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## Challenging Divisions Through Teacher Education and History Teaching: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina

LARISA KASUMAGIĆ-KAFEDŽIĆ\*<sup>1</sup> AND LEJLA MULALIĆ<sup>2</sup>

≈ Educating teachers to teach language, culture and history in a post-conflict country such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is still deeply divided and fragmented, implies enormous social and moral responsibilities. These endeavours represent continuous challenges where the processes of healing the wounds in such vulnerable situations, so deep and irreparable, are discussed and contextualised within the long-term social recovery in which the education of children and young people takes on a primary transformative role. The present paper examines the education policies and divisions in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the past twenty years, which reflect the segregation, politicisation and fragmentation in the post-war society. It also focuses on the role of educators in teaching for peace, antidiscrimination and intercultural understanding by addressing the issues of social exclusion, injustice, prejudice, privilege and violence across the curriculum. It problematises the construction and representation of historical and cultural knowledge, which is usually ethnocentric in orientation. Special emphasis is placed on the role of universities, i.e., university teachers and teacher educators, in promoting critical thinking and universal humanistic values among students in Bosnia and Herzegovina in general, and those studying at the English Department, University of Sarajevo, in particular. Drawing on the theories and resources of critical and intercultural pedagogy and peace education, the paper explores the possibilities of discussing stereotypes and prejudice with first-year BA students at the English Department within their Introduction to British Studies course, and with MA student teachers within their Interculturalism in Language Education course, which deals with peacebuilding and intercultural sensitivity in teaching English from a cultural perspective.

**Keywords:** ethnocentric education, stereotypes and prejudice, history teaching, teacher education, education for peace

1 \*Corresponding Author. University of Sarajevo - Faculty of Philosophy, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina; [larisa.kasumagic@ff.unsa.ba](mailto:larisa.kasumagic@ff.unsa.ba).

2 University of Sarajevo - Faculty of Philosophy, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## Problematiziranje razdeljenosti skozi izobraževanje učiteljev in poučevanje zgodovine: primer Bosne in Hercegovine

LARISA KASUMAGIĆ-KAFEDŽIĆ IN LEJLA MULALIĆ

~ Izobraževanje učiteljev za poučevanje jezika, kulture in zgodovine v postkonfliktni državi, kot je Bosna in Hercegovina, ki je še vedno globoko razdeljena in razdrobljena, pomeni ogromno družbeno in moralno odgovornost. Ta prizadevanja predstavljajo stalne izzive, pri katerih se o procesih celjenja tako globokih in nepopravljivih ran v tako ranljivih razmerah razpravlja in jih umešča v kontekst dolgoročne družbene obnove, v kateri vzgoja in izobraževanje otrok in mladih prevzema primarno transformativno vlogo. Ta članek raziskuje vzgojno-izobraževalne politike in razdeljenosti v Bosni in Hercegovini v zadnjih dvajsetih letih, ki odražajo segregacijo, politizacijo in razdrobljenost v povojni družbi. Osredinja se tudi na vlogo učiteljev pri poučevanju za mir, nediskriminacijo in medkulturno razumevanje z obravnavo vprašanj družbene izključenosti, nepravilnosti, predsodkov, privilegijev in nasilja pri vseh predmetih. Problematizira oblikovanje in predstavljanje zgodovinskega in kulturnega znanja, ki je običajno etnocentrično usmerjeno. Poseben poudarek je na vlogi univerz, tj. visokošolskih učiteljev, tudi tistih, ki poučujejo na pedagoških programih, pri spodbujanju kritičnega mišljenja in univerzalnih humanističnih vrednot med študenti v Bosni in Hercegovini na splošno, še posebej pa med študenti, ki študirajo na Oddelku za angleščino Univerze v Sarajevu. Na podlagi teorij in virov s področja kritične in medkulturne pedagogike ter vzgoje za mir članek raziskuje možnosti razpravljanja o stereotipih in predsodkih s študenti prvega letnika dodiplomskega študija na Oddelku za angleščino v okviru predmeta Uvod v britanske študije in z magistrskimi študenti, bodočimi učitelji, v okviru predmeta Medkulturnost v jezikovnem izobraževanju, ki obravnava vzpostavljanje miru in medkulturno občutljivost pri poučevanju angleščine s kulturnega vidika.

