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Bosnia and Herzegovina - One Country, Two Entities, Three National Identities.

Introduction

The term 'race' is a word with largely debated meaning, with some arguing that race is used to distinguish certain populations based on biological and physical differences, such as skin colour, hair colour, and particular facial characteristics for example, (Van den Berghe, 1967:17) whilst others argue that 'race is a figment of the human imagination' that remains from a 'prescientific era' (Anemone, 2015:4) and a social construction embodied in social signification (Fiske and Taylor, 1991: 376). Although it does not have universal meaning, race and associated racialisation and racist issues are often at the forefront of global and more domestic level problems. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country that can be described as having a fraught past regarding racial and ethnic tensions, with such events in history largely shaping both public and private societal discourse today. It becomes an extremely complex case however as they largely do not accept that they have 'race' problems because the country is 'predominantly white people who physically possess more or less the same features' and rather consider themselves to have 'ethnicity issues' due to a lack of 'intercultural exchange' (Orucevic, 2013). To understand current day racial ethnic and religious tensions, it is crucial to acknowledge the changing political landscape that led to such substantial divisions in society.

The Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina existed as part of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia between 1943-1992, and as the political standpoint would suggest, society existed under equal treatment of all within a socialist regime. This was particularly emphasised by the major slogan of the time 'brotherhood and unity,' that represented the inter-ethnic relations that the constitution promoted through policies prescribed within the nations that every person, inclusive of national minorities were to coexist peacefully. As well as this, governmental representation was forcibly balanced between the three major ethnic and religious groups within the nation; Orthodox Serbians, Roman Catholic Croats and Muslim Bosniaks, yet remained primarily communist. Although, for some this brotherhood and unity represented a forcible and false coexistence between differing ethnic groups, a large majority of the state were supportive of the peaceful system (Mesić, 2004:246). From reflections from the time, people were seemingly unaware of the differences of race and ethnicity that were apparent, stating that they 'could not remember a difference between the children of different groups' continuing that 'there was no separation – we were together' and any differences that did exist 'in any event they didn't matter' (Leydesdorff, 2011:35). Whilst the context of this harmonious coexistence was highly superficial in nature, it allowed for people that identified with varying different ethnic groups to become much more aware and understanding of others and in this way created a tolerance of other religious and cultural practices different to their own. However, the rise of a political elite during the 1970s and 1980s, along with the later collapse of the Soviet Union sparked the beginning of a nationalistic climate, and a shift within society of intolerant values towards others which had previously not prevailed; the influence of which dated back hundreds of years to the days of the Ottoman Empire rule. Through the use of propaganda, the poor treatment of the Serbians by the Ottomans was brought back into public consciousness and thus ignited a hatred amongst the ethnic groups of viewing the 'other' as inferior and through an ethnocentric lens. The Bosnian War followed lasting over three years between 1992-1995, during which the Serbians attempted to eradicate Bosnian Muslims in what was later acknowledged as a genocide labelled as the Srebrenica massacre, killing more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys. Since signing the Dayton Agreement in December 1995, Bosnia and Herzegovina has been an independent country, yet has had a host of international involvement that has arguably contributed to the instability between the three main ethnic constituents, due the lack of understanding of each group and discontent it left (Venneri, 2007:5).

What becomes very explicit when examining and analysing Bosnia and Herzegovina and the processes that have led to racialisation in this nation is that it is a very unique case that not only needs the racial and ethnic tensions within it addressing, but the complexity of the intersectionality that exists between national and religious identity, that along with historical intricacies have led to the state being embroiled in a manifold of issues. Some have argued that rather being an essentially segregationist and racist state, it is a country in which the differing ethnic groups are ethnically chauvinistic – they believe that one's own is superior to others (Stovel, 2000:4), and that despite various international interventions, Bosnia never was and never will be able to overcome this ethnic chauvinism that exists (Boyle, 2014:100). This essay will examine the consequences of a country populated by three such distinct identities that possess such a strong sense of personal racio-nationalism through looking at how public discourse emphasising separation has affected minority groups, politics, media and hate group rhetoric, the education system and employment rights, and created a naturalisation of cultural difference and consequently racism within society that will not be altered unless radical political and educational change takes place.

