in the textbook, as he fled the country and the Chetniks, the Yugoslav army at home, discredited themselves with their actions.

Differentiation us/them:

In the Bosnian textbook, the line of differentiation is constructed softly but systematically, since there is not much explicit language of “us/them”, but the storytelling clearly delineates “us” as Bosniaks who seek to preserve multi-ethnicity and avoid crimes, while “other” groups appear as sources of threats or radical projects. The negative portrayal of the Others is evident in the characterization of the NDH as a regime that wished to assimilate Bosniaks “Ustaše political theory considered the territory of the NDH to belong exclusively to Croats, who also included Bosniaks.”, as well as in the depiction of the Chetniks as a movement with no less equally radical program of “creating a homogeneous Serbia” and describing their systematic crimes primarily against Bosniaks (Šabotić, 2012.p.155 – 156).

Victimization is presented through the image of double pressure, from Croats and Serbs, where Bosniaks were forced to create a self-defense militia to protect their own civil population primarily: “In many regions, Muslim units were formed and armed to protect their villages and populations” (Šabotić, 2012, p.155). Victimization is also present through the description of battles: “The partisans and the people, with great efforts and great sacrifices, broke through the enemy ring and reached Mount Gumech” (Šabotić, 2012, p.158). The author avoids the guilt of the Bosniaks regarding collaboration; on the contrary, he emphasizes that the majority adopted "resolutions of protest condemning the policy of violence against their fellow citizens" and if there was some collaboration, it was a consequence of the interwar policy of Yugoslavia (Šabotić, 2012, p.155).

There are generalizations about the Chetniks and Ustaše in a restrained form. They are described as an organized negative force that collaborated with the occupiers. For example: "At the beginning of 1943, a joint offensive of German, Italian, Ustaše and Chetniks troops began on the free territory in Bosnia" (Šabotić, 2012, p.159). At the same time, the role of Bosniaks in the "Khanjar" division is minimized to avoid undesirable

associations with Bosniaks. Also, the Muslim paramilitary formations of the “Hadžiefendićeva legion” and the “Huskina militia” are legitimized by the fact that they were created for Muslim self-defense and later joined the ranks of the partisans (Šabotić, 2012, p. 155).

Instead, on the contrary, interethnic cooperation within the ranks of the Partisans is emphasized, and the joint restoration of statehood itself is used as a positive marker to reduce the guilt of Serbs and Croats in particular. While the NDH and Chetniks are mainly referred to as movements or forces, the description of the restoration of independence uses the name of the nationality: Bosnia is not Serbian, not Muslim, not Croatian, but at the same time their free, fraternal and equal Bosnia and Herzegovina (Šabotić, 2012, p.162).

Interpretation of Shared and Divergent Historical Experiences:

In a Bosnian textbook, shared and divergent historical experiences are interpreted through the framework of a multinational Bosnia, where the war appears both as a common tragedy and as a field of asymmetrical actions by different groups.

The outbreak of the war and the collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia are not the fault of any particular group, but rather the king and his own government, who abandoned their people, which caused the country’s collapse and subsequent occupation. Bosniaks did not supported the occupational authority but had to interact restrainlly with them for own security. The participation of Bosniaks in the 13th SS Division “Handschar” is minimized by using the neutral term “Wehrmacht” to avoid associations with the Waffen-SS and by emphasizing the “Villefranche Uprising” as evidence of anti-Nazi sentiment among the soldiers, as well as the creation of their own Muslim militias is interpreted not as an ideological choice in favor of one of the parties, but as a need to protect their homes in a security vacuum. The creation of these units was later legitimized by their joining the partisans (Šabotić, 2012, p. 155)⁵. It also minimizes the connection of Bosniaks with Nazi structures

In the Bosnian textbook, the shared and heterogeneous war experience is interpreted through the prism of a multinational Bosnia, where World War II appears both as a common tragedy and as a field of asymmetrical actions of different groups. Shared suffering during the occupation and joint participation in the partisan movement serve as points of unity, while collaborationism, but also ethno-nationalist projects and wartime

⁵ Huskina militia and Hadžiefendićeva legion was two Bosnian Muslim military units during World War II, created with the aim of protecting the Muslim population. During the war, they formed alliances with all forces of the conflict, including the Germans and the NDH. Huskina's militia joined to the Partisans in the middle of the war, and most of the Hadžijefendić Legion joined to the SS Handschar Division.

crimes are points of divergence. Bosniaks are therefore morally distinct from the more radical war projects of others. The collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia is attributed not to any specific nation, but to the king and his government, who “abandoned their people,” leading to the state's collapse and subsequent occupation (Šabotić, 2012, p. 153). Bosniaks are depicted as a community that did not support the occupiers, but was forced to maintain discreet, pragmatic contact with them for security reasons.

The participation of Bosniaks in the 13th SS Division "Handschar" is minimized through linguistic and narrative strategies: the unit is described using the neutral term "Wehrmacht" to avoid an explicit connection to the Waffen-SS, while the "Villefranche Uprising" is highlighted as evidence of anti-Nazi sentiment among its soldiers. The formation of Muslim militias is seen not as ideological collaboration but as a response to a security vacuum and the need for local self-defense; their later integration into the partisan movement further legitimizes them and distances Bosniaks from Nazi structures (Šabotić, 2012, p. 155).

The violence of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), which implemented a “radical program of ethnic violence” against Serbs, Jews, Roma, political opponents, and Bosniaks themselves (Šabotić, 2012, p.155), is presented as a shared traumatic experience that united all three Bosnian peoples. An equally positive experience is participation in the Partisan movement, which united Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks and enabled the restoration of Bosnian-Herzegovinian statehood as a common country: Muslims, Serbs, and Croats (Šabotić, 2012, p. 162). However, it is notable that the textbook does not mention Partisan violence, maintaining the image of the movement as an inclusive and morally legitimate force.

At the same time, the textbook emphasizes different experiences, in particular, downplaying the involvement of Bosniaks in collaborationism and emphasizing their moral distance from the crimes of the NDH. In contrast, the Chetniks are depicted as a movement driven by ethnic dominance rather than state restoration (Šabotić, 2012, p. 155). Their systematic crimes against Bosniaks and Croats are foregrounded, creating a sharply negative portrayal of the Serbian war experience. Since the Chetniks formally represented the king and the government in exile, their actions delegitimized their right to represent the population, which ultimately leads to their exclusion from post-war Yugoslavia. In this narrative, the new government organically emerges from the population's struggle.

Additionally, the textbook emphasizes divergent experiences, downplaying their own participation in collaborationism, thereby distancing Bosniaks from the NDH's crimes and

emphasizing their moral position. In contrast, the Chetniks are depicted as a movement that sought ethnic domination rather than the restoration of the state (Šabotić, 2012, p.155). But they committed systematic crimes against Bosniaks and Croats, thereby discrediting themselves. This creates a sharply negative image of the Serbian experience of the war. Since the Chetniks formally represented the king and his government in exile, they lost the legitimate right to represent the population and were forbidden to return to Yugoslavia. As a result of the struggle, the Yugoslav population created its own partisan government, which deprived King right for return (Šabotić, 2012, p.163).

Markers of National Identity:

In the Bosnian textbook, markers of national identity are built around three key elements: multinationalism, anti-fascist legitimacy, and historical statehood of Bosnia. The author emphasizes that Bosnia was a space where different communities coexisted rather than a project of a single nation, which is why the Chetniks of the NDH are criticized for denying the region's multinational nature. Bosniaks are positioned as a community that largely distanced itself from and condemned crimes, which forms a marker of moral and political moderation.

The central marker of identity is participation in the Partisan movement, which gave Bosniaks the opportunity to “restore Bosnian-Herzegovinian statehood” within the framework of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia (Šabotić, 2012, p.162-163). State continuity is built not only on the historical continuity of its own statehood, restored by the common will of the three peoples in 1943. It was also because Bosnia was the center of the partisan movement in Bosnia that it had the largest number of free territories. It also created the first free partisan " Republic in Bihać " (Šabotić, 2012, p. 158).

As a result, the textbook creates an image of "us" as a multinational, mostly anti-fascist community that emerged from external and internal threats, then as "them" - mostly radical, non-inclusive, or violent projects that threatened Bosnia as a territory and its population.

Presentation style/tone:

The style of presentation in the Bosnian textbook mostly corresponds to a neutral-academic tone, as the author uses factual formulations, shows dates, institutional descriptions, and minimizes emotional coloring, presenting events through structural reasons ("paralysis of power", "division of the country", "radical program of ethnic violence"). Patriotic and emotional elements appear only in fragments that emphasize the positive role of the partisan's struggle (for example, the Uprising against the occupier, the

Battle for the Wounded, the People's Liberation War). In particular, in the coverage of the restoration of statehood as the common will of three peoples, and the Formation of the Partisan Government of Socialist Yugoslavia, a legitimizing patriotic tone is created. Conflict-hostile rhetoric is almost absent: negative phenomena are described not through ethnic generalizations, but through institutional categories (NDH, Chetniks, occupation troops), which allows avoiding aggressive language, accusations, or demonization of groups. The role of Bosniak in collaboration with the Axis powers and their allies is downplayed, but there are also justifications for these decisions.

3. Croat Perspective:

The section on World War II in Croatia is divided into 4 parts and spans 18 pages. The first part, "The Disintegration of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Creation of the Independent State of Croatia and the Nature of its Regime," occupies 6 pages, and the next part, "The First Years of the War in Croatia," occupies 3 pages. Another 3 pages are devoted to the section titled "The Situation in Yugoslavia Before the End of the War"; the last section, "The End of the War in Croatia," takes up 6 pages.

Plot:

The first storyline presents the mission to create a Croatian state. Croatia is depicted as having a legitimate right to political subjectivity but as being forced to act under external pressure: Germany "allowed the creation of a Croatian state" (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 81- 82). Thus, the NDH is described not as an authentic expression of Croatian aspirations, but as a distorted form of statehood imposed by the occupiers and unrepresentative of the Croatian population as a whole.

The second storyline concerns the apportionment of responsibility for the Ustaše's crimes. The heroic image of the Croats is portrayed through examples of moral valor demonstrated by individual Croats, including those who initially supported NDH, who helped and saved persecuted groups at the risk of their own lives, as well as through an emphasis on the participation of Croats in the partisan movement (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 86, 89). This narrative claims that not all Croats supported the Ustaše and that many were later recognized as Righteous Among the Nations (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015). The downplaying of negative events is achieved by narrowing the responsibility for the crimes of the NDH, mainly to Ante Pavelić: "everything needed to be subordinated to the will of the poglavnik" (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p.86).

The third storyline depicts the Croats as a nation-victim-martyr who suffered from repression of their own government, from external occupiers, whose troops committed

looting, violence, and created concentration camps for the local population, and from the persecution of the Chetniks (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015). The negative image of the Chetniks is reinforced by the description of their project of an “ethnically pure Serbia”, which, combined with the terror perpetrated by foreign troops, creates a coherent narrative of Croatian resistance to two parallel existential threats (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015). The culmination of this narrative of victimhood is the “Bleiburg Tragedy” and the “Croatian Crusade,” where mostly civilians fleeing the Partisans were “executed near Bleiburg” by the Partisans themselves (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, pp. 106- 107). The struggle for survival is further reflected in the depiction of the Croatian population as trying to distance themselves from radical actors— “many people supported the creation of the Independent State of Croatia, but not the Ustaše” (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015)—while simultaneously suffering the consequences of the Ustaše’s policies towards Croats and others.

The continuation of the plot about the restoration of statehood is evident in the emphasis on the Partisans' role in the liberated territories of Croatia and in the creation of a new political system, in which Croatia received its own representative bodies within the New Yugoslavia. Separately, the Lorković-Vokić⁶ conspiracy at the end of the war to carry out a coup in the NDH, "to side with the Allies and save Croatia," is presented (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 98, 106).

Differentiation us/them:

Croats textbook, the “us/them” dichotomy is constructing through several images of the self and the other. Primarily through sentences that clearly separate the population from the NDH regime. For example, a significant share of responsibility is placed on the poglavnik⁷ Ante Pavelić: “Pavelić is the head of the Ustaše and the state...all important decisions were taken by the poglavnik”, in contrast to “the circle of Ustaše supporters was narrow, but the circle of supporters of Croatian independence was much larger” (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p.82).

Negative image of the Other is presented in the characterization of the Chetniks as a movement that sought to create: “Greater Serbia, in which Croats were to be denationalized or killed”, as well as in the assertion that the Chetniks believed that “Croatia must be punished for the crimes of the Ustaše” (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p.98). Foreign forces, mainly Italians, are also portrayed as a threat: “Italian soldiers committed

⁶ The Lorković-Vokić conspiracy (Croatian: Urota Lorković-Vokić) was a secret coup attempt in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) in August 1944, organized by the NDH Minister of Foreign Affairs and the NDH Minister of Armed Forces together with opposition parties and Home Guard officers. Its goal was to withdraw Croatia from the Axis powers, declare war on the Third Reich, and join the Anti-Hitler Coalition. The plot was exposed and the conspirators were executed.

⁷

looting and violence” and “Many of those arrested ended up in concentration camps, all over Italy” (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p.88). The Orthodox clergy are also negatively portrayed as accomplices of the Chetniks: "The Chetniks in the Knin area, under the command of the priest Momčilo Dujić, were particularly prominent".

The self-victimization is reinforced by descriptions of the suffering of Croats at the hands of the occupiers, Chetniks, repression of their own government, and later at the hands of the partisans during the "Bleiburg tragedy." For example: "The repressions concerned Croats who supported the NDH but were opponents of the regime," and regarding the partisans: "the civilian population was afraid of the partisan violence" and was "shot on the spot." (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p.86, 106-107).

The textbook systematically avoids Collective Guilt; for example, the authors distinguish between the "volunteer military formations of the “Ustaše Militia ” and the ‘Croatian Home Guard ’, which was formed on the basis of conscript military service", which narrows the circle of those responsible for the crimes of the NDH to Pavelić and a small group of ideological volunteers. It is also indicated that the “Poglavnik bodyguard brigade and the Mobile Rapid Trials" were the most prominent in the repressions. (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 82, 85). The author also stressed that "109 citizens of Croatia and Bosnian Croats were recognized as Righteous by Yad Vashem," and that many citizens and the church "condemned violence against their fellow citizens" (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 82, 85). This shows that not all Croats are guilty of the crimes of the Ustaše, because not all supported them.

Generalizations are applied selectively, for example, if the Chetniks and Italy are clearly and unambiguously described as forces with a systematic program of ethnic violence (Greater Serbia) and Italianization. In contrast, generalizations are avoided or, on the contrary, fragmented with regard to "us" Croats. The authors systematically emphasize that many people supported the creation of the NDH, but not the Ustaše, and that many people condemned and saved others. Responsibility is fragmented and narrowed to certain elements and certain individuals. The same logic applies to the Partisans: on the one hand, they also committed crimes, but on the other, they liberated all Croatian territories, which ensured their international recognition as a component of Croatia within the framework of the future Equal Federal Yugoslavia (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 98, 104-105).

This allows avoiding collective responsibility and presents Croatian society as heterogeneous, morally complex, but generally not criminal, and creates a dichotomy in which “we” are the Croatian people who sought statehood, suffered, and offered moral resistance; “they” are the radical Ustaše, occupiers, Chetniks, and communist repressors.

Interpretation of Shared and Divergent Historical Experiences:

The main argument of the textbook that the peoples of Yugoslavia experienced the war differently and asymmetrically because they striving for statehood and suffering from both external pressures and internal repression, whereas other groups—especially Serbs—are cast as principal perpetrators of wartime violence. The common experience is the collapse of Yugoslavia, caused by the state's internal weakness, which allowed Germany to “exploit them and create the NDH” (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 81).