**Ključne besede:** etnocentrično izobraževanje, stereotipi in predsodki, poučevanje zgodovine, izobraževanje učiteljev, izobraževanje za mir

## Introduction

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is a post-communist, conflict-affected and fragile country that has continued to work through a large number of socioeconomic and political challenges for almost three decades after the end of the deadliest and most devastating war on the European continent since the end of World War II. After the breakup of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the war in BiH (1992–1995) deepened ethnic divisions among the three main ethnic groups – Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs – and left a legacy of massive war trauma, polarisation and segregation that continues to impact society at all levels. As such, BiH is particularly vulnerable and its post-war development is still seen as paralysed, stagnated and regressed. The post-war governmental structures in BiH have enabled the emergence of three conflicting, irreconcilable and often incompatible curricular approaches and school systems, which foster three ethn-national world views among youth and new generations (Perry, 2015), who are left without a civic identity that could embrace all of them regardless of their language, their ethnicity or their religious affiliation. BiH is divided into two entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (predominantly Bosniak and Croat), which consists of ten cantons, each with its own Ministry or Department of Education; and Republika Srpska (predominantly Serb). There is also the self-governing administrative unit of the Brčko District. Each entity has its own Ministry of Education and the school curriculum often reflects the ethnic composition of the community such that the national group of subjects (mother language, history, civics, religious education) can significantly differ.

Unsurprisingly, it is not only post-conflict BiH that faces this reality; many conflict-affected societies and education systems with painful histories of massive human rights abuses and social wounds and traumas are grappling with similar efforts to find appropriate educational responses, frameworks and approaches in their post-conflict contexts. The tragic realities of the ongoing wars and armed conflicts, political divides and social polarisations, marketisation and technocratic approaches to education and learning, poverty and other major crises throughout the world create high levels of insecurity, loneliness, mental health problems, isolation and human suffering, which particularly affects the wellbeing of children and youth all around the globe. The UNESCO Report (2023) states that “in 2022 there were 33 active armed conflicts which were reported globally and the number of forcibly displaced people passed 100 million for the first time. In total, since the adoption of the United Nations Charter in 1946, over 250 armed conflicts have occurred across the globe” (p. 4).

Modelling an education system to respond to these different challenges in the vulnerable societies of today requires the full determination, in-depth rethinking and holistic vision of the education policymakers, whereby the role of schools and education reforms is framed in the perspectives of social justice and peace, as well as critical pedagogies that challenge inequalities and discrimination.

The main goal of the present paper is to discuss the role of the self-conscious engagement of university teachers who work within a deeply divisive education system and who advocate for the promotion of critical approaches to learning and reclaiming humanistic values for local and global responsibilities of social relevance among students in BiH in general, and those studying at the English Department, University of Sarajevo, in particular. These approaches are seen as critical to make small inroads and undertake activities in fragile and conflict-affected educational communities where “responses may be more sporadic, less theorised and less coordinated to engage with overarching needs” (Millican, 2018, p. 20). More generally, the goal of the paper is to underscore the importance of peacebuilding through the education system, which needs to systemically and structurally advocate for alternative pedagogical strategies and approaches that address the issues of divisiveness and polarisation. Aliu and Kačaniku (2023) indicate that “the changing role of teachers has called for a new paradigm of the teaching profession that recognises the potential of teachers to lead for supporting school development and change” (p. 37). The authors of the present paper hope to contribute to this discussion from their specific educational and cultural context, thereby enhancing the general understanding of the role of teachers in creating democratic and peaceful classrooms.

Drawing on the tenets of critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2020; Phipps & Guilherme, 2004) and the concept of border-pedagogy (Giroux, 2005), the paper presents two examples from the classroom, contextualised within the English Department of the University of Sarajevo, with the aim of demonstrating the relevance of teaching peace and overcoming divisiveness in post-conflict societies such as BiH.

The fact that both authors of this paper are to a great extent defined by their experience of war in BiH – one of them living through the siege of Sarajevo as a high school student and falling in love with literature and history in the face of constant shelling, and the other living through the war in Zenica as a high school graduate and as a refugee in Germany for almost a year, and shortly after the war joining an NGO to help war-traumatised children cope with their experiences – enables both of them to use the precious yet subversive potential of personal experience in university classroom teaching. This lends

authenticity, immediacy and relevance to their teaching, and privileges the individual over any other form of identity and responsibility. Acknowledging the importance of critical reflection in the classroom, it seems imperative to create a safe space for students to feel encouraged to reconsider their views on obviously shifting concepts of (ethnic) majority and minority, while recognising the notion of “us versus them” as an artificial construct.

### **Theoretical background: Critical pedagogy and intercultural language teaching as key pillars in education for peace**

Although rooted in the context of the infiltration of neoliberal capitalist ideology into every pore of society in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s, Giroux’s theoretical framework of critical pedagogy is highly applicable to other periods and contexts. This is primarily due to the fact that “critical pedagogy as a moral and political practice does more than emphasize the importance of critical analysis and moral judgments. It also provides tools to unsettle common sense assumptions, theorize matters of self and social agency, and engage the ever-changing demands and promises of a democratic policy” (Giroux, 2020, p. 1). Likewise, rather than being an “a priori method”, critical pedagogy is “the outcome of particular struggles and is always related to the specificity of particular contexts, students, communities, and available resources” (Giroux, 2020, p. 2). The pressure of neoliberal capitalism to view education as a sort of job training leading to (personal) economic growth and better prospects in a highly competitive job market has gradually become visible in BiH in the last two decades, i.e., once it emerged from the devastating 1992–1995 war. Hence, the twin challenge of neoliberal capitalism and ethno-nationalism has proved to be crucial for the development of educational paradigms in post-conflict BiH. Critical pedagogy envisions classrooms that are not “reduced to a transmission model of teaching and limited to the propagation of a culture of conformity and the passive absorption of knowledge” (Giroux, 2020, p. 3). Instead, it aims to provide “students with alternative modes of teaching, social relations, and imagining rather than those that merely support the *status quo*” (Giroux, 2020, p. 4). In addition to these aspects, one of the most relevant missions of critical pedagogy is to draw attention to the interplay of knowledge and power. For students to become aware of these relationships, they should be encouraged to connect the classroom with the social, cultural and political contexts in which the process of teaching and learning is taking place.

