

Liberating Education: What From, What For?

Editors:

Igor Cvejić,
Predrag Krstić,
Nataša Lacković,
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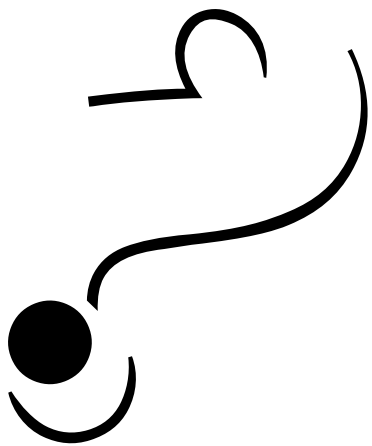


Table of Contents

Igor Cvejić, Predrag Krstić, Nataša Lacković, and Olga Nikolić	
Emancipation and/or Education: Challenges and Frictions	7

EDUCATORS AND EDUCATED

Igor Cvejić	
The Emotional Base of Educational Process: Beyond Care for Wellbeing	19

Aleksandar Milanković	
Interactive Teaching as a Component of Social Emancipation	35

Marija Velinov	
Free Yourself from Yourself: The Ethics of the Self as an Emancipatory Educational Practice	55

EMANCIPATION FOR AND FROM THE SOCIETY

Milica Smajević Roljić	
An Interpretation of the Educational Process from the Perspective of Kant's Philosophy of History and Legal-Political Theory	83

Olga Nikolić
Emancipatory and Ideological Functions of Education 101

Andrija Šoć
**Deliberative Education and Quality of Deliberation: Toward
a Critical Dialogue and Resolving Deep Disagreements** 123

Aleksandar Ostojić
**Knowledge Versus Production: Michel Serres and
Idiosyncratic Roads of Education** 147

Sanja Petkovska
**Decolonial Emancipation on the Postsocialist Peripheries
and the Future of Critical Pedagogy** 167

EDUCATIONAL TOOLS OF EMANCIPATION

Mikhail Bukhtoyarov and Anna Bukhtoyarova
**Educational Technology: From Educational Anarchism to
Educational Totalitarianism** 185

Sonja Jankov
***Social Turn and Operative Realism: Two Emancipatory
Methods of Contemporary Art Practices*** 205

Aleksandar Pavlović and Aleksandra Ilić Rajković
**Neo-National Romanticism in Serbian Education:
Comparing Romantic-National and Recent Serbian History
Textbooks** 223

Neo-National Romanticism in Serbian Education: Comparing Romantic- -National and Recent Serbian History Textbooks

In this paper, we argue that, paradoxically, there are striking similarities between the Serbian education and textbooks today and those from the times of Romantic nationalism in the late 19th century. Firstly, we will outline the Romantic-national concept of education as it has been in use in Serbia in the late 19th century. As we show, in the pre-WWI Serbian textbooks, pupils were taught that language is the basic and obvious proof of common origin and past, that the nation is a natural form of grouping of people, and that all those speaking the same language wish to – and should – live in their national state. We will illustrate this point by taking into consideration the History Reader for elementary schools written by Mihailo Jović, which was one of the most lasting textbooks in the Serbian educational history overall, used from 1882 all the way to 1944; for illustration purposes, we particularly focus on the depiction of Albanians and the Serbian-Albanian history in Jović's textbook.

In the second part of the paper, we compare these Romantic-na-

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tional ideas of education with the current Serbian history readers for primary and secondary school. In particular, we will examine the depiction of the 1999 NATO bombing and the 1998-1999 Serbian-Albanian conflict in Serbian history textbooks. As we argue, Serbian textbooks and, by extension, educational system, still promote a kind of neo-romantic notion of fixed national identity, patriotic education, and lack critical tones and re-examination of history and the past. Lastly, we will close our paper by emphasizing some recent examples of bridging this issue and offering a more critical, nuanced, and multifaceted view of Serbian and regional history in textbooks.

