

Culture Wars: Serbian History Textbooks and the Construction of National Identity

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Abstract *This paper explores the development of a new form of national identity as mediated through the history curriculum in the new nation of Serbia and Montenegro. It compares the politics and ideology of creating forms of national identity in the pre- and post-Milošević era. The paper illustrates how the history curriculum in Serbia and Montenegro was and remains dominated by issues focusing upon what it means to be Serbian and provides a case study example of the power of the history curriculum in creating senses of belonging.*

Keywords School textbooks, History, Serbia, Culture, National identity

Introduction

Lying is a form of our patriotism and is evidence of our innate intelligence. We lie in a creative, imaginative and inventive way. In these lands every lie becomes a truth in the end. (Ugresic, 1998:34)

The collective memories of nations are scarred by their past and what they decide to celebrate or forget about their history says much about how they wish to be seen by themselves and others. For the British important defining moments include the London Blitz, Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain, events burnt deeply into the British psyche which create and maintain definitions of national identity. For the Germans the experiences of National Socialism and the horrors of the Holocaust have been pivotal in shaping the social, moral and political re-construction of post-war Germany and the dropping of the atomic bombs has enabled Japan to present Hiroshima as a site of national victimhood (Buruma, 1994).

Concepts of national identity have during the past decade come under increasing pressure as legitimate identifiers through which peoples define themselves and their physical, cultural and intellectual place in the world. The claimed impact of globalisation, the fracturing of previously secure and established national boundaries, the rise of ethnicity as a cultural label which crosses political boundaries, have all asked fundamental questions regarding 'what does it mean to belong?' One outcome has been the emergence of multiple identities, a plurality which has given rise to individuals defining themselves against a number of 'markers' e.g. gender, class, ethnicity as well as nation. An important feature of the fluid way in which individuals and communities seeking to define and re-define themselves within changing political, socio-cultural and ideological contexts is the differential nature of change both spatially and longitudinally.

Consequently, different countries and cultures ask different questions of themselves depending upon quite specific sets of circumstances: what it means to belong is a question which is asked urgently and passionately in some nations undergoing deep-seated changes, while in other nations with longer, more established and secure senses of nationhood the question can become rhetorical, a subject of intellectual debate with little expectation of re-definition or change. Hein and Selden have pointed out that 'The stories chosen or invented about the national past are invariably prescriptive – instructing people how to think and act as national subjects and how to view relations with outsiders.' (Hein and Selden (Eds), 2000, p.4). In the recent history of Eastern Europe perhaps nowhere has this claim been more forcefully demonstrated than in the events surrounding the disintegration of the Federal

Republic of Yugoslavia.

One of the most important and challenging characteristics of Yugoslavia was that its creation as a nation state at the Treaty of Versailles in 1918 produced one of the most ethnically, religiously, linguistically and culturally diverse and complex nations in Europe. Grant (1969) described Yugoslavia as:

... the country with *seven* frontiers (with Italy, Austria, Hungary, Rumania, Greece, Bulgaria and Albania); *six* republics (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia); *five* nationalities (Slovenes, Serbs, Croats, Montenegrins, Macedonians); *four* languages (Slovene, Croatian, Serbian, Macedonian); *three* religions (Orthodox, Catholic and Muslim); *two* alphabets (Roman and Cyrillic); and *one* party (the Yugoslav League of Communists).

In attempting to demonstrate the ethnic and linguistic diversity of Yugoslavia, Mikes (1984) argues that:

Although there are communes in which three or more languages are used for everyday communication and at the institutional level, the typical situation is that contacts exist between two languages - usually a language of nation and a language of nationality : (a) Hungarian and Serbo-Croat, Romanian and Serbo-Croat, Slovak and Serbo-Croat, Rutherfordian and Serbo-Croat in the Autonomous Socialist Province of Slovenia; (b) Hungarian and Serbo-Croat, Italian and Serbo-Croat, Czech and Serbo-Croat in the Socialist Republic of Croatia; (c) Albanian and Serbo-Croat, Turkish and Serbo-Croat in the Autonomous Socialist Province of Kosovo; (d) Bulgarian and Serbo-Croat in the Socialist Republic of Serbia; (e) Albanian and Macedonian in the Socialist Republic of Montenegro.

