

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION: THE CASE OF NORTH MACEDONIA

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Abstract: *Stereotypes and prejudice have an important role in conflict resolution. They represent an underexplored sociological and psychological dimension of ethnic conflicts in the Western Balkans, and particularly in North Macedonia. Most research have shown that these are the root causes of interethnic conflict. Moreover, they are considered the fuel of interethnic and interreligious conflict. The goal of this paper is to (1) present the general role of stereotypes and prejudices in intergroup conflict (be it ethnic or religious) conflict and (2) clarify and better understand their nature from socio-psychological perspective and (3) explore them on a small sample of*

140 Macedonian and Albanian children in North Macedonia in the municipalities of Tetovo and Jegunovce. The research was conducted in February 2020, and Human Figure Drawing projective technique was used in order to measure stereotypes and prejudice. The results are descriptive an indicate the actual situation in these two municipalities. Further, the findings show that Macedonian group of children could easily imagine an Albanian as the `other` (friend) whereas the Albanian group of children could easily imagine the `other` (friend) as someone who is not living in the state, not even in the same municipality. This research findings recommend that more strategic and research based approach should be implemented in relation to minimizing the stereotypes and prejudice among Macedonian and Albanian children and improving interethnic coexistence at grassroot level.

Keywords: *stereotypes, prejudice, conflict resolution, North Macedonia*

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Introduction

This paper aims to approach intergroup conflict in an interdisciplinary way investigating the notions of stereotypes and prejudice and in the frames mainly of sociology and its social psychological aspects interrelated to other relevant disciplines such as political psychology, and politics. Stereotypes and prejudice are considered as the root causes for many intergroup conflicts. Investigating them as such can bring for a better understanding of how intergroup conflict emerges and thus finding out appropriate solutions to its re-resolution. This paper work is with a particular focus on the case of North Macedonia.

Humanity has been facing conflicts since the primordial times. It always happens to be scarce of resources which leads to the feeling of not meeting someone`s needs, be it that personal ones or the ones of a group as such. The approach to intergroup conflicts has changed drastically since the World War II² (Reus-Smit & Snidal, 2008). As this wave brought about a change after the second global crises to humanity that certain ethnic groups, and nations faced, the need of a both sociological and socio-psychological as well analysis and approach toward conflict resolution as a whole process emerged. The very first researches and theories related to the notions of conflict and peace argue stereotypes and prejudice as its basis. These are the notions that underlie categorization, hatred, antagonism fear of, and demonization for the outgroup members. Galtung was among the first scholars who opened this scientific - transdisciplinary debate, that it become a subject of many researches and nowadays a discipline in the frames of the international relations study. His words on need of transdisciplinary are as follow: *“If the road to peace passes through conflict resolution then a transnational, transdisciplinary and trans-level conflictology is a must for peace studies”* (Galtung, 2009) . Based on these argumentations this is the idea of this research with a general objective to contribute to the study of conflict resolution, per se at a grass root level.

1. Understanding the nature and the role of stereotypes and prejudice in conflict resolution

Beneath the notions of stereotypes and prejudice there are whole processes, thus this analysis requires a more contextual and holistic approach. Below are explained some stances related to the meanings of stereotypes and prejudice. The general definition of a stereotypes is that is a generalized - mental image for the members of

²The academic disciplines contributing to conflict resolution include political science, international studies, psychology, communication, sociology, law, anthropology, management studies, industrial relations, and economics (Brigg, 2008).

a particular group, mostly negative ones. Prejudice is more negatively driven since they are intertwined with negative emotions such as hatred, fear, anger, shame and etc. Many factors both sociological and psychological influence their content such as processes of socialization, language, state policies, media, cultural (norms, beliefs and etc.). In most of the cases prejudice are considered as the root causes of intergroup conflict. Different factors can contribute to the stereotypes and prejudice which can be classified as social economic and cultural; and psychological conditions related to the person. Historians, anthropologists and sociologists are mainly interested to the external, societal-economic and cultural factors, and psychologists mostly in the psychological processes through which these factors act, and especially to the psychological factors related to the person. It is important to note here that none of these conditions are dominant. Both categories are quite relevant to our study. One of the factors that contributes toward prejudice activation is their institutionalization toward certain minorities and groups.³ Allport noted that “it is easier, someone has said, to smash an atom than a prejudice” (Allport, 1954, p. 15) which is in the direction of how complex prejudices can be and how much work it takes in order to minimize them.