At the same time, the Croats are presented as those who suffered during the war no less than other groups. Responsibility for the repressions is primarily placed on Pavelić and the ideological followers of the Ustaše, while the population itself never supported them but simply sought its own state. In contrast, it is argued that the NDH government tried to show goodwill towards Muslims, and if there were repressions, it was politically motivated violence, not ideology (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, pp. 84- 85). All detailed references to violence against Muslims are presented as a result of the Chetniks' deliberate actions. The Serbian Chetniks are presented through the prism of the threat, whose program of an “expanded Greater Serbia” included the ethnically cleans of Croats and Muslims (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, pp. 99- 100). By doing so, this textbook creates a sharply negative image of the Serbian movement and builds an image in which Muslims and Croats share a common fate.

The textbook further argues that Serbs were not the primary target of NDH racial policy and initially supported the new state, with repression emerging only after they were blamed for the crimes of Yugoslavia (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p.85). This framing shifts responsibility away from Croats and presents NDH violence as a reaction to earlier Yugoslav injustices rather than as a systematic genocidal project.

The common experience for all peoples is presented as the struggle against the Axis forces as part of the Partisan struggle, which created new representative bodies that later enabled the creation of the new Federal Yugoslavia. But the difference here is that the first partisan actions began on Croatian territory. This makes Croatia the Center of the resistance movement, which led to the creation of a new Croat partisan government.

The culmination of the different experiences is the description of the "Bleiburg tragedy" and the "Croatian Way of the Cross", where the Croats are presented as victims of the Partisans who were unjustly ostracized (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, pp.106- 107).

Markers of national identity:

The first sign of national identity is the desire of Croats for their own state, presented as desirable, justifying the creation of the NDH: "The word Independent State in the name was intended to emphasize the desired independence and complete independence."(Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p.82).

The second moral dimension of identity is reinforced by the population's distancing from the Ustaše: "many people supported the creation of an independent state, but did not support the Ustaše", while "the youth and the church condemned the violence against their fellow citizens"(Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p.82,85). This thereby purifies the nation's image and shows an internal moral compass independent of the regime.

The third symbol of national identity is the church, which serves as the nation's internal moral compass. The figure of Alojzije Stepinac, who appears as a living representation of the moral suffering of the Croats: "initially welcoming the creation of the state, but later strongly opposing the persecution of Serbs and Jews, is used as evidence that the true Croatian identity is Christian, humane and capable of moral resistance"(Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p.86).

Additional markers are the experience of suffering and victimhood; the Croats were presented as victims of the Italians, who "openly opposed any signs of Croatian identity" and created camps for the Croats, as well as the Chetniks, who sought to "denationalize or kill" the Croats (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p.87,99).

The last marker is the participation of Croats in the partisan movement, which demonstrates the ability to build a state based on equality and brotherhood. It was their struggle that allowed Croatia to legally emerge from World War II in the victorious camp, return the territories occupied by Italy (Dalmatia and Istria), and lay the foundations of a renewed statehood, which legally separated the country from the legacy of the Ustaše regime (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, pp. 98- 99, 104- 105).

Presentation style and tone:

The style and presentation of World War II in the textbook follow a justificatory-explanatory and national-defensive narrative. Although events are presented as a coherent historical account, the choice of wording systematically softens the image of the NDH regime and constructs a morally ambivalent portrayal of Croats as a society. Collective responsibility is mitigated by highlighting morally upright individuals who opposed the regime, like Alojzije Stepinac, and by emphasizing the humanity of ordinary citizens. Responsibility is placed primarily on Ante Pavelić and the Ustaše's ideological supporters. The narrative further reduces Croatian culpability by arguing that the Home

Guard was engaged in conscription military service and therefore did not participate in atrocities, in contrast to specialized voluntary formations such as the “Ustaše Militia” or the “Poglavnik’s Bodyguard Brigade.”

In contrast, the descriptions of the Chetniks and foreign occupiers are emotionally charged and rhetorically intensified, reinforcing the image of an external threat: “Chetnik terror,” “The Chetniks committed horrific crimes in their quest to create an ethnically pure Serbia” (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, pp. 99–100). Key episodes such as the “Great Tragedy of Bleiburg” and the “Croatian Way of the Cross” (pp. 106–107) are dramatized through language emphasizing suffering and sacrifice, producing a strong emotional effect that symbolically redeems Croatian sins and frames national endurance as a form of resurrection. The terminology evokes religious mythology—particularly the imagery of Christ carrying the cross—thus elevating Croatian suffering to a sacred narrative. Although Bleiburg involved the execution of soldiers and NDH officials, the textbook foregrounds the civilian population: “Together with them (the military) retreated civilians who were fleeing communist violence” (p. 106), shifting attention away from the regime’s responsibility and toward the victimhood of ordinary Croats.

II. Socialist Yugoslavia

1. Serbian Perspective:

The period of socialist Yugoslavia takes up 18 pages and is divided into 4 parts. The first part is called "Consolidation of Communist Power (1945 -1948)" and takes up 4 pages; the next part, "Time of Transformation (1948 -1974)," takes up 4 pages. The last two parts are called "Time of Crisis (1974-1991)" and "Economic, Cultural and Social Development," each occupying four pages.

Plot:

The Main plot of the textbook is based on the image of the struggle for survival, where both external pressures (such as the breakup of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, embargoes and threats of intervention) and internal challenges (protests, nationalism, tensions between republics) are interpreted as existential threats, thereby legitimizing repression and centralization as necessary measures (Васич, 2024. p.164, 166, 169). The author also outlines that a significant part of the conflict inside Yugoslavia was caused by: “the division of power between the federal center and the republics, which in the long run becomes a source of growing nationalism, socio-economic tension and political crisis” (Васич, 2024, p.159).

The next storyline, which follows from the first, is the depiction of the Serbs, who suffer the most from “brokenness and humiliation” due to the 1974 Constitution, demographic decline, and violence in regions such as Kosovo, creating an image of "double injustice" (Васич, 2024, p.169-170). At the same time, elements of heroic self-perception are evident through the portrayal of the Serbian leadership led by Zlatan Milošević, and especially Josip Broz Tito, as a resolute, stabilizing figure, while the army is portrayed as a defender of sovereignty and order: "Yugoslavia continued to function thanks to the Authority of Tito, the Communist Party and the JNA" (Васич, 2024. p.166). Therefore, after Tito's death, when the "key stabilizing element" disappeared and weak institutions were unable to contain the economic and political crisis, the republics began acting in their own interests, since the federation lacked mechanisms to prevent fragmentation. The author leads the reader to the conclusion that the economic crisis intensifies the political one, and the political one intensifies the economic one (Васич 2024, 168). Creating a vicious cycle of degradation that makes dissolution inevitable under those conditions.

The last storyline also reinterprets negative events, showing that the Yugoslav leadership used repression to silence the traumatic past and to try to overcome tense interethnic and interreligious relations through the slogan "Brotherhood and Unity" (Васич 2024, 160).

The author presents Yugoslavia as a fragile entity whose unity depended on strong centralized power. The program of decentralization and reforms is retrospectively constructed as steps towards crisis and collapse, as it strengthens internal destabilizers, namely national minorities. Minorities are a source of problems, creating tension between the stabilizing center and the destructive republics. Building a picture where political conflict is securitized, coercive measures are justified, and the final collapse of Yugoslavia appears almost inevitable.

Differentiation between them and us:

The textbook constructs a "us-versus-them" framework, contrasting the Serbs with everyone else. Here, Serbs and Serbia appear exclusively as "us," in contrast to the "Autonomous Regions," "Albanians," "Muslims," "Slovenes and Croats," and the “Catholic Church – strangers.” The Serbs, on the other hand, appear as victims of historical injustice, which shapes the perception of the “us” as a sacrificial, systematically oppressed community and of everyone else as a source of threats. For example, this is evident in the explanation of the demographic decline in Bosnia: “The Serbian people in Bosnia and Herzegovina regressed demographically, primarily due to the genocide of the NDH...” (Васич, 2024, p. 168). There is also mention of direct persecution in Kosovo:

"Serbs and Montenegrins were subjected to pressure and violence, so they sold their property and left this province" (Васич, 2024, p.170).

All groups that question the unity of the federation or the political dominance of the center are portrayed as "Them," a source of threat, instability, and separatism. "The most developed republics, Slovenia and Croatia, did not understand Serbia's situation," which collectively transforms them as the Other into an indifferent neighbor" (Васич, 2024, p.169). It is also the Albanians in Kosovo who allegedly seek to join Albania and grant the status of a separate nation to Bosnian Muslims, which are presented as attempts to destabilize the interethnic balance and because "Muslims ... seek all of Bosnia and Herzegovina for themselves"(Васич, 2024, p.168, 170).

"Victimization of the Self" consistently emphasizes the suffering and injustice of Serbs: the ban on the return of Serbs to Kosovo and Macedonia after the war, "false federalism" as a limitation of Serbian sovereignty and political losses, demographic vulnerability in Bosnia, attacks by Croatian communists on Serbs as objects of unitarism, creating an image of their own group as victims whose legitimate demands are ignored (Васич, 2024, p.160,166-167). The textbook clearly establishes a moral asymmetry between Serbs and others, which acts to victimize them, first of all, Serbs- they appear as rational, restrained, and legitimate in their demands, while "they"- the others are depicted as radical, selfish, and dangerous. The Serbian position is presented as moderate, aiming to reform and preserve the system, while the positions of other republics are described as guided by nationalist interests and an unwillingness to understand the "real problems" of the federation. This can be seen, for example, in the description of protests, where demonstrations in Belgrade are depicted as socio-economic, i.e., "normal", while protests in Kosovo and Croatia are ethno-political, separatist and threatening state unity (Васич, 2024, p.166). Therefore, Serbs are the bearers of legitimate interests and stability, while all others are a source of destabilization, radicalism and threats to sovereignty.

At the same time, the authors note some cooperation. After the war, under the slogan "No peace until reconstruction," the work of youth labor brigades rebuilding the country is described. There is also a reference to the elimination of the consequences of the 1969 Banja Luka earthquake throughout Yugoslavia (Васич, 2024, p. 161, 170). These fragments temporarily remove the boundary between "us" and "them" and demonstrate the model of solidarity supposedly existing within the federation. The textbook's structure shows that, despite deep contradictions, Yugoslavia was able to mobilize common resources and act as a single whole. It creates an image of past unity that would later be lost due to political and national conflicts. Second, it reinforces the moral assessment of

the later disintegration, hinting that the split in the N.V. was partly the result of political decisions and nationalist ambitions. These episodes serve as a “positive exception,” emphasizing that collective solidarity was possible but was destroyed by the actions of “others” in a later period.

Interpretation of Shared and Divergent Historical Experiences:

The textbook constructs a consistently Serb-centric, victim-oriented interpretation of the socialist period, reinforcing asymmetrical understandings of shared events and deepening divisions between the three national narratives. Common historical episodes are reframed through the prism of mutual accusations, inequality, and conflicting memories. Post-war communist repression is depicted as a “settlement of scores between the victors and the vanquished,” with the Chetniks presented exclusively as victims of persecution (Васич, 2024, p. 160). While avoiding controversy in Croatian and Bosniak narratives, which view them as perpetrators. The textbook omits this duality entirely, reducing the complexity of the figure and presenting repression solely as injustice against Serbs. In contrast, Croatian anti-communist guerrillas, the Križari⁸, are labeled unambiguously as criminals (Васич, 2024, p. 160), reinforcing a moral hierarchy between groups.

The 1974 Constitution—formally a collective political act—is interpreted as a historical injustice against Serbia. It is described as a document that “revived nationalism” and reflected “the ideas of Croatian and Albanian nationalists,” weakening Serbia’s position within the federation (Васич, 2024, p. 166). For other republics, however, the same constitutional changes represented an expansion of rights and political autonomy. The textbook does not acknowledge this divergence, instead presenting Serbia’s interpretation as the only legitimate one.

Selective omission further reinforces the asymmetry. Key events from Croatian and Bosniak national histories are minimized or ignored, while actions of the Yugoslav military against peaceful demonstrations are framed as necessary measures to preserve the state. The treatment of religious institutions follows the same pattern. Although the authors admit that communist authorities pressured all religious communities, the Catholic Church is mentioned only in the context of its “duplicity” due to alleged collaboration with the Ustaše, which allows the textbook to dismiss its protests as morally invalid and to overlook the repression it faced (Васич, 2024, pp. 162–163). In contrast, the Serbian Orthodox Church is portrayed as unjustly persecuted and simultaneously described as “the center of Greater Serbian ideology” (Васич, 2024, p. 173), a formulation

⁸ Križari or The Crusaders - were a Croatian pro-Ustaše, anti-communist insurgency that operated after the Independent State of Croatia was liquidated in May 1945, toward the end of World War II, and continued into the 1950s.

that paradoxically reinforces its centrality to Serbian identity while presenting it as a target of political injustice.

Overall, the narrative constructs a vision of the socialist period in which Serbs are cast as the primary victims of wartime and post-war developments, while the experiences and traumas of Croats and Bosniaks are marginalized or delegitimized. This selective interpretation deepens the asymmetry of memory and reinforces a Serb-centric understanding of Yugoslavia's socialist era.

Markers of national identity:

The first marker is victimhood, attributed primarily to Serbs. The textbook highlights the genocide committed against Serbs in the NDH, its demographic consequences, and the claim that the post-war authorities suppressed discussion of these crimes. Additional elements reinforcing this victimhood narrative include the alleged ban on Serb return to Kosovo and Macedonia and the out-migration of Serbs from Kosovo between 1961 and 1981 (Васич, 2024, p. 160).

The second key marker concerns political status and the role of Serbs within the federation. Serbs are portrayed as the principal carriers and guardians of both Yugoslavia and Serbia, with loyalty to the state presented as the defining criterion of a “proper” national identity. The 1974 Constitution is interpreted as an act that “weakened Serbia” and disrupted the balance among the republics, reinforcing the idea that Serbs were structurally disadvantaged within the federal system (Васич, 2024, pp. 166, 169).

A third marker is the depiction of the Serbian Orthodox Church as the most vulnerable religious institution, suffering greatly during the war. This reinforces the image of Serbs as morally superior victims, especially when contrasted with the Catholic Church, which is portrayed as having collaborated with the Ustaše (Васич, 2024, pp. 162–163).

Finally, the national aspirations of other groups are presented asymmetrically. Belgrade's goals are framed as limited to socio-economic reforms and preserving the unity of the state, whereas the aspirations of Kosovo Albanians and Croats are depicted as separatist and dangerous. This contrast strengthens the marker of loyalty to the state as the core of legitimate national identity. The Bosnian Muslim pursuit of national self-determination within Bosnia and Herzegovina is described as creating “an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and competition for influence,” while the Macedonian Orthodox Church's separation from the Serbian Church is condemned as an artificial act imposed by political authorities (Васич, 2024, pp. 166, 170, 173). Thus, national groups are differentiated not primarily by cultural or historical characteristics, but by their moral and political status

within the federal hierarchy, with Serbs positioned as the most loyal, most endangered, and therefore most legitimate actors.

Presentation style and tone:

The textbook's tone is justificatory, softening the actions of the Serbs and Yugoslavia. Repression is presented as a forced measure that saved the country: "In the struggle for survival, the leadership began to arrest Stalin's supporters..." (Васич, 2024, p. 164). The JNA's intervention in the events in Kosovo is also legitimized by the fear of Soviet intervention and the need for protection, thereby pushing the legitimacy crisis of the political system into the background. Croatian protests and accusations that they "threatened to leave Yugoslavia, the authorities of the CPY and Tito" also work to justify repressive actions (Васич, 2024, p.166). The description of the Catholic Church, mentioning its involvement in the crimes of the NDH, serves as a moral justification for the repression against it (Васич, 2024, p.162). This tone serves as a moral justification and removes responsibility from the group presented as "we", that is, the Serbs.