During Yugoslavia's communist years these fundamental differences were concealed in the sense that the political and ideological nature of the nation was dominated by communist ideology which provided a context which diluted nationalistic tendencies held by differing ethnic and religious groups. While the acceptance of diversity established under the communist régime did not necessarily represent the unspoken feelings of one ethnic group for 'the other', Tito's policies were designed to subdue the question of ethnicity and nationality. Yugoslavian history teaching stressed the common features of the history of the Yugoslav republics and peoples as the party consciously used nationalist and patriotic ideology as means of underpinning their power; the outcome was that many felt themselves to be Yugoslavs as well as Serbs, Croats and Bosnians. The system was designed for life preparation in an ideological and closed society. In a study of the ideological content of school textbooks in Yugoslavia during the 1970's, Kundacina (1980) analyzed secondary school textbooks; his conclusion was that 86.6% of the content of history textbooks contained political and ideological content. Samardic (1987), in a later study, concluded that 62% of social science textbooks for primary schools and 30% of primary school history textbooks contained political and ideological content. When Tito died in 1980 his vision of a united Yugoslav nation died with him.

In the post-Second World War period most republics in Yugoslavia comprised populations which were more or less homogeneous: 96% of Macedonians live in Macedonia and 96% of Slovenians live in Slovenia. Serbians are scattered throughout the republics that comprised the state of Yugoslavia. For example, data from the 1991 census in Bosnia-Herzegovina showed that 31.3 per cent were Serbs and 17.3 per cent were Croats. However, the break up of the Yugoslav communist state provided a catalyst for the re-emergence of a rapid post-communist nationalism. Mestrovic (1994) has claimed that:

Nations that were assumed to have disappeared over a century ago lay apparently submerged beneath communist modernism, and they awoke with more vigour than ever. Almost as soon as communism fell, nationalism replaced it as one of the strongest and most important social forces of the world today. (p.22)

As the dominant partner in the Yugoslavian federation of republics, Serbian nationalism emerged strongly during the early 1980s. One person credited with the intellectual rise of Serbian nationalism was the novelist and writer Dobrica Cosic. Previously an ally of Tito, in 1983 he published a number of works which claimed that under Tito's regime Serbs had found themselves persecuted by other Yugoslav ethnic groups (Cosic, 1995). In 1986 two hundred Serb intellectuals, led by Cosic, signed the 'Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences' which claimed that the Serbs were the most oppressed group in Yugoslavia and that the Serbs did have their own state because Tito had suppressed the question. The solution was to be '...the territorial unity of the Serbian people' regardless of which republic or province they lived in (quoted in Cigar, 1996, p.55). With Yugoslavia in its death throes, communism dying and socio-economic problems rampant, a relatively unknown Serbian politician, Slobodan Milošević, fastened upon the idea of Serbian nationhood as a powerful political tool. The focus of his attention was Kosovo, a province in the south of Yugoslavia which has a special cultural and spiritual significance in the history of the Serbs. In order to avoid nationalist and ethnic confrontation, Tito had given the Kosovans, 90% of whom were of Albanian heritage, a degree of autonomy in 1945 and strengthened this in 1974 when Kosovo was made an independent region within the Serb Republic.

Pursuing a policy of xenophobic nationalism, in April 1987 Milošević visited Kosovo and promised a group of angry Serbs gathered at a town hall in Kosovo that the ethnic Albanians '... will never beat you again.' The '... this is your land' speech marks Milošević out as a strident defender of Serb nationhood and together with total control of the television and news media which generated a climate of racist propaganda, laid the groundwork for his subsequent rise to power. Milošević worked hard to preserve in the minds of Serbs the memory of the 1389 Battle of Kosovo, in which the Turks defeated the Serbs and initiated 500 years of Turkish rule. Milošević had the bones of Prince Lazar, the Serb leader defeated at the battle of Kosovo in 1389, paraded around Serbia turning him from being the representative of an unpopular federal government into the champion of Serbian nationalism.