Allport being himself a pioneer in the field has paved the path in which prejudice should be investigated and treated. As he puts it: “One`s reputation whether false or true, cannot be hammered, hammer, hammered, into one`s head without doing something to one`s character” (Allport, p. 138-139). Meaning this in terms of majority and minority group members, once majority group members are the ones that generate those stereotypes and prejudiced thinking then members of minority groups sometimes have no other choice, except to start believing and acting in accordance with the prescribed images and attitudes for themselves as members of a particular group. Another possible definition for prejudice is the follow: The human category also seems to be a platform for in-group projection processes, where distinct attributes of the in-group in relation to a salient out-group tend to be considered more typically human. Such a process mirrors the phenomenon of infra humanization whereby an in group is perceived to be able to experience complex uniquely human emotions more than a salient outgroup is (Leyens et al., 2007). This goes in hand to the in-group projection mode or to say it in a more old-fashioned way the ethnocentrism. One of the general reasons for prejudiced thinking is the expectation that outgroup members should be at least similar to its own group. The more outgroup members look different according to different criteria such as skin colour, language, religion, culture and etc. the more it is likely that the one groups which is considered as a prototypical will develop prejudice for the outgroup.

Religion can be a serious criterion for a group categorization in the region of the Western Balkans. One of the main indicators for a biased or prejudiced society in

³With other words when trying to explain this dimension of conflict it belongs to the structural violence, which means the state has institutionalized its discriminatory policy toward a minority group through their laws and regulations.

general based on religious affiliation is the absence of mixed marriages. However, religions remain a significant category behind many stereotyped and prejudiced thinking and behaviour alike. When it comes to the stereotype's content it is the categories that define it. Different cultures acquire different typical categories. As already mentioned, at some cultures, religion is considered as relevant dominant category, in other feminism can be considered as a preferred and positive category. For instance, in the Middle East preferable category is religion and highly expected that to be Islam. Operario and Fiske (2001) claim that inside in stereotype content can elucidate intergroup relations, political attitudes, social tension and other societal phenomena, whereas knowledge of process and structure may be less helpful in these domains. In order to better understand the importance of stereotype's content it is important to mention the psychological principles such as the one that stereotypes contain ambivalent beliefs reflecting relationships between group; they augment perceptions of negative and extreme behaviour; and they maintain division between ingroups (us) and outgroups (them). This short theoretical background gives the glimpse into how division and intergroup conflict emerges. Following these notions and meanings solutions and state policies should be adjusted especially in multi-ethnic societies. Although stereotypes cannot be a harmful as prejudice, still once intertwined and combined they inevitably lead to conflict.

1.2. Language, stereotypes, prejudice and conflict

Utterances about people can have an impact on social stereotypes. Both representational systems, language and stereotypes, originate in the same process of social learning and interaction (Fiedler & Schmid, 2001). As authors cite in their work although language is not given a systematic status, textbooks, monographs and etc., both representational systems, language and stereotypes, originate in the same process of social learning and interaction. It was proven even decades ago the ethnic prejudice are acquired during childhood with little contact to the target group or no contact at all. This means that kind of experience is not conveyed by first hand but it is conveyed in human's most symbolic system - language. From an ontogenetic perspective, stereotypes are encoded in language before they're encoded in children's memory (p. 270). This is extremely important for this research since we are approaching stereotypes and prejudice as one of the root causes for intergroup conflict. The fact we know how and when stereotypes can emerge and develop makes our work more at ease for each phase of the conflict cycle, especially in the prevention, resolution and post conflict phase. In addition, to mention another relevant fact already mentioned above that ethnic prejudice is emerged as well at an early age, as noted by Bar-Tal & Teichman (2005a) even by age of 3, mostly developed by and

through the experience of their parents/guardians, using language as a tool. Researchers claim that in this direction besides the already distorted cognitive image, the possibility of adding an error to already second hand created content is very high, and in most of the cases it truly taking a place. Collective conflict was seen to result from the simultaneous exposure of a number of individuals to the same frustrating stimuli (Bar-Tal et al., 1988). This is one stance of understanding and defining intergroup conflict.

