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The Role of Education in Post-Conflict Kosovo

**The Role of Education in Post-Conflict Kosovo: A Proposal for an Analysis of How Experts
Understand the Role that Education Has Played in Peacebuilding**

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Abstract

This study seeks to answer the following research question: What is the relationship between Kosovo's education system and the conflict between Kosovo and Serbia? This study uses a mixed purposeful sampling strategy that includes purposive sampling and snowball sampling. The researcher interviewed five different individuals from the following ethnic backgrounds represented in Kosovo which are one Bosnian, one Serbian, two Albanian Kosovars, and one Romani Kosovar. The results showed that education played many roles before, during and after the conflict between Kosovo and Serbia. Kosovo's education system has historically been used as a tool to promote the political agendas of competing governments, whether that be the Albanian Kosovars, the Serbs or that of the United Nations. The combination of the existing research and the data collected through the interviews created a strong foundation in understanding the role of education in the conflict between Kosovo and Serbia. It also revealed possible ways of moving past this conflict to true reconciliation through initiatives such as multi-ethnic teacher trainings, workshops aimed at building cultural awareness of the different ethnic groups represented in Kosovo or through promoting critical thinking through the use of distant historical wars. Theoretical and practical implications of the results were discussed.

Keywords: role of education, reconciliation, patriotism, peacebuilding, Kosovo

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Introduction

Kosovo is a country located in Southeastern Europe (the Balkans). The Balkans are the historical home to many different ethnic groups with different values, religions, and identities, which has given numerous opportunities for the rise in different problems, conflicts, and wars (Çeku, 2018). This can be seen throughout the history of Kosovo where many conflicts erupted due to ethnic politics. Strapacova (2016) describes ethnicity as a form of ascriptive identity based on kinship, culture, language, appearance, religion, and shared origin. “The origin and dynamics of ethnicity are central to understanding ethnic conflict and interethnic relations, as well as ascertaining how best to approach post-conflict reconciliation in societies divided along ethnic lines” (Strapacova, 2016, p.58). However, unlike most Balkan countries, Kosovo had no history of being an independent state. The experiences and traditions of countries that were once a part of the Social Federal Republic of Yugoslavia were not those of Kosovo that had autonomy but not independence (Salihu, et al, 2019). Therefore, it is only natural for the people of Kosovo to place more importance on ethnic groups than on a national identity. Thus, for the purpose of this study the terms Serbian Kosovars, Albanian Kosovars, Bosnian Kosovars, and Roma Kosovars will be used when addressing certain populations.

Kosovo as a territory covers about 10,908km² and has a population of approximately 1.7 million (Gashi, 2022). For centuries, as other Balkan states, Kosovo has been described as an infamously violent region due to the number of wars fought in this area. The most recent was the war of 1999 which was the reason North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) fought its first war (Gashi, 2022). After this war Kosovo became a protectorate of the United Nations from 1999 to 2008 (Rexhaj & Saqipi, 2020). Later, in 2008 Kosovo attained the status of independence from Serbia. However, this new status was not recognized by the Serbian

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government nor widely recognized by UN member states. As a nation, Kosovo's educational system has experienced two transformative events. The first occurred in 1989 when there was a systematic dismissal of Albanian speakers from school systems and agencies throughout Kosovo. These positions were then filled by Serbian officials. The second event was a direct result of the first. Due to this, the Albanian Kosovars developed their own parallel underground Albanian education system in 1992 (Salihu, et al, 2019). Selenica (2018) explains that from these actions,

The result has been an education system that reflects and reproduces a model of segregated and negative peace, i.e., whereby open conflict is frozen, but root causes are neither addressed nor overcome, and a contested process of state- and nation-building. While inter-ethnic interaction and integration remains a chimera, the 'reversed pattern' of ethnic and spatial segregation has turned education into one of the most problematic foundations of a socially just peace and a functioning, yet largely externally envisioned, multi-ethnic state. (p. 253)

In post-conflict countries, education is a crucial tool that can bring about social and political transformation. In some cases, education has been used as a tool of peacebuilding and reconciliation. However, in the case of Kosovo, education has been at the center of ethnic and political disputes between Kosovo and Serbia. Both systems receive funding from the Kosovo government in Prishtina, but Serbian schools also receive direct funding from the Serbian government and are given textbooks and curriculum by the Serbian government. Under the current system the Serbian-Kosovar teachers are making roughly twice the salary than other teachers in Kosovo (Shahini, 2016). The use of education as a tool of oppression and resistance has resulted in today's ethnically parallel system (Baliqi, 2019). Therefore, the main challenge to

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overcome in the fight to reconciliation in Kosovo, is the integration of both education systems (Baliqi, 2019; Alo, 2010; Strapacova, 2016).

There have been many internationally led education reforms aimed at transforming Kosovo's education system through the integration of concepts such as democracy, human rights, and critical thinking. However, most of these initiatives have only seen success at the policy level and failed once they came to the grass-roots level. A large cause of this is the practice of excluding teachers from the policy developmental process. Instead, teachers are told to implement these changes in their classrooms with little discussion. However, by excluding the views and opinions of the local teachers who are experts in their own culture, these reforms end in failure or end up being completely misunderstood on the practical level. Thus, these policies never truly enter the classrooms where they would have the most impact on the next generations (Elbasani, 2018; Saqipi, 2019).

Reading different analyses of the education systems in Kosovo demonstrates a gap in literature. A lot of the articles focused on the role of the international organizations in Kosovo and on the role of the governments, however very few fully focus on the role education plays in the conflict (Saqipi, 2019). To truly have a comprehensive understanding of the history and possible future of Kosovo, it is crucial to understand the role education has played and continues to play in the existing ethnic conflict. Therefore, the purpose of this study is aimed at understanding the role education played in the war and still plays in the conflict between Kosovo and Serbia. This will be achieved through answering the following question: What is the relationship between Kosovo's education system and the conflict between Kosovo and Serbia?