The campaign for a greater Serbia, in which only Serbs governed Serbs, generated considerable hostility in neighbouring republics. In Croatia in 1990 Franjo Tudjman, running a strongly nationalist campaign, was elected President and declared Croatia an independent nation. A new constitution denied the Serbian minority their rights and when the Serbian majority in Krajina, a region within Croatia, declared their independence the dispute escalated into a war between Croatian forces and the Yugoslav army sent to support them attacking Vukovar and Dubrovnik. By the end of the war the Serbs occupied 30% of Croatia before a UN peacekeeping force arrived and the Yugoslav army withdrew. The next point of conflict was Bosnia where the Serbian nationalist movement sought to ally itself with the Krajina Serbs. Milošević provided military support to Radovan Karadžić, the Bosnian Serb leader. Serb autonomous regions were declared and the Yugoslav army moved in to protect them. In 1992 Bosnian Serb forces bombed Sarajevo and a process of ethnic cleansing began. By August 1992 1.8 million Bosnians had been forced to flee their homes as the Yugoslav army and other Serbian forces captured over half of Bosnia in six weeks (see Glover, 2001, for a helpful summary).

Against this background, the early 1990s saw the Milošević's regime under threat, with many Serbs becoming alarmed about his virulent form of Serbian nationalism. In March 1991 in Belgrade nearly 100,000 people demonstrated against him. The demonstration was crushed by tanks. By June 1992, the international community had imposed sanctions against Belgrade and, despite further demonstrations demanding his resignation, Milošević's domination of the political scene, the media and support of the army enabled him to deal effectively with any sign of an organised opposition. However, by late 1996 more widespread dissatisfaction with the Milošević regime was being heard across Serbia prompted in part by the strong belief that the democratic process was being comprised through the rigging of local elections and that Serbia had acquired the status of a pariah in the world community.

In 1999, partly to deflect growing unease with his regime, Milošević played the 'nationalist' card and turned his attention once again to Kosovo. The outcome was a violent civil war which eventually led to his downfall. Amid reports of ethnic cleansing in the province, similar to that which had taken place in Croatia and Bosnia, in February and March 1999 at Rambouillet in France, the United States and its European allies invited the Albanian Kosovars and the Milošević government to sign an agreement agreeing to the withdrawal of Serbian forces from Kosovo, autonomy for Kosovo and the entry of a NATO peacekeeping force. NATO said it would bomb the Serbs if the Albanians signed and the Serbs refused. The Albanians accepted the Rambouillet agreement, Milošević refused, and in the spring of 1999 NATO launched a 78 day bombing campaign against Yugoslavia.

By early 2000, with Milošević indicted for war crimes by the International Tribunal in The Hague, his regime was again under serious threat from internal opposition forces. In September 2000 Milošević called a presidential election. The results gave Vojislav Koštunica, the Democratic Opposition of Serbia's (DOS) candidate over 48% of the vote short of the 50% required to win, but indicated an almost certain landslide in the runoff against Milošević. Claims of election fraud as Milošević once again struggled to hold on to power led, in October 2000, to the Democratic Opposition of Serbia calling citizens to a rally to protest and to call for Milošević's resignation. Late on the afternoon of 5th October Koštunica addressed the rally from the balcony of the City Assembly and later that day made a television appearance. That night hundreds of thousands of people gathered in the centre of Belgrade. A new interim government under Koštunica was formed and during the night the DOS representatives had talks with government officials, the police and the army. The next morning Milošević was no longer the president of Yugoslavia.

Against this political background, the aim of this chapter is to explore the way in which the social construction of Serbian history textbooks reflected the ideological framework within which Serbian society functioned during the 1990s. The following section briefly describes the bureaucratic process through which Serbian textbook knowledge is officially sanctioned. This is followed by a critical analysis of the history textbook controversies which have raged in Serbia and, in particular, the recent conflicts surrounding the authorisation of a new generation of history textbooks for school use in 2002.

Structure of the Serbian Education System

Compulsory education in Serbia lasts for eight years (7-15) in a 'basic' or 'elementary' school (*osnovna skola*). Those pupils continuing their education after the age of fifteen attend secondary schools (*skole drugog stupnja*), either grammar schools, vocational schools or art schools, for four years (15-19). The role of the grammar school (*gimnazija*) is to offer a general education in social studies and

science and to prepare pupils for further or university education. By completing grammar school students acquire four-form secondary education. Secondary vocational schools (*skole za kvalifikovne radnike*) offer a general and vocational (practical and theoretical) education equipping pupils for entry in the world of work and further education. Practical instruction institutions provide three-year courses in trades, such as electrical skills, wood working, metal working etc. Instruction consists of both theory and practice, with practical work conducted in school laboratories. Secondary art schools offer courses in the fields of Music, Art and Ballet.