Patriotic Education

Education of students in the spirit of nationalism has a long history. The idea of nation as formative for a community and as the highest achievement in the evolution of mankind was firmly established in the nineteenth century, and scholars have for long observed that the education of the time had the function of national coherence and organization (Dewey 1916). While the Romantic-nationalist ideas affected the Serbs gradually from the early 19th century onwards, these ideas started being properly implemented in educational policy only after the full national independence was secured at the Berlin Congress of 1878. The reform of the educational system that followed in 1882 saw the introduction of mandatory education and was an integral part of that process. Given that, according to contemporary Serbian pedagogues, education in the age of nations should likewise be national, school has become one of the key factors of this form of education, as elsewhere in Europe at the time (Lowe 1999). A testimony that these ideas inspired the reformers of the school system can be found in the words of Stojan Novaković, the leading figure of the modernization and reformation of Serbian education. In line with his views expressed during the debate over the gymnasium curriculum in 1881, Novaković emphasized in his opening speech to the Main Education Council that “education is the crucial factor in the unification of Serb-

dom” (Glavni prosvetni savet 1880: 533). Reports from discussions and debates regarding curriculums and school programmes exemplify that Serbian teachers and their associations held similar views.

In the period prior to World War I, Serbian pupils were thus typically taught that language is the fundamental and obvious evidence of common origin and past, that nation is a natural way of grouping people, and that all those who speak the same language wish to and should live together in their national state. Hence, the primary task of Serbs is to fulfil their centennial legacy of liberating and uniting all of Serbdom. The development of this idea of united Serbian statehood and successes and failures in its fulfilment have been presented chiefly through history textbooks (Ilić 2010).

The most representative textbook of the time, Mihailo Jović’s *Serbian History* (*Српска историја*) amply illustrates this general framework by its depiction of the national history as the constant struggle for national liberation and unification and its emphasis on heroism and bravery. Jović thus already in the “Foreword” advised the pupils to “always be heroes like Obilić and the highwaymen Veljko” (Jović 1882: V), which corresponded perfectly with the methodical instructions of the Ministry of Education that expected from the Serbian history education to inspire “love for our nation and feelings that would strengthen the will for heroic moral actions” (Ministarstvo prosvete i crkvenih dela 1895: 863).³

In an interview for the newspaper *Vreme* in 1934, Jović himself embraced such perspective and claimed that his textbook was very successful in that respect: “All those generations that partake in recent wars learned the history of their nation from this little book of mine” (D.M. 1934: 5). His contemporary colleague Milenko Vukićević, himself a history textbook author and a Ministry of Education supervisor, wrote that “the greatest success has been achieved where children used

3 All of the quotes from Serbian sources are translated into English by the authors.

this book” (Vukićević 1898: 336).

Messages arising from the content of Jović’s texts get their full meaning only when perceived in the context of Serbian education in which national education occupied a prominent position. Regardless of whether they ended their schooling on the elementary or the secondary level, pupils acquired several messages as its integral part: that most Serbs live outside of the Serbian state borders, that the country that will gather them all is the great national goal, that national state is a natural right of every nation for which it can and should fight. In accordance with such a view, young generations were expected to fight for the liberation of the subjected parts of Serbdom and the unification in a joint state.

Written in 1882 during the aforementioned educational reform, Jović’s textbook served as the absolutely dominant history schoolbook prior to the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes after the Great War, and had dozens of editions. Throughout this period, the author repeatedly adjusted and revised his *Serbian History* in accordance with official curriculums and programmes. We will focus henceforth on the perceptions of Albanians in the various editions of this textbook in order to exemplify the evolution of negative perceptions during this period (for a parallel presentation of references relating to the Albanians in different editions please consult Chart 1; for a more detailed textbook analysis, see: Pavlović & Ilić Rajković 2017: 225-236).

The perceptions of the Albanians in the textbooks of Mihailo Jović		
Edition from 1882	Edition from 1886	Edition from 1894 and later
<p>“[Serbian Patriarch] Arsenije Čarnojević did not do good to the Serbs by leading this migration. Those Serbs that he took suffered a lot from the Austrians and still do, because the Austrian Emperor rules over them. Yet, it was even worse for those who stayed here in Serbia. The Turks settled the Arnauts on these empty estates, and hence nowadays a few Serbs remained in Serbia south of us (around Prizren and Peć) but all of them are Albanians, even though they were not there before.” (p. 187).</p>	<p>“One massive migration of Serbs took place in 1690. <i>Arsenije Čarnojević</i>, Serbian Patriarch, summoned the Serbs from Old Serbia and fled with them to Banat and Bačka. These migrations were bad for the Serbs, for the Serbs spread around faraway lands, and the Turks settled the Arnauts in their place, who did greater evils to the Serbs than even the Turks themselves.” (p. 91)</p>	<p>“Arsenije did not do good to the Serbs, for those that he took nowadays obey the Hungarians and Germans, while those that remained are scattered, left on their own and weakened; thus neither can we become strong, because we are small in numbers, nor can those in Bačka and Banat.” (p. 74).</p>