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Researcher's Positionality Statement

During my undergraduate degree I majored in Elementary education where I learned about different teaching pedagogies and learning styles. Most of my knowledge was limited to the classroom level. It was not until I began my master's degree in international education, that I started learning about education from an overarching structural level. During my program, the readings examined different educational systems, policies from different countries, the motivations behind the development of these policies and the challenges that come with their implementation. Through these readings, I was first introduced to the hidden curricula. These are the norms, values and beliefs that guide what subjects are being taught, the teaching techniques encouraged, educational materials used, the language of instruction and even which students are allowed to attend which schools (Bourdieu, 2000). As an educator, it is very important to understand the values and motivations guiding whichever education system I am working in. This allows me to make a conscious choice about what kind of values and beliefs will be perpetuated in my classroom.

Throughout my studies, I also learned about the way education was used in countries affected by conflict. In many cases, the systems were used as a platform to spread the political doctrines of the opposing sides and as a way to segregate and legitimize the social hierarchy in the country. On the other hand, during the movement towards peace, these same systems were used to bring the opposing sides together in the attempt to create an atmosphere of understanding, empathy, and reconciliation. I worked as a TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) Peace Corps volunteer in post-conflict Kosovo from the years 2022 to 2023. When I heard about Kosovo's unique education systems, I was instantly intrigued to learn about the impact this system has on the on-going conflict between both countries. During my service, I

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lived in an Albanian majority small city in western Kosovo. I worked at an Albanian school where I co-taught English to grades seven through nine. Both of my co-teachers were Albanian Kosovars, and my school is mostly made up of Albanian-Kosovars with a few Roma and Bosnian Kosovars. Most of the teachers at my school participated in the parallel-educational system during the beginning of the 1999 war, which many considered to be their proudest experience. It was the combination of my passion for learning about education's role in societal transformation and the many stories I heard from local teachers about the way education was and still is used in the inter-ethnic conflict between the Albanian-Kosovars and Serbian-Kosovars that led me to choose this research topic. Though I served as a Peace Corps volunteer, my research does not reflect the beliefs of the organization and is not in any way connected to the institution.

The study is organized by first analyzing pre-existing narratives around the use of education throughout the history of Kosovo through the use of a Literature Review. Next, it introduces the methodology used in this research. Following this section is the analysis of the research findings and recommendations for future research.

Literature Review

To truly analyze and appreciate the role of education in a nation, it is essential to first examine the country's history, traditions, values, and the political and economic conditions that guide its development. The purpose of this section is to analyze pre-existing narratives surrounding the different roles education has played throughout the history of Kosovo. To achieve this, the section will be divided into three main time periods. The first time period (1455 to the 1970s) will be examining the role and development of the education system under the Ottomans to its development under the Yugoslav government. The second covers the periods of

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the 1970s to 1999. This section will be analyzing Kosovo's education system before and after the collapse of Yugoslavia. This includes the parallel school systems and the rising ethnic tensions that led to their creation. Lastly, the final section will cover the aftermath of the war of 1999 to modern day Kosovo by looking at the current education systems and the materials used in both systems, specifically the history textbooks.

The Historical Role of Education in Kosovo: The Ottoman Empire to the Creation of Yugoslavia

As stated by Vula and Shala (2006), "Behind every school, every teacher and every student, stands a series of beliefs, a philosophy that affects what the students will learn, what the role of the teacher is and what the aims of education are" (p. 31). As in many regions of the world, the first schools established in Kosovo were for religious purposes. From the years 1455 to 1912, the region of Kosovo was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, first as a part of the eyalet (province) of Rumelia and then as a separate Kosovo Vilayet in 1864. Under the Ottoman empire, schools acted as tools to indoctrinate the Albanian population in the teachings of Islam and allegiance to the Sultan. Additionally, a common practice of the Ottoman empire was to promote locals of the region to administrative positions to help oversee the management of their newly conquered areas. To achieve this, they allowed these subjects to attend schooling that aimed at building the locals' skills in bureaucracy, language (Arabic), and religious studies with the promise of social mobility (Salihu, et al., 2019). In 1912, local Albanians led a revolt under Isa Boletini against the Ottomans to gain sovereignty in their region. Isa Boletini was an Albanian revolutionary commander and politician. With the help of the Albanian Nationalist group, League of Prizren, he staged a revolt to liberate the region of Kosovo. Though the revolt

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failed, it left the Ottomans in a weakened state. Seeing this, the Serbians used the Ottoman's state to their advantage and seized Kosovo.

This is known as the first Balkan war. The victors divided Kosovo's territory up between Serbia, Montenegro, and Greece. Not even a year later on June 29, 1913, disputes over this division sparked the second Balkan war. This war resulted in the territory of Kosovo being partitioned between Serbia and Montenegro. The territory was added to the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes by the end of World War I. This would be later known as Yugoslavia. After 1912, by the end of the Ottoman rule, the Serbs established a few Serbian primary and secondary schools in the region. However, the use of the Albanian language was banned and there were little to no educational opportunities available to their population (Hetemi, 2020). This was used to limit the social mobility of the Albanian-Kosovars, while also suppressing their national awareness.

In 1916, during World War I, areas such as Prishtina under Bulgarian occupation banned Albanian language schools. However, areas under Astro-Hungarian occupation allowed for the opening of 300 Albanian schools led by the Catholic church. Between 1919 and 1939 in Yugoslavia, all Albanian schools were closed, and only Serbo-Croatian language schools were permitted to operate. This, however, was against the Agreement of 1919 that sought to provide education in the native languages of minority groups. However, despite this international treaty the Albanian schools were closed under the pretense that there was a shortage of literate Albanian personnel that could teach in these schools. These claims were proven to be false in the 1930 League of Nations gathering where an Albanian Catholic priest revealed that there were 27 Albanian teachers in Kosovo that were forced to close their schools. Regardless of this

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revelation, education in the Albanian language only became available during the second World War (Hetemi, 2020).