The Bureaucracy of Textbook Selection

While textbooks are cultural commodities they are also economic commodities, produced within structural systems characterised by political, social and economic conditions of existence. Serbian textbooks are nationalised and standardised. There is currently no open textbook market; instead a single authorised textbook, for pupils at different stages of their education, is provided in all state schools, published by *Zavod za udzbenike i nastavna sredstva* (the State Publishing House). The curriculum for Serbian schools is decided upon by a Ministry of Education committee in consultation with teachers and academics, although the Ministry has the final say in cases of disagreement; currently teachers have a minor role in this process but educational reform will see them occupy a more central position. A further committee of teachers and civil servants will then take a decision on who will write a particular textbook. Textbook writers are provided with a curriculum which lists the topics to be taught, and the book is written in relation to those topics. The outcome is a system where there exists 'An inadequate quality of textbooks ...; limitations on the freedom to choose textbooks; problems stemming from the monopoly position of the publishers and their publishing policy' (CCD, 2002, p.13).

Textbooks have traditionally been written by academic historians. Previously, these professors were selected with care and they invariably produced a text which reflected the dominant ideological and political perspective of the day; that is changing, and practising teachers are now making an increasing impact upon the construction of texts. One author of the text used in this study is a classroom teacher.

One way of describing textbook knowledge is that it represents a cultural map requiring the acknowledgement that this particular form of selected knowledge is a product presented in a particular fashion for populist consumption. As such it is coded and classified, placed within contexts, assigned spaces and ranked in terms of status and meaning; the process of its manufacture is, therefore, intensely political. Textbook knowledge is far more than mere information, being located within clear cultural contexts; its meanings are changed and are used to justify behaviours and actions which are designed to have specific social consequences.

Creating 'Official' History: the Milošević Years

Thomas Carlyle once described history as no more than a distillation of rumours and inflamed by the nationalist rhetoric of politicians. During the 1990s the writing of school history textbooks in Serbia strongly represented a subjectivity and subservience to ideological and political interests every bit as powerful as that supported by the communist regime, where the promotion of the idea of 'brotherhood and unity' among Yugoslav peoples dominated education. In the decade following the collapse of eastern European communism in 1990 suppressed national rivalries rushed to fill the political and ideological vacuum.

Once in power, Milošević's political platform was dominated by the aim of creating a greater Serbia, uniting Serbs in Bosnia and Croatia with those in Serbia; what

language you spoke, where you lived, your ethnic heritage and your religion began to provide the cultural cement for the construction and re-construction of national identities as interest groups began to stake their particular claim to defining the characteristics of nationhood. Rubenstein, in a conversation with Serbs in Belgrade in 1993, was told '...Serbia once again stood alone protecting Christian Europe from the threat of a Muslim reconquista and once again had taken up defending Christian Europe against militant Islam' (Rubenstein, 1996, p.30).

During this decade the education system, therefore, continued to be dominated by the needs of the state, particularly in terms of the maintenance of the relationship between education policy making and the dynamic re-creation of a strong sense of Serbian nationalism. Lying at the heart of this process was the need to create a powerful sense of a Serbian national past designed to promote a robust and resilient collective unity and identity, providing justification for expansionist military policies. In his powerful critique of Serbian nationalism, Anzulovic describes this as a process in which 'Myths and lies are used to justify uninformed policies and hide the ignorance and amorality of their makers' (1999, p.180).

Olsen has suggested that 'Textbooks, like religious ritual, are devices for putting ideas and beliefs above suspicion' (Olsen, 1989, p.241) and the value-based messages contained in Serbian textbooks during the 1990s were highly explicit, strong and transparent. In their content analysis of the presence of democratic ideals in 5th-8th Grade Serbian history textbooks and language readers, Ivic *et al.* (1997) provide an interesting commentary upon the ideological and political content of Serbian textbooks during the 1990s. Their research revealed that textbook content was dominated by issues of national sovereignty, freedom and equality, in particular, patriotic values focusing upon freedom and bravery. The textbooks presented pupils with a picture of their past painted in glowing terms with emphasis placed upon historic achievements and national heroes. They write:

Patriotic values are absolutely the strongest value message of our textbooks. They appear only in the positive form and almost exclusively as the national value. The significance of those values is practically equated with the fight for the freedom of the homeland or, even more concretely with the enormous sacrifices in this fight and the readiness to sacrifice in the future. (p.20)

