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Bosnian educational system

### Two schools under one roof

Bosnia, a small country in South Eastern Europe has undergone extreme ethnic divisions as a consequence of post war policies created to bring peace in the 1990's. Instead of building a tolerance and functional government the Dayton peace accord created new problems. The educational system that was created segregated ethnic groups just like American schools segregated black and white children. Segregated school system create hatred and discrimination amongst neighbors. To desegregate these schools we need to act fast in educating teachers on mutual respect and tolerance. A paid multi-ethnic seminar for teachers will begin this process. We can all feel the scars of war still within us, but the war is in the past and we should learn to live in the society where tolerance and acceptance matters in order to heal those scars and to have brighter and unified future.

In 1991 the former country of Yugoslavia collapsed into a half of dozen small ethnically driven countries. In the middle of this collapse a country was left composed of three different ethnic groups. "Unlike the other Republics it had neither a majority of national group nor a majority religious community"(Rogel 29). All three ethnic groups have the same mother language that each country refers to as their own. Bosnians speak Bosnian language, Croatians speak Croatian language and Serbian speak Serbian. The only difference between these three languages is the dialect in which they

speak. Unable to co exist peacefully three ethnic groups Bosnians, Croatians and Serbians began to fight with one another for control of various regions. Croats fought Bosnians who fought Serbians in a three sided war that killed many unarmed civilians. In July 1995, Bosnian Serb forces killed as many as 8,000 Bosniak men and boys from the town of Srebrenica. It was the largest massacre in Europe since the Holocaust ( "Bosnia and Herzegovina"). The hatred and animosity between these ethnic groups has lingered. Three years later on December 14 1995 with significant international pressure the Dayton peace accord was signed. By the end of the year 1.5 of the 4.2 million citizens had fled the country. (Rogel, 32). 60 percent of all the dwellings and 28 percent of the roads were damaged. The domestic product was at 5 to 10 percent of its pre war level. (Rogel 74). 145,000 people were registered dead, 174,000 were injured, and 1.1 million had gone abroad (Roger 72). After the war ended Bosnia was left in ruins and it has been taking its citizens 20 years to rebuild their lives.

The resolution to the end of the conflict in Bosnia was not satisfactory to any side. At the time, the president of the Bosnians, Alija Izetbegovic said that he felt like he was drinking "bitter but useful medicine" (Begleiter). The three ethnic groups agreed to share power by creating three separate governments within the country. This tiny country with half the land mass of Virginia with a population of 3.5 million had now three presidents, 50,000 politicians, and a disconnected society. The affects of three governments bureaucracies on its citizens is astonishing. In 2013 the nations social security number system stopped functioning due to one of the three ethnic groups trying to issue their own unique social security numbers. On multiple instances young children have died due to lack of passport or social security number not allowing them to travel internationally for medical treatment. (Ferhatovic). The Dayton peace accord allowed peace but it created dysfunctional and bloated government.

The Dayton peace accord established three separate educational departments in Bosnia. It was

seen as a temporary post war solution lasting only until a unified government could be established. Twenty years after the war ended this education system has become permanent. Currently 18 percent of secondary schools, or roughly 52 schools in Bosnia are divided in the same building. Two schools under one roof exist only in the Bosniak and Croat dominated areas. In other areas of Bosnia the pre-war mixed population through ethnic cleansing, intimidation, and prejudice has caused all but one ethnic group to flee (Coles 49). Ethnically divided educational departments teach subjects such as languages, history, geography, government, and religion differently. The Serbian curriculum has a Serbian world perspective. Students learn of the symbols, struggles and sacrifices of the Serbian people neglecting other ethnic perspectives. In Croatian classes Bosnia and Herzegovina is referred to like a foreign country such as Serbia or Macedonia. Croatian textbooks are published in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia outside of Bosnia. Textbooks of each ethnicity contain both subtle and blatant hate speech. The children attending these schools are ethnically isolated from the other ethnic groups. In some of these schools there are also visible barriers between each group (Coles, VanBalkom and Baera 49, 2012). In Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje, a small town in the Central Bosnia, Bosnian and Croatian students enter and leave the building via separate entrances. If the children try to socialize with one another they get punished by their teachers with lower grade ("Under One Roof in Bosnia"). Unintegrated institutions also have segregated school boards and administrations (Coles 49). The current educational system in Bosnia is unequal, discriminating, and abominable to European educational standards.

Up until the 1950's black and white school children in America attended separate but equal schools. Blacks were separated from whites by law and by private action in transportation, public accommodations, recreational facilities, prisons, armed forces, and schools in both Northern and Southern states. Segregated schools were unevenly funded allowing for a great disparity between the education of white and black children. In the mid-to-late 1920s Georgia spent \$4.59 per year on each

African-American child as opposed to \$36.29 on each white child. This disparity and funding caused over 80 percent of teenage African Americans to drop out before reaching high school (Lowe). In the American segregated schools black children were treated unequal and racially discriminated. This discrimination was bad for American society just as modern day Bosnian schools are.