The social identity theory standing point is that we cannot understand intergroup conflict only as a result of individual psychological processes determined on intergroup relations only, but also this should be considered as processes which are related to the group membership i.e. psychological processes may actually be transformed as a result of group membership (Le Bon, 1895; McDougall, 1909) i.e. sociological processes as well. However, this stance has been the best utilized and scientifically proven by Tajfel (1982), who emphasizes the discontinuities between the individual and group behaviour may be attributed to the operation of distinctive psychological processes associated with group membership. The basic assumption of the social identity approach is that social categories are employed by individuals not only to simplify their social world but also as a means of self-reference. Categories such as nationality, ethnicity, and religion are internalized and constitute a potentially important aspect of the individual's self-concept, the "social identity" (Tajfel, 1982). Turner's elaboration in terms of self-categorization - he suggests that the self is not a static entity, but that when a particular group membership does constitute a salient aspect of the momentary self-image, will come to apply the norms and stereotypes associated with that category to self (Turner J. C., 1987) and will hence come to regard self as interchangeable with other ingroup members. Through this psychological process (which Turner and his colleague called depersonalization) the individual's behaviour becomes normative (conformist) and, to the extent that a number of individuals perceive themselves in terms of the same social category at the same moment in time, collective behaviour will occur. The idea of the self-concept is related to the group behaviour because there is a psychological process that is taking a place. Namely, the psychological process involved in categorization and a motivation for positive self-evaluation (Turner J. C., 1985) lead to a situation in which individuals to whom group membership is salient will seek to differentiate ingroup from outgroup on valued dimensions.⁴ This theory claims that each individual as a group member to any group strives to achieve a positive self and thus identity, this is a human need.

⁴ It has to be clarified that as Tajfel and Turner put it that this competitive orientation among groups doesn't mean that always has to be antagonistic and hostile.

1.1.1. *An integrative developmental-contextual approach*

Acknowledging the mediation of cognitive, motivational, affective and contextual factors in forming social representations suggests an integrative and dynamic approach to the acquisition and development of stereotypes and prejudice. Referring to cognitive and personality development within a specific context enables us to generate unique predictions regarding the developmental trajectory of stereotypes and prejudice in that context. However, unlike Nesdale (2001) who suggests an either/or approach Aboud`s sociocultural theory (2003), (or SIT) to explain the development of social representations, a group of authors suggest an integrative developmental contextual approach. Such an approach would provide explanations for the origins and developmental changes in intergroup representations and attitudes. In referring to development, they account for cognitive-development (i.e., changes in cognitive abilities) and for personality development (i.e., changes in the development of the self - and social identities and related changes in personal needs and motivation). In referring to context, we refer to conditions elevating group salience and personal and/or group threats (i.e., negative emotional arousal). The integrative developmental contextual approach would introduce a prediction of nonlinear shifts in inter group representations and attitudes. Dealing with age-related developmental changes prompts the questions as to what constitutes an expression of prejudice or intergroup bias, especially in preschoolers, and what changes with age. As noted, until recently it was assumed that young children (aged 3-4) categorize people according to social groups, liking those similar to themselves and disliking the dissimilar (Aboud, 2003) (Aboud & Amato, 2001) . However, recent reviews and findings indicate that before the age of 7, or even 12, the prevailing tendency is that of ingroup favoritism, not necessarily accompanied with outgroup rejection. Outgroup rejection or derogation appeared only at a later age (Aboud, 2003a). These findings, however, are qualified, suggesting that contextual factors such as intergroup conflict or specific socialization may encourage earlier outgroup negativism and even hostility (Aboud, 2003b). Thus, again we notice that context determines not only the formation and development of intergroup biases but also the way they are expressed (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005) . This paragraph on the developmental aspect of intergroup processes is relevant and essential because children are considered as a key group that should be investigated on stereotypes and prejudice. Based on these theoretical assumptions and findings the research sample was dominantly created by school children from primary schools.

The research was implemented in the period between January - February 2020. The city of Tetovo was chosen as a sample city since the diversity there or bi-ethnicity is higher in terms of dominance of Albanian and Macedonian population. Thus, considering the fact back in 2001 Tetovo was the epicenter of the conflict between the Macedonian army and the Albanian rebel groups. However, speaking from to-

day's perspective things there have been changing. Processes of peace-building activities have been taking a place along with some state and international measures. Today, there is more dis-integrated instead of integrated society. More rights were granted to the Albanian population but this doesn't not necessarily brought toward a coexistence in the city. Policy of segregation has been implemented instead of having multicultural an intercultural approach and strategy on a state level. The second entity in this research is the municipality of Jegunovce, whereas for the purpose of the research a dominantly Macedonian primary school was included from the village of Vratnica and a dominantly Albanian school from the village of Jadzince in the same municipality.