Chart 1 – References to the Albanians in different editions of Jović’s textbook

Present Day Serbian Textbooks

Moving to the contemporary Serbian educational system and history textbooks, the present-day goals, as declared and prescribed by the Serbian Ministry of Education and other relevant bodies (Institute for the Improvement of Education and Pedagogy – ZUOV) – are very different from those promoted in the late 19th century:

The goal of teaching history is acquiring humanistic education and developing historical consciousness; understanding historical space

and time, historical events, manifestations and processes and the role of distinguished persons; developing individual and national identity, acquiring and expanding knowledge, developing skills and forming attitudes necessary to understand the contemporary world (in the national, regional, European and global context); improving functional skills and competencies necessary for living in contemporary society (investigative skills, critical and creative thinking, ability to express and give reasons for personal attitudes, understanding multicultural-ity, advancing tolerance and culture of dialogue based on arguments).

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Cilj nastave istorije je sticanje humanističkog obrazovanja i razvijanje istorijske svesti; razumevanje istorijskog prostora i vremena, istorijskih događaja, pojava i procesa i uloge istaknutih ličnosti; razvijanje individualnog i nacionalnog identiteta; sticanje i proširivanje znanja, razvijanje veština i formiranje stavova neophodnih za razumevanje savremenog sveta (u nacionalnom, regionalnom, evropskom i globalnom okviru); unapređivanje funkcionalnih veština i kompetencija neophodnih za život u savremenom društvu (istraživačkih veština, kritičkog i kreativnog mišljenja, sposobnosti izražavanja i obrazlaganja sopstvenih stavova, razumevanja multikulturalnosti, razvijanje tolerancije i kulture argumentovanog dijaloga). (Šuica & Krstić 2005: 6)

History teaching should contribute to the understanding of historical space and time, historical events, manifestations and processes, as well as to the development of national and European identity and the spirit of tolerance among the pupils.

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Nastava istorije treba da doprinese razumevanju istorijskog prostora i vremena, istorijskih događaja, pojava i procesa, kao i razvijanju nacionalnog i evropskog identiteta i duha tolerancije kod učenika. (Svilar & Dujković 2013: 7)

However, once we move to the actual content, the picture tends to change significantly, especially when describing recent events of Serbian history such as the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the 1990s wars. To illustrate this point, we are quoting relevant passages about the interpretation of the Serbian-Albanian conflict in Kosovo from 1998-

1999 and the subsequent NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in Spring 1999.

Since 2003, Serbia gradually lifted the state monopoly on textbooks, thus enabling private publishers to publish textbooks. For the purpose of our analysis, we scrutinized arguably the most popular history textbook in Serbia in the last decade or so, written for Grade 8 of elementary school by Đorđe Đurić and Momčilo Pavlović in 2010 (Đurić & Pavlović 2010) and published by the state-owned Zavod za udžbenike (Institute for Textbooks), and then compared it to the history textbooks of competing publishers Klett and Freska.

When Đurić and Pavlović describe the reasons for the Serbian-Albanian conflict and the subsequent NATO bombing, one does not see any of the declared goals of critical approach, multiculturalism, European and global identity, tolerance, understanding broader historical trends, etc:

Daily armed actions by Albanian terrorist groups, called Kosovo Liberation Army, brigandry, and conflicts with the forces of law and order, in which many civilians were killed, extremely deteriorated the situation in Kosovo. Ultimately, the Western countries, especially the USA, got involved, providing open support to the Albanians. After the failed negotiations in Rambouillet and Paris in February 1999 and the rejection from the Serbian side to sign the ultimatum on withdrawing army and police from Kosovo, the NATO aggression lasting from March 24 to June 10, 1999, followed.