Racial and ethnic division in Bosnia have not escaped un-noticed by civil rights organizations. The son of the famous civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. who is also a civil rights leader Martin Luther King III came to visit this country. Martin Luther King III acknowledged that both Bosnia and United States are home to a diverse people. He believes that Bosnia can overcome ethnic and racial differences just as America did (Msnbc). Martin Luther King III has also stated while being patient people of Bosnia should feel inspired to work together to end this educational discrimination. King says, "When people are willing to work hard enough, its diversity can be a source of great strength as well" (Cerkez-Robinson). Martin Luther King III believes in change within Bosnia and urges young people to create a country based of their dreams rather than their frustrations.

There are consequences of having a segregated school system. Roma, the most vulnerable minority group, continue to face widespread discrimination, high unemployment, low levels of school enrollment, political representation, and standards of living ("World Report 2014: Bosnia and Herzegovina."). Serbians who already autonomous region within Bosnia are pushing for greater autonomy and eventual statehood. Croatians in the southern section of Bosnia are ambitiously trying to create their own autonomous region. Bosnia is going to be divided further if nothing is done. Ethnic desegregation in Bosnia today is greater than ever before.

Desegregation of Bosnian schools starts with the educational staff. Teachers and other educational staff members are children's role models. In most towns teachers are the most educated members of society. Parents of the students and the school alumni respect teachers and value their

opinions. Bosnian educators after college lack further training opportunities. Recent advancements in education are not familiar to educators in Bosnia. I propose an all inclusive multi-ethnic summer seminar where teachers learn about recent advancements in education and participate in team building exercises. Teachers influence students serving as leaders of the community.

The paid multi-ethnic summer seminar will begin the process of desegregation of the schools. Teachers would relish in paid summer work since half population of Bosnia is unemployed. Money will be obtained through UNICEF(United Nation International Children's Emergency Fund), USAid, and other international organizations that have been funding similar programs in Bosnia. Unlike other programs funded through international aid, the seminars will focus on only one school at the time to gain the best results. The teachers will be removed from their community and sent to the University of Sarajevo. They will attend classes, meetings, activities, entertainment, and dinners in multi-ethnic groups. A summer seminar can be easily accomplished with resources found in Bosnia and with the help of current reconstruction organizations operating in the country.

The multi-ethnic seminar classes will cover a range of topics taught by experts in various educational fields. The experts will be recruited from the University of Sarajevo, visiting professors from around the world, and leaders of non-profit organizations. The classes will teach the educators that different opinions are valuable and should be respected in a modern democratic state. Scientific theories based on facts and not ethnically driven opinions will form the basis of modern education. New teaching styles and materials in the various curriculum would be provided to the teachers to bring back to their school. Multi-ethnic seminar classes taught during the one week course will bring a new perspective and teaching styles to poorly funded educational staff.

Outside formal time periods that teachers are required to be together in classes they will be in close contact with each other. Teachers will be housed in the University of Sarajevo dorms. Housing

facilities will be mixed with different ethnicities unlike in towns where these teachers come from that are ethnically divided. The educators will receive meals vouchers to eat at the same locations. Shared dining will allow teachers from both ethnic groups to socialize and spend time with their colleagues that they have never shared a word with. Teachers will be provided with the free passes to museums that will teach them about different ethnic groups. Buses to and from the University of Sarajevo will transport all teachers no matter their ethnicity. Having teachers talk to one another without hatred will give a positive impact on the children and would dissolve racial barriers among ethnic groups.

Desegregation of the Bosnian schools is a complex problem. There are multiple educational departments and hundreds of bureaucratic jobs in the way of desegregation. The first step is having three groups talk to one another without hatred. According to Talić “the biggest problems are segregation and isolation, as well as general absence of tolerance, acceptance and understanding”. We need to break down the barriers to move beyond discriminatory policies for well-being of Bosnian’s children and youth and for guaranteeing a positive future where all are able to receive an education in a comfortable and safe environment. The children of Bosnia did not ask for this kind of educational system, nor did their parents. The politics have decided what is best for them. While this segregation violates the Bosnian Law against discrimination as written in the Bosnian Constitution, all Bosnian citizens need to work together to create equal educational system for all ethnic groups ("Bosnia and Herzegovina: Law of 2009 on Prohibition of Discrimination"). Outside observers such as Martin Luther King III acknowledge that the solution to this problem needs to be solved in a slow and effective manner.

MLA citation for "Two schools under one roof"

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