Under Italy's occupation in World War II in 1939, Albanian-language schools were allowed to be opened in the region, including the first Albanian language high school in Prishtina. At the end of the war in 1945, Kosovo officially became a part of Yugoslavia under the rule of Josip Broz Tito. Under Tito's rule, primary schools were allowed to teach in Albanian but secondary schools were all in Serbo-Croatian. By the end of the 1940s to the beginning of the 1970s, the textbooks used in the Kosovar education system were prepared for Serbian schools and were just translated word for word into Albanian. Albanian grammar was taught through Serbian textbooks that were badly translated. Only in the 1970s were there Albanian textbooks that were written by Albanian writers (Çeku, 2018). This meant that Albanian history, culture, geography, art, and literature were initially omitted from the schools. Through this action, the Serbian nationalists in power at the time aimed to weaken national awareness among the Albanians, and to cleanse Kosovo ethnically (Çeku, 2018).

During the periods of 1968 to 1970, the region of Kosovo underwent a literacy campaign to reduce the rate of illiteracy in its area. This was mainly to increase the human capital of its regions to make Yugoslavia more competitive on the global stage. In 1968 the illiteracy rate was about 54.8 percent. However, through education reforms, in the year 1971 this rate fell to about 31.5 percent (Gashi, 2022). The reform included expanding the four-year schooling system for Albanians (first grade to the fourth grade) to an eight-year education system that included secondary grades fifth to eighth. Most of the former four-year schools were divided by nationality and the history taught were that of the Serbian perspective merely translated in Albanian.

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Additionally, in the early 1970s the number of Albanian Kosovar teachers increased to about 70 percent. Schooling in the Albanian language increased dramatically. This led to the event where the first Albanian language University opened on February 13, 1970, the University of Prishtina (Salihu, et al, 2019; Hetemi, 2020). According to Gashi (2022), this action was only meant to create the illusion of cultural emancipation for Kosovar-Albanians while also barring them from the increasingly burdened labour market. This university was not recognized for its academic quality and its graduates would hardly have a chance of finding a job outside of Kosovo. In the height of national euphoria, many of the Albanian-Kosovars majored in Albanian history and philology which were irrelevant in other parts of Yugoslavia. Though this move to open the University of Prishtina was aimed at controlling the Albanian-Kosovar population, it became the source of mental emancipation for the Albanian-Kosovar students.

The Historical Role of Education during the Conflict from the 1970s to 1999

In 1974, Albanian Kosovars were granted greater self-governance through amendments in the Yugoslavian constitution that allowed Albanians to be taught at all levels. As an autonomous region of Serbia, Kosovo now enjoyed all the same rights of a republic in Yugoslavia without the actual title. By the end of the 1970s reforms, all citizens of Kosovo regardless of their religion and ethnicity were offered basic education. However, these changes did not last long. By the period of 1980 to the 1990s, these reforms would have been reversed. After Tito's death in 1980, the six Yugoslavia republics grew increasingly unstable in the face of declining economic stability (Salihu, et al, 2019). At this point, the University of Prishtina was about 75% Albanian. As more Kosovar-Albanians became more educated, eventually they started to demand to move from being an autonomous region of Serbia to being their own

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Republic in Yugoslavia. To express their demands the students from the University led peaceful protests in the city of Prishtina which were violently repressed by the Serbian government.

Political elites from Serbia sought to blame the actions taken by the students on the misguided Albanian education policies, including the use of Albanian textbooks and the decision to hire Albanian professors from Albania to teach in Kosovo in the early 1970s (Gashi, 2022). The prospects of equality and independence for the local Albanian-Kosovars were a thorn in the side of national elites from Serbia. Increased demonstrations by Albanian-Kosovars in 1981 gave the Serbian elites a long-welcomed opportunity to revisit the Kosovo current political standing. In response, the Serbian regime began to crack down on all forms of media in Kosovo including the Prishtina radio, television station and newspapers. The regime actively persecuted Albanian journalists. Serbian became the language of broadcasting. Additionally in the 1990s the Serbian government adopted a new law on education which fully withdrew Kosovo's autonomy over education and instead took full control over the University. Furthermore, the Serbian regime pushed a new curriculum that focused only on Serbian history, ideology, language, and national values. All University staff that rejected this curriculum were relieved of their positions at the University (Baliqi, 2019; Epp & Walker, 2010). These efforts were only the beginning of a pattern of repression in the region of Kosovo and led to the rise of Slobodan Milosevic. Milosevic came to power as the next head of Serbia by focusing on the ethnic differences between the Albanian-Kosovars and the Serbian-Kosovars and playing into their disharmony. "Apart from political and socio-economic subjugation, the regime of Slobodan Milošević clearly sought to impose complete subjugation on the sphere of [Albanian] culture and identity" (Gashi, 2022, p. 2018). Milosevic's main aim was to ethnically cleanse Kosovo (Çeku, 2018). With the repression of the Albanian language, history and values that were fueled by the discriminatory

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policies, the Albanian Kosovars decided to form their own parallel education system (Zabeli & Kaçaniku, 2021). This was a vital move to preserve their culture and way of life.