HFD⁵ is a technique for assessing children's social representations. One of the reasons why it is widely used among children's population is because children are fond of drawing. When the child recognizes his or her productions carry meanings, that is, are independent of the motor action that produced them, the drawing can be considered a representational statement of an internal model of mental image (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). A drawing may be guided by reality but nevertheless represents a private image. It follows then that drawings of human figures also represent images - images of people. HFD reflects unconscious layers of their personality such as conflict, feelings, and attitudes related to the self and significant others. The instructions were given to the all the children in the same way⁶.

The sample includes 115 Macedonian and Albanian children at age between 7 and 11, from rural and urban areas. The urban area is the municipality of Tetovo, whereas the rural area is the municipality of Jegunovce. School in rural areas are ethnically clean, so for the research the researcher visited one Macedonian and one Albanian school in the municipality of Jegunovce. The primary school in the city of Tetovo was mixed but with ethnic clean classes.

Conclusion

Gained results are descriptive and presented in percentages based on the findings of Human Figure Drawing and the answers given as a result of the instructions.

For the rural municipality of Jegunovce the results from the Macedonian primary school show that Macedonian children drew the other as Macedonian in 10% of

⁵ Human Figure Drawing

⁶ In the first half of the page draw first yourself and write down your ethnicity (the group you know and feel you're belonging according to you religion/culture and/or nationality), your age, name and other relevant information.⁵² Then on the second half of the page draw the other person who is not from the same (probably ethnic) group as you are. Then write the same information below as you did for yourself. This person can be a real one - someone that you already know or exists in your life or can be also an imaginary one. The idea with giving this instruction was not to assign them any category or to put them in a category, which is something that social constructivist are so much against. Then which I find more important is to check whether children in their perceptions hold image of persons who are psychologically close or distant, and if that is the case, whether this is mutual or not.

the cases, Macedonian drew the other as Albanian in 31% of the cases, drew Turks as other in 7% of the cases, Serbs in 14% of the cases and other in 38% of the cases.

The results from the Albanian primary school show that Albanian children drew the other as Albanian in 52% of the cases, Macedonian in 13%, Turks in 13% of the cases, Roma in 4% of the cases, and other than these categories in 18% of the cases.

The results in the city of Tetovo show that for the Macedonian children drew the other as Macedonian in 11% of the cases, then drew the other as Albanian in 19% of the cases, drew the Serb as other in 8% of the cases, Roma in 12% and the other as other from these categories in 42% of the cases.

Gained results show the Albanian children drew the other as Albanian in 46% of the cases, Macedonians in 18% of the cases, Turks 12% of the cases, 18% had no second drawing or no answer about the ethnic belongingness, and 6% drew other than these ethnic categories.

Stereotypes and prejudice are considered to be the root causes of intergroup conflict. These lead to avoidance, decreased or absence of communication based on their rigid mental images for the other groups, very often accompanied by certain emotions, mostly negative ones. Based on the research findings the conclusions are the follow:

- Albanian children tend to demonstrate greater in group favoritism and potential out-group rejection toward Macedonian children (this has to be investigated further);
- Macedonian children tend to demonstrate greater outgroup favoritism (mainly toward the Albanian group of children);

Also significant:

- In the mental image for the “other” small percent of the Albanian group perceives a Macedonian child as an imaginary friend;
- In the mental image of the “other” greater percent especially from the rural environment perceives the other as an Albanian friend.

Positive feelings are being hold mostly toward Roma and Serbian ethnic groups mostly from the Macedonian group.

The results lead to the assumption that here is one sided interest for the members of the group with whom they share many common things, including the same territory, same municipalities and the same resources for meeting many of their needs.

The Albanian members of the group when asked to draw another child as their potential friend they tend to refer and draw persons who are physically distant, rather than drawing members of their community-municipalities and broader city.

Recommendations - Further research should be implemented with adjusted approach taking into consideration all the factors that directly influence the process of drawing the human figure. There is a need of a broader research with the main research idea. During the research an absence of general knowledge of the Macedoni-

an language was noticed in the Albanian group of children, although the researcher was instructed that they have the basic knowledge, this circumstance caused interruption into the testing process.

Contact has to be stimulated among children coming from different villages (homogenous ones) by using different tools. A more systemic approach and policy should address situation in ethnic pure municipalities. If the situation goes on without any contact and any knowledge of a language in 10 years, these adults would be strangers living and sharing the same municipalities and cities.

This a solid ground for growing (negative) stereotypes and prejudice which are also nurturing factors for intergroup conflict.

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