Svakodnevne oružane akcije albanskih terorističkih grupa, pod nazivom Oslobođilačka vojska Kosova, razbojništava i sukobi sa snagama reda, u kojima je stradalo sve više civila, izuzetno su zaoštrili stanje na Kosovu. Konačno su se i zapadne države, posebno SAD, umešale, dajući otvorenu podršku Albancima. Posle neuspelih pregovora u Rambujeu i Parizu i odbijanja srpske strane da potpiše ultimativne zahteve o povlačenju vojske i policije sa Kosova februara 1999. usledila je agresija NATO-a koja je trajala od 24. marta do 10.

juna 1999. godine. (Đurić & Pavlović 2010: 186)

Largely similar interpretation of events is offered by other Serbian history textbooks as well. For instance, literally the same wording is found in the textbook by Nikolić et al (2005, 283) by the same publisher, even though it has been written for the year 3 or 4 of high school and one would therefore expect that older students would benefit from a more elaborate, complex, and nuanced interpretation of these events.

History textbooks of two other major competitors do not differ significantly in their presentation of these events. *History 8* by Radojević, published by Klett, thus describes the crisis in Kosovo and the subsequent NATO bombing as follows:

The provocations of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) spilled into armed conflicts in which the international community got involved. Equally as in previous wars, the 'international community' led by the USA, provided full political and military support to the Albanian terrorists. In addition to police, military forces also took part in the conflicts in Kosovo and Metohija. After the failed negotiations in Rambouillet and Paris and the refusal of the Serbian side to succumb to an ultimatum that stipulated the withdrawal from Kosovo and Metohija and a free travel of NATO forces through Serbian territory, the NATO aggression followed suit.

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Provokacije terorističke Oslobođilačke Vojske Kosova (OVK) pretočene su u oružane sukobe u koje se uključila i međunarodna zajednica, Podjednako, kao i u prethodnim ratovima "međunarodna zajednica" koju su predvodile SAD, pružila je punu političku i vojnu podršku albanskim teroristima. U sukobima na Kosovu i Metohiji pored policije učestvovala su i vojne jedinice. Posle neuspelih pregovora u Rambujeu i Parizu i odbijanja srpske strane da pristine na ultimatum koji je predviđao povlačenje sa Kosova i Metohije i slobodan prolaz NATO preko teritorije Srbije, otpočela je agresija NATO pakta. (Radojević 2014: 290)

Again, the same wording is found in the textbook by Ljušić and Dimić for Level 8 of the elementary school of the same publisher (Ljušić & Dimić 2009: 240). Ljušić and Dimić also published their textbook for Years 3 / 4 of high school, with a typically brief and dry interpretation of the events:

The Albanians demanded secession from Serbia and, with that goal in mind, formed the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), which constantly attacked army and police forces between 1996 and 1998. During the attacks, it enjoyed the support of the United States of America and several members of the European Union. In the negotiations between the Serbian and the Albanian side in the Rambouillet castle near Paris, which ended in March 1999, Serbia received an ultimatum demanding that she accepts an agreement by which the NATO alliance would hold the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. The refusal of this ultimatum led to the beginning of air strikes of the NATO alliance members.

Zahtevajući izdavanje iz Srbije, Albanci su formirali Oslobođilačku vojsku Kosova (OVK), koja je tokom 1996-1998. godine neprestano napadala vojne i policijske snage. Prilikom napada imala je političku podršku Sjedinjenih Američkih Država i više članica Evropske unije. Na pregovorima između srpske i albanske strane u dvorcu Rambuje, u okolini Pariza, završenim u martu 1999. godine, Srbiji je dat ultimatum sa zahtevom da prihvati sporazum kojim bi NATO savez zaposeo teritoriju Kosova i Metohije. Odbijanje ultimatum dovelo je do početka vazdušnog napada članica NATO-a. (Ljušić & Dimić 2013: 291)

One-sidedness and the lack of critical approach in the representation of these events by Serbian textbooks is perhaps the most evident when compared to the ways these events have been portrayed in the textbooks of Albanians in Kosovo. Thus, human rights abuses by the Serbian regime against Kosovar Albanians during the 1990s are presented in the Kosovo textbooks as massacres by the Serbian regime across Kosovo, which “[...] inspired the emergence of the UÇK to protect the people of Kosovo” (Rexhepi & Demaj 2009: 104). The Serbian textbooks do not give any evidence of these abuses, and they present

the deterioration of the situation in Kosovo as a consequence of the “robbery and confrontations of Albanian terrorist groups, declared as the Kosovo Liberation Army, with associated forces, who impacted ever more on civilians” (Đurić & Pavlović 2010: 251) but they do not provide data on the ethnicity of these civilians.