Secondly, the text contains elements of emotional style, expressed through phrases such as "the most vulnerable" or "the people are broken and humiliated", as well as "False federation", etc. (Васич, 2024, p. 173, 169, 165). Much more often, the image of one's own community is constructed through depictions of suffering and injustice that align with the narrative of the victim.

There are also elements of a conflict-hostile style, where other republics and ethnic groups are indirectly described as selfish and incomprehensible, or separatist. This is presented as a threat to sovereignty, stability, and identity, and as a rejection of other desires. This opposition can be described, for example, as follows: "Slovenia and Croatia did not understand Serbia's position" (Васич, 2024, p. 169) and "By the will of the authorities, the Macedonian Orthodox Church was separated from the Serbian Orthodox Church" (Васич, 2024, p. 173).

2. Bosniaks perspective:

The section on Bosnia and Herzegovina spans 13 pages. It is divided into 3 parts: the first part, "Bosnia and Herzegovina in Socialist Yugoslavia," takes up 4 pages; the second part is called "The Tito-Stalin Conflict and the Period of Self-Government" and takes up 5 pages; the last part is called The Development of Bosnia and Herzegovina within the SFRY and takes up 4 pages.

Plot:

Bosniak textbooks form the main narrative of this period, focusing on the struggle to preserve Bosnia and Herzegovina's political subjectivity within post-war Yugoslavia. Although Yugoslavia is described as a state “reborn” as a federal socialist republic, it is simultaneously portrayed as a system that in practice remained highly centralized, with real political authority concentrated in Belgrade and federalism functioning largely as a symbolic façade (Šabotić, 2012, p. 167). As a result, the restored state failed to meet the expectations that Bosniaks had associated with their participation in the Partisan movement during the Second World War, since formal institutional reforms concealed an unchanged vertical of power.

A recurring theme is the suffering caused by repression and the long-term non-recognition of Bosniaks as a distinct nation, which illustrates how Yugoslavia transformed the national question into an instrument of political control. Symbolic gestures—such as changing the Yugoslav coat of arms from five to six torches—are interpreted as superficial attempts to ease interethnic tensions without addressing the underlying institutional inequalities (Šabotić, 2012, p. 172). The repressions during the conflict with Stalin are presented as further evidence that the state perceived any form of dissent as a threat to its own survival; among the victims were not only ordinary citizens but also “yesterday’s participants in the partisan struggle” (Šabotić, 2012, p. 171).

The final period is dominated by the dual themes of reform and disintegration. Beginning in 1950, Yugoslavia introduced a series of reforms that culminated in the 1974 Constitution, which legally transformed the republics into “states” and granted extensive autonomy to the provinces within Serbia (Šabotić, 2012, pp. 172–173). Although these reforms were intended to stabilize the federation, they instead deepened tensions between the federal center and the republics. The recognition of Bosniaks as a nation is presented as a major shift in national policy that finally ensured formal equality among the peoples (Šabotić, 2012, p. 176). Yet the textbook emphasizes that these reforms did not resolve the system's structural contradictions. The new constitution quickly became the target of centralist and unitary forces, illustrating the fragility of the federal compromise (Šabotić, 2012, p. 173).

Differentiation between us and them:

The differentiation between “us” and “them” in the Socialist Yugoslavia period is constructed through a political-institutional rather than ethnic opposition. On one side stand “Bosnia” as a republic and “Bosniaks/Muslims” as a nation—representing the internal, legitimate community—while on the other side appear the “central government in Belgrade,” the “Communist Party,” and the “state apparatus,” which function as

external, dominating forces. This framing positions “us” as the multinational community of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and “them” as the repressive centralized structures of the Yugoslav state.

Negative characterizations are directed exclusively at state institutions, not at other ethnic groups. The centralized economic model is described as ineffective because it “suppresses any initiative,” federalism as merely “symbolic,” national policy as one that “did not recognize the nation,” and the communist regime as “brutal and cruel” (Šabotić, 2012, pp. 167, 171, 173). No ethnic group is portrayed as hostile or collectively guilty. Instead, the narrative emphasizes shared suffering: victims of repression included “yesterday’s participants in the partisan struggle,” and the peasant uprising is described as “a joint action of Bosniak and Serbian peasants, which spread to Croatia,” whose leaders were executed (Šabotić, 2012, p. 171). Responsibility is attributed to systemic factors—evident in the statement that “demands for federation reform became more frequent”—and to centralist forces that opposed decentralization. (Šabotić, 2012, p. 173).

When describing Bosnia as a republic, the author highlights that territorial identity was genuinely shared among the three main groups. “Young politicians from the three peoples” jointly promoted modernization and the recognition of Muslims as a nation, contributing to a sense of Bosnian-Herzegovinian pride. The textbook stresses that all peoples in Bosnia were “constitutionally and practically equal” (Šabotić, 2012, p. 176). This line constructs a positive foundation for the emergence of a supra-ethnic spatial consciousness, presented as a key condition for stable coexistence in a complex multiethnic society. Bosnia is depicted not as a battleground of competing national projects but as a shared political space shaped through common struggle, joint institution-building, and constitutionally guaranteed equality. Generalizations are directed solely at the state apparatus, with no negative generalizations about ethnic groups.

Interpretation of Shared and Divergent Historical Experiences:

The history of socialist Yugoslavia is presented in a way that simultaneously highlights both the marginalization of Bosniaks and their institutional discrimination in broader interethnic processes that shaped socialist Yugoslavia.

The Yugoslav–Soviet split is framed as a moment that acknowledges an external threat while questioning the Yugoslav leadership's internal response. Although the narrative mentions border clashes and the presence of pro-Soviet sympathizers within the Communist Party, the emphasis on brutal interrogations and repression against “yesterday’s participants in the partisan struggle” (Šabotić, 2012) undermines the

legitimacy of indiscriminate accusations and transforms the episode from a story of necessary self-defense into a shared tragic experience.

Subsequent reforms and the 1974 Constitution are presented as major achievements and institutional compromises that established equality and defined the republics as “states,” emphasizing that “Bosniaks, Croats, Serbs and others were constitutionally and practically equal” (Šabotić, 2012, p. 158). At the same time, they are depicted as the beginning of the end, since “Croatia and Slovenia wanted even more reforms,” while “centralizationists criticized the 1974 Constitution,” which ultimately contributed to the collapse of the state (Šabotić, 2012, p. 173).

The Bosnian textbook avoids topics that might contradict Serbian or Croatian national narratives and does not assign collective guilt to any people, focusing instead on cooperation and development, particularly in education and culture (Šabotić, 2012, p. 177). As a result, shared historical experiences are interpreted not as sources of conflict but as the foundation for a supra-ethnic territorial identity in which Bosnia appears as a space of equality, cooperation, and collective institutional development.

Markers of national identity:

Inside the Bosnian textbook, they are realized through criticism of the state policy of non-recognition of Bosniaks, territorial affiliation, the Islamic religion, multiethnic relations, and “historical continuity”. National identity is anchored in the experience of the lack of official recognition as a nation, which is an ancient historical injustice that shapes collective self-understanding. This belated recognition functions as evidence of the consolidation of modern Bosnian statehood. Recognition of the new nation did not mean denying the right of Serbs or Croats to have their own identity; instead, it was about restoring true justice and equality between the peoples of all of Yugoslavia (Šabotić, 2012, p. 173, 175). Recognition anchors a sense of patriotism, legitimizing later political claims. Symbolic markers of this process appear in the transformation of the Yugoslav coat of arms: the transition from five to six torches is interpreted as a symbolic inclusion of Bosniaks into the federal structure, even though they are officially designated as representatives of six republics (Šabotić, 2012, p. 172).

Territorial affiliation and historical continuity in the Bosniak textbook are constructed through the depiction of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a coherent political and historical space, one that was restored at the end of World War II. A central marker of this continuity is the restoration of the Bosnian Parliament, described as the first Bosnian government since 1918 (Šabotić, 2012, p.167). Although the Bosniaks were not yet recognized as a separate nation at the time, the establishment of a republican government and parliament

made Bosnia and Herzegovina a “people’s state” with its own institutional heritage (Šabotić, 2012, p. 167).

The existence of a republic with its own institutions created a truly shared political space, conceived as equal for all its inhabitants, rather than for any particular ethnic group. This institutional structure contributed to the formation of a territorial identity that transcended ethnic boundaries and encouraged cooperation between the three constituent peoples. The emergence of a new generation of Bosniak, Croat, and Serb politicians further reinforced this interethnic model, as their joint participation in governance was portrayed as key to affirming “Bosnian-Herzegovinian pride” and to the republic's cultural, educational, and economic development (Šabotić, 2012, p. 175). It consistently emphasizes constitutional equality among all groups, presenting Bosnia as an environment where national identity is rooted in collective republican institutions and sustained through interethnic cooperation rather than exclusive ethnic markers (Šabotić, 2012, p.176).

In socialist Yugoslavia, Islam gained importance not primarily as a system of religious beliefs, but as the only possible marker through which the collective identity of the Bosniaks could be expressed during a long period when they were not recognized as a separate nation. The self-designation “Muslims” was later consolidated at the official level, functioning as a substitute for a national category, preserving group continuity and visibility at a time when no other official designation existed to differentiate themselves from other peoples.

Presentation style and tone:

This section of the Bosniak textbook is dominated by a neutral, academic style of presentation. The text is built on a precise chronology, institutional terms, and statements of fact like: the “adoption of constitutions”, “the introduction of workers' self-government”, and “conflict between federal and republican authority” (Šabotić, 2012, p.173). Evaluative judgments are reduced to analytical formulations about the inefficiency of the centralized economy or the gap between the legal form of the federation and reality.

The tone of justification is completely absent; here, the actions of the authorities are characterized critically: «the brutal behavior of the communist government», «forced labor and forced land purchase », and the leaders of the uprising «were shot» without any mitigating explanations. Events that are significant for the Bosniak identity — recognition as a separate nation or the development of the republic — are described with emotionally charged vocabulary: “the recognition of an entire people under its religious affiliation is a unique case that has never happened anywhere, neither before nor since” (Šabotić, 2012, p.173). It has a noticeably higher emotional level than the textbook's general style, appeals

to historical exceptionalism, and emphasizes the injustice of the past. But in general, there is little of this in the text.

Also, no ethnic group is portrayed negatively; rather, cooperation and its importance are emphasized. All critical characterizations are directed exclusively at the state system and party apparatus, and interethnic relations are consistently portrayed in an inclusive manner — through the “joint uprising” of Serbs and Bosniaks, “youth politicians from all three peoples,” “constitutional equality of all peoples, and “joint rebuilt after the war” which together form a balanced tone without emotional mobilization or hostility (Šabotić, 2012. p.173, 175,171).

3. Croat Perspective:

The section on socialist Yugoslavia, titled "Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Second Yugoslavia," is 16 pages long and divided into 3 parts. The first part, "Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia," is 5 pages long. The second part, "Conflict with the USSR," is 2 pages long. The last part is 6 pages long and is called "Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia".

Plot:

Croatian textbooks construct two interconnected storylines—suffering and the struggle for survival in socialist Yugoslavia—which together form a narrative of self-protection and the pursuit of equality. This logic runs through all thematic blocks: from the constitutional system, described as marked by “rigid centralization and the monopoly of the state-party nomenclature in Belgrade,” to economic policy and political repression. The result is a discrepancy between constitutional declarations and political practice: Yugoslav federalism is presented as merely ideological, while real sovereignty was systematically curtailed in favor of Serbia (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 134-136).

Victimization unfolds across several dimensions. Politically, repression is depicted as the core mechanism of governance: freedoms of speech, assembly, and political activity existed only formally, while the Communist Party remained the sole legal force (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015). Institutionally, the army and internal affairs bodies are described as Serb-dominated, functioning as instruments of control rather than neutral state institutions. National-culturally, Croats are burdened with collective guilt for NDH crimes, their anti-fascist contribution is minimized, and the group is stigmatized (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, pp. 136–137). Religiously, the Catholic Church is portrayed as a target of

ideological pressure aimed at weakening its ties with the Holy See (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 137).

Territorially, injustice is reinforced through claims that republican borders were drawn on a historical rather than ethnic basis, leaving “purely Croatian” lands in Bosnia (Neum) and Montenegro to fragment Croatian space and give Bosnia access to the sea (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 137). Economically, Croatia is depicted as the main currency donor forced to transfer its revenues to Belgrade (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 145). Together, these layers construct an image of Croats as a systematically oppressed community.

The narrative concludes with the theme of statehood restoration. The 1974 Constitution is presented as the institutional precondition for future independence, granting republics the status of federal states with the right to self-determination and secession (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 144). After Tito’s death, Yugoslavia is portrayed as entering structural collapse: republics pursued their own interests, while Serbia allegedly sought to reassert dominance, illustrated by the suppression of protests in Kosovo in 1981 (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 144). For Croats, Serbian elites viewed the 1974 decentralization as a threat, deepening tensions and accelerating the federation’s fragmentation.

Differentiation between them and us:

The textbook constructs an “us” versus “them” divide, portraying Croats as a community systematically subjected to political repression, institutional discrimination, and multiple forms of stigmatization, while the federal center, linked to Belgrade and Serb-dominated structures, is presented as the source of these injustices. This asymmetry is reinforced by descriptions of Serb dominance in the army and state institutions, which are portrayed as instruments of political control rather than neutral administrative bodies (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 141, 136). The drawing of republican borders that left Croats outside Croatia, together with the stigmatization of Croats due to the legacy of the NDH and the imposition of collective guilt, further deepens the symbolic boundary between the groups, positioning Croats as a vulnerable community under constant threat (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 141, 137).

The text also emphasizes a double logic of collective guilt. Serbs are portrayed as a group collectively responsible for dominating the state apparatus and repressive structures, but at the same time condemning the collective perception of Croats as guilty of the crimes of the NDH and declaring them “fascists and destroyers of Yugoslavia” (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p.141). This duality emphasizes the authors' argument about systemic injustice and their own position through double standards. The text also reveals the lack of genuine interethnic cooperation, as Croat participation in governing bodies is described as purely formal and devoid of real influence, without any other examples of meaningful

cooperation. Croatia itself is portrayed as an instrument for containing Serbia within the federation. Such generalizations reinforce a closed narrative of victim protection, which ultimately legitimizes Croatia's future exit from the common state as the only viable way to escape long-term oppression.

Interpretation of Shared and Divergent Historical Experiences:

Although Croats, Serbs, and others formally lived in the same federal state and political system, the textbook presents Croats as the most limited and stigmatized group. Thus, the common institutional structure of the federation is reinterpreted as creating fundamentally different life realities. Serbian dominance in the army, security structures, and state apparatus is described as transforming common institutions into mechanisms of control—an interpretation absent from the other two textbooks. Historical figures, such as Archbishop Aloysius Stepinac, depicted as a tragic and morally unwavering man who “speaks out simultaneously against the fascist and communist regimes,” condemns the crimes of the Ustaše, and rescues the persecuted “regardless of faith and nationality” (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p.134). His trial is portrayed as a political manipulation, while the real reason is explained by his protests against the violence against the clergy. Thus, a figure remembered in Serbian memory as a collaborator becomes a symbol of martyrdom in the Croatian narrative.

The legacy of the NDH further exacerbates these divisions. Although all groups experienced the same historical period, Croats are depicted as uniquely burdened by an imposed collective sense of guilt. The idea that Croats were the main targets of repression also appears in the description of the Stalin-Tito conflict, where the fight against Stalinism is presented as a pretext for anti-Croat persecution: “Repressions were rigged throughout Croatia; anyone who felt patriotic and tried to act nationally became a target.” The 1974 constitution is interpreted as a response to a deep crisis in the Yugoslav model, granting the republics the status of a federal state and the right to self-determination and secession (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 144). What Serbian narratives consider a catastrophe is presented here as the institutional basis for Croatia's future independence.