The textbooks adopted a strong collectivist orientation and gave less space and attention to individual values, such as individual responsibility, self-reliance, self initiative, that did not emphasise national or social contexts. They also claim that the textbooks were lacking in the promotion and fostering of tolerance, non-violent conflict resolution, dialogue and compromise; instead, personal traits included personal strength, commitment to the cause and dignity. Furthermore, personal traits appeared within a context where heroes bear injustice. Lying at the heart of such presentations is the image of a nation fighting for freedom and independence, for the survival and preservation of national and religious identity. Consequently the textbooks were characterised by an antipathy and distrust toward other national and ethnic groups. This is particularly so in their treatment of World War 1 and World War 2 where pupils were taught that non-Slavs, especially Croats and Albanians, collaborated fully with the Nazis (Jantetovic, 2001). Jantetovic claims that during the Milošević regime: 'All old negative perceptions of non-Slav neighbours are retained, positive ones completely dropped, and some new, negative, ones added' (p.213). So powerful is this sense of patriotic and nationalistic fervour that sacrifice and death is a dominant message, freedom and liberation is the ultimate goal no matter what the cost.

Central in the presentation of historical knowledge was the aim of instilling in pupils a fear that the very existence of the Serbs as a people was constantly in danger and that Serbs live in a state of constant conflict or isolation from their neighbours. Anzulovic (1999) has claimed that the work of many Serbian historians and novelists '... propagated the thesis that Serbs, because of their goodness, have always been victims of others; that their enemies conspire to annihilate them; and that the time has come to act aggressively to avenge past wrongs and become the dominant power in the area'(p.7).

Stojanovic's(1999) analysis of Serbian history textbooks published during the early 1990s illustrates the point in revealing a highly patriotic, nationalist and xenophobic attitude to the conflict with neighbouring republics where the conception of history is ethno-centred, and where wars dominate the narrative. In the textbook for the 4th grade of the primary school the authors blame the break-up of Yugoslavia on the political machinations of neighbouring republics. 'After that nationalism and separatism in Yugoslavia strengthened with time. The Slovenian leadership led the way, especially since 1989, intimating the secession from Yugoslavia.' Children in the 4th grade of secondary school were taught that the Serbs were excluded from the Croatian Constitution and deprived of their rights. Therefore, 'Attacked and threatened, the Serbs had to protect themselves against new sufferings and destruction. The acceptance of the struggle imposed on them created among Serbs the conviction that they had the same right to be independent as others, and to decide on their fate themselves.' Stojanovic writes that 'Brimming with xenophobia, contempt and hatred for neighbouring nations, European and the world community, such texts fit well into the propaganda system which has made this war psychologically possible'(1999, p.4).

Creating National Memory: Continuity or Change?

The Milošević years had a substantial impact upon Serbia in social, economic and political terms; as far as education is concerned it left a system in tatters with a deep rooted cultural and ethnic antipathy remaining at the core of the Serbian history curriculum. Today the climate is changing radically and educational reforms currently being implemented in Serbia are asking fundamental questions regarding the shape, content and aims of the school curriculum based upon economic recovery, democratic participation and the international integration of Serbia. These changes are seen in Serbia as being highly significant and important (Commission for Curriculum Development, 2002). One important site for this development is the history curriculum (*The Guardian*, 12th September 2001; Janjetovic, 2001).

The Serbian government recognised the challenge that the state faced in coping with this, and many other, problems:

Following the victory of democracy, Serbia has entered a transition period. This transition to a market economy and the creation of a modern and law-abiding society is characteristic of all post-communist countries. A devastated economy, financial institutions, electric utility system, and a decline of basic moral and social values are just part of what the new authorities faced upon taking office in Serbia. (<http://www.serbia.sr.gov.yu/cms/view.php?id=400>)

One immediate response has been to engage in the fundamental re-configuration of the Serbian education system which had been '...the most badly damaged' (CCD, 2002, p.7; see also Ministry of Education and Sports, 2002). This involves the complete restructuring of a curriculum agreed to be overburdened by anachronistic content, a curriculum which paid insufficient regard to the development of skills and

concepts, where teaching was largely transmissional and where assessment was dominated by the learning of a body of unstructured and unrelated factual information.

