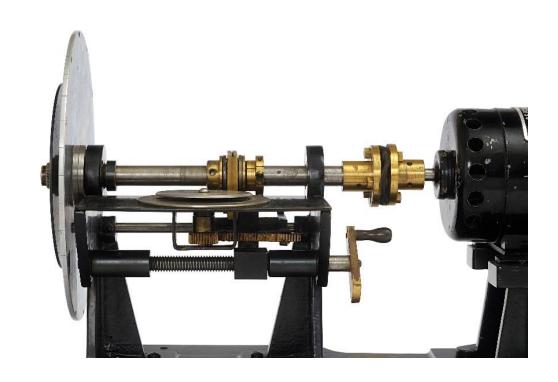
PROCEEDINGS OF THE XXVI SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

# EMPIRICAL STUDIES IN PSYCHOLOGY

OCTOBER 15<sup>TH</sup> – 18<sup>TH</sup>, 2020 FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE



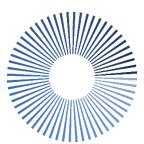
INSTITUTE OF PSYCHOLOGY LABORATORY FOR EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE

# EMPIRICAL STUDIES IN PSYCHOLOGY

OCTOBER  $15^{\text{TH}} - 18^{\text{TH}}$ , 2020 FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE



Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade



Laboratory for Experimental Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

#### Belgrade, 2020

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# The Socio-Psychological "Infrastructure" of Conflict in Croatian, Bosniak and Serbian History Textbooks - Comparing 1996 to 2017

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#### **Abstract**

The so-called "socio-psychological infrastructure of conflict" (SPIC, Bar-Tal, 2007), as a shared cognitive-affective repertoire, psychologically prepares groups for participation in the conflict. The same repertoire, however, poses an obstacle for reconciliation after its resolution. Relying on SPIC as an analytical framework, we compared Croatian, Bosniak and Serbian elementary school history textbooks published immediately after the war (1996) and twenty years after (2017). First, we sampled the textbooks, choosing the most widely used ones in each period. In selected textbooks, we identified chapters that mention relations among three ethnicities. We proceeded to split them into paragraphs as units of analysis (N=945). Two independent coders classified each paragraph according to nine categories. Results showed that 1/3 up to more than 1/2 of all the selected paragraphs were indicative of SPIC. Contrary to our expectations, we did not observe a significant decrease in SPIC in post-war textbooks, even when we separately analyzed only the categories identified as key obstacles towards reconciliation. We discuss how SPIC integrated into national historical narratives across ethnicities as its core element and why the societies need to enhance their effort towards developing socio-psychological foundations of peace.

**Keywords:** history textbooks; intergroup relations; Yugoslav conflict; socio-psychological infrastructure of conflict; reconciliation

#### Introduction

The violent dissolution of Yugoslavia (1991-1995) included gross violations of international humanitarian law through ethnic cleansing, concentration camps, paramilitary formations (Radović, 2004), which resulted in more than 120 000 victims and more than 2.5 million of refugees (Koulouri & Repe, 2018). The consequences of the conflict still burden societies since questions regarding the number of victims (Radović, 2004), state borders (Karabeg, 2016) and the responsibility of war (Forum za Tranzicionu pravdu [Forum for Transitional Justice], 2015) remain open, while inflammatory rhetoric often permeates public and political discourse (e.g. Janjić & Šovanec, 2018).

According to Bar-Tal (2007), to meet the challenges of conflict, societies develop a cognitive-affective repertoire that includes shared beliefs, attitudes, motivations, and emotions that ultimately transforms into a *socio-psychological infrastructure of conflict* (SPIC). Although SPIC enables societies better adaptation to conditions of

war, it is also the main obstacle towards the reconciliation after the violence has officially terminated. The cognitive basis of SPIC consists of societal beliefs that are focused either on the past (collective memories) or present (ethos of conflict), and that are related to the following themes: justness of own goals, delegitimization of the rival, victimization, abstract peace, security, positive ingroup image, patriotism, national unity. While the first four societal beliefs are the key obstacles towards reconciliation, others are common even in peaceful times. although in a more complex form (Bar-Tal, 2000). Regarding the affective aspect of SPIC, Bar-Tal (2007) discusses collective emotional orientation as a model emotional response that is widespread throughout the society, and that is mostly related to emotions of fear, hate and revenge. As violent confrontations between groups progress, SPIC gets disseminated and institutionalized via societal channels of communication.