Secondly, as Shkelzen Gashi clearly showed: the textbooks of two countries present only the crimes of the ‘other side’ (Gashi 2019: 98-107). For example, the Serbian textbooks do not mention a single Albanian killed by the Serbian/Yugoslav forces during the armed conflict in Kosovo, while in the textbooks of Kosovo there is no mention of a single Serb killed by the UÇK and NATO forces during and after the armed conflict. The textbooks of Kosovo and Serbia also exaggerate the crimes of the ‘other side’ and create room for misunderstanding (Ibid.: 99-101).

The Serbian textbooks refer to a letter of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), sent to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in February 2000, which said that since the entry of NATO forces in Kosovo “...899 had been killed and 834 had been kidnapped” (Đurić & Pavlović 2010: 255) but they do not give the ethnicity of these people and the fate of those kidnapped. The Humanitarian Law Center (HLC), whose headquarters are in Belgrade, notes that 1,123 Serbian civilians were killed in the period between January 1998 and December 1999, of whom 786 were killed following the entry of NATO forces (12 June 1999 – December 1999) (Kandić 2001: 3).

On the other hand, the Kosovo textbooks say that during the armed conflict in Kosovo, only in the period between January and December 1998 “[...] more than 2,000 Albanians were killed, not counting here a very large number of missing persons.” (Bajraktari, Rexhepi & Demaj 2010: 206, quoted in Gashi 2019: 99). However, also for this period, the Humanitarian Law Center’s multi-volume *Kosovo Memory Book 1998-2000* registers 1660 Albanians killed, including 678 UÇK soldiers, and

296 Serbs, including 167 members of the Yugoslav Army and the Ministry for Internal Affairs (Mišina, Tompson Popović & Kandić 2011: 457). According to the Kosovo textbooks, in the period of the NATO bombings (from 24 March to 10 June 1999) “[...] the Serbian army killed approximately 15,000 Albanians.” (Bajraktari, Rexhepi & Demaj 2010: 207 and Bicaj & Ahmeti 2005: 202, quoted in: Gashi 2019: 99). The *Kosovo Memory Book 1998 – 2000* gives the numbers of Albanian civilians killed in the period between January 1998 and December 2000, including the 78-day NATO bombing, as 7,864 in total. Therefore, the number of those killed is doubled in the Kosovo textbooks, but the sources of the data are not given.

During the 78 days of the NATO bombing of the FRY, according to the Serbian textbooks, “(...) between 1,200 and 2,500 civilians were killed” (Đurić & Pavlović 2010: 251). However, in the table given by these textbooks for the suffering of civilians from the NATO bombardment, data are provided for only 347 civilians killed. In this table, Albanian ethnicity is mentioned only for the 70 civilians killed by NATO forces near Gjakova, while for the 50 civilians killed in the village of Luzhan near Podujevo, the 20 near Peja and 87 in the village of Korisha near Prizren, there is no mention of their Albanian ethnicity. Likewise, there is no mention in the table of the attack of NATO forces on the Dubrava Prison where, according to the HLC, 112 Albanian prisoners were killed. It may be that this attack is not included in the table because only 29 of the prisoners in Dubrava Prison were killed by the NATO bombs on the 19 and 20 May 1999 while the others, again according to HLC, were executed by Serbian forces on the 21 and 23 May 1999.

On civilian casualties by NATO, the report of Human Rights Watch, based on field research, says that during the bombing of the territory of the FRY, NATO killed a minimum of 489 and a maximum of 528 innocent civilians. According to Human Rights Watch, the majority of these innocent civilians were killed in the territory of Kosovo, giving numbers of between 279 and 318 people (Gashi 2019: 101). The

number of civilians killed by NATO is therefore at least doubled in the Serbian textbooks while not being recorded at all in the textbooks of Kosovo.