The Rise of the Parallel School System

In the 1990s, after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, there arose a full division between Serbian-Kosovars and Albanian-Kosovars in the education system through the use of parallel schooling (Baliqi, 2019; Zabeli & Kaçaniku, 2021). The Albanians conducted an underground parallel education system from the elementary to university levels. These were called home schools even though some of the classes were conducted in garages, and mosques. In these classes, teachers would use unofficial Albanian textbooks and informal curriculum (Alo, 2010; Baliqi, 2019). In response to this, the Albanian Kosovar diaspora financially funded these schools as a way to support their fight for the emancipation of their people. At this time, roughly 300,000 to 450,000 students were enrolled in these parallel Albanian-language schools (Salihu, et al, 2019). Though there were some cases in which the Serbian regime allowed some of the elementary schools to operate in the traditional school buildings, these classes were highly segregated and only served as a façade to show that the basic rights of the Albanian-Kosovars were being respected (Epp & Walker, 2010). During this period, the Roma-Kosovars were placed in a difficult position. Since there were only two education systems at the time, wherever they sent their children was the side they were viewed as supporting. Either they allowed their children to continue going to the Serbian schools to ensure they were getting a good education, or they let their children be persecuted by the Serbian forces for attending the parallel Albanian schools. Whichever they chose guaranteed political persecution.

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From Peaceful Education Marches to Armed Conflict

On October 1, 1997, at the beginning of the academic year, a peaceful protest was organized by the Independent Students Union, pushing for the release of the confiscated school buildings. In response to the protest, the Serbian force brutally suppressed the peace march. This event became a catalyst for the Albanian-Kosovar military resistance. As Baliqi (2019) argues, “The increasing opposition of the student movement against non-violent resistance and the support for the militant option signified the beginning of the armed resistance. With the public appearance of the Kosovo Liberation Army at the beginning of 1998, it resulted in massive mobilization among students and eventually culminated in a violent ethnic conflict” (p. 93). This war lasted about 78 days starting on March 24, 1999, and was then suspended on June 10, 1999. The results of this ethnic conflict left about 10,000 dead, 800 Serbian-Kosovars and Roma-Kosovars abducted, 3000 Albanian-Kosovars abducted, and over 850,000 Albanians displaced and expelled from the country. Immediately after NATO’s (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) bombing campaign, approximately 230,000 Serbian-Kosovars and Roma-Kosovars fled for their safety as a response to the reverse ethnic cleansing being perpetrated by Albanian-Kosovars as they returned to claim their land. After the war, there were about 1710 missing people cases which had further contributed to distrust on both sides (Strapacova, 2016).

The Role of Education in Kosovo: 1999 to the Present

Historically in Kosovo, schools were used as a tool for societal transformation, a means for social-mobility, national liberation on the side of Albanian-Kosovars and indoctrination under the Ottomans and the Serbians. One of the main ways this continues into the modern day is through the materials being taught in schools (Saqipi, 2019). After the end of the war, Kosovo’s government encouraged the integration of minority communities and stressed that regardless of

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their ethnicity each citizen is to be given the same rights. However, the Serbian minority has rejected this initiative and has set up a parallel education system from pre-school to the university level (Çeku, 2018). This can be seen in the events following the reopening of the University of Prishtina in 2000. Though the Albanian-Kosovar students returned to their faculties after the conflict, the Serbian-Kosovar students relocated their university to the northern part of the town Mitrovica which borders Serbia. Both Universities, however, have claimed the name 'University of Prishtina.' After a dispute about this issue the Serbian Kosovars named theirs 'University of Prishtina temporarily settled in Kosovska Mitrovica' while the Albanian-Kosovars named theirs 'University of Prishtina, Hasan Prishtina' (Baliqi, 2019, p. 93).

With this new division between the Serbians and Albanians school systems, comes clashing curriculums. The curriculum used in the Albanian-Kosovar school system was developed by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the United Nations. While on the other side, the curriculum used in the Serbian Kosovar education system was developed and funded by the Serbian government. This phenomenon only perpetuates further division and limits the possibility of reconciliation. This is mainly done through the presentation of historical narratives that are presented to the next generations. The biased way that these histories are presented in addition to the lack of contact between the communities only leads to stronger ethnic prejudice, mistrust, and misunderstandings (Strapacova, 2016).

The Role of Modern History Textbooks on the Future Generation

The relationship between Kosovo's education system, school textbooks and the deep ethnic political division must be considered for its influence on the younger generation (Çeku, 2018). Through the teaching of national history governments and other political groups are able to shape the historical consciousness and the sense of national identity to the next generations

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(Vuka, 2008). The historical narratives of textbooks are taught as the uncontested truth that is to be transferred to students. In schools, students are only expected to passively memorize what is said in the textbooks and reproduce the narrative with little to no reflection (Vuka, 2008).

Techniques such as debating, and critically questioning the information presented in these books are non-existent.

If the information transmitted to these students are distorted by nationalist propaganda and politics, these books only serve as a vehicle through which the government perpetuates ethnic conflict, impeding familiarity of the values and thinking of the 'other' and thus reducing the next generations chances to construct a better future between both groups (Çeku, 2019). An example of this can be seen in the way Serbian historical textbooks misrepresents some of the most significant historical events (Baliqi, 2019). Serbian history textbooks used in the sixth, seventh and eighth grade depicts the Serbs as the main protagonists in the struggle against the Ottomans in ancient times, trying to liberate their ancient land. However, these books do not mention the Albanian uprising (mentioned earlier in the paper) that was instrumental at weakening the Ottomans in the region, which allowed the Serbs to seize the region. Another example of this is the teaching on the Great Migration. In history textbooks,

for the seventh grade in Kosovo, the Great Migration of 1690 is interpreted as a migration of the Albanian people from Kosovo. The defeat of the Austrians by the Ottoman Empire in the war of 1690 brought about population movements in the Balkans. In that war, Albanian rebels under their leader, the Albanian archbishop of Skopje, Pjetër Bogdani, sided with the Austrians. With the retreat of the Austrians, a good number of Albanians left Kosovo, too. In contrast to this, the seventh-grade history text in Serbia does not

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mention the Albanians as having taken part in the uprising at all but depicts them simply as Muslim colonists come over from central and northern Albania. (Çeku, 2018, p. 14)