In our work, we focused on one of the most influential societal channels of communication - elementary school history textbooks. Their importance stems from (Bar-Tal, 1998): a. being state-controlled official narratives of the conflict; b. targeting still developing youth as future citizens; c. representing epistemic authorities; d. having an extensive reach due to compulsory education.

Therefore, our main research goal was to determine the presence and change of SPIC in Bosniak, Serbian and Croatian history textbooks just after the war (1996) and in contemporary times (2017). We expected a lower presence of SPIC in the "contemporary" textbooks (2017) than in the "war" textbooks (1996), especially for those elements which are regarded as the key obstacles towards reconciliation. We based such prediction on previous studies (Bar-Tal, 1998; Bar-Tal, 2000; Nasie & Bar-Tal, 2012), where authors argued that withdrawal of SPIC from the societal channels of communication should follow de-escalation of the conflict.

#### Method

Considering we used content analysis, the sampling procedure had two stages. First, we sampled the most widely used history textbook for each ethnicity and each time moment (see Appendix). For 1996 there was only one history textbook per ethnic group, while for 2017 we selected the textbooks referred to at national ministries of education websites. Second, within the sampled textbooks, we selected chapters that included the relation of at least two out of three relevant ethnic groups. As a unit of analysis, we chose one paragraph of text within selected chapters (total number of paragraphs per textbook:  $N_{C'96} = 226$ ;  $N_{S'96} = 184$ ;  $N_{B'96} = 217$ ;  $N_{C'17} = 128$ ;  $N_{S'17} = 110$ ;  $N_{B'17} = 80$ ).

Two independent coders analyzed paragraphs according to each of the nine categories (Table 1)<sup>6</sup>. Inter-rater agreement was ranging from 89% to 98% of all cases depending on a category. However, as a large number of zeroes could inflate the agreement coefficient, we used more conservative Krippendorff alpha which is more robust to category absence (Krippendorff, 2004). It ranged from .37 to .74. The lowest reliability was for the categories that were the least frequent, whereas the most frequent had the highest reliability. Nevertheless, to ensure the validity two coders settled each disagreement through discussion based on guidelines that we determined in the training process (available at OSF repository).

Table 1: Coding scheme

Elements of SPIC
Justness of own goals
Delegitimization of the rival
Security
Victimization
Positive ingroup image
Patriotism
National unity
Abstract peace
Collective emotional orientation of fear, hate and
revenge

Key obstacles to reconciliation are bolded<sup>7</sup>

#### **Results**

As detailed in Table 2, we observed strong presence of SPIC in history textbooks of all three ethnicities, varying from 1/3 to more than 1/2 of all analyzed paragraphs. Our expectation that SPIC would decrease in contemporary textbooks was not supported by the data. In fact, with the exception of Bosniak textbooks, we even identified a trend towards an increase, but none of these changes reached statistical significance (Croatian:  $\chi$ 2(1, 354) =

1.69,  $\phi = .07$ , p = .19; Serbian:  $\chi 2(1, 294) = 1.50$ ,  $\phi = .07$ , p = .22; Bosniak:  $\chi 2(1, 297) = .20$ ,  $\phi = .03$ , p = .65). Notwithstanding this, the exact number of SPIC related paragraphs decreased in contemporary textbooks, but due to the reduction in content rather than withdrawal of SPIC.

We proceeded to test if elements of SPIC which are the key obstacles to reconciliation decreased, bearing in mind that some elements also exist in the times of peace. In contrast, across ethnicities we again observed a trend towards an increase (Table 3) (Croatian:  $\chi 2(1, 354) = 3.65$ ,  $\varphi = .10$ , p = .06; Serbian:  $\chi 2(1, 294) = 1.19$ ,  $\varphi = .06$ , p = .28; Bosniak:  $\chi 2(1, 297) = .06$ ,  $\varphi = .02$ , p = .80).