Critical pedagogy of foreign language education is a new paradigm shift in language education, in which intercultural communication implies “a critical

use of language(s), a critical approach to one's own and other cultural backgrounds and a critical view of intercultural interaction" (Phipps & Guilherme, 2004, p. 3). There are several important concepts in relation to the intercultural approach to teaching. The first is that of *dissent*, with which students deal through "critical cultural awareness towards the Self and the Other and through honest and balanced negotiation" (Phipps & Guilherme, 2004, p. 3). Specifically, rather than nourishing "harmony and intercultural consensus" (Phipps & Guilherme, 2004, p. 3) as the only legitimate pedagogical goal, dissent provides immense possibilities to develop a sense of the Self and the Other in what is a very contradictory world. The second concept is that of (*critical*) *reflection* of students, which should be promoted instead of "the memorisation and interpretation of facts and [...] cultural generalisations or even stereotyping" (Phipps & Guilherme, 2004, p. 3). The notion of *difference* is the third integral element critical for in-depth understanding in an intercultural approach to teaching, since it endorses multiculturalism and intercultural values. Crucial for difference is Giroux's concept of *border pedagogy* (2005) because borders or margins, whether cultural, political or social, give rise to a sense of difference. Thus, critical pedagogy becomes inseparable from border-crossing as it "signals forms of transgression in which existing borders forged in domination can be challenged and redefined" (Giroux, 2005, p. 20). Furthermore, both students and teachers become "border-crossers in order to understand otherness in its own terms, and to further create borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power" (Giroux 2005, p. 20).

These concepts and critical discussions of education could also be seen as framed within the larger field of peace education, which is the umbrella term of the "what" and "why" of peace teaching and learning. In communities emerging from histories of mass violence with ethnocentric approaches to education, peace education aims to "lay the foundations for healing from historical harms, ensuring their non-repetition, restoring trust among former enemies and building a stronger basis for a shared future" (Kasumagić-Kafedžić & Clarke-Habibi, 2023, p. 8). Since it is seen as only one aspect of the much wider project of "peacebuilding through education", it contributes to the recognition of the structural issues of educational governance, curriculum, access to all, quality and provision, which all play a very important role in shaping peace and conflict in one society (Novelli et al., 2015; Smith, 2010), where the interconnectedness of critical pedagogy and an intercultural approach to language teaching infuses peacebuilding values in teaching goals and fosters the development of education for peace.

## **Classroom initiatives in the context of divisiveness and ethnocentric education**

Many transitional societies, such as BiH, retain educational institutions that are deeply divided and segregated, and they often “mirror broader socio-political norms that are still in place”, which is “particularly true of cases where conflict or repression has had an identity-related dimension” (Duthie & Ramírez-Barat, 2018, p. 22). Following the war, BiH’s education system became highly segregated along ethnic divisions, especially in schools and neighbourhoods that remained physically segregated along ethnic lines. This is illustrated by the phenomenon of “two schools under one roof”, which is still present in many communities across the country. While this type of segregation “can be a reflection of identity and other social divisions, it can also be part of an explicit policy of privileging one group over another, and the persistence of segregated schools in the public system can contribute to reinforcing divisions and exacerbating tensions – by perpetuating stereotypes and prejudices – and hindering progress made by other initiatives designed to promote acknowledgment and build civic trust” (Duthie & Ramírez-Barat, 2018, p. 22). In the words of Giroux, numerous borders are continually installed, thus creating new teaching and learning contexts.

Even though BiH has committed to assuming responsibility for carrying out reforms of its compulsory public education system(s), through which society transmits values to its children and youth, many of the initiated reforms have stagnated and so-called “interim solutions” have become permanent (Perry, 2014). The monoperspective paradigm in the education system in BiH, with the “us versus them” narrative and a focus on one perspective and one worldview as the only “truth” (Perry, 2015), continues to shape the educational realities within the classroom. Likewise, the curriculum still seems to be dominated by the use of highly prescriptive content divided into separate subjects, frontal teacher-centred teaching methodology, a conservative worldview that favours conformism, and passive uncritical consumption of knowledge, while religion is represented as the exclusive domain of a single collective and its important determining factor (Perry, 2015; Soldo et al., 2017).