Another way that historical textbooks help to spread nationalist propaganda is through the use of victimization. When representing the war of 1999, Albanian-Kosovar textbooks are completely silent on the role that they played in the violent 'reverse ethnic cleansing.' This event took place after the shift in the balance of power under the watch of the international community. The members of the KLA have become synonymous with their heroic sacrifice. Therefore, any accusation of war crimes has been seen as an unjust attack on their national heroes (Strapacova, 2016). There were a number of cases of interethnic help, where Serbs risked their own lives to hide their Albanian-Kosovar neighbors. However, since these cases do not fall under the narrative of Albanian-Kosovar victimization, the stories have been lost in an anonymous mass of crimes ascribed purely to Serbs (Strapacova, 2016). By not acknowledging the crimes committed on both sides, a mutual relationship of interethnic coexistence and reconciliation is hindered (Baliqi, 2019; Strapacova, 2016). Unless there is a move to integrate the two school systems and to present a more comprehensive historical narrative, reconciliation cannot be achieved.

To truly analyze and appreciate the role of education in a nation, it is essential to first examine the country's history, traditions, values, and the political and economic conditions that guide its development. It is impossible to truly understand education apart from its cultural, historical and social environment (Takayama & Sriprakash, 2016). In the case of Kosovo, education has historically been used as a tool to promote the political agendas of competing governments, whether that be the Albanian Kosovars, the Serbs or that of the United Nations. As seen through the Literature Review, education has also been used as a tool for societal transformation, a means for social-mobility, national liberation on the side of Albanian-Kosovars

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and indoctrination under the Ottomans and the Serbians. Throughout the three time periods schools were used to either push against the narratives being spread by the competing governments or legitimized those same narratives in the eyes of their students. To truly have a comprehensive understanding of the history and possible future of Kosovo, it is crucial to understand the role education has played and continues to play in the existing ethnic conflict.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative study that uses semi-structured interviews. This approach was chosen as it is the best way to investigate the following research question: What is the relationship between Kosovo's education system and the conflict between Kosovo and Serbia?

To ensure that all research procedures are ethically sound and includes very few risks to the participants, prior to any data collection, the research proposal was thoroughly reviewed by the School for International Training's Institutional Review Board. Once granted approval, the researcher moved forward with the study. This study uses a mixed purposeful sampling strategy that includes purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling refers to the practice of selecting information-rich individuals that are either experts or knowledgeable of the research topic. On the other hand, snowball sampling refers to the practice of asking participants to identify other potential research participants (Korzh, 2021). Throughout my research for my literature review, I have come across the names and contacts of multiple researchers that have studied Kosovo's history. I sent out electronic invitations to these researchers, expressing the purpose of the study. Those who were interested completed a Google form by opening a link at the bottom of the invitation. On this form the purpose of this study was re-stated again. This consent form also assured all potential participants that they were allowed to withdraw their consent at any time in the study at no penalty. After the participants responded, they were

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contacted directly to set up an interview. I asked participants if they knew any other experts that would be interested in participating. If they knew of anyone, I collected their contact information and reached out to them by email. To be selected for this research, participants had to have either worked in or extensively researched Kosovo's history and education system. Additionally, they had to have intermediate to advanced English proficiency.

After the participants responded, they were contacted directly to set up a 45-minute interview. During the interviews participants were also asked orally if they consented to be interviewed, recorded and to have their information quoted in the paper. In the end five participants took part in the interviews.

To relieve any potential stress, I reminded participants that all information shared will be completely confidential. They were only required to share as much information as they were comfortable with at no risk. During the interview they had the right to not answer any questions or to discontinue participation at any time without risk of penalty.

To protect participants' privacy during the entire process from recruitment to the interview, all emails were sent directly to prospective participants. This ensured that no participant had access to the emails of other prospective participants. Before any interviews were conducted, participants first consented to the meeting. During the data collection phase, all names and identifiable information were replaced by pseudonyms. All information was password protected.

The semi-structured interview was conducted according to a list of guiding questions which mainly acted as themes to ensure flexibility. Participants had the power to guide the discussion within the main topics. See Appendix A for a copy of the interview protocol used in the interviews. This tool allowed for a more natural flowing conversation. This in turn provided

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greater context for their understanding of the role education plays in the ongoing tensions between Kosovo and Serbia. All recordings were transcribed and sent to participants. Here, participants were given the chance to make any changes to what they said before it was used in the study. Due to time restraints, participants were asked to return any changes within a week. This was to ensure data accuracy. All collected data was analyzed using Inductive coding (Bittencourt, 2021). This style of coding creates codes based on the content detected from the dataset.

Analysis of Findings

Introduction

This section is broken down into four parts. The first part gives an overview of the interviewees' backgrounds and interests in the Kosovar Education system. The second part goes deeper into the structure of the Parallel system and firsthand experience working and attending these schools. Additionally, it expounds on the role this system played in the local communities. The third part focuses on the roles of the history textbooks in Kosovo, the effects they have on students and the plight of Kosovar history teachers. The final part presents the interviewees' recommendations on how education could be used to support reconciliation.

Interviewees' Backgrounds

For the sake of this research, I interviewed 5 different individuals from the following ethnic backgrounds represented in Kosovo which are one Bosnian, one Serbian, two Albanian Kosovars and one Romani Kosovar. To protect their identity, I will use the following pseudonyms: Kelsey, Andrew, Jake, Cade, and Mariyan. Two of the interviewees Kelsey and Andrew have done extensive research on Kosovo's Education system, specifically the impact of

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the history textbooks used. Both interviewees hold University degrees in Political Science.

Andrew went on to get a master's degree in international education policy and a PhD in International and Comparative Education, while Kelsey obtained a bachelors in Social Psychology, and a PhD in Human Rights, Political, Ethical and Social Challenges.