Protests in Croatia are described as a reaction to unitary pressure, especially from those “who actively contributed to the creation of the Yugoslav nation and language” (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p.142-143). At the same time, the textbook minimizes or ignores experiences that are central to other groups. Croats are portrayed as the most underrepresented group in Bosnia’s political structures, while the Bosniak experience is reduced to the brief statement that “faithful Muslims in Bosnia gained their own state and a separate nation of Muslims” (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p.137-138), without

acknowledging the historical significance of this event. Similarly, the joint Serb-Bosnian peasant uprising is omitted; instead, the peasant uprisings are presented as a general reaction to collectivization and agrarian reform throughout Yugoslavia (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 136).

Markers of national identity:

National identity in this period is constructed through a combination of: religion, language, territorial fragmentation, and the threat of Serbian domination. They are presented through the prism of a systemic threat to Croats, which simultaneously asserts the exclusivity of Croatian rights to territory, language, and religion and contrasts them with Serbian domination.

The central marker is the territory as a place of residence and a political subjectivity within it, which can be traced back to the Proclamation of the People's Republic of Croatia in 1946 (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 136). This event is presented as the restoration of statehood, while the real centralization of power in Belgrade is interpreted as a systemic limitation of Croatian political autonomy; the new opportunities provided by the constitutional reforms of 1974 created the foundation for future independence and the long-desired state. But at the same time, a significant part of the Croats from regions with a 100% Croat population was given to Bosnia and was limited in their capabilities (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 137). This creates a sense of artificial fragmentation of the national body, as the Croatian regions find themselves outside the republic's borders. This is interpreted as a conscious policy intentionally aimed at weakening Croatian integrity, which forms the idea of the territory as belonging to the Croats, but unfairly taken away by the political decisions of the communist leadership.

The next important marker of national identity in the Croatian textbook is religion, primarily the Catholic Church, which is presented not only as a spiritual tradition, but as a structural element of the Croatian nation. Its role goes beyond the religious sphere and becomes a symbol of cultural continuity, moral legitimacy, and historical uniqueness of the Croats. Therefore, the repressions of communist Yugoslavia- the closing of educational institutions, the confiscation of church property, the persecution of the clergy- are interpreted as a targeted attack on the foundation of the Croatian community, on the very basis of its identity (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 134). Making the Catholic Church a political compass that defines the boundaries between "their own" and "alien".

The Croatian language is presented as having been subjected to systemic pressure from the Yugoslav unitarians, "who purposefully created the Yugoslav nation and language", and therefore becomes a symbol of resistance to assimilation and protection of Croatian

identity (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 142). The language appears in these conditions not only as a means of communication, but also as a political resource, embodying the historical continuity and cultural identity of the Croats. Its protection is interpreted as a form of national self-determination, and any attempts to unify in Serbo-Croatian are seen as a threat to the existence of the Croatian nation (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 142). Because of this, the Croatian Spring is presented as a natural response, and makes the language issue into the heart of the political conflict. Thus, language and culture in the textbook serve not only as cultural attributes but also as tools of political mobilization, legitimizing the Croats' aspirations for autonomy and future statehood.

The last marker is the fear of Serbian domination, where Serbs are consistently portrayed as an aggressive, dominant force: “the Serbs dominated the security structures”, “Serbia sought to achieve Serbian domination over the entire territory of Yugoslavia”, the Serbian leadership “used force” (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015). Even abroad, Croatian emigrants were persecuted by special services for their activities, which spread the image of a threat to the transnational level. In contrast, the Croats appear as victims of this domination – politically disenfranchised, economically exploited (giving most of the foreign exchange income to Belgrade), culturally stigmatized, and territorially dismembered. Continuous victimization turns identity into a list of losses and grievances, asserting the moral right of the Croats to leave the common state.

Presentation style and tone:

The text formally employs elements of a neutral-academic style at the beginning and in its description of the constitutional processes; however, this neutral layer quickly gives way to value judgments and accusations, which shift the tone towards attacks on the Serbs. The text does not use sublime vocabulary or heroic images; instead, emotionality is built through suffering and moral dissatisfaction. Terms such as "Croatian Spring" in this context refer to similar events in world history associated with democratization and national awakening after a long period of repression or strict control. In contrast, the "Croatian silence" is a period when any talk of Croatian autonomy became dangerous. Functioning as markers of oppression, hostility dominates in the portrayal of the Serbs and the central government as an aggressive, dominant force, to which generalized negative characteristics are attributed, such as: "Serbian domination over the entire territory of Yugoslavia", a willingness to use force, and structural superiority in the army and security agencies (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015). The systematic attribution of the role of oppressor to one group creates an image of conflict in which interethnic relations are portrayed as a struggle rather than coexistence.

III. Fall of Yugoslavia and Consequences of War (1980-2000)

1. Serbian perspective:

The section dedicated to the events of the Yugoslav War and its consequences is called "Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the space of the former Yugoslavia at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries" and occupies 16 pages. The first part is titled "The Fall of Yugoslavia." The War for the Yugoslav Succession takes up 3 pages. The second part, which takes up 3 pages, is titled "Serbia and Montenegro at the Beginning of the 21st Century. «The fourth part is called "Civil War" in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995). Creation of the Republika Srpska takes up 4 pages. The last part, "Republika Srpska in Dayton, Bosnia and Herzegovina," contains 3 pages.

Plot:

The narrative portrays the Serbs as the only group that sought to keep Yugoslavia within the legal framework, but ultimately fell victim to external pressure, while other ethnic communities – through unilateral and uncompromising decisions – provoked the disintegration. The disintegration is portrayed as a “protracted multi-level crisis” exacerbated by foreign intervention, as the 1974 Constitution and Tito’s death transformed the federation into a confederation (Vasić, 2024, pp. 169, 177). The Communist Party is portrayed as the only integrative force whose disintegration occurred because it “lost faith in communism and Yugoslavia”, after which “the power vacuum was filled by nationalist forces”, while the old elites merely “pragmatically adapted” (Vasić, 2024, pp. 177–178).

Within the country, Serbs and Montenegrins are portrayed as the only supporters of preserving Yugoslavia, but at the same time would accept the self-determination of other republics “if Serbs outside Serbia were granted the same right” (Vasić, 2024, p. 182). In contrast, Slovenes and Croats, whose unilateral declarations of independence and the deprivation of Serb constitutional status caused both disintegration and war. By forcing the JNA and Serbs to resort to “self-defense”. The creation of Serbian autonomous regions in Croatia and Bosnia is legitimized as a forced defensive reaction and as the result of a democratic plebiscite on staying in Yugoslavia, which absolves Serbs of separatist intentions and presents their actions as legally and morally justified (Vasić, 2024, pp. 179, 185). The war began due to the Bosniaks' rejection of the peace plan and the Croatian attack on Serbian settlements.

The peace is explained by the decisive military intervention of the United States, which imposed the Dayton Accords as a compromise that granted the Serbs a "state within a

state", with the assumption that more territory and people could be preserved (Vasić, 2024, p. 187).

Post-war Bosnia is portrayed as unstable: Bosniaks allegedly seek centralization, Croats look towards Croatia or secession, and Serbs face pressure from the High Representative, who is accused of undermining the sovereignty of RS since 2000. Despite this, Republika Srpska is described as the most stable part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where long-term peace is linked to cooperation with "mother Serbia" (Vasić, 2024, pp. 189–190).

Differentiation us/them:

Here, Serbs are the "we" who, during the breakup of Yugoslavia, are consistently portrayed as the legitimate, restrained, and defensive side, while other nations and the international community have treated them unfairly, as initiators of the breakup, rule breakers, and a source of threat. "We" are the community that: "Advocated for the preservation of Yugoslavia", "wanted more effective federalization" and "adhered to the principle of consensus"; Serbs are the party that: "defends Dayton" (Васић, 2024, p.178,185,189). "They" - the Slovenes, Croats, Bosniaks, and the international community in general - are portrayed as those who "without the prior consent of the other republics" declared independence, "those who regularly attacked", violated peace plans, "supported the secession of Slovenia and Croatia", and "presented Serbs as the sole perpetrators of the war" thereby provoking the conflict (Vasić, 2024p.178,180,181). In Bosnia, this asymmetry is amplified: The Serbs are the only party that abides by the law, while the Bosniaks and Croats appear as political actors who "violated the constitution" and destroyed the principle of tripartite consensus and continue to challenge the Serbian Coat of Arms and the Anthem after the war (Vasić, 2024, p.185,189). International actors who intervened in the war, who exert international economic and political pressure on the Republika Srpska. Even mass crimes are presented through this lens: "Serbs are guilty of ethnic cleansing" and at the same time emphasizes the "disproportionately higher number of convicted and accused," emphasizing international justice, which allegedly disproportionately punishes Serbs (Vasić, 2024, p.182).

Interpretation of Shared and Divergent Historical Experiences:

The narrative portrays the Serbs as the only group that acted legally and sought to preserve Yugoslavia, while the constitutional reforms, the collapse of the political system, the first multi-party elections, and the outbreak of war are presented as evidence of Serbian restraint. Other peoples are portrayed as those who broke the rules, broke away from a common political framework, and initiated the conflict. Although the breakup is formally explained by a "multi-level crisis" and foreign intervention, the main culprits were

Slovenes, Croats, and Bosniaks who allegedly undermined the common political space. In Bosnia, this logic is extended to describe the Serbs as the only group that “adhered to the constitution and the principle of consensus,” legitimizing the proclamation of the Republika Srpska as the legitimate outcome of the plebiscite (Vasić, 2024, p. 185). International participation is interpreted through the same asymmetrical lens. Western states are portrayed as external actors whose actions have deepened internal fragmentation, supporting exclusively anti-Serbian forces. Examples include the claim that “NATO, led by the US, attacked the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia without UN consent” and that the High Representative used expanded powers to change the Constitution and the Dayton Agreement (Vasic, 2024, pp. 182, 189).

The polarized portrayal of leaders reinforces this structure: Tuđman is portrayed as a resentful former communist who justified the crimes of the NDH, Izetbegović as an Islamic pro-Hitler fundamentalist shaped by anti-Serbian war traditions, while Milošević is transformed into a neutral technocrat deprived of political responsibility (Vasic, 2024, pp. 186, 182, 179). This asymmetrical formulation delegitimizes non-Serb leaders and normalizes the Serbian position, reinforcing narratives of Serbian victimhood, moral superiority, and the impossibility of compromise with inherently hostile political figures.

The demographic consequences of the war are described as “ethnic cleansing,” but responsibility is depersonalized to a list of symbolic places—Srebrenica, Sarajevo, Mostar, Vukovar, Ovčara—without context or perpetrators. Such generalizations transform legally established crimes into undifferentiated tragedies and reinforce claims of “political bias” against Serbs in international tribunals (Vasić, 2024, p. 180).

Markers of national identity:

Markers of national identity in the textbook are constructed through a combination of territorial, political, historical, religious, and symbolic elements, all presented as stable foundations of Serbian identity under threat.

A central marker is legal legitimacy, which frames Serbs as the only community that consistently respects constitutional norms, avoids escalation, and seeks to preserve Yugoslavia’s territorial integrity, while other peoples are depicted as systematically undermining this order. Within this logic, Serbs appear as defenders of the federation: they support Yugoslavia’s preservation to prevent its fragmentation into “many small states” and advocate self-determination for all—on the condition that Serbian self-determination means the right to remain in Yugoslavia (Васич, 2024, p.178, 182). This reinterpretation legitimizes the creation of Serbian autonomous regions in Croatia

and Bosnia as defensive rather than separatist projects, aligning with the idea of Serbia as the “Piedmont of the South Slavs” (Васич, p.56).

A second marker is the notion of a shared historical space, which extends Serbian identity beyond Serbia’s borders to all territories inhabited by Serbs. As Yugoslavia collapses, these regions are reframed as part of a broader Serbian civilizational space, tied to Serbia through the concept of the “mother state,” which is entitled to provide “humanitarian, economic and military assistance to Serbs from the FRY” (Васич, 2024). Security is portrayed as possible only within Serbian political units or in union with Serbia, while life outside these structures is depicted as inherently vulnerable to “ethnic cleansing.” Examples such as the persecution of Serbs after the loss of Serbian authority in Kosovo or the destruction and mass flight from the Republic of Serbian Krajina after Operation Storm (Васич, 2024, p.180, 183) transform territorial loss into a marker of existential threat and justify political unification. Symbolic markers reinforce this unity: the shared colors of the Serbian, Republika Srpska, and Krajina flags, and disputes over Bosnian Serb symbols are framed as attacks on Serbian cultural continuity (Васич, 2024, p. 189).

A third marker is the trauma of the NDH, which becomes a lens through which modern Croatian politics is interpreted. The textbook draws a direct analogy between the NDH and Tuđman’s Croatia, arguing that the new constitution’s removal of Serbs as a constituent nation and Tuđman’s alleged historical writings that “justified the NDH and downplayed crimes against Serbs and Jews” (Васич, p.179) demonstrate ideological continuity. This framing legitimizes Serbian fears and presents Serbian political and military structures as necessary self-defense against renewed genocidal threats.

Finally, Orthodoxy functions as both a moral and civilizational marker. The Serbian Orthodox Church is portrayed as the guardian of ethical integrity, exemplified by Patriarch Pavle’s statement: “If I were the last Serb, I would agree to disappear so that there would be no crimes” (Васич, 2024, p.184).

Presentation Style and Tone:

The period of the Yugoslav wars is characterized by a distinctly patriotic and emotional tone, with information consistently presenting the Serbian perspective as legitimate, emphasizing injustice, and clearly justifying Serbian actions while delegitimizing those of other groups.

This tone is dominant and consistently mitigates or completely removes responsibility from the Serbian side. For example, the military intervention in Croatia is interpreted as: Small skirmishes between Croatian troops and Serbs escalated into war, and the JNA

attempted to separate the warring parties. (Васич, 2024, p.179). The emotional tone of the text is formed through the dramatization of the injustices and suffering of the Serbs: the use of formulations such as “the Serbs were expelled”, “the Serbs were deprived of the status of a constitutional people”, references to the trauma of the NDH as excuse for the “threat of a new genocide”, as well as “hundreds of thousands of refugees” (Васич, 2024.p.179,180,182). The conflict-hostile tone is intensified through biographical portraits of the leaders of other communities: Croats are associated with the Ustaše legacy through the figure of Franjo Tuđman, who was sentenced for nationalism, Bosniaks – with radical Islam through Alija Izetbegovic’s Islamic Declaration, Albanians – with separatism that was “stopped by the army and police”, and the West (USA, Germany, Vatican, NATO, The Hague Tribunal) appears as a biased force that “justified the dismemberment of Yugoslavia and anti-Serbian policy” (Васич, 2024p.179,180,186). Taken together, this configuration creates a closed narrative in which the Serbs appear simultaneously as defenders of legality, its centuries-old victims, and the only party acting morally, while all other groups are portrayed as a source of existential threat.

An additional emotional emphasis is created by the example of Major Milan Tepić, who, “sacrificing his life, blew up an ammunition depot so that it would not fall to the Croatian separatists,” and is directly called the “national hero of Yugoslavia,” which reinforces the image of heroism and self-sacrifice. Finally, the civilizational dimension is presented indirectly through the formula “War for the Yugoslav heritage.” For the Serbs, it is a struggle to preserve a single Serbian state and their own historical mission as the defender of Serbia. (Васич, 2024.180-181)

2. Bosniaks perspective:

The chapter on the breakup of Yugoslavia in the Bosniak textbook is divided into 2 parts and takes up 12 pages. The first part, which takes up 5 pages, is titled "The Breakup of the SFRY and International Recognition of Bosnia and Herzegovina". The second part, titled The War and Post-War Period in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-2000), takes up 6 pages.