The most vulnerable groups in a system based on a monoperspective and ethnocentric approach to education are always children and young people, who are the victims of the structures from the past created and maintained by adults. Giroux notes that the experience of children and young people is crucial for understanding “the relationship between power and the lived realities shaped by material relations of power”. Accordingly, “educators need a new language in which young people are not detached from politics but become

central to any transformative notion of pedagogy conceived in terms of social and public responsibility” (Giroux, 2004b, p. 7).

In the sections below, we provide two examples of specific pedagogical approaches to monoperspectivity and ethnocentrism in education aimed at addressing the issues of segregation, discrimination, social exclusion and conflict. These examples are illustrations of socially responsible classrooms that focus on teaching peace in a deeply divided socio-political context.

The first example contextualises the teaching of peace at the Department of English Language and Literature of the University of Sarajevo by looking at the approaches to peace and conflict in educational contexts prior to university, in order to gain a better understanding of the knowledge and values students bring to the classrooms. First-year BA students of the said department take a course on British history and culture called Introduction to British Studies, in which a significant amount of time is dedicated to Britain’s regional identities. It is here that students encounter the story of “the Troubles” in Northern Ireland (for more details see, for example, Gibney, 2017), most of them for the first time. Given the common timeframe of the final years of the Troubles and the 1992–1995 war in BiH, as well as the prominence of ethnic and religious divides in both countries, interesting insights can be obtained from examining how these issues are treated in the classroom. Furthermore, drawing on the analogies between BiH and Northern Ireland, as well as the tenets of critical pedagogy, the paper will present a specific example of teaching practice in order to reflect on the power of stereotypes and prejudice in fragile societies, as well as the possibility of dismantling their harmful impact and transforming it into learning opportunities.

The second example examines the teaching methods and approaches employed in the curriculum of the teacher education programme for English language teachers at the same English Department, which was reformed in 2008 as part of the Bologna reform processes by the establishment of a distinct teacher education master’s programme for the first time in the history of the department. One of the modules in the Interculturalism in Language Education course, which is integral to the teacher education programme at the English Department, is dedicated to researching and learning about critical and peace pedagogies aimed at empowering students to recognise and address social issues in society. Students are encouraged and instructed to use literary and historical examples to guide them through their understanding of the present-day experiences of social injustice, segregation, polarisation and racism. In the treatment of the pre-service education or professional development curriculum, the role of teachers is not sufficiently explored, which is why it is critically important to acknowledge the fact that teachers may be expected to



play a range of roles as both agents and subjects of peacebuilding in conflict-affected contexts, which are some of the reflections illustrated in this section.

The authors of the present paper seek to illustrate the fact that self-conscious engagement in teaching is creating new cultural spaces by offering alternative pedagogical strategies within teacher development in dealing with contested narratives and sensitive topics in university classrooms, which are seen as “communal places that enhance the likelihood of collective effort in creating and sustaining a learning community” (hooks, 1994, p. 8). For this reason, classrooms are places in which these theoretical concepts should be subjected to the test of practical teaching in a particular socio-historical context.

### **Educational contexts prior to university: Bosnia and Herzegovina and Northern Ireland**

Forić-Plasto and Blagojević-Dujković (2023) analysed history curricula and textbooks in primary and secondary education in BiH in order to ascertain whether values of peace were promoted in the way that was envisaged by the relevant education reforms.

Their analysis of 14 different primary school history curricula and textbooks used in both BiH entities, including the cantons and the Brčko District, demonstrates that the representation of war throughout history is mostly reduced to depersonalised statistical data, factual accounts and the obscure language of politics, all of which fails to enable pupils to develop a sense of empathy for the ordinary people on all sides whose lives are devastated by war. Furthermore, wars are represented as inevitable and almost integral to the struggle for freedom and homeland, which is especially valid for the 1992–1995 war. The focus is on the suffering of only one ethnic group (Bosniaks, Croats or Serbs), rather than the destructive impact of war on all people, while the values of peace are largely ignored (Forić-Plasto & Blagojević-Dujković, 2023, pp. 172–173). The situation in high school textbooks and curricula is not significantly different. The emphasis is on reproductive learning, while references to peace are made only in the context of the work of the United Nations, thus limiting the discussion of peace to a factual account of peace organisations, rather than exploring peace as a universal value (Forić-Plasto & Blagojević-Dujković, 2023, p. 175). However, it is important to note that these conclusions are based on the available documents (curricula and text-books) and therefore do not take into account the efforts, creativity and courage of individual teachers to explore the margins of curricula and approach the prescribed units in ways that promote students’ skills of critical and multiple-perspective thinking.

The story of Northern Ireland reveals interesting parallels with post-conflict BiH. Following the period of violent conflict known as “the Troubles” (1968–1998) between Protestant unionists who identified with the UK and Catholic nationalists, most of whom wanted unification with the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland remains a divided society in spite of the peace process that resulted in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (for more on the history of the conflict, see, for example, Gibney, 2017).