Overall, Marijana Toma argues that Serbian history textbooks offer selective, insufficient, or cursory interpretation of the facts, or avoid attributing any responsibility to the representatives of the Serbian people (Toma 2015: 112), and concludes:

What is evident in almost all the textbooks [...] is the lack of objectivity in presenting the events related to the wars in the former Yugoslavia, particularly in the presentation of the war crimes that were committed and of the victims who suffered those crimes. The partiality and bias are primarily reflected in the selective choice of data, and the obvious omission or neglect of the facts and events in which the role of the Serbian people and Serbia as a state could be shown in a negative context - including, first and foremost, the facts about the sufferings of the members of other ethnic groups, and an evident effort to portray the Serbs as the only/the greatest victims among the peoples of the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s wars. (Toma 2015: 100)

Event	Serbian Textbook (Đurić and Pavlović 2010)	Kosovo-Albanian Textbook (Rexhepi and Demaj, 2009)	Alternative/ Non-govern- ment Sources
Emergence of the Koso- vo Libera- tion Army	“Daily armed actions by Albanian terror- ist groups, called Kosovo Liberation Army, brigandry and conflicts with the forces of law and order, in which many civilians were killed, extremely de- teriorated the situa- tion in Kosovo.”	Massacres by the Serbian regime across Kosovo, which “[...] in- spired the emer- gence of the UÇK to protect the peo- ple of Kosovo.”	
Other nationalities’ casualties	No mention of a single Albanian killed by Serbian/ Yugoslav forces during the armed conflict in Kosovo.	No mention of a single Serb killed by the UÇK and NATO forces during and after the armed con- flict in Kosovo.	
In 1998.	No figure given	“[...] more than 2,000 Albanians were killed, not counting here a very large number of missing per- sons.”	HLC - 1660 Al- banians killed, including 678 UÇK soldiers, and 296 Serbs, including 167 Yugoslav army and police members

<p>Albanian casualties</p>	<p>No figure given</p>	<p>In the period of the NATO bombings “[...] the Serbian army killed approximately 15,000 Albanians.”</p>	<p>1998 – 2000, including the 78-day NATO bombing, 7,864 Albanians in total.</p>
<p>NATO civilian casualties</p>	<p>“(...) between 1,200 and 2,500 civilians were killed” (only 70 mentioned as Albanians)</p>	<p>No mention at all</p>	<p>Human Rights Watch – 489-528, out of which 279-318 in Kosovo (mostly Albanians)</p>
<p>After NATO arrived</p>	<p>“899 had been killed and 834 had been kidnapped” (no ethnicity mentioned)</p>	<p>No mention at all</p>	<p>The Humanitarian Law Center (HLC) - 786 were killed following the entry of NATO forces (12 June 1999 – December 1999) (of various ethnicities).</p>

Conclusion

To sum up, our analysis illustrates that, once we move from the proclaimed goals of current Serbian education, the depiction of recent traumatic historical events in the Serbian history textbooks actually corresponds more to the early Romantic-national ideas than the contemporary ones about nourishing critical approach, various perspectives and other sides' views, and promoting more inclusive and tolerant identity(ies). After conducting a comprehensive analysis of Serbian textbooks, several Serbian and international scholars concluded that these examples are not simply isolated cases but actually a dominant perspective:

Since relations with other neighbouring nations have been presented in a similarly brutal manner, it could be said that history textbooks develop a paranoid model of historical consciousness that can provide a solid foundation for hatred and contempt towards neighbouring nations, which leaves constantly open the possibilities for further misunderstandings, conflicts and revanchism. By constructing such dimensions of historical consciousness education acquires significant mobilizing function with a delayed effect, as the capital of hatred and model of behaviour enforced in the earliest years is being passed to a future time, thereby reducing the possibility of rational confrontation with the past and present.

Budući da su na slično brutalan način predstavljeni odnosi i sa drugima susednim narodima, može se reći da udžbenici istorije razvijaju jedan paranoidan model istorijske svesti koji može dati solidnu osnovu za mržnju i prezir prema susednim narodima, čime mogućnosti za dalje nesporazume, sukobe i revanše ostaju trajno otvoreni. Konstruisanjem takvih dimenzija istorijske svesti obrazovanje dobija značajnu mobilizatorsku funkciju sa odloženim dejstvom, jer se kapital mržnje i model ponašanja nametnuti u najranijim godinama života prenose i na neko buduće vreme, čime se smanjuje mogućnost racionalnog suočavanja sa prošlošću i sadašnjošću. (Stojanović 2007: 59)