On the other hand, Mariyan, Jake and Cade, all experienced Kosovo's education system as students and as English teachers. These three interviewees all went to University for English Literature and Teaching. During and after studies, Mariyan participated in several human rights and Minority Communities Awareness trainings and sessions with many Youth NGOs and official educational institutions. Mariyan has 10 years of experience working in Kosovo's education system. Mariyan is a Romani Kosovar. They are one of the most marginalized ethnic groups in Kosovo and the rest of Europe. Through the interview, Mariyan gave me a small glimpse into how Education during and after the conflict of 1999 affected different minority populations in Kosovo.

Jake has about 39 years of experience as an educator in Kosovo and even worked as a professor during the conflict of 1999 in the parallel system. Cade has over 5 years of teaching experience. Like Mariyan, Cade went to school as a student during the conflict of 1999. However, unlike Mariyan, Cade went to the Albanian Parallel classes, while Mariyan went to the Bosnian/Serbian schools. This diversity in experiences and ethnic backgrounds gave a more comprehensive view on the role of Education in post-conflict Kosovo.

Interviewees' Interest in Kosovo's Education System

All of the interviewees had diverse reasons for either studying Kosovo's Education system or working as an educator. Understanding their interest in Kosovo's education system helps to contextualize their findings and opinions on the matter. Kelsey is Serbian and went to

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school in Serbia. During his bachelor's and master's degrees, Kelsey started reflecting on how history was taught in Serbia, specifically the lack of coverage on the war of 1999 in Kosovo and the influence it had and still has on the younger generation. For a wider picture, Kelsey expanded his research to include many Balkan countries including Kosovo.

On the other hand, Andrew is Bosnian. Andrew was born during the conflict and had to flee Bosnia with her family. When she/he was about 2 years old, she and her family resettled as refugees in the United States. However, she has always wanted to reconnect with her heritage, so she decided to serve as an education volunteer in Kosovo in the local school system. While there, she could see the scars left behind from the war. She saw the way in which the locals held on to their ethnic identities more passionately than their shared nationality. Additionally, how they interacted with each other and how they presented history to the younger generation inspired her to do a deep dive comparison into how Albanian History textbooks and Serbian history textbooks presented their historical narratives. Here, she specifically focused on the aims behind these narratives and the effects they had on the younger generation's understanding of ethnicity and national identity.

Next, Mariyan, being a Romani-Kosovar, experiencing discrimination and life during the war sought to find what gaps he could fill in his society to make life better for all. To do this, he saw education as the best option. So, he became an English teacher at a local high school and worked with local Youth NGOs to spread the awareness of the plight of the different minority communities and to promote multiculturalism. On the other hand, Jake went into teaching in Kosovo's education system because of the love he had for the English language. While Cade chose the field of education due to the level of security it offered during a time of high rates of unemployment and due to his teachers' recommendations.

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Life in the Parallel System

Historical Overview into the Parallel System

According to Jake, during the time of Yugoslavia, the schools were run by the Serbian regime. All the syllabi were created and enforced until the year 1980 when the war started in Bosnia and Yugoslavia began to collapse. He shared that there was no hostility between the Serbian and Albanian students. As a student Jake had classes in Albanian and Serbian. He had literature classes for the Albanian language and for the Serbian language. And he said that the Serbian students also took some Albanian classes. However, everything changed when the war struck Kosovo. There was systematic ethnic cleansing of the Albanian language and culture by the Serbians.

During the interview, Jake recalled the moment he and his colleagues heard the order to remove the Albanian language and history from the schools. He said that all the Albanian teachers refused and were immediately expelled from the schools. He stated that this move was instrumental in sparking the war. As an act of “patriotism” he and his colleagues decided to open an Albanian parallel school system with a syllabus created by key Albanian educational figures. Jake explained that the system was very organized. All the classes were held in private houses. There were many individuals that were willing to host classes for the children. However, it was very dangerous. There were Serbian police everywhere. To make things more difficult, if a student had six classes, he/she would have to move from one house to another and sometimes the houses were not close to each other. Here education’s role was that of patriotism and cultural conservation in the face of ethnic cleansing.

Other interviewees shared another role education played during this time of conflict. Mariyan explained that outside of patriotism, another important role education played at this time

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was keeping the children engaged with something. He said the quality was not great, but it helped to organize children and keep them safe. It gave them structure and a path to follow in a time of uncertainty.

Structure of the Albanian Parallel School System

In the interview Jake described the structure and management of the Albanian Parallel system. It is as follows:

There was a principal and teaching staff. And then supervisors or headteachers, as we call them here, who were in charge of supervising or monitoring the work and the normal functioning of one class and taking care of the group of students. There was also parents' union at that time in function because there was a lack of everything. We didn't have any material due to finance problem, but most of the parents were ready to donate. They were also engaged, which functioned all together for the system of education....There was cooperation between teachers and the parents...Everyone did their job. So, it functioned.

Another important factor to note of this parallel Albanian system, is the fact that key Albanian educators came together to create the materials and syllabi. This then continued to modern-day Kosovar school system. The ways the materials are used in the classroom and the narratives are told in the civics and history textbooks are used by the government to shape the experiences of the next generation. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the main aims of these textbooks as Kosovo moves towards reconciliation.

History Textbooks & Education

Roles of Historical Narratives

According to Kelsey and Andrew, there are two main roles of History Textbooks' narratives in post conflict countries. The first is focused on building a positive national identity

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and fostering patriotic feelings. The other role is to promote critical thinking skills in the next generation. In the case of Kosovo as a post-conflict country, Kelsey explains that it is difficult to put these two countering images together: one of participating in the war and another of painting a positive image. So, what tends to happen is that the writers slightly distort versions of the conflict to that of excluding any kind of wrongdoing on the side of the group writing the narrative. To do this, Kelsey explains that both groups “sanitize the violence.” In the textbooks both Serbians and Albanians portray their own group as the biggest victim and as a group that had to participate in the war to protect themselves. So, whenever there is violence towards the other group, it is justified.