The role of politics and representation in maintaining segregation

Politics, representation and consequent political power that one possesses often shape much of what occurs in society for certain individuals and groups, and that is of particular prominence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The country is described as having 'possibly the world's most complicated institutional set up' whereby 'since the end of the war, political allegiance has been usually based on ethnic identity' (Nardelli et al, 2014). The country itself, under the Dayton Agreement was split into two entities; Republic Srpska compromised of a majority Serbian population and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, made up Bosniaks and Croats. The government is made up of a tripartite presidency and the House of the Peoples formed with elite members of society who represent the three major national groups, and this in itself is extremely problematic, albeit attempting to be representative of the nation. Firstly, it is classist, those in higher society may not receive nor understand racist attitudes and ethnic tensions that exist amongst lower levels of society, for example those that perpetuate in access to healthcare, or access to housing, for as Wise (2015) notes, racism often plays a role in dividing classes along lines of racial and ethnic identity. Secondly, as identified as particularly controversial by many, candidates are 'self-defined' and must only claim one identity, making it impossible within political representation for people to be for example, both Jewish and Croatian. With such rigid and well-defined national identities, boundaries of self-identification with various racial, ethnic and religious groups cannot be altered, and hence why tolerance cannot be furthered. And thirdly, because the government is made up of three presidency members who represent the majority three constituents, the seventeen recognized by law national minority groups including, Jewish and Roma communities are not at all represented and cannot participate in the same way that others can. This means that issues that may only be fully understood or experienced by people of that ethnic and religious standing may never be acknowledged, such as the exclusion of minorities that has led to the requirement of international intervention. Therefore, such structural racism and segregation contributes to the normalisation of separation in everyday life, and could even be described as actively encouraging it.

The constitution and political institutions that embody its meaning, are essentially segregationist and exclusionist in nature, and can only serve to create a society that mirrors this. This injustice was clearly seen in the case of Sejdić and Finci vs. Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2009, which involved two citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina being denied the right to political participation in the form of barring them the right to be elected to public office. Dervo Sejdić was of Roma origin, and Jakob Finci was Jewish, and it was simply these specific identities that did not allow them to fit the three distinct categories of Bosniak, Croat or Serb agreed upon by the Dayton Accords, and hence prohibited them from standing for election to the House of Peoples, and for Presidency. This was a fundamental breach of human rights, and as such was brought to the European Court of Human Rights who ruled in their favour that their continued ineligibility was discriminatory because the respondent Government would face a 'heavy burden' in its continued treatment, as it lacked 'objective and reasonable justification' (European Court of Human Rights, 2009:28).

Political participation is a sign of citizenship, and as noted 'the rights to vote, to be elected and to stand for office were what most clearly distinguished a citizen from an alien' (European Court of

Human Rights, 2009:30). In that way Bosnia and Herzegovina successfully creates all national minorities as the 'other' or 'alien' even though they hold citizenship and should therefore receive equal treatment, with Mirjana Tesanovic (a Bosnian national) describing it as 'anyone who doesn't belong to one of the three constituent peoples is either an 'enemy' or excluded, unwanted, and considered weird, to say the least' (Irwin et al, 2013). Wirth (1945: 347) draws particular attention to this idea of the 'other' in his definition of a minority group, in which membership is based on 'collective discrimination' and a consequence of society ascribing that role, as can be seen when analysing politics in BiH. By denying minorities political participation, societal discourse of segregation is reinforced and naturalised which is then echoed further afield in contemporary life.