Religious separation is at the very core of education in Northern Ireland, so most children attend Protestant or Catholic schools. In 2011, a modest percentage of children attended integrated schools funded by the government (Smith, 2011, p. 57). As Smith (2011) explains, the concept of an inclusive civic identity is a contested issue in education, unlike national identity, which is based on binary oppositions and patriotic models of thinking (p. 66). However, the prospects of integrated education have changed for the better in the meantime, and Gallagher (2022) claims that support for integrated education is so high that in July 2022 “the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland announced additional funding of £1.9 million to support schools wishing to become integrated” (para. 2). However, Protestant and Catholic churches still insist on maintaining their own schools and have been unwilling to have their role in education reduced to make room for new approaches to integrated schooling (Gallagher, 2022, para. 4). This is an unambiguous example of the interplay of knowledge and power, comparable to the strong connection between political elites and education in BiH, which constitutes one of the main sites of contention according to critical pedagogy.

When it comes to teaching the controversial history of the Troubles, a survey of Northern Ireland’s secondary schools reveals that “the vast majority of Catholic schools teach this unit, which covers the years 1965–98”, while “just under half of ‘Protestant’ schools – those with a Protestant denomination or controlled by the state rather than by the Catholic church – teach the 1920–49 period instead” (Abrams, 2020, para. 4). According to Davies, “both units avoid controversy” (Abrams, 2020, para. 8):

Actually, there are some Catholics who have no idea what the Protestant story is. There’s a really positive Protestant story to tell: you could say it’s about freedom of thought, freedom of religion. They could point out that some of the earliest advocates of Irish independence were Protestant. Instead, we have an eviscerated, inoffensive curriculum that occupies the middle ground and which is not recognisable to people when they go home and talk about their history. (Abrams, 2020, para. 10)

The report written by the Centre for Children's Rights at Queen's University concludes the following:

Participants in all groups in the study were aware of the limitations of accounts shared with young people with concerns related to partiality or 'bias' linked most strongly to family accounts, but also to social media and accounts within the community. The potential to glorify or romanticise the past was a key concern where children were not included in discussions about the impact of the Troubles/Conflict in communities and families. Additionally, participants noted that selective or partial accounts may perpetuate sectarian views that can reinforce a divisive mind-set between communities across the generations. (McAlister et al., 2021, p. 9)

As well as sanitising uncomfortable truths about the past, a biased or selective approach to the contested history of the conflicts in BiH and Northern Ireland, which share many similarities in spite of their different historical backgrounds, fails to engage young people in a dialogue. Quite the contrary, such uncritical readings of the past, along with the lack of awareness of the necessity of reclaiming universal values of peace, only entrench young people deeper in their national, ethnic and religious myths, without allowing for a multifaceted inclusive narrative that primarily requires them to confront their own beliefs and question the truths propagated at school and within their families and communities. These contexts call for Giroux's border-crossing in order to lay bare the scaffolding behind the artificial mental borders and gain a deeper understanding of the processes of construction of ethnic and religious identities.

### **Teaching practice to reflect on the power of stereotypes and prejudice**

The familiarity of the notion of a divided society makes the story of Northern Ireland particularly valuable teaching content for first-year BA students of English in BiH. The course addresses an audience fresh from high school and still under the influence of controversial government policies on the history curriculum, especially the teaching of national history. The confluence of these factors in the context of British history and culture classes at the University of Sarajevo makes it possible to challenge monolithic perceptions of history, on the one hand, and mistrust or indifference towards the study of the past, on the other, by introducing students to the diversity of histories and cultures of the British Isles, while, at the same time, indirectly touching upon identity issues inherent to the complex history of BiH.

The specific example we would like to discuss is the concept of bystanding in a conflict based on the Corrymeela publication *The Choices We Made: Bystanding and Conflict in Northern Ireland* (Murphy & Pettis, 2020). This publication is an Educator's Guide developed with the aim of exploring human agency in times of conflict, not in order to instil a sense of guilt in those who did nothing to prevent injustice, but to make learning about history more meaningful for students (Murphy & Pettis, 2020, p. 6). Meaningful learning here refers to the fact that history is typically seen by students as either irrelevant and "boring", due to the dominance of instant experiences rooted in "the now" best exemplified by the use of social media; alternatively, it is perceived as problematic due to the uncomfortable questions it raises about the past. The guide consists of six personal stories, also available as short videos, and appropriate teaching strategies and activities to be used in class. Our students read the story entitled "He just crumpled" and watch the video where the story is narrated by the actual protagonist of the events, while the person appearing in the video is a professional actress with the fictional name Bronagh. It is about a Catholic woman driving in a so-called black taxi in West Belfast with her two sons in 1988. They are sharing the taxi with another man and his son. During the ride, Bronagh witnesses the shooting of a British soldier in the street. The man in the taxi is literally cheering, intoxicated with delight. Bronagh does nothing but remains speechless and ridden with a sense of guilt.