These textbooks do not just stop at redefining the war, but as Andrew explained, they help to define national identity and ethnicity. The Kosovar government describes Kosovo as a multi-ethnic country, however not all the population share this view. This can be seen in history textbooks. While analyzing the Serbian and Albanian textbooks, Andrew found that in Serbian textbooks,

If you're in Kosovo, you're Serbian. Unless you're Albanian, in which case you shouldn't be there. And in the Albanian textbooks, Kosovo is basically it's great that it's independent. It would have been better if we [Albanian Kosovars] were all independent with Albania, but since that didn't happen and we [Albanian Kosovars] weren't able to get the Albanian Liberation Movement to unify all of the lands on which Albanians lived at that time, Kosovo being independent is suboptimal but still great.

In this case for the Albanian Kosovars who make up over 80 percent of the population, being Kosovar is basically synonymous to being Albanian. Andrew went on to explain that if Kosovo is seen as an “additional Albanian liberation state,” there is no room for Serbians, Roma, Gorani,

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Bosnians or Ashkali Egyptians. This in turn creates a difficult situation for minority communities.

Effects of Historical Narratives on Minority Groups

Kelsey describes the situation in this way. During the conflict between the two main groups (Serbians and Albanians) the minority groups tend to be marginalized. The government and the rest of the society are struggling to deal with the conflict through the use of educational narratives, while the minorities stay on the margins, left out of the story. The spotlight is on these two main players and everything else sort of fades into the background. Kelsey goes on to say that this creates a huge problem for the minority group members, especially the youth. Not seeing themselves represented in the narrative causes them to feel as if they are not as important as the dominant groups.

Usually to solve this problem, the government translates these textbooks into the languages of the minority groups, however the content remains the same and their presence is underrepresented. This in terms means that their role in the conflict, their culture and their shared history goes untold. This disregards their contributions to the conflict. Being on the margins of that type of conflict makes it seem as if they are not a part of the conflict because they do not identify with either side. However, this puts them in an even worse situation. During the conflict of 1999, the Kosovar-Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians and Bosnians were forced to choose a side and were then persecuted for that choice. Their stories and memories remain untold and overshadowed by that of the Albanian Kosovars and Serbian Kosovars.

Mariyan shared the experience of his family during the conflict. Being Romani-Kosovars, they neither were Albanian nor Serbians. So, Mariyan's dad had to choose where to send his children. Mariyan's older siblings all went to Albanian schools however during the conflict, the

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Serbian schools offered better quality education. Therefore, Mariyan's dad sent him to a Serbian school. In doing this, his father underwent a lot of discrimination from his Albanian community members for taking sides with the Serbians. On top of that he faced discrimination on the side of the Serbians for having children in the Albanian parallel school system. By not including the stories, struggles and contributions of the different minority groups during the conflict, these textbooks spread a narrative of exclusion and help to further segregate the country. However, it is the role of local teachers to combat this narrative and to promote inclusion within their classrooms. Sadly, most teachers are not trained in the strategies necessary to tackle these issues.

The Impact of Teachers' Lack of Training in Post-Conflict Education

The second role of history textbooks is to teach critical thinking. However, teaching critical thinking in relation to the history of the conflict of 1999 comes with many challenges on the side of the teachers. Kelsey stated that the history teachers in Kosovo do not receive adequate training on how to teach the war itself, furthermore, how to deal with the emotional consequences that come up when discussing the war. Teaching history in a way that develops critical thinking necessitates questioning the narratives depicted in the textbook. This is where the problem begins. Kosovo is a small country with many small to medium communities where most people know each other. Critiquing the current conflict in a community where everyone was affected by the war, either the student's parents or grandparents can cause backlash. This could be in the way of having overly emotional outbursts at school or being discriminated against by the community. With all of the preceding in mind, most teachers avoid diving deeper into the conflict. However, students are looking to the teacher to be their guide in understanding the conflict. This then affects the possibility of reconciliation for the younger generation. To expound on this, Kelsey states,

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There is very little communication [between the different groups]. So, what students know about the other group mainly coming from that [the textbook]. So, the only way they are able to imagine the other side, is only through this “negative depiction” of the other group. The other group did this to us, they did this and this. And then this kind of portrayal, of course, it's very difficult that it would create a sort of fertile ground for building reconciliation.

If the teachers are too intimidated to engage with the historical narratives critically, and with the narratives present in the textbooks highlighting one side as the victim and the other side as the antagonist, then education is used to maintain the status quo of division and conflict.

Education as a Tool for Reconciliation

To address the underrepresentation of the other minority ethnic groups, Kelsey and Mariyan recommended opening up a dialogue to start changing the narrative of the textbooks to make them more inclusive of the different ethnic groups. However, the government closely monitors what is written in the textbooks and is not willing to budge. So instead, Kelsey recommends bringing in additional materials from outside. Instead of teaching critical thinking skills using the conflict of 1999, Kelsey strongly suggests that teachers should use older conflicts from other countries to help the students build up that skill for themselves, for example analyzing the Romans. It would be easier for the students to develop these skills when they are presented in reference to something that is not so personal.

On the other hand, Andrew and Mariyan discussed the idea of using informal education programs that occurs outside of the traditional school-based systems, to facilitate understanding between the different communities. Mariyan shared an example of one of these educational training programs he participated in,

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I remember that I used to cooperate with the NGO whose main aim was to raise awareness, especially in domestic violence. And I was engaged there as a youngster who will kind of play small pieces of theater scenes in many classes and in many schools and then discuss with youngsters the impact of domestic violence and then from that we switched into what communities are more touched by this aspect and how much do we know about these communities and how much do we interact with these communities.