Table 2: Percentage of at least one element of SPIC in all selected paragraphs per history textbook and time moment

	Time moments	
History textbook	1996	2017
Croatian	52.2% (118)	59.4% (76)
Serbian	32.1% (59)	39.1% (43)
Bosniak	47.9% (104)	45% (36)
Total	44.8% (281)	48.7 (155)

Exact number of paragraphs in brackets

Table 3: Percentage of at least one key obstacle to reconciliation in all selected paragraphs per history textbook and time moment

	Time moments	
History textbook	1996	2017
Croatian	43.4% (98)	53.9% (69)
Serbian	23.4% (43)	29.1% (32)
Bosniak	39.6% (86)	41.3% (33)
Total	36.2% (227)	42.1 (134)

#### **Discussion and conclusion**

By showing that SPIC hasn't decreased in history textbooks more than 20 years after the war, our study suggests that such "ideology of conflict" became integrated into national historical narratives of former belligerents as its core element. This finding is in line with several previous comparative textbook analyses, in which the authors demonstrated how ethnocentric narratives introduced in the '90s consolidated through time (Forum za Tranzicionu pravdu [Forum for Transitional Justice], 2015; Pavasović Trošt, 2018). However, the same authors also note that language got moderated and that textbooks did improve. Although our coding scheme wasn't sensitive to detect subtle differences in language intensity, coders observed such moderation through time. Also, we identified other indicators of progress as well - e.g. the content is reduced in favour of more didactic support.

Although three ethnicities currently live in peace, our work raises awareness about the issue of integrating SPIC in educational materials of future citizens, who as a consequence grow up epistemically and psychologically

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Examples for each of the categories from the coding scheme are available at <u>OSF</u> repository, together with the database, inter-rater agreement and category percentages.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Unlike in the original article (Bar-Tal, 2000), we omitted abstract peace due to low frequency and added security due to intense emphasis on threats to national existence and culture.

ready for the conflict (Žeželj & Pratto, 2017). In that sense, we agree with the warning of Bar-Tal and Čehajić-Clancy (2013, p. 128) that "old national elements of collective memory and other national credos do not disappear but are held, transmitted and lie dormant within families and other ethnic institutions. These elements are ready to be reawakened when needed by societal, political and cultural forces".

Thus, it is necessary to work towards developing "sociopsychological infrastructure of peace" by changing beliefs and attitudes which are the key obstacles to reconciliation, while making the others more multidimensional, complex and open to criticism. Bearing in mind that elements of SPIC are well-founded in societies, we hope future studies would expand on reconciliation practices and their implementation, especially with regard to the educational system as an essential socialization tool.

#### **Appendix**

#### History textbooks

#### (Croatian):

Perić, I. (1996). Povijest za VIII. razred osnovne škole (1. izd.). Zagreb, Hrvatska: ALFA.

Đurić, V. (2015). Vremeplov 8 udžbenik povijesti za osmi razred osnovne škole (2. izd.). Zagreb, Hrvatska: Profil Klett.

#### (Serbian):

Gaćeša, N., Mladenović-Maksimović, L., & Živković, D. (1996). Istorija za 8. razred osnovne škole (4. izd.). Beograd, Srbija: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva. Đurić, Đ., & Pavlović, M. (2011). Istorija za osmi razred osnovne škole (2. izd.). Beograd, Srbija: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva.

#### (Bosniak):

Imamović, M., Pelesić, M., & Ganibegović, M. (1996). Historija 8. razred osnovne škole (2. izd.). Sarajevo, Bosna i Hercegovina: Ministarstvo obrazovanja, nauke, kulture i sporta.

Šabotić, I., & Čehajić, M. (2012). Historija Udžbenik za deveti razred devetogodišnje osnovne škole. Tuzla/Zenica, Bosna i Hercegovina: NAM/Vrijeme.

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