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BOOK REVIEWS

From Class to Identity: The Politics of Education Reform in Former Yugoslavia, by Jana Bacevic. Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2014, pp. 235.

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The debate on the nexus between education, conflict and peace has received growing attention in the past two decades. Scholars such as Bush and Saltarelli (2000) have shed light on the ‘two faces of education’ (i.e., education can prevent war but also foster conflict), delving into its multifaceted relationship with social (in)justice and social change in peacebuilding (Novelli and Smith 2011). At the same time, research has drawn attention on the globalization of education policies and the role of international organizations (Verger et al. 2012; Dale 2000).

Jana Bacevic’s *From Class to Identity: The Politics of Education Reform in Former Yugoslavia* is an ambitious, interdisciplinary and empirically-grounded work that makes an important contribution to the existing scholarship. Bacevic moves away from the ‘education gospel’ that has informed much of the policy and scholarly assumptions about education in the post-Yugoslav region (p. 1). She does so by problematizing the structuring role of education, both as a cause and consequence of social and political dynamics in the post-Yugoslav

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space. The study aims to contribute to the understanding of the role of education in social, economic and political processes that led to the break-up of Former Yugoslavia (chapter 2); the continuing ethnic and social fragmentation of the region in the aftermath of the Yugoslav wars (chapters 3 and 4); most importantly, however, it helps us unravel the interaction between education and reform policies, aiming to provide new insights on the ways in which “education can contribute to emancipation without necessarily reproducing the existing social divisions or creating new ones.” (p. 3)

The book’s ambition is fourfold, as it is deployed at the theoretical, methodological, empirical and policy level. While incorporating some of the theoretical approaches that have highlighted the reproductive role of education for social and class inequalities, the analysis, however, seeks to capture the more nuanced, dynamic and ultimately constitutive role of education in shaping, defining, changing and challenging political subjectivities, group identities, demands and social struggles in the region. Dichotomous arguments such as good vs. bad education are overshadowed by the consideration of why and how education can be both a reproductive force and a socially transformative and emancipatory tool.

Bacevic tries to overcome the categories of nationalism, communist legacy, conflict, European integration and modernization that to different degrees have characterized the study and practice of post-Yugoslav education policy-making. The analysis sheds light on a double shift in discursive emphasis that occurred already during the 1990s – i.e., during the nationalist revival that characterized the crisis of the Yugoslav system: the shift from class to identity and the shift from government to governance (chapter 5). In these passages the sphere of education played a crucial role, becoming the arena where such shifts

were first observed, reflected and reproduced. The analysis of the cases of Kosovo, Sandzak and Macedonia, shows how where the international community intervened to stop the conflict and supervise the post-conflict phase, it further reinforced and consolidated the ethnic discourse while attempting to shift the focus onto (multi-) ethnic identity (p. 123-188).

From both a methodological and theoretical viewpoint, the book represents the first attempt to apply Dale and Robertson's Critical Cultural Political Economy (CCPE) approach to the study of education policies and politics in Former Yugoslavia (see Robertson and Dale 2015; Dale and Robertson 2009). It does so by empirically comparing and contrasting a number of post-Yugoslav case studies where education is put at the centre of social, economic and political processes. Nonetheless, the author does not engage in an explicit dialogue with political economy analysis, although the book speaks to it.

The different country-cases are studied before, during and after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and they are grouped according to three instances of education reform: vocational education, religious vs. civic education, and the fragmentation of higher education along ethnic lines in the post-conflict phase. The analysis is conducted on the meso level that focuses on policies and the policymaking process – which Bacevic claims is under-researched compared to the macro level based upon broad statistical comparisons and the micro-scale of ethnographic research, the latter being rich in details but sometimes blind to broader political structures and processes. The focus on the role of education in shaping political subjectivities and *vice versa* is in line with a CCPEE framework, and emphasizes the role of agency within the politics of education reform. How much of the transformative potential of education the book brings in through its empirical analysis remains an open question that the author

leaves to future research: the emancipatory function of education remains more of an envisioned possibility rather than something empirically grasped throughout the analysis.

The book speaks to students, scholars and practitioners interested in the changing role of education, and contributes to our understanding of its changing relationship with the state, a relationship embedded in broader transitions, such as from communism to capitalism and from nationalism to European integration. Moreover, it is relevant for International Relations, peace and conflict scholars interested in the role of education between conflict and post-conflict and its location within the hybrid and post-liberal governance of countries in transition and/or frozen conflicts. For this purpose, it would have benefited from the inclusion of Bosnia and Herzegovina as an additional case study, whose exclusion is not articulated. Scholars and students of education studies will find the book an extremely important source as it advances the debate and scholarship on the reform and policy-making of education by incorporating the critical and theoretically cutting-edge framework of cultural political economy into its analysis.

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