Thus, it appears that we are still far from emancipating our pupils and educational system from the neo-romantic idea about nation and national identity. One way to go has been set by an ambitious long-term Joint History project of the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe from Thessaloniki, which gathered historians from all countries in the region. The project lasted since 1998, for nearly two decades. The participants sought answers to questions such as: how much do we know, and how much do we learn about the Balkan past? The solution has been found in the new approach to teaching history – multiperspective. The aim of that method is not to offer one ‘truth’, acceptable for all, about what happened in the past, but to offer information about how different representatives of their and neighbouring nations perceived their joint past (Stojanović 2005: 8). Following those methodological principles, the project produced six volumes, intended as the supplementary teaching material, of historical sources on the Ottoman Empire (Berktaj & Murgesku 2005), nations and emergence of national states (Murgesku, 2005), the Balkan Wars (Kolev & Kuluri 2005) and World War II (Erdelja 2005), The Cold War (Kuluri & Repe 2018a) and the 1990-2008 period (Kuluri & Repe 2018b).

v30.	The settling of the Turkish-Bulgarian conflict, Romanian cartoon 1913	72
IIb. Life at the Front		
III-8.	<i>From Mt. Staraco to Bitolj</i> : The diary of a conscript in the Danubian Medical Column (the Battle of Kumanovo), revealing the situation in the Serbian army	73
III-9.	The suffering of horses, described by a Turkish lieutenant	73
v31.	The transportation of wounded soldiers from Thessaloniki Port	74
III-10.	The situation of the Bulgarian army in Thrace, described by a Frenchman	74
III-11.	A Croatian doctor expresses his thoughts after a visit to the battlefield near the river Maritza	74
v32.	Czech physician, Dr. Jan Levit, in the Circle of Serbian Sisters' hospital	75
III-12.	Izzet-Fuad Pasha describing the Turkish soldiers' lack of bread	76
III-13.	Excerpt from the memoirs of a Romanian soldier	76
v33.	Greek camp outside Xanthi	76
III-14.	Excerpt from the diary of Vassilios Sourrapas, a Greek volunteer	77
III-15.	The morale in the Bulgarian army, analysed by the Bulgarian Chief of Staff, years after the war	77
III-16.	From the memoirs of a Romanian officer about crossing the special pontoon military bridge across the Danube at Corabia	77
III-17.	The meeting of Turkish and Montenegrin soldiers in Scutari after the city had surrendered	78
IIIc. The Parallel War		
III-18.	Letter from Ippokratis Papavassiliou to his wife, Alexandra	78
v34.	The ruins of Serres	79
III-19.	The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace comments upon the 'parallel' losses from the burning of villages and the exodus of people	80
III-20.	The flight of the Muslims, October 1912	80
III-21.	The Bulgarian Exarchate trying to convert Bulgarian-speaking Muslims to Christianity	80
v35.	A Bulgarian Red Cross convoy	81
III-22.	Official disapproval of violent practices by the Bulgarian General HQ	81
III-23.	The destruction caused by the war in the villages near Shkodra and peoples' agony in trying to find a 'valid' reason for their misery – An account by Mary Edith Durham	82
v36.	Poor, hungry people who invaded the garden of the Italian Consulate, Scutari	82
v37.	Bread distribution by the Bulgarians to the starving people of Adrianople	82
IIId. Behind the Front		
III-24.	Description of Belgrade by a Croatian newspaper correspondent	83
III-25.	Description of Istanbul by a French journalist	84
	A. In November 1912	84
	B. In March 1913	84
v38.	Aid distribution to the families of the soldiers mobilised in the Romanian-Bulgarian war, 1913	85
III-26.	The situation in Scutari during its siege described by an Italian journalist	85
v39.	In Cetinje – women, children and wounded soldiers	86
III-27.	'The Serbian woman'	87
III-28.	An upper-class Greek woman offers her services as a nurse and records her experience	87

Illustration of the content from *Balkanski ratovi: istorijska čitanka 3* (Kolev & Kuluri 2005: 8)

Typically, as illustrated above, these sources provide the view of the same events from various sides, including military reports, private letters from the front, newspaper articles and international reports and sources. Therefore, these collections of historical

sources can assist teachers to apply more easily contemporary methods of teaching history; likewise, they help the students to acquire a more comprehensive grasp of their and their neighbours' past through active learning, and thereby to contribute overall to more realistic, nuanced, and reconciliatory perceptions of their present problems. As we argued, putting sources such as these in use in Serbian schools and the educational system would be a step forward towards a desired critical and humanistic way of teaching and understanding history.

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