I should have done something. I should've got out and said to that young boy, "Are you all right?" Or even an act of contrition into his ear, which as a Catholic we're taught to do. But I didn't, I... I just went on. (Murphy & Pettis, 2020, p. 20)

Bronagh is relieved to learn on the news later that day that the soldier has been wounded but not killed. Nevertheless, she is haunted by the notion that she unwillingly participated in the gruesome act of violence. She tries to talk about her feelings with her sister, but encounters only a sobering reminder that she should mind the boundaries that clearly set the enemy outside the domain of empathy.

Our students are introduced to the socio-political and historical context of the Troubles before watching the video. They are also reminded to listen to each other carefully and respectfully, allow for differences of opinion, and feel no pressure to share with the rest of the class ideas and stories they are uncomfortable with, as the underlying notion of teaching sensitive topics is that everyone should feel safe. The teaching approach is aimed at understanding the causes of the conflict and recognising the extent to which ethnic and

religious stereotypes and prejudice, in this case among Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, contributed to the actual unfolding of the historical events. The power of ideas about the (ethnic, religious, racial, gender) Other as an enemy is foregrounded as the driving force of conflict. Likewise, the role of power centres such as the state and the church in creating and disseminating stereotypes and prejudice is highlighted and discussed. The goal is to demystify historical events as something inevitable and decided upon somewhere else, far away from ordinary people, and to develop an understanding that people are instrumental in creating, nourishing and abusing ideas that directly contribute to historical developments such as conflict, either by being part of centres of power or by uncritically accepting the narratives created by them.

In order to contextualise the teaching of the Northern Ireland conflict within BiH, students are encouraged to identify similarities between the two countries in terms of the power of negative perceptions, i.e., stereotypes and prejudice, of ethnic groups different from our own, as well as the nature of collective identities. This approach to potentially controversial issues is largely in line with what Judith L. Pace calls “contained risk-taking”, which is characterised by “careful calibration of risk” and “a compromise between openness and safety” (Pace, 2019, p. 229), so as to minimise the risk of inflammatory discourse that may accompany the creation of an open climate in the classroom (Pace, 2019, p. 230).

The story/video “He just crumpled” offers numerous teaching and learning possibilities in exploring the meaningfulness of war and violence as a legitimate response to diversity of opinion, religion and ethnicity. The shooting of a young man, the ecstatic approval of one witness, and the searing sense of guilt and shame of another witness unequivocally underline the power of the ideas on which we base our national, ethnic and religious identities. For students in BiH, the concept of Northern Irish Protestant and Catholic are no longer abstract and related to a far-away conflict. Quite the contrary, they often identify the power of the media in constructing a (biased) image of certain groups and communities; they also recognise the importance of family and community in transmitting these ideas and the (unused) potential of education to challenge these perceptions. Students of the English Department come from different parts of BiH and their experiences of the education system and its role in forming identities vary, which is why the possibility of encountering different stories and attitudes and having their own views challenged is particularly important. The concept of difference, which is integral to critical pedagogy, thereby becomes a site of constant negotiation for students in their attempt to critically examine the construction of identities.

The part of Bronagh's story that is suitable for discussion of these complex notions is the final part, in which she reduces the lofty patriotic and political slogans to a simple difference between life and death for the young British soldier on the streets of West Belfast in the midst of the Troubles. Although nominally she was a "bystander" in this particular situation, her true agency comes to life once she unmistakably recognises the absurdity of divisions as "natural" and unquestionable categories. She agreed to share her story with the activists at Corrymeela, thus setting an example for her sons as well as for the many other people who read her story. In doing so, she became an upstander, an active doer rather than the passive and frightened observer she initially imagined herself to be. Students do not immediately react to this part of her narrative because it does not have the dynamics of an action film visible in the shooting scene. Some of them insist there was nothing she could do and fail to notice the potential of her moral development towards the end of the story and the necessity of self-reflection in the face of ready-made perceptions and monolithic discourses on identity. This may cause dissent in the classroom, which should not be stifled to achieve uniformity of opinion but, on the contrary, should be used as a learning opportunity to deconstruct defeatist interpretations of Bronagh's story centred around the inevitability of war (in some parts of the world) and the powerlessness of ordinary people in the face of history. Careful facilitation of dialogue and an analysis of diverse resources such as images, murals, personal stories and text-books foregrounds the harmfulness of stereotypes and prejudice and the necessity of dismantling them. It is here that parallels to the challenges of peace and reconciliation in BiH can be made in order to make the learning and teaching of British history more meaningful and helpful in making ethical and socially responsible decisions outside of the classroom.