Plot

The Bosnian textbook presents the disintegration of Yugoslavia as a process that remained manageable until Slobodan Milošević rose to power. His centralizing policies, the abolition of the autonomies of Kosovo and Vojvodina, and Belgrade’s media campaign questioning Bosnia’s legitimacy are depicted as the key destabilizing forces that undermined the Yugoslav constitutional order and threatened Bosnia’s historical statehood (Šabotić, 2012, pp. 179–180). Within this narrative, Hamdija Pozderac and

Alija Izetbegović appear as political figures who sought to preserve Yugoslavia through peaceful reform and protect the equality of its peoples. Pozderac's removal is framed as the result of a politically motivated campaign by the Serbian leadership aimed at eliminating the strongest defender of Bosnian subjectivity (Šabotić, 2012, p. 180).

The collapse of the League of Communists accelerated the rise of three ethno-political parties in Bosnia. After Croatia and Slovenia declared independence, Bosnia faced the threat of asymmetry with Serbia and therefore proclaimed sovereignty on 15 October 1991. The subsequent referendum is presented as a legal, legitimate, and internationally recognized act that confirmed Bosnia's independence (Šabotić, 2012, pp. 181–182). In contrast, the withdrawal of Serbian deputies and the proclamation of Republika Srpska are depicted as the beginning of aggression. Following the referendum, JNA and Serbian paramilitary groups attacked Sarajevo, marking the start of the war.

As armed formations emerged on all sides, Croats proclaimed the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosna, deepening Bosnia's internal fragmentation. The Croat–Bosniak conflict is attributed to the “double game” of the Croatian leadership, which simultaneously supported Bosnia against Serbia while considering the possibility of partition (Šabotić, 2012, p. 183). Both Serbian and Croatian projects are portrayed as excluding Bosniaks, leaving them isolated between two competing ethno political agendas. Ethnic cleansing by Serb forces, aimed at erasing non-Serb identity through the destruction of cultural heritage and the establishment of camps, is described as systematic; similar practices during the Croat–Bosniak conflict are also acknowledged (Šabotić, 2012, p. 185). U.S. mediation ended the Croat–Bosniak war and created the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, enabling a renewed joint focus on resisting Serbian forces

The international community is portrayed as passive: the arms embargo deprived Bosnia of the right to self-defense, UN peacekeepers lacked authority, and “safe zones” proved illusory, culminating in Srebrenica (Šabotić, 2012, pp. 184, 187). The UN's failure becomes the moral justification for transferring responsibility to NATO, whose intervention—combined with Bosnian-Croat military advances—forced the Serbian side to accept a ceasefire.

The narrative concludes with the Dayton Agreement, presented as a balanced compromise (51/49) that preserved Bosnia's internationally recognized borders and ensured equality among Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs. Post-war reconstruction is described as ongoing, with the ICTY portrayed as an instrument of justice and reconciliation, and the High Representative as essential for implementing the peace agreement and maintaining stability.

Differentiation Us/Them:

Bosniaks construct the breakup of Yugoslavia through the consistent opposition of the Bosnian "we" as a legitimate, inclusive, and democratic political community confronting the Serbian leadership, which is portrayed as a source of destabilization, threat, and aggression: "Milosevic tried to impose Serbian rule on the other republics in Yugoslavia" (Šabotić, I. 2012, p.179).

The text, prior to the start of the Croat-Bosniak War, presents a clear binary: the Bosniaks are portrayed as supporters of constitutionalism, seeking to preserve Yugoslavia, compromise, and legality, while the Serbian side is depicted as a force that destroys the constitutional order and ultimately resorts to aggression. Such a collective, generalized negative characterization is given to the actions of Serbia without directly blaming the Serbs, but rather by placing responsibility on the Serbian forces, like: "Belgrade media challenged the statehood of Bosnia and Herzegovina", "The Yugoslav People's Army and forces loyal to the Serbian Democratic Party attacked Sarajevo" and "The Army of Republika Srpska ethnically cleansed the non-Serb population" (Šabotić, I. 2012, p. 180, 184,185).

At the same time, the Bosniaks are presented as a community that found itself alone between the Croats and the Serbs without international support, which reinforces their vulnerability and victimhood. Finally, the Croatian side is again indirectly represented, this time through the hidden idea of a potential division of Bosnia. As evidence, a historical reference is given to a conversation between Zimmerman and Franjo Tuđman, in which the Croatian president calls Bosnia "historically Croatian" and claims that "majority Muslims actually consider themselves Croats" (Zimmerman 1997, in Šabotić 2012, p. 183). It then goes on to emphasize that the Croat-majority communities proclaimed the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia, as well as mentioning that: "during the Croat-Bosniak war there were concentration camps for Bosniaks" (Šabotić, I. 2012, p.185). This makes the Croats another threat to the Bosniaks, an additional "them".

Despite this, the textbook demonstrates elements of cooperation, primarily through the positive portrayal of American mediation that created the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and brought Bosniaks, Croats, and the international community together in a common opposition to the Serbs: "After this agreement put an end to the hostilities of the ARBiG and the HVO, all the efforts of the international community were directed towards resolving the issue with the Serbs" (Šabotić, I. 2012, p. 186).

The result is an asymmetrical narrative in which "we" is the inclusive, legitimate, and democratic Bosnian community, while "they" are all other external and internal forces

that threaten its existence, from the Serbian leadership and forces loyal to it to Croatian territorial ambitions and a passive international community that failed to prevent genocide and limited Bosnia in self-defense.

Interpretation of Shared and Divergent Historical Experiences:

For Bosniaks, the key point is that it was the Serbian policy of centralization—the elimination of autonomies, the violation of the 1974 Constitution, and the media campaign against Bosnia—that initiated the dismantling of the federation (Šabotić, 2012, pp. 179–180). While the Serbian side interprets these actions as a struggle for constitutional balance and the protection of Serbian rights, others see them as aggressive steps aimed at disrupting reforms and negotiations. Therefore, under the existing conditions, Yugoslavia could not be saved.

Bosnia's independence was a forced step, as they did not want to be left alone with the Serbian majority, especially since Serbia was already using force to suppress other groups. For Bosniaks, the referendum is a legal exercise of the right to self-determination (Šabotić, 2012, pp. 181- 183), while Serbs consider it unconstitutional and illegitimate, and boycott of the vote. Also important is the right of precedence, since Bosnia's independence preceded the proclamation of Republika Srpska, so Bosniaks are right according to their logic, and Serbs are separatists led from Belgrade. Croats also recognize Bosnia's independence and initially cooperate with them, but their subsequent position is complicated by the war and alleged parallel ambitions.

The biggest disagreement concerns the nature of the war. For Bosniaks, this is aggression against an internationally recognized state, since after joining the UN, Bosnia became a sovereign country, and the actions of the JNA and the Army of Republika Srpska are external aggression against an independent country (Šabotić, 2012, p.185)

Finally, the victim's experience is also radically different. Bosniaks emphasize the systematic nature of the ethnic cleansing against them and Srebrenica in particular as a genocide that forced NATO to intervene in the conflict (Šabotić, 2012, p. 188). Bosnian textbooks do not mention similar acts committed against Serbs, reducing everything to the fact that the Serb population “fled in panic” (Šabotić, 2012, p. 188). Croat abuses against Bosniaks are acknowledged, but also in a limited and descriptive manner. For example, the textbook mentions the existence of concentration camps run by Croats during the conflict between Bosniaks and Croats (Šabotić, 2012, p. 185). This allows us to portray Bosniaks as victims of both sides, while avoiding a detailed explanation of the conflict's causes. In the following, the textbook will emphasize the importance of cooperation

between the two sides for coercing the Serbs into peace, making the conflict itself secondary and irrelevant.

The Dayton Peace is ultimately presented not as a final point or solution, but as a balanced compromise, and the problems caused by the war have not yet been fully resolved, although some progress has been noted. Bosniaks assign an important role to the High Representative, who is authorized to implement the Dayton Agreements, as well as to the International Court in The Hague, as a basis for reconciliation (Šabotić, 2012, p. 188). The other two sides are more critical.

Hamdija Pozderac appears only in the Bosniak narrative, as responsible for revising the system after Tito's death, he becomes a symbolic figure in the institutional struggle between federalists ("the rest of Yugoslavia") and Serbian centralists. His removal through what is described as a "fabricated scandal" is framed as a politically motivated attack by the Serbian leadership aimed at eliminating "the most powerful defender of Bosnian subjectivity" (Šabotić, 2012, p.180).

Markers of national identity:

The Bosnian textbook constructs national identity through statehood legitimacy, sacrifice, political moderation, and historical continuity, directly countering Serbian and Croatian narratives that deny Bosnia's political subjectivity. Bosnia and Herzegovina is presented as a historically formed and legitimate state whose existence was repeatedly questioned by its neighbors: Serbian media depicted it as an artificial construct and "Tito's invention" (Šabotić, 2012, p. 180), while Croatian narratives claimed it "has always belonged to the Croatian geopolitical sphere" (Zimmerman, 1997 in Šabotić, 2012, p. 183). In response, the textbook emphasizes the right to self-determination, framing the 1992 referendum as a lawful expression of the will of all "peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina" (Šabotić, 2012, p. 181).

The narrative of sacrifice reinforces this identity through accounts of ethnic cleansing against Bosniaks, culminating in Srebrenica, where "Serb forces... killed eight thousand Bosniaks" (Šabotić, 2012, p. 188). Political moderation is embodied by Hamdija Pozderac and Alija Izetbegović, portrayed as leaders committed to diplomacy, equality, and avoiding war; the textbook's positive view of the ICTY further underscores a commitment to legal culture and reconciliation (Šabotić, 2012, p. 188).

Finally, historical continuity situates Bosnian identity within a long struggle for political subjectivity, affirmed at the 1943 Partisan congress. Serbian attempts to portray Bosnia as artificial, along with subsequent military intervention, are framed as existential threats.

External border revisionism is depicted as denying Bosnia's foundational statehood, while the narrative traces Bosnian political identity back to the medieval period: after the fall of 1463, Bosnia "regained independence" only in 1992, symbolized by adopting a flag and coat of arms referencing medieval Bosnia (Šabotić, 2012, p. 182).

Style and tone:

The text combines an outwardly neutral academic style with attempts to avoid overt hostility, creating the impression of an objective presentation. The narrative is based on factual formulations and legal arguments. Events are consistently presented through the description of structural processes- economic crisis, political disintegration, constitutional disputes- without emotional adjectives or overt evaluative judgments. Such a style creates the impression of analytical distance and objectivity. At the same time, at key moments describing the war, moderate elements of emotional tone appear, aimed at evoking sympathy for the Bosniaks and emphasizing the legitimacy of Bosnian statehood and the sacrifices of Bosniaks. This emotionality is realized through the dramatization of the suffering of Bosniaks, for example: genocide in Srebrenica, ethnic cleansing, destruction of the cultural code of territories, concentration camps, deprivation of the right to self-defense due to the embargo. There are also photographs of prisoners in Trnopol near Prijedor, which encourage the expression of emotions.

But at the same time, this is not described in detail, and there is no apologetic tone; the text is focused on accusing others and is categorically silent about the negative actions of its own side. The openly hostile tone to the conflict is clearly visible in the characterization of the Serbian side: Milosevic violated the constitutional order, the Serbian leadership fabricates scandals, pursues a policy of genocide and purges, and denies the statehood of Bosnia. But this is indirectly associated with the Serbs as a nation, rather than generalized to institutions. At the same time, the Croats are more neutral, with the exception of mentioning the existence of concentration camps. The Croat-Bosnian war is described as having begun in 1992 and quickly frozen. Tudjman's views are presented to students for evaluation. There are value judgments, for example: the UN embargo deprived Serbia and Montenegro of the right to defense, the conservative position.

3. Croat perspective:

The chapter on the collapse of Yugoslavia in the Croatian textbook is called "The Creation and Development of Independent Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina" and is divided into five parts. The first part, "The Collapse of the SFRY," is 6 pages long. The second part, "The Serbian Rebellion in Croatia," is 9 pages long. The third part, "From International Recognition to Victory in the Patriotic War," is 9 pages long. The fourth

part, "The Consequences of the Patriotic War," is 4 pages long. The last part, "Bosnia and Herzegovina as an Independent State," is 4 pages long.

Plot:

In the Croatian textbook, the breakup of Yugoslavia is presented as a process caused by the rise of Serbian nationalism and Belgrade's centralism. After Tito's death, tensions between the republics and the federal center are described as having been managed until Slobodan Milošević came to power, and his abolition of the autonomies of Kosovo and Vojvodina is interpreted as an attempt to subjugate the other republics "by force of police and army" (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015). In this narrative, the adoption of the new Croatian constitution portrays Croatia as a democratic, legal, and defensive state, committed to reforms, peaceful conflict resolution, and protection of minority rights, while the Serbian leadership is portrayed as acting through coercion, violating constitutional norms, and manipulating historical memory. These events are presented as the direct cause of the Serbian uprisings in Croatia and Bosnia, which the textbook characterizes as artificially created projects aimed at realizing the idea of a "Greater Serbia."

Croatia's response is portrayed as democratic and legitimate: a referendum in which "90% of the population supported independence" and the adoption of the Charter of Rights of Serbs and Other Nationalities, intended to demonstrate the new state's inclusive and legitimate nature (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015). However, war broke out, and Croatia is portrayed as being forced into self-defense while continuing to seek peaceful solutions. The Serbian side is portrayed as having rejected peace proposals, making Operation Storm a necessary and legitimate action in the circumstances (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015).

In the Bosnian context, the textbook emphasizes that Croats and Bosniaks jointly led Bosnia to independence, while Serbs sought to create a Greater Serbia. The boycott of parliament, the recall of Serbian deputies, and the proclamation of the Republika Srpska are presented as the culmination of this separatist project, while the 1992 referendum is portrayed as a legitimate act that the Serbs boycotted for political reasons (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015). Although Bosniaks and Croats initially acted as allies, the textbook explains their later conflict not as a betrayal but as deep political distrust. The 1994 Washington Agreement is described as a "triumph of rationality," enabling the creation of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and joint military operations that were halted only by external pressure (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015). Previous peace plans are dismissed as declarative, and the textbook argues that the Serbs took peace seriously only after losing territory. The Dayton Agreement is presented as an artificial but necessary compromise

that established a territorial balance between the Federation (51%) and the Republika Srpska (49%) and ensured stability through international supervision.

Differentiation Us/Them:

The “us/them” distinction in the Croatian textbook is built through the consistent opposition of the “self” of the Croatian political community as legitimate, democratic, moderate, and defensive, to Serbian political actors, who are portrayed as the source of crisis, aggression, and destabilization. “We” are the Croats who sought autonomy, acted within the then legal field of Yugoslavia, conducted negotiations, proposed reforms and peaceful solutions; “they” are the Serbian leadership, which, according to the text, promoted “Greater Serbian nationalism”, used force and rejected any compromises (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015). The Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences is presented as the ideological foundation for future conflicts, which translates political discussion into the plane of territorial claims, thereby framing the Serbian side as the initiator of radicalization (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015).

The Croats are portrayed as a democratic community that adopted a "democratic" constitution, sought peaceful coexistence among all Croatian citizens regardless of their nationality, and was ready to provide legislative guarantees of their rights and freedoms. Even after the uprising, the Croats were the ones who, to the last, offered peaceful reintegration and amnesty to the rebels. Instead, the Serbs responded with "unconstitutional decisions" and an information war in which the Serbian media distorted the image of Croatia, unjustifiably portraying them as the successor of the NDH, mobilizing local Serbs for separatism (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015). Thus, "we" are Croats operating within the legal framework, "they" are Serbian political structures manipulating historical memory and initiating violence

In the narrative of Bosnia, Croats and Bosniaks are mostly presented as allies who sought independence, while Serbian elites are depicted as those who “sought to create a Greater Serbia” and destroyed common state institutions (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015). The boycott of the parliament and the proclamation of the Republika Srpska are presented as the culmination of Serbian separatism. But despite the temporary hostility with the Bosniaks being described as a negative phenomenon between the allies, the textbook maintains an asymmetry: The Bosniaks are depicted as those who sought to “minimize the role of the Croats”, while the Croats are depicted as a community that defended the principle of equality of the three peoples (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015).

