

BIAS IN OFFICIAL HISTORICAL NARRATIVES: EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONALIZATION IN SERBIA AND CROATIA

Miloš Jevtić

Institute for Political Studies, Belgrade, Serbia

milos.jevtic@ips.ac.rs

Research on educational institutionalization of historical narratives indicates that two basic types of historical fact deformations are involved in this process: systematically presenting one's group in a positive and opposing one in a negative light and avoiding information that could jeopardize the existing image of the group. In this regard, we wanted to check whether the educational mechanisms in Serbia and Croatia give a biased picture of the war in Croatia in 1991-1995 in one or both ways. We conducted a systematic review of content analyses of textbooks from Serbia and Croatia and a thematic analysis of entrance exams for history studies in Serbia, history tests from the graduation exams in Croatia and gymnasium curriculums in Serbia and Croatia. We integrated the results using five general elements that every conflict narrative possesses: cause of the war, description of the parties, course of the war, victims and war crimes and outcome of the war. Our findings indicate that these states take on an almost identical approach: the narratives provide an antagonistic picture of the conflict where the ethnic out-group is blamed for the start of the war, damage, and war crimes, while ethnic in-group is portrayed as a moral side advocating for the end of war and as a victim whose actions were merely a response to the rival's aggression. The only major difference between the official historical narratives is that educational institutionalization in Serbia also contains an avoidance of threatening information (the curriculum contains almost no explicit mention of the war), while all three analyzed elements of the Croatian education system consistently and in detail nurture extremely simplified and biased interpretation of this war.

Keywords: historical narratives, educational institutionalization, out-group image, content analysis