### **Teachers as agents of peace**

In the curriculum of the teacher education programme for English language teachers at the English Department of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Sarajevo, special emphasis is put on an intercultural approach to language-culture didactics, a process in which it becomes critically relevant for student teachers to work on their own professional identity, educational values, beliefs and assumptions by critically reflecting on their intercultural sensitivity. The teacher education programme dedicates one full course to Interculturalism in Language Education, which offers new strategies, new goals and new practices in teacher education. The major shift is the emphasis on teaching as transformative and relation-based negotiated learning, thus moving away from

the emphasis on knowledge transmission and rote memorisation, towards critical pedagogy and intercultural learning (Kasumagić-Kafedžić, 2017, p. 49).

One of the modules in the Interculturalism in Language Education Course is dedicated to researching and learning about the *Facing History & Ourselves* methodology (<https://www.facinghistory.org/>), which aims to empower students by using literary and historical examples to guide them through the understanding of present-day experiences of social injustice, intolerance and racism. Two documentaries, “Eye of the Storm” and “A Class Divided” are used to discuss the role of the teacher Jane Elliott, who used a classroom experiment in 1970 to teach her third-graders a lesson in discrimination. The themes of prejudice, victims and victimisers, as well as human behaviour and the moral obligations of teachers, are contextualised for post-war society in BiH, and the student teachers are invited to critically reflect on the strategies, methods and activities used by Ms Eliot and compare them to the methods for teaching contested issues in classrooms in BiH of today. The applicability and adequacy of certain methods and strategies are also critically evaluated.

Such approaches to teacher preparation are critical in conflict-affected societies, since they embrace the understanding that schools, as future workplaces of teachers, should be seen as “cultural areas where diverse ideological and social forms are in constant struggle” (Pennycook, 1990, p. 24, as cited in Crookes, 2010). In such an environment, critical pedagogy, as the underlying pedagogical philosophy of teacher educators, would seek “to understand and critique the historical and socio-political context of schooling and to develop pedagogical practices that aim not only to change the nature of schooling but also the wider society” (Pennycook, 1990, p. 24, as cited in Crookes, 2010). In this sense, the way society decides to educate future teachers and prepare them for their work in classrooms becomes a critical stepping stone of the university pre-service teacher education curriculum, which should support future teachers to view language, culture or history education as an important component of constructing their own teacher identities. Teacher cognition and teacher conceptualisation of how they perceive the goals of education and schooling in conflict-affected education systems are rarely given the deserved representation in the literature and the teacher education curriculum. While teachers “are usually implied rather than addressed specifically” (Horner et al., 2015, as cited in Clarke-Habibi, 2018, p. 3) in the treatment of the pre-service education or professional development curriculum, it is critical to acknowledge that they “may be *expected* to play a range of roles as both agents and subjects of peacebuilding in conflict-affected contexts: from technocrats to reflexive practitioners, as well as agents of transformation, democratisation, healing, peace and/or resistance”

(Horner et al., 2015, as cited in Clarke-Habibi, 2018, p. 3) and “yet, little corresponding attention is given to the practical, social and personal challenges they face in striving to fulfil these role expectations” (Clarke-Habibi, 2018, p. 3).

It is therefore critical, as illustrated in the examples of the course on Interculturalism in Language Education, to support student teachers in the self-reflection process to understand how they assess their experiences in promoting the values of peace and nonviolence in their teaching, and how their own past experiences have shaped the conceptions and worldviews that they would like to integrate into their teaching.

In one of the reflection assignments of the Interculturalism in Language Education Course, a first-year master’s student teacher reflected (Kasumagić-Kafedžić, 2017, p. 54):

A deep-seated anger is never a solution, especially in educational contexts. As an educator, I want my students to develop their own identity, not the assumed identity of their environment. I want them to critically think of their own culture and fight the stereotypes and labels they have been served throughout their life, labels pertaining to them or the people from other cultures. The best way to achieve this goal is to introduce cultural and intercultural activities and workshops into curricula, establish intercultural school clubs, or develop inter-ethnic school cooperation. Students must be shown both mirrors and windows of their culture; mirrors to see themselves as a part of social change in their culture, and windows to look through them into the yard of a different culture. I want to be there to help my students open that window.

In this course, students are given different assignments to critically reflect on their own social and political roles in the post-conflict society and education system, by designing their method and framework of an intercultural approach to English as a Foreign Language specific to the local needs and environment. In a different task, another student teacher reflected (Kasumagić-Kafedžić, 2017, p. 55):

In order to apply intercultural pedagogy, we first need to “find and meet” our interculturality inside ourselves and dare to open our minds and hearts to something new and different. We need to learn not to be judgmental and to allow the time to really meet someone. I believe I have been lucky enough to have lived in two culturally different parts of Bosnia. When you live and attend primary and secondary school in one place, you get accustomed to a certain perspective and attitudes which form your personality. Not being exposed to the “other” you are not even prepared to live with



those others and you have no possibility to gain it because you are told that they are a minority and they should be the ones who are supposed to assimilate into your prevailing and dominant culture.