A crucial element of these changes is the introduction of new history textbooks from September 2002, a process which is not without tensions and problems. What is clear from an analysis of those books currently in use is that they have removed the ideological and xenophobic hostility so evident during the 1980s and 1990s. A comparison of history textbooks in use now with those in use in 1994 reveals significant differences. While the titles of each text are the same, the authors are different. Yet, they are not without their problems in reflecting the 'new' Serbia and sensitivity to Serbia's recent past remains a difficult issue for educators. A new textbook for 13- and 14-year-old pupils in the *gimnazija* includes a final chapter on *Contemporary Problems of Yugoslavia* which discusses the wars in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo in two paragraphs. Absent, however, is any mention of Milošević. While the book discusses the elections of December 2000 which led to Milošević's downfall an analysis of his role in Serbia's history in the previous thirteen years is omitted.

Radoslav Petkovic, the director of the state-owned textbook publishing company, claims that '... the omission was an attempt to strip the country's recent history of any ideology. All that historians currently have are journalistic accounts and the memoirs of certain participants ... But these are not primary sources. Before having access to the relevant documents and archives, they would not be able to produce an unbiased view of history' (*Time Europe*, February 18th 2000). Snezana Knezevic, a history teacher at the Vladislav Ribnikar Elementary School in Belgrade, argues that 'The problem with leaving the latest chapter of Yugoslav history practically blank is that many of my less responsible colleagues may fill the gap as they see fit' (*Time Europe*, February 18th 2000).

In addition, the concept 'Serbhood', which existed before Milošević, has outlived his pragmatic use of it as a justification for territorial wars. A strong sense of patriotic and nationalist fervour remains an important element in the new history textbooks in Serbia where chapters on Serbian national and international history are kept separate from world history. For example, in the Serbian textbook, *Astoria za III razred gimnazije prirodno matematickog smera i IV razred gimnazije opsteg i drustveno-jezickog smera*, published in 2002, the thirteen page chapter on World War 1 in Serbia uses powerful and emotive language to describe events, issues and themes. A strong element of patriotic, national, pride is evident. For example:

After they were defeated the Austria-Hungarian army were in complete dsarray, and were running madly with great fear back towards the border.

A description by an escaping enemy soldier is included:

We could not imagine that the Serbs would be able to get behind our lines. we were running in panic; crossing the bridge, we were pushing and struggling to get away and escape.

A description of Austro-Hungarian tactics by a Serbian general:

The Austro-Hungarian military is committing bestial acts and brutality in our villages. Everywhere I can find a group killed, most of them children and women, some had been hung and some shot, some children as young as ten.

Reference is often made to the heroism of Serbian soldiers. In calling upon them to defend Belgrade, a Serbian general said to his troops:

The soldiers who are called upon to fight for the town of Belgrade must shine like a light. You are all soldiers and heroes and all must fight until we are dead. When we die we die with glory, long live Belgrade.

The textbook quotes a German general on the fall of Belgrade ordering:

... That all dead Serbian soldiers should be buried in one grave with the greatest honour and that a memorial be put on the grave memorial saying, 'Here lie Serbian heroes'.

These highly emotive descriptions of brave national heroes fighting and dying for their homeland against a larger enemy capable of committing atrocities against the civilian population remain central in Serbian interpretations of their past.

Conclusion

While the overt xenophobic nationalism of the Milošević era is gradually becoming a thing of the past, the 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1971, p.2) is powerfully institutionalised in Serbia and images of national sacrifice, myth and legend remain at the heart of Serbian national identity at the beginning of the 21st Century. The outcome of constructing social representation, historical memory and identity in the tradition of Serbian textbooks produces cultural silences. What is often absent is a plurality of discourses and narratives which might emerge from oppositional histories or what Apple calls 'mentioning' where '...limited and isolated elements of the history and culture of less powerful groups are included in the texts' (Apple, 1993, p.56). While this is most certainly being addressed in contemporary Serbia, in creating a sense of national identity the borders in people's minds are far more powerful than those drawn on maps as Serbia's attitudes towards the form of official knowledge sanctioned in history textbooks suggests.

Central in this debate is the need to ensure continuity between past and present, to maintain the cohesiveness of society and order based upon traditional social, political and ethical mores. State control over textbook content remains a key means of transmitting hegemonic and ideological control and is, therefore, an important site of political struggle. It is through controlling textbook content that government can legitimise a particular set of values which provides people with an intellectual and moral sense of direction, which seeks to unite them in the face of a fracturing social cohesion. At the heart of this endeavour remains the complex question of what it means to be Serbian at the beginning of the 21st Century.

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