In this way, the issues, challenges, and cultures of these minority groups are introduced to the students in a more engaging environment. Andrew supported Mariyan in saying that using events such as these are the best way to spread understanding instead of trying to go through the formal school system which is very political.

Lastly, Cade and Jake suggested that to foster reconciliation, there should be shared educational programs, trainings, and initiatives where these groups can come together and brainstorm ideas on how to make the country's educational system better. Cade shared his experience in one of these multi-ethnic teacher trainings.

Personally, I have had a lot of encounters or meetings when I participated both with, Serbian teachers, for example, either from Kosovo here, working in Kamenica and Mitrovica and also from Belgrade, from Serbia. We met on many occasions in Albania, in Tirana, etc. and in Montenegro and in Serbia. I think we exchanged a lot of useful ideas and experiences. I would say we have a lot of things in common and also, we have things in common when it comes to sharing culture as well.

Cade and Jake explained that investing more in these initiatives will help to improve diplomacy between the two countries. It also serves as a safe space where these diverse groups that are usually separated must come together to collaborate on different small projects.

Conclusion

This research aimed to identify the role education played in the conflict between Kosovo and Serbia. Based on qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with individuals who either conducted extensive research of Kosovo's education system or worked in Kosovo's education system, it can be concluded that education played multiple roles. Education acted as a tool for social mobility, patriotism, political indoctrination, nation building and reconciliation. In the 1970s to the early 1980s the Albanian population in Kosovo started becoming more educated, took on more political roles, and began making demands to become a Republic (Salihu, et al, 2019). In response to this, the Serbian officials used the education system as a tool of ethnic cleansing and control by cracking down on all forms of Albanian media including textbooks. The Serbian government also removed any curriculum that included Albanian culture and language from the schools and only allowed Serbian curricula in schools (Baliqi, 2019; Epp & Walker, 2010). To counteract the repression of their culture and as an act of patriotism, the Albanian Kosovars opened informal schools to maintain their language, culture, and way of life. However, this patriotism was not directed to the country of Kosovo but to their ethnic identity as Albanians.

During the war of 1999, education was also used as a tool to create a safe place and a sense of consistency for the younger generation in a very unstable time. Multiple Albanian families and Imams opened their homes and Mosques to be used as secret schools for the children in the communities to continue their learning. This gave the students a routine to follow each day and kept them occupied during the day. Mariyan explained that this helped the younger generation cope with the chaos caused by the war and kept them safe indoors.

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After the war, the Kosovar government attempted to use the education system as a tool of nation building. The government went about creating this narrative through the use of history textbooks. Sadly, many of the Kosovar ethnic minorities have barely any representation within the narratives presented as the history of the country and the conflict. Thus, the Bosnians, Romani, and Ashkali Egyptians were made to feel unimportant or marginal at best. This in turn created a contradictory effect. Instead of education having the desired impact as a tool for nation building, it functions as a tool of exclusion and segregation. Furthermore, in the separate education system maintained by Serbia for the Serbian Kosovars, education continues to play the role of a tool of division. On the other hand, local and international NGOs have been using education as a tool to bring about reconciliation and awareness amongst the different ethnic groups represented in Kosovo through the use of multi-ethnic teacher trainings, plays that showcase the plight of different minority groups and workshops aimed at spreading cultural awareness of different minority communities. As seen above, the education system has played many different roles in Kosovar Society and some of these roles have been contrary in nature.

For the sake of this study, I employed the Purposive sampling strategy to identify possible interviewees. I looked for individuals that had rich information that would give an informed oversight into the role education played in the conflict between Kosovo and Serbia. From these individuals, I was able to gain a deeper understanding into what the situation was like before, during and after the war and how education was interwoven during these times. A major limitation to this research was the small sampling size. However, within this small sampling size, most of the ethnic groups in Kosovo were represented.

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Recommendations for Future Research

To better understand the implications of these results, future studies could involve a larger sample group of local teachers and students from the different ethnic groups represented in Kosovo. Additionally, the study could also examine existing informal education programs such as multi-ethnic teacher training workshops put on by either NGOs or the Kosovar government aimed at reconciliation and spreading multi-culturalism within the country.

Closing Statement

To bring about true reconciliation, it is essential to understand the multifaceted impact the education system has had on the younger generation in Kosovo. The Literature Review showed the role education played throughout the history of Kosovo from the time of the Ottomans to the present. Throughout the Literature review, it can be seen and showed that education was used as a tool for social mobility, national liberation and political indoctrination. However, the interviews showed that the informal parallel school system acted as a safe haven for the younger generation during the conflict. Additionally, it acted as a tool for reconciliation bringing about mutual understanding between the different ethnic groups through teacher trainings and informal educational programs put on by local and international NGOs. The combination of the existing research and the data collected through the interviews created a strong foundation in understanding the role of education in the conflict between Kosovo and Serbia. It also revealed possible ways of moving past this conflict to true reconciliation through initiatives such as multi-ethnic teacher trainings, workshops aimed at building cultural awareness of the different ethnic groups represented in Kosovo or through promoting critical thinking through the use of distant historical wars.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

- Where did you go to university?
- What degree(s) did you graduate with?
- What inspired you to choose that field?
- How long have you been working in this field?
- What motivated you to start researching Kosovo's history and its education systems? Or
What motivated you to start working in Kosovo's education system?
- In your opinion, how has Kosovo's education system evolved over the years?
Specifically, can you explain how the parallel school system has evolved over time?
- How has the conflict between Kosovo and Serbia impacted the local school systems?
- What role has education played in this conflict over the years, if any?
- How does this affect the roles of local teachers?
- How does this affect local students enrolled in these different systems?
- What are some ways education can bring about reconciliation?
- What else about the education system in Kosovo should be considered?