In war stories, “we” are the defenders who respond to aggression, while “they” are the aggressors or violators of agreements. Operation Storm is justified as a necessary response

to the constant ceasefire violations. International organizations, primarily the UN, also fall partly into the category of “them” – as actors who have shown inaction, especially in the case of Srebrenica, and in ensuring peace in Croatia after the ceasefire between the Croats and the RSK.

As a result, the Croatian textbook forms a binary: “we” – a democratic, legitimate, defensive community that seeks peace and justice; “they” – Serbian political structures that initiate the conflict and use force. The Croats are presented as victims of aggression and manipulation, while the Serbian side is the main destabilizing factor in the region.

Interpretation of Shared and Divergent Historical Experience:

The Croatian textbook frames the breakup of Yugoslavia through a narrative that transforms a manageable political crisis into a deliberate Serbian expansionist project. What Serbian actors interpret as a struggle for equality and the protection of national interests is reinterpreted as the unfolding of a Greater-Serbian agenda. This storyline begins with the Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences—presented as a political manifesto emphasizing the alleged marginalization of Serbs—and culminates in the abolition of the autonomies of Kosovo and Vojvodina “by force of police and army” (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 149). Milošević’s rise to power is depicted as the decisive turning point that converted a constitutional dispute into a nationalist offensive, as he allegedly attempted to impose the same centralist model on neighboring republics as he had on the autonomies. His control of four votes in the collective presidency gave him disproportionate influence. In such a situation, the collapse of the League of Communists and the 1990 elections—interpreted not only as democratization but as a defensive reaction to Milošević’s attempt to seize control of the entire Yugoslavia.

Although socialism collapsed, the textbook stresses that Yugoslavia did not immediately fall apart. Republican leaders continued negotiating the future of the federation: Serbia and Montenegro advocated deeper centralization under the guise of preserving unity, while Croatia and Slovenia proposed a confederal model based on republican sovereignty. Macedonia and Bosnia signaled that they would follow Croatia and Slovenia should they choose independence (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 154). When negotiations stalled, Serbia began preparing for a military solution and imposed anti-institutional measures on Croatia, whereas Croatia began implementing its national project. The declarations of independence of Croatia and Bosnia in this case were morally as legally justified and democratically endorsed through referendums in which “the majority of the population supported independence.” Serbian actions in Croatia and Bosnia, by contrast, are depicted not as legitimate self-defense but as the result of political manipulation and information

warfare, enabling the creation of the RSK and RS under the slogan “Everything is Serbia” (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 54, 157, 177).

At the same time, the JNA began illegally transferring weapons from the Croatian Territorial Defense to rebel Serbs, and launched rebellion in different parts of Croatia, forcing Croat police to respond. Serbian forces are described as repeatedly violating ceasefires and rejecting peace initiatives. Croatia, in contrast, is portrayed as acting responsibly: granting amnesty to Serb citizens who had not committed crimes and guaranteeing rights and freedoms to those who remained (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 166). This framing supports the argument that Croatia prevented revenge and cannot be held responsible for the conflict's consequences.

In the Bosnian War narrative, Croats and Bosniaks appear as allies resisting Serbian elites who deliberately dismantled common institutions. Even the Croat–Bosniak conflict is framed asymmetrically: Croats are said to have believed that Bosniak leaders sought to marginalize them, while the creation of the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia—though acknowledged as “controversial”—is legitimized as a defensive response to threats at a moment when Bosniak leadership was indecisive and Serbs controlled 70% of Bosnia (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p.178).

Dayton Agreement, meanwhile, is presented as establishing a strict territorial balance under international supervision, yet the narrative subtly implies that Croatia and Bosnia could have achieved more favorable territorial outcomes if international pressure had not intervened. At the same time, the textbook emphasizes that the agreement was made possible by the joint military successes of Croats and Bosniaks, which shifted the balance of power, because the Serbian side refused to follow any real peace plan (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015). A similar ambivalence characterizes the portrayal of the International Tribunal: while its role in confronting wartime atrocities is acknowledged, the text expresses cautious doubts about its impartiality. Thus, international mechanisms are recognized as legitimate but simultaneously portrayed as imperfect and politically constrained (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015).

Markers of national identity:

Markers of Croatian national identity in the textbook are constructed through a mirror opposition in which Croats appear as democratic, anti-fascist, lawful, and fundamentally defensive, while the Serbian political project is reduced to Greater-Serbian nationalism, centralism, and expansionism. Croatian identity is anchored in three interlinked markers: the democratic nature of Croatian state-building and its legitimacy; the defensive and

sacrificial character of the Croatian war effort; and the historical continuity of the Croatian political subject.

The democratic marker is articulated through the portrayal of Croatia as a modern, “united, indivisible and democratic” state whose new constitution guarantees minority rights, including the Charter of Rights of Serbs and Other Nationalities. Even during wartime, Croatia is depicted as willing to forgive and coexist with Serbs, whereas Serbian leadership is portrayed as acting through force, adopting “unconstitutional decisions,” and manipulating memories of the Second World War to mobilize Serbs against others. The markers of sacrifice and defensiveness are expressed through depictions of Croats as a community resisting Serbian armed aggression and confronting a project aimed at creating a “Greater Serbia in all Serb-populated territories of Yugoslavia” (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015, p. 149). Serbian self-determination (RSK, RS) is delegitimized as a separatist enterprise, while Croatian and Bosniaks' self-determination is framed as lawful and historically justified. The suffering of other groups is minimized or omitted, whereas Croatian losses and actions are emphasized, morally justified, and presented as necessary for national survival. Finally, historical continuity is constructed as a linear narrative stretching from partisan anti-fascism to the injustices of collective guilt and culminating in the restoration of historical symbols—the modern flag and coat of arms—which the textbook presents as deeply rooted in the Croatian past. Through this narrative, the Croatian nation is endowed with the qualities of a primordial freedom-fighting community whose statehood is not invented but endured, defended, and historically grounded.

Style tone:

The text consistently justifies the Croatian position, legitimizing Croatian actions as legal, democratic, and defensive, while Serbian actions are the opposite. The texts are widely used in value judgments. Also, their own illegal actions are either silenced or, if acknowledged, their explanations are provided. For example: "Due to the violence of Serbian aggression against Croatia, some members of regular Croatian units also committed crimes, but the judicial system conducted numerous trials against the guilty" (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015). In episodes of the conflict, a conflict-hostile tone emerges, directed at Serbia, reinforcing the image of an external threat. For example: The Greater Serbian Aggression against Croatia and the Serbian Uprising. Individual events- such as the Serbian uprising, information warfare, and the consequences of the JNA's actions- are described with emotional intensity, which adds drama and forms a narrative of Croatian sacrifice and moral correctness. At the same time, the Bosnians are criticized more mildly, without demonization. “The author summarizes the consequences of the Bosnian Croat

war: the fighting led to the displacement of civilians and a large number of deaths” (Bekavac & Rozić, 2015). In short, the textbook's style is not neutral but emphatically emotional and justifying, and its tone is asymmetrical, aimed at legitimizing the Croatian position and delegitimizing the Serbian political project. Self-heroization is reflected in the biographies and military exploits of various soldiers during hostilities, as well as in the titles of various fragments describing the fighting: Croatian Defenders and Their Victories, Vukovar the Hero City, and the City of Heroes.

IV. Findings:

The textbooks of the three educational systems construct a coherent set of narrative models that span all historical periods and produce three parallel national histories. Each textbook develops its own internal logic of the past in which the central actor is “its” people, while other groups appear only as background figures or sources of threat. Bosnian textbooks differ in that they focus almost exclusively on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, making it the primary spatial and historical center of interpretation.

In the Serbian textbook, Serbs are portrayed as the principal creators and bearers of statehood—from the medieval kingdom through the SFRY to its collapse—and simultaneously as the group that has suffered the most from historical injustice. Other ethnic groups and external actors are depicted mainly as hostile forces whose cooperation is possible only in exceptional circumstances and only in the absence of foreign intervention. The narrative of “brotherhood of peoples,” ostensibly emphasizing South Slavic unity, in practice subsumes Croats and Bosniaks into a Serb-centric historical trajectory, diminishing their agency. Serbs are presented as the greatest victims of both Yugoslav breakups, with the First and Second World Wars functioning as foundational traumas that shape a continuous martyrdom narrative extending into the 1990s. Yugoslavia is framed as a natural continuation of Serbian history, while its disintegration is depicted as a process that left Serbs “enslaved” in new state formations—reinforcing the idea that Serbs can live freely only within a unified Serbian state.

The Bosnian textbook adopts a markedly different approach, striving for a neutral tone and focusing almost exclusively on Bosnia and Herzegovina as a shared historical space. History is presented not as the story of a single nation but as the history of a territory in which different groups have coexisted for centuries. The central theme is the formation of a common Bosnian territorial identity grounded in traditions of coexistence and mutual tolerance. Even in periods of war and crisis, the textbook highlights examples of intercommunal cooperation. At the same time, it emphasizes that Bosniaks often found themselves between two powerful neighbors—Serbia and Croatia—both of whom had

historically claimed Bosnia as part of their respective geopolitical spheres. This dual pressure is portrayed as the main obstacle to the development of a unified political identity, despite the long-standing foundations of a shared Bosnian-Herzegovinian identity.

The Croatian textbook centers its narrative on the threat of Greater Serbian ideology and underscores the necessity of an independent Croatian state for the preservation of national identity. Although the NDH is acknowledged as a problematic historical episode, the textbook stresses that crimes were committed by and against all sides, thereby rejecting the notion of collective guilt. Croatian suffering is emphasized as equal to or greater than that of others, reinforcing the legitimacy of Croatian statehood. While the textbook avoids harsh judgments of Bosniaks, it consistently portrays Serbs in a negative light, in line with its broader narrative structure. In the depiction of key historical figures and events, each group highlights its own heroes and victims; Bosniaks occasionally acknowledge others, but the majority of individuals presented as positive examples are Bosnian Muslims.

Overall, both Croatian and Serbian textbooks prioritize their own national histories, while Bosnia appears as a peripheral space relevant only insofar as it intersects with the histories of their respective “homelands.” This is reflected in the disproportionate number of pages devoted to events in Serbia and Croatia compared to those in Bosnia. In many cases, Bosnia does not even appear in chapter titles, effectively erasing the shared experience of living in a common space. Bosnia’s role is reduced to a secondary, derivative narrative, while the main historical developments unfold in Serbia or Croatia. This excessive focus on the “homeland” reinforces the idea that Bosnia’s territory belongs to, or is historically tied to, these states, making its current borders appear artificial and temporary. Such narrative structures complicate intergroup dialogue and diminish the prospects for reconciliation by undermining the possibility of a shared historical perspective.

V. Table of distribution of material in history textbooks:

Structure Interwar period in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia		
Serbian Section Title	Number of Pages	Content Focus
The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918–1929)	5 pages	State formation, political system, interethnic relations, first crises.

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929–1941)	5 pages	Dictatorship, administrative reforms, political conflicts, external pressure
Yugoslav society, economy and culture	4 pages	Social change, economic development
Bosniaks Section Title	Number of Pages	Content Focus
Establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and the Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina until 1929	4 pages	Formation of the new state, political reorganization, loss of Bosnian autonomy, early interethnic and administrative changes
Bosnia and Herzegovina during the January 6th Dictatorship	4 pages	Royal dictatorship, abolition of Bosnian institutions, division into administrative units, centralization and repression
The End of the January 6th Dictatorship and the Cvetković–Maček Agreement	3 pages	Political crisis, assassination of King Alexander, negotiations, creation of the Banovina of Croatia, implications for Bosnia
Economic and Cultural-Educational Life between the Two Wars	3 pages	Social structure, economic underdevelopment, cultural and educational developments in interwar Bosnia
Croats Section Title	Number of Pages	Content Focus
Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina as Part of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs	2 pages	Formation of the State of SHS, political fragmentation, early challenges
The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes	3 pages	Centralization, Vidovdan Constitution, political conflicts, Croatian opposition

The Adriatic Question	2 pages	Italian territorial claims, Treaty of London, occupation of Dalmatia, international diplomacy
The Kingdom of Yugoslavia	3 pages	Royal dictatorship, administrative reforms, suppression of political opposition
The Croatian Economy between the Two World Wars	2 pages	Economic inequality, regional disparities, effects of the Great Depression
Resistance to the Dictatorship and the Solution of the Croatian Question	3 pages	Political resistance, Ustaše movement, Cvetković–Maček Agreement
Education, Culture and Sports in Croatia between the Two World Wars	4 pages	Croatian cultural institutions, schooling, sports, modernization processes
Structure of the World War II		
Serbian Section Title	Number of Pages	Content Focus
May War and Its Consequences	4 pages	Axis invasion of Yugoslavia, collapse of the state, territorial dismemberment, consequences for Serbs
Independent State of Croatia and Its Genocidal Policy towards Serbs, Jews and Roma.	4 pages	Establishment of the NDH, Ustaše regime, policy against Serbs, Jews, Roma; persecution and mass killings
Anti-Fascist Resistance Movement and the War in Yugoslavia (1941–1943)	5 pages	Chetniks and Partisan movements, Serbian resistance, internal conflicts, military operations
War in Yugoslavia (1943–1945)	3 pages	Escalation of fighting, Partisan advances, shifting alliances, liberation of territories

Character and Consequences of the War in Yugoslavia	4 pages	Human losses, destruction, demographic impact, suffering of Serbs, long-term political consequences
Bosnian Section Title	Number of Pages	Content Focus
Bosnia and Herzegovina in World War II	4 pages	Overview of wartime developments in Bosnia, occupation, fragmentation, early resistance
People's Liberation Movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina	5 pages	Growth of the Partisan movement, local resistance, key battles, political mobilization
Restoration of Bosnian-Herzegovinian Statehood: AVNOJ and ZAVNOBiH	5 pages	Federal reorganization, establishing partisan government, foundations of post-war Bosnian statehood.
Croat Section Title	Number of Pages	Content Focus
The Disintegration of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Creation of the Independent State of Croatia and the Nature of Its Regime	6 pages	Collapse of Yugoslavia, establishment of the NDH, characteristics of the Ustaše regime
The First Years of the War in Croatia	3 pages	Early wartime developments, occupation zones, resistance beginnings
The Situation in Yugoslavia Before the End of the War	3 pages	Shifts in military and political dynamics, Partisan advances, changing alliances
The End of the War in Croatia	6 pages	Final military operations, collapse of the NDH, liberation, immediate post-war consequences.
Structure of the Socialist Yugoslavia Section		