The observations made by the student teachers indicate the importance of initiating and using non-judgmental reflection to interrogate and challenge our own perceptions and values in teaching, which will then inform the decisions we make in the classroom.

Since “much of peace education literature continues to assume that *prescribed* peace education curricula translate neatly into *taught* curricula; that professional teachers function as abstracted *conduits* of peacebuilding, uninfluenced by their own conflict-affected pasts or the prevailing collective narratives; and that post-conflict peace educators are *at ease* with visions of a reconciled future in their own violence-affected society” (Clarke-Habibi, 2018, p. 3), it is of utmost importance that future teachers recognise the risks and challenges of leaving the safety nets of university classroom discussions and acknowledge all of the prospects and fears of addressing constructively and openly some of the contested issues in their own school communities and in connection to their country’s violent and turbulent past.

One of the key learning outcomes that the teacher educator in this course underscores is that the teacher’s understanding of peace and social justice should be founded on acknowledging the ways in which history has shaped their own positionality in education, or in the words of Giroux (2005, p. 25) “student experience has to be analyzed as part of a broader democratic politics of voice and difference”. The just assessment of lessons focusing on language, history, culture and literature should be embedded in the teacher education curriculum and analysed through the lenses of peace pedagogies.

## Conclusion

The idea of the transformative role of education in addressing the issues of divisiveness explored in this paper brings to the fore Giroux’s concept of “educated hope”, understood not only as a policy, but also as “a pedagogical and performative practice that provides the foundation for enabling human beings to learn about their potential as moral and civic agents” (2004a, p. 38). This concept best captures the essence of subversive self-reflexive teaching of the sensitive topics discussed throughout this paper, as it brings together personal experience/responsibility and “a progressive sense of social change” along with the different futures enacted by it (Giroux, 2004a, pp. 38–39).

University teachers, like all other educators, are not considered neutral figures, devoid of history or identity, or devoid of power or peacebuilding agency. They are positioned socially and politically in relation to the conflict legacy in their localities. BiH can be seen as a locality and place defined as a borderland between East and West. Such positionality can also imply infinite possibilities, both of conflict and creative cultural exchange, which is why the lives of people in BiH are always shaped by the burden of history, but also blessed with an enlightening plurality. As Stradling notes, our personal identities are always in a state of becoming, while our national identities are continually shaped by shared experiences, both admirable and shameful (Stradling, 2001, p. 151). Likewise, “collective memory may be a social ‘fact’, yet individuals have minds and emotions that are part of the narratives constructed; all these need to be constantly acknowledged and interrogated” (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2017, p. 148).

Teaching foreign languages, cultures and historical events requires the teacher to consistently, systematically and methodically pursue coherent teaching strategies and guide student learning as appropriate in the given context. In doing so, teachers need to work on their own professional identity and educational values, while acknowledging the impact of their prior learning and experience. Likewise, critical pedagogy helps students of languages, culture and history to deconstruct preconceived notions and to promote the transformation of the self, by looking back and connecting previous experiences to present realities, thus constructing new meaning. The process of negotiating between the demanding content of a course and the unmapped territories of our personal experience is not always pleasurable and may sometimes turn into moments of heavy silence or unease, but even these moments of quiet conflict can be precious learning opportunities for students and teachers alike.

The role of universities, as institutions educating new generations of citizens and shaping the values for local and global responsibilities, becomes crucial in countries and education systems affected by painful histories. The impact of post-war realities on universities in BiH is further complicated by the so-called “neoliberal project” or the tendency to downsize “unprofitable” disciplines or fields, such as the humanities and social sciences, as they are not adaptable to the “free market as the primary mechanism for all human exchange and interaction” (Kenway et al., 2015, p. 262). One aspect of this socio-political trend that is particularly relevant for BiH is the fact that disciplines labelled as unpopular and unmarketable are the rare sites of resistance at universities, as they “help give voice to subaltern knowledges and people”, thus enacting “dangerous knowledges” (Kenway et al., 2015, p. 263).

Universities are not isolated islands in the political, structural and social web of changes and daily realities. “When reforming norms and institutions within education systems, it is equally important to address aspects of segregation among different groups, a common structural legacy of past human rights violations” (Duthie & Ramírez-Barat, 2018, p. 22).

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## Biographical note

**LARISA KASUMAGIĆ-KAFEDŽIĆ**, PhD, is an associate professor at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo. She is a 2003-04 Cornell University Humphrey Fellow Alumni, and 2022-23 Cornell University Fulbright Visiting Scholar Alumni. Her research interests are in the fields of intercultural and peace education, reflective and critical pedagogy, language and culture learning, teacher development, and action research in language classrooms. She is the founder and president of the Peace Education Hub which was established at the University of Sarajevo in early 2020.

**LEJLA MULALIĆ**, PhD, is an associate professor in the field of British literature and culture at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Her main areas of research are: contemporary British and specifically Scottish literature, vulnerability studies and ethics of care, historical novel, and the role of literature, history, and culture studies in peace education.