Serbian Section Title	Number of Pages	Content Focus
Consolidation of Communist Power (1945–1948)	4 pages	Establishment of the new socialist order, political repression, nationalization, early federal organization
Time of Transformation (1948–1974)	4 pages	Tito–Stalin split, Yugoslavia’s independent socialist path, self-management reforms, constitutional changes.
Time of Crisis (1974–1991)	4 pages	Effects of the 1974 Constitution, decentralization, rise of republican elites, economic and political instability
Economic, Cultural and Social Development	4 pages	Industrialization, modernization, demographic changes, cultural policies, social welfare, education
Bosniak Section Title	Number of Pages	Content Focus
Bosnia and Herzegovina in Socialist Yugoslavia	4 pages	Post-war political reorganization, federal structure, integration into the socialist system, early socialist reforms
The Tito–Stalin Conflict and the Period of Self-Government	5 pages	1948 split, Yugoslavia’s independent socialist path, development of workers’ self-management, political and economic implications for Bosnia and Herzegovina
The Development of Bosnia and Herzegovina within the SFRY	4 pages	Industrialization, modernization, demographic changes, cultural and educational development,

		strengthening of republican institutions.
Croat Section Title	Number of Pages	Content Focus
Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia	5 pages	Post-war reconstruction, establishment of the FPRY, federal structure, early socialist reforms, political consolidation
Conflict with the USSR	2 pages	Tito–Stalin split, Yugoslavia's expulsion from Cominform, and its consequences.
Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia	6 pages	Development of the SFRY, self-management system, constitutional changes, modernization, social and cultural policies
Structure of the Yugoslav Wars and Post-War Period Section		
Serbian Section Title	Number of Pages	Content Focus
The Fall of Yugoslavia. The War for the Yugoslav Inheritance	3 pages	Disintegration of the SFRY, political crisis, secession of republics, outbreak of armed conflicts
Serbia and Montenegro at the Beginning of the 21st Century	3 pages	Political developments after the wars, formation of the FRY/Serbia and Montenegro, early 2000s transformations.
“Civil War” in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995). Creation of the Republika Srpska	4 pages	Interpretation of the Bosnian War as a civil conflict, military developments, establishment of Republika Srpska
Republika Srpska in Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina.	5 pages	Dayton Peace Agreement, constitutional structure of BiH, status of Republika Srpska

Bosniak Section Title	Number of Pages	Content Focus
The Breakup of the SFRY and International Recognition of Bosnia and Herzegovina	5 pages	Disintegration of Yugoslavia, political crisis, international recognition of BiH.
The War and Post-War Period in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–2000)	6 pages	Outbreak of war, military developments, war crimes, peace process, Dayton Agreement, reconstruction and post-war political order
Croat Section Title	Number of Pages	Content Focus
The Collapse of the SFRY	6 pages	Political disintegration of Yugoslavia, rise of nationalism, constitutional crisis, breakdown of federal institutions
The Serbian Rebellion in Croatia	9 pages	Escalation of Serb–Croat tensions, formation of Serb autonomous regions, armed rebellion, early stages of the conflict
From International Recognition to Victory in the Patriotic War	9 pages	International recognition of Croatia, course of the war, key military operations, Croatian state consolidation
The Consequences of the Patriotic War	4 pages	Human and material losses, demographic changes, reintegration of territories, political and social aftermath.
Bosnia and Herzegovina as an Independent State	4 pages	Recognition of BiH, outbreak of war, relations between Croats and Bosniaks, Dayton Agreement.

3) Analysis of geography textbook:

Croatian and Serbian geography textbooks for Bosnia and Herzegovina are conventionally divided into three blocks: General geographical features of Southeastern Europe; Geography of Bosnia and Herzegovina; and Geography of Neighboring States (Serbia, Croatia, and Montenegro). The Bosnian textbook, on the other hand, is devoted exclusively to Bosnia.

I. Serbian textbook:

In the Serbian geography textbook, the section dedicated to Bosnia is 123 pages long and divided into 5 parts. The first part, "Historical and geographical development and geographical position of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska," is 12 pages long. The second part: Natural and geographical features of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska, 34 pages long. The third part: Socio-geographical characteristics of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska, 34 pages long. The fourth part: Geographical regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 39 pages long. The last part, called "Protection and improvement of the environment," is 10 pages long. Additionally, a separate section is dedicated to neighboring states, with Serbia taking 22 pages, Montenegro 12, and Croatia 17.

Spatial Framing & Symbolic Borders:

The space of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Republika Srpska (RS) is constructed in the textbook discourse as a politically unstable and vulnerable territory, constantly threatened by external and internal factors. The political and geographical positions of both entities in Southeastern Europe and the Balkan Peninsula are described as “negative” due to the constant transformations of statehood, which are presented as the main drivers of wars, migrations, and territorial changes (Grmuša et al., 2024). On the other hand, the physical and geographical characteristics are portrayed as positive, creating a sharp contrast between the “natural” attractiveness of the region and its “political problematicness” (Grmuša et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the emphasis on the “non-ethnicity” of the borders and the presence of Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks in neighboring states contributes to the perception of the territory as demographically blurred, artificial and unstable (Grmuša et al., 2024). This effect is reinforced by the specific description of the regions of Republika Srpska. Most of them are described as completely “internal” to RS, while the other two extend beyond its borders to the territory of the Brčko District, the cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, or neighboring countries (Grmuša et al., 2024). This classification constructs symbolic borders, where RS appears as a space with its own internal logic and geographical integrity.

In this context, the Republika Srpska stands out not only as an administrative unit but also as an autonomous geographical entity. The authors consistently depict the Republika Srpska separately on most of the maps presented, highlighting it against the background of Bosnia. Thus, the authors construct a spatial vision in which the territory is divided not only by physical features but also by cultural, national, and political markers. The regions are designated as separate “cultural spaces” with their own customs, ethnic composition, and social characteristics (Grmuša et al., 2024). As a result, Bosnia and Herzegovina is presented not as a single geographical whole, but as a mosaic of partially incompatible segments. In addition, the text emphasizes that although the modern administrative and managerial organization arose from political decisions, it is interpreted as an objective “geographical organization of space” (Grmuša et al., 2024). This normalizes the post-war division, giving it a natural, rather than conflictual, character. Narratives of “political distrust” and “attempts to liquidate” the RS fuel the perception of a constant threat to its existence, intensifying feelings of vulnerability and the need for protection (Grmuša et al., 2024). As a result, political division becomes a natural, historically grounded structure. Symbolic borders legitimize the separation of Republika Srpska as a “fortress”, depriving Bosnia and Herzegovina of internal unity and marking it as a zone of constant danger and geopolitical turbulence.

Demographic representation

In Serbian geography textbooks, demographic data on Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is constructed through an asymmetrical and politicized framework that delineates latent ethno-religious boundaries and reinforces an ethnic hierarchy. For example, some Migration processes are illustrated exclusively through the historical experience of the Serbian population—specifically highlighting the flight of Serbs during Croatia's Operation Storm—while equivalent experiences of other ethnic groups are omitted (Grmuša et al., 2024, p. 111). Despite a nominal acknowledgment of the state's multinational character, Bosniaks are excluded from the list of “autochthonous” peoples of the Balkan region and are not categorized among the South Slavs; furthermore, the authors' suggestion to “learn about their origin from the teacher” effectively de-subjectivizes this group, depriving it of a full-fledged ethnic agency (Grmuša et al., 2024, p. 15). This exclusionary logic extends to linguistic representation: Serbian and Croatian are categorized as distinct normative languages, whereas Bosnian is descriptively designated as “the language of the Bosnian people” (Grmuša et al., 2024, p. 66). This phrasing deliberately lowers its status, establishing a hierarchical boundary between the “normative” languages of Serbs and Croats and the mere “linguistic practice” of Bosniaks. The subsequent analysis of ethnic structure narrows down to three “constituent peoples”

with strict spatial demarcation, locating Serbs "predominantly in the Republika Srpska" and Bosniaks and Croats in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Grmuša et al., 2024, p. 114). Such a rigid localization legitimizes and normalizes post-war ethno-political segregation, presenting it as an inherent and permanent state of affairs. This spatial asymmetry is further reinforced by a historical overview that evaluates the transformations of the Ottoman period solely through the lens of the "difficult position" of the Christian population (Grmuša et al., 2024, p. 62, 114). This interpretation constructs a rigid religious hierarchy, positioning Islam as an exogenous faith brought by the Ottomans, and casting Bosniaks as an "alien element" within the region. Collectively, these narratives shape a selective demographic memory and reproduce hidden inter-ethnic borders, thereby naturalizing the post-war territorial division of the country.

Historical narrative:

Historical discourse interprets the development of events in Bosnia and Herzegovina through the prism of geographical determinism, positioning the region as a zone of chronic vulnerability that supposedly automatically provokes interethnic antagonisms. The authors of the textbook (Grmuša et al., 2024) open the text with the thesis that the Balkans have traditionally been a target for the expansion of great powers, which in their pursuit of hegemony regularly conflicted with each other, which forms a destructive vision of a space doomed in advance either to foreign domination or to a permanent state of war. The authors extrapolate this linear logic to Bosnia and Herzegovina, portraying it as a territory that, throughout its historical retrospective, was under the destructive, determinative influence of neighboring states, hinting that its favorable geographical location attracted external aggressors (Grmuša et al., 2024). As a result, global historical transformations — from autochthonous ancient ethnic groups to the Slavic settlement — are interpreted exclusively as a chain of foreign interventions, which artificially deprive Bosnia of its own subjectivity, turning it into a passive object of world history.

A separate manipulative tool in this process is the claim that the first state formation of local Slavs in Bosnian territory had an exclusively Serbian and Christian character (Grmuša et al., 2024), thanks to which a rigid historical vertical is constructed, where the political presence of the Serbian ethnic group is marked as primary, autochthonous, and decisive for the subsequent ethno-political landscape. Such a one-sided reduction of the early medieval period in favor of one ethnic group creates a perception where the modern Republika Srpska appears as an "organic" and legitimate continuation of the aforementioned medieval statehood. In this way, the authors of the textbook deliberately marginalize and displace other powerful historical traditions of Bosnia and Herzegovina,

in particular the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian eras, which are invariably branded as periods of occupation (Grmuša et al., 2024), as a result of which the causal relationships acquire a pronounced ethnocentric coloration, where the Serbs are explicated as the only initial political subject of this space, while other ethnic and religious groups are presented either as later layers or as the product of destructive "external influences". This tendency is clearly evident in the textbook's presentation of historical and demographic processes, which aims to legitimize the modern political landscape by appealing to "historical law" and the primacy of the Republika Srpska. The conceptualization of causal relationships in the events of the 1992–1995 war is also aimed at depersonalizing guilt and removing responsibility from specific military-political actors, as the armed conflict is deconstructed as an internal, conditioned confrontation between three indigenous peoples. The authors write that the war was an inevitable consequence of the incompatibility of political, national, and religious vectors of Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks, which was additionally fueled by negative external interference (Grmuša et al., 2024), reducing the complex architecture of the Bosnian war to a simple "clash of interests".

The reason for the war and the emergence of the Serbian entity in this narrative is the lack of a consolidated compromise, which makes the proclamation of the Republika Srpska a legitimate, preventive, and forced step by the Serbian people, aimed at protecting their existential interests (Grmuša et al., 2024). Thus, the textbook narrative successfully implements three tasks: normalizes the modern post-war territorial and administrative division of BiH, justifies a unilateral exit from the legal field, and constructs a parity model of guilt, where responsibility for the resolution of the war is equally distributed among all participants, regardless of their real role and legal status in the conflict.

Way of Presenting Geographical Knowledge:

The space of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska is presented through manipulative spatial representations that shape a politicized vision of the territory. Selective memory is manifested in the selective explanation of the causes of conflicts: civil wars are reduced to the "disintegration of the SFRY", the "desire to dominate" and the "negative intervention of the international community", which hides the real political processes and the responsibility of specific actors (Grmuša et al., 2024). The space is framed as dangerous and unstable: The Balkans are described as a "target for conquest", Bosnia as a "zone of constant danger", and Republika Srpska as an entity that is "under threat of liquidation", creating an atmosphere of constant threat. Separately, the textbook normalizes the post-war political division, presenting the regions of Republika Srpska as "geographically justified", which legitimizes the existing administrative structure and

political decisions as the natural state of affairs. Finally, the emphasis on “non-ethnic borders,” “demographic blurring,” and “cultural differences of regions” creates symbolic boundaries between “us” and “them,” reinforcing the notion of internal spatial fragmentation. Taken together, this is a manipulative way of presenting geographical knowledge that does not integrate, but rather deepens, socio-spatial divisions.

II. Bosniak textbook:

The Bosnian textbook consists of 8 chapters, covering 126 pages. The first chapter is titled "Development and Social Organization of Bosnia and Herzegovina" and is 10 pages long. The second chapter is titled "Natural and Cultural Traditions of Bosnia and Herzegovina" and is 8 pages long. The third chapter is titled "Geographical Features and Dimensions of Bosnia and Herzegovina" and is 6 pages long. The fourth chapter is titled "Climate, Fauna and Flora of Bosnia and Herzegovina" and is 18 pages long. The next chapter, "Waters of Bosnia and Herzegovina," is 16 pages. The sixth chapter is titled "Socio-Economic Development of Bosnia and Herzegovina" and is 20 pages long. The last two chapters are titled "Regional Distribution of Bosnia and Herzegovina" and "Ecological Aspects of Environmental Protection."

Spatial Framing & Symbolic Borders:

In Bosnian textbooks, the space of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is presented as a clearly defined, historically formed, and functionally interconnected geosystem, with its elements harmoniously combined (Bećirović et al., 2019). The regional structure of the state is modeled through a system of homogeneous zoning, based on natural-geographic and socio-economic criteria. This model deliberately ignores modern administrative borders in order to form an integrative spatial vision. In this context, the physical and political-geographical position of BiH is presented neutrally, without any assessment. The authors present a picture of a stable, orderly country, with its advantages and disadvantages, in which everyone who ruled Bosnia left a positive impact (Bećirović et al., 2019). On the maps in the textbook, Bosnia is mostly depicted as a single, integral unit without internal divisions into entities, cantons, or ethnic zones. It naturalizes the idea of the integrity of the Bosnian state, makes political and ethnic borders “invisible,” and emphasizes the unitary nature of its space. The authors of the textbooks consistently emphasize the “natural” nature of state borders, tying them to riverbeds, mountain ranges, and the seacoast, while international treaties and agreements serve as a legal anchor for this objective geographical and historical given (Bećirović et al., 2019). These legitimize natural borders and depoliticize space. They neutralize the symbolic weight of the Dayton system's internal demarcation lines, presenting the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina as

a logical, stable, objectively defined, and indivisible system. This, in turn, reinforces the notion of state space as naturally holistic and geographically grounded.

Demographic representation

The population of Bosnia and Herzegovina has undergone continuous settlement from the earliest human settlements to the present day. Particular emphasis is placed on the multi-layered nature of cultural influences – Illyrian, Roman, Slavic, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian (Bećirović et al., 2019). Such a retrospective naturalized the modern population as a “historically given” community, subject to various influences. A similar depoliticized logic is applied to the religious and national sphere. Islam, Orthodoxy, and Catholicism are considered the main denominations, and religious diversity is a natural characteristic of Bosnian society.

Also Modern Bosnia and Herzegovina is often described as a state of three indigenous peoples—Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats—as well as other citizens” (Bećirović et al., 2019). which presents the ethnic structure as historically formed and free from conflict potential. Against the background of such depoliticized “normality,” the only concrete example of ambiguity is, forced displacement, mentioned in the topic of migration, is Srebrenica (Grmuša et al., 2024); However, this precedent appears as an isolated case, and not as part of a systemic pattern of conflict relations or military ethnic cleansing. The general strategy of describing demographic processes is implemented through the optics of scientific data and ordinary social processes. All sensitive data on ethnicity, religion, and population density are explained using statistical tables and descriptive definitions, which creates the effect of conflict-free objectivity. The textbook does not explain the reasons for the radical demographic changes between 1991 and 2013, instead attributing them to the complex structure of the state (Grmuša et al., 2024). As a result, the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina is presented as a naturally formed, historically continuous, internally differentiated, yet functionally coherent community, taken beyond the current political context.

Historical Causality & Narrative:

The historical narrative of Bosnia and Herzegovina is presented as a continuous line of development, from prehistoric settlements to modern statehood. Causality is presented as a natural historical movement: Paleolithic and Neolithic cultures → Illyrian tribes → Roman administration → Slavic settlement → medieval Bosnian state → Ottoman period → Austria-Hungary → Yugoslav state formations → independence in 1992 (Bećirović et al., 2019). Each stage is represented as a logical continuation of the previous one, creating

in the reader a sense of historical continuity and the nature of the territory and the name of the country.

Special emphasis is placed on the creation of the medieval Bosnian state, which occupied the territory of modern Bosnia and beyond. Accordingly, documents that confirm the “historical legitimacy” of Bosnia — primarily the Charter of Kulin Ban of 1189 — are presented as the “birth certificate” of Bosnian statehood in these territories (Bećirović et al., 2019).

According to this integration logic, the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian periods are interpreted as important stages of cultural, administrative, and infrastructural progress that directly laid the foundations for the formation of a unique modern, multi-confessional, and multinational society (Bećirović et al., 2019). World War II and the political decisions of 1943 are seen as a key moment in the restoration of historical borders, which was won by all inhabitants of Bosnia in a joint struggle. At the same time, in an effort to preserve the impeccable integrity of this line, the authors encounter events of the late twentieth century, as a result of which the 1992–1995 war is mentioned in the textbook exclusively as a chronological event that “preceded the Dayton Agreement” (Bećirović et al., 2019). This structure of causality forms a narrative in which the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina appears as a consistent, natural, and internally logical process that legitimizes modern statehood and, within its space, minimizes all contradictory and conflicting aspects of the past.

Way of Presenting Geographical knowledge:

Geographical knowledge is presented through the Integration Model, which combines natural, historical, and cultural elements into a single cognitive scheme of space, making it an integrative process of presenting information. The student is not asked to consider the territory as a set of separate regions or political entities; on the contrary, the material is organized so that different pieces of information overlap and create an idea of an interconnected geographical reality. The material is organized so that the territory appears not as a mosaic of regions, groups, or political entities, but as a single whole, depriving the student of the opportunity to imagine space as a set of competing or mutually exclusive zones. This helps avoid controversial events of the past and not to emphasize the present too much. Constructing a model of space where alternative spatial imaginations don't even arise because the textbook doesn't show them, offering only one, conflict-free geographical framework:

III. Croat Textbook

In the Croatian textbook, 96 pages are devoted to Croatia, 12 to Serbia and Montenegro, and 84 to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The section on Bosnia is divided into 4 parts. The first is the General Characteristics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (14 pages), and the second is the Natural Characteristics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (26 pages). The third and fourth parts have 26 and 22 pages, respectively, and are titled "Socio-Economic Characteristics of Bosnia and Herzegovina" and "Natural and Geographical Units of Bosnia."

Spatial Framing & Symbolic Borders:

Bosnia and Herzegovina is embedded in the broader space of Southeastern Europe, characterized by long-standing clashes between states, civilizations, peoples, and their interests, which have led to frequent changes in statehood, large-scale migrations, and the layering of various cultural influences (Jelić et al., 2016). Within this framework, the country's political and geographical position is presented as "unfavorable", marked by repeated conquests, border shifts and external pressure. At the same time, the deep historical presence of the population on the territory of Bosnia – from the Paleolithic to the present day – is presented not as a factor of stability, but rather as a background for the constant change of various political and cultural formations.

This frame is reinforced by descriptions of the penetration of cultural influences from the East and West, the struggles of the Franks, Byzantium, and Hungary for the region, as well as the Illyrian, Slavic, and Roman layers that shaped its civilizational borderland (Jelić et al., 2016). In this context, the modern borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which emerged only in 1943 during the Second World War, appear as a late, politically determined construct rather than a historically stable territorial form (Jelić et al., 2016). Therefore, the subsequent description of the Yugoslav wars, which emphasizes that the country "immediately divided" after the first multi-party elections, reinforces the idea of the almost inevitability of territorial fragmentation. The Dayton Agreement is presented primarily through its territorial outcome- a state of three constituent peoples, divided into two entities in a ratio of 51/49, which normalizes the post-war division as a natural political order (Jelić et al., 2016).

The following describes the internal regions of Bosnia: Peripanonska Bosna, Srednja Bosna, Regija visokoga krša, and Niska Hercegovina. These regions are defined as having formed "exclusively on the basis of relief and climate," that is, as natural geographical wholes. At the same time, the textbook asks students: "Which of these regions have a continuation in Croatia?" (Jelić et al., 2016). This question diminishes the significance of Bosnia and Herzegovina's current political borders. It also places the Bosnian space within

broader natural zones that extend into Croatia. As a result, the Bosnian space is indirectly integrated into the Croatian geographical framework; this is not explicitly stated, but the very structure of the description leads students to perceive the regions of Bosnia as part of a wider supranational space connected to Croatia.

Demographic representation:

In the demographic representation block, the authors construct Bosnia and Herzegovina as a space with a distinct Croatian historical identity. The textbook establishes a hierarchy of belonging to the territory, within which Croats are presented as the autochthonous and primary people of this space, while Serbs and Bosniaks are portrayed as later communities associated with migration and Islamization (Jelić et al., 2016).

Such a narrative includes Croats in the “deep” history of the territory, while other groups are presented as secondary or those that have violated the original ethno-religious integrity. In particular, the authors note that after arriving in the “new homeland,” the Croats adopted Christianity here (Jelić et al., 2016), thereby emphasizing the Christian tradition as organic and historically inherent to this space. Instead, Islam is presented indirectly as a later, external phenomenon, unrelated to the region's “primary” cultural basis.

Demographic changes are also interpreted selectively. The decline in the number of Croats is explained by historical losses, emigration, and external factors, while changes in the shares of the Bosniak and Serbian populations are presented mainly as neutral statistical processes without broader historical context (Jelić et al., 2016). The textbook focuses primarily on the waves of migration that affected the Croats and also examines modern demographic processes through the prism of their impact on the Croatian population. At the same time, migrations and demographic losses among other ethnic groups are largely unrecorded, creating a selective demographic memory (Jelić et al., 2016).

As a result, Bosnia and Herzegovina appears as a historically Croatian space that later underwent transformations under external influence, while ethnic and religious diversity is presented not as an organic feature of the region, but as a consequence of processes that altered its original unity.

Historical Causality & Narrative:

The historical development of events in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina is depicted through the prism of cultural, religious, and political affiliations with Croatia, constructing a rigid scheme of historical determination. The narrative's starting point is the thesis of the autochthonous nature of the Croatian population and its early settlement

of the region, which creates a conceptual framework in which the genesis of Bosnia appears not as an independent process but as a derivative continuation of Croatian statehood (Jelić et al., 2016). In this logic, medieval Bosnian statehood is deprived of its own political subjectivity: its elite is represented as figures integrated into the Croatian civilizational space. A key tool of this interpretation is the emphasis on pre-Ottoman “cultural and religious unity” (Jelić et al., 2016). This serves as retrospective legitimation and marks Bosnia as an organic part of the Western Christian world.

Therefore, all subsequent transformations — Islamization, immigration of Serbs, changes in state structures — are interpreted exclusively as external interventions that allegedly destroyed the original harmony. At the same time, interethnic conflicts are simplified and normalized through depersonalized formulas such as “the war caused the displacement of the population” (Jelić et al., 2016). This becomes a logical consequence of the confrontation of civilizational dimensions.

The events of the late twentieth century, including the war of the 1990s, are reproduced through the prism of external aggression and ethno-national division, thereby allowing us to avoid analyzing internal political processes and the responsibility of specific actors (Jelić et al., 2016). As a result, such a one-dimensional logic of historical process systematically affirms the Croatian historical presence in Bosnia while simultaneously marginalizing other historical traditions and interpretations of the region's past.

Way of Presenting Geographical Knowledge:

The territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina is not understood as a neutral geographical reality but as a derivative element of the Croatian historical and cultural area. Its territory is presented through images as a place of instability and division, a clash of civilizations. Croatia is given a separate thesis about the autochthonous nature of the Croats, which creates a deterministic framework in which geographical data – settlement, migration, religious structure, spatial boundaries – are used to confirm the previously given ethno-political statement about the “natural” Croatian belonging to the region. Spatial descriptions in the texts do not serve a descriptive function, legitimizing the historical narrative, in which Bosnia appears as a secondary, dependent space, devoid of its own subjectivity. As a result, such a structure of spatial knowledge does not integrate the territory, but, on the contrary, reproduces and deepens ethno-political and socio-spatial divisions through a manipulative presentation of knowledge, reinforcing the idea of Bosnia's un alternative belonging to Croatia.

IV. Findings:

Geography textbooks in Bosnia and Herzegovina openly demonstrate the existence of three parallel, mutually exclusive spatial narratives, directly reflecting the country's ethno political fragmentation after the Dayton Agreement. Each of the three ethnocentric educational systems—Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian—constructs its own isolated version of geographical reality, interpreting identity, the connection of the “indigenous” people to the territory, and historical relations with neighbors in different ways. In Croatian and Serbian textbooks, Bosnia is depicted as an artificial, unstable, and geopolitically imposed entity, a perpetual site of ethnic confrontation and a battlefield of “great civilizations,” normalizing the inevitability of conflict. In these narratives, Bosnia is not treated as a sovereign space, but rather as a peripheral extension of the “mother states” of Croatia and Serbia, while state borders are described as artificial barriers that unfairly divide “united” ethnic nations. This is why there is a clear disproportion in the structure of textbooks: the geography and culture of Serbia or Croatia (together with Republika Srpska) receive much more attention than those of Bosnia itself. This forms a hierarchy of space in which the “true homeland” of Serbs and Croats lies outside Bosnia, and Bosnia itself appears not as an independent territorial and political unit but as an addition to the “greater Serbian” or “greater Croatian” space. Students receive a clear signal that their national identity is not tied to Bosnia, that their “real” state is Serbia or Croatia, and that Bosnia is a temporary, artificial, or imposed political project. This directly undermines the legitimacy of Bosnia as a common state and contradicts the very possibility of integration. At the same time, Bosnian textbooks build the opposite logic: they focus exclusively on Bosnia as a single, indivisible territory, emphasizing its natural borders and cultural plurality, offering an inclusive vision of space that resists civilizational divisions. A separate dimension appears in Serbian textbooks, where Republika Srpska is depicted not simply as an administrative unit, but as a “separate state, physically and cartographically defined,” creating a spatial vision in which the territory is divided not only physically, but also culturally, nationally, and politically—into Republika Srpska, intended for Serbs, and the rest of Bosnia, intended for others.

General Conclusion:

This dissertation addressed three central questions: how the three constituent nations and their recent history and geography are represented in the respective textbook sets; what these narratives reveal about memory politics and the formation of socio-spatial identities; and what they indicate about the prospects for integration in post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through this lens, the study examined how educational texts function as mechanisms of socio-spatial socialization, shaping understandings of the past, space, and identity. Textbook analysis made it possible to identify which interpretations of history

and geography are legitimized within each educational system, how they influence memory and identity formation, and how they reproduce—or obstruct—the possibilities for integration among the three constituent nations.

Thirty years after Dayton, Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats continue to construct parallel and often mutually exclusive collective memories and spatial identities. Most textbooks do not offer a shared or integrative narrative. Instead, each system produces its own ethnocentric reality in which “its” group is the protagonist or primary victim, while others appear as aggressors or marginal actors. Cooperation is framed as exceptional and conditional.

Serbian and Croatian narratives frequently subordinate Bosnia to their respective national “homelands,” treating Bosnian history and territory as secondary to Serbia- or Croatia-centered storylines. Identical events are interpreted through incompatible moral frameworks, yielding divergent judgments about responsibility, legitimacy, and victimhood.

Each group constructs a fixed narrative coordinate system in which the same historical processes take opposing meanings, while compromising aspects of its own past are minimized or omitted. Actions framed as legitimate self-defense in one textbook appear as aggression in another. Tragic episodes such as Srebrenica are variously described—as genocide, as one of many wartime tragedies, or downplayed—while the mass victimization of Serbs in the NDH is emphasized in Serbian narratives but treated in Croatian textbooks as only one component of broader wartime suffering. Geography textbooks mirror these patterns, embedding territorial claims and ethno-spatial imaginaries into students’ mental maps and reinforcing the idea that Bosnia’s space is divided into competing national domains. As a result, students learn not only different pasts but also different geographies—effectively three incompatible versions of the country.

These broader dynamics crystallize in three dominant national narratives.

The Serbian narrative portrays Serbs as a victim nation struggling for centuries to survive and unite, repeatedly facing betrayal, genocide, discrimination, and external aggression. Serbian political and military actions are framed as self-defense, while Croats and Bosniaks are associated with Ustaše violence and Islamic fundamentalism. The Serbian geographical imagination extends “national space” to all Serb-inhabited territories, legitimizing Republika Srpska as the guarantor of Serbian security.

The Bosniak narrative presents Bosniaks as an autochthonous European people whose identity developed through long-term non-recognition and political marginalization.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is depicted as a shared homeland of three equal peoples with deep historical roots. Territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders is emphasized, and Dayton is framed as a necessary compromise. Other groups are not collectively demonized; conflict is attributed to political elites rather than inherent ethnic hostility.

The Croatian narrative portrays Croats as a nation with a long state tradition that suffered systematic oppression under Serbian centralism. A key component is the effort to dissociate modern Croats from the NDH: Ustaše crimes are acknowledged but responsibility is limited to individuals, while Croats are simultaneously depicted as anti-fascist participants and victims. Bosnia is framed as part of Croatian historical space due to the long-term presence of Croats there.

Another mechanism reinforcing division is the monopolization of victimhood and the delegitimization of the Other's suffering. Each group presents itself as the primary victim while minimizing or erasing the suffering of others. Ethnic cleansing against one's own group is described as a "demographic catastrophe," whereas participation in crimes against others is reduced to a list of place names without context or perpetrators. This asymmetry prevents empathy and reinforces the belief that one's own suffering is unique, while others' is exaggerated or fabricated.

Geography textbooks deepen these divisions by embedding conflicting national narratives into spatial representations. Instead of presenting space as shared, they construct three distinct ethno-spatial worlds, each positioning Bosnia differently. Students thus learn not only incompatible histories but also incompatible geographies and territorial logics. History and geography cease to function as shared cognitive maps and instead reproduce mutually exclusive spatial realities.

The result is not merely divergent interpretations of events but the production of parallel realities. Each group emerges with its own understanding of what happened, who initiated conflict, who is victim or aggressor, and even what the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina is. This fragmentation stems from the fact that the three communities undergo separate trajectories of socio-spatial socialization. As Paasi (1998, 1999) argues, political communities integrate only when they share the phases of territorial shaping, symbolic shaping, institutionalization, and social reproduction. In Bosnia, each nation undergoes these phases separately, producing three incompatible socio-spatial worlds.

When students educated in these divergent systems enter the public sphere, they bring with them three distinct sets of "truths." Dialogue becomes impossible not due to unwillingness to compromise but because there is no shared factual ground. Thus, even

under formal integration, Bosnia reproduces three separate realities. Students understand differently what happened, who the victim is, and even imagine differently the state they inhabit. This corresponds to what Hromadžić (2015) calls an “empty nation”—a state that exists formally but lacks shared meaning. The Dayton Agreement codified not only administrative borders but also mental ones, producing internal fragmentation in which territory no longer functions as a shared home but as three autonomous political platforms. Within this space, groups struggle for symbolic power— “the power to make people see and believe” (Bourdieu, in Paasi 2009).

In this context, history textbooks do not promote reconciliation; they reproduce one-dimensional ethno-national interpretations and reinforce the notion that the three peoples are fundamentally incompatible. As a result, Bosnia’s school system functions as an instrument of nationalist projects that institutionalize division rather than community, thereby sustaining a political architecture that “deliberately constructs dysfunctional states” (Hayden, 2005).

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