Whilst this is just one lone case, it goes a long way in representing the wider picture of politics and more than exhibits the key racial and ethnic issues that riddle the country, and begs the question, why must it be so essential to belong to just one singular identity? An answer can be found in the explanation that 'the divisions of the past may have been frozen, but their complexity and scars remain deeply enshrined in how the country's parliament and government are elected and organised' (Nardelli et al, 2014). Much of the present day problems stem from the context of the war, and the Dayton Accords have now been described as a 'temporary solution' that has now 'outlived three of its main signatories' (Radio Free Europe, 2015). In a desperate attempt to end conflict, Bosnia and Herzegovina was divided along ethnic lines, and has since remained that way, especially in political terms. But the Sejdić and Finci case also marks a great milestone and a potential turning point if the ramifications are properly implemented because it draws attention to the need 'to overcome [national minority] marginalization and bring them into the mainstream' as well as helping to foster the constructive and sustainable relations between all ethnicities that are essential to a viable multiethnic State' (European Court of Human Rights, 2009: 30). Furthermore, The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (2011) recognized the problems caused by such a political system by suggesting that as a nation, they would need to avoid prolonging a situation of ethnic discrimination violations, stating that a solution must be found that whilst

> 'Ensuring the full equality of members of the three constituent peoples, does not reduce representation to a question solely or primarily of ethnic belonging but allows all members of society to participate fully in the electoral process' (p15).

Various external institutions have therefore recognised the racial and ethnic segregation that is still apparent, yet the country itself sees no issues with the current system, for example, standing by the decisions it made regarding the exclusion of national minorities in government. Social cohesion is a very real possibility however, for as Hann (2003:159) notes 'Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks were living in harmony until their local communities were disrupted by conflicts created by political elites.' Political elites were to blame for the creation of the ethnic lines drawn, and it must be the political system that solves the issues.

Exploitation of nationalistic and hate rhetoric in public discourse

Nationalism is defined as 'a state of mind and an act of consciousness' (Kohn, 1944:10) that often draws on the past to create a sense of belonging in the future. It can be attributed to playing a large role in shaping racial and ethnic tensions in Bosnian society, for as Mujkic (2011) notes 'the public sphere in Bosnia is almost completely dominated by an ethno-nationalist dynamic of chauvinistic discrimination.' In a report conducted by ECRI (2011:22), they recognized the common and everyday use of the exploitation of such nationalistic tendencies within the political sphere that was consequently leading to encouragement of fostered 'divisions between the various constituent peoples and ethnic groups' through the use of 'ethnically inflammatory discourse.'

Unlike most countries worldwide that have a clear and 'defined' nationality and identity within it, Bosnia is described as a country where there was 'no dominant nationality,' and rather 'the different religious communities evolved into different nationalities' (Hoare, 2008). It would be correct to conclude that this led to a somewhat power vacuum regarding which religious community and corresponding nationality would become Bosnia's national identity, and what led to the war. For example, Hoare (2008) suggests that it is 'nonsensical' to argue that Serbian destruction of Islamic

heritage in combination with a powerful hateful propaganda campaign did not exist, but that it is equally nonsensical to overlook the fact that this was not due to genuine hostilities against Islamic ideology, but rather from fear that Muslim people would 'outbreed the Serbs, and turn them into an increasingly small minority in their own country.' Wartime inter-ethnic tensions, and the nationalism that has stemmed as a result is therefore a direct result of the clash of ethnicities to identify as the 'main' nationality of Bosnia, and for the Serbians to be the majority. Contrary to logical assumption that one might presume Bosnia and Herzegovina would avoid becoming embroiled in any form of nationalistic behaviour that was a key contribution to the path of war in 1992, and hence 'turn away from the nationalist politics that pushed them into [such a] mess,' (Most, 1997) it could strongly be suggested that instead they draw on these wartime inter-ethnic tensions, with huge bearing on the everyday lives of the population. Some have suggested that the 'respective problems of Serbs, Croats and Muslims are caused by the treacherous behaviour of the other two national groups and the international community,' (Most, 1997) and the very fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina 'struggles to handle the effect neighboring ethno-nationalist states have on its multi-ethnic population.' (Wood, 2015). The very issues that other surrounding nations had and continue to have influence Bosnia, and most specifically affect the political landscape and decisions that are taken, with 'ethno-national identity taking precedence over national accountability' (Wood, 2015). This was highlighted in the most recent census, that included three questions regarding, ethnicity/nationality, mother tongue and religion, and was accused of being largely an exercise in highlighting and stirring up ethnic tensions, as well as for political gain, because of 'interest by some of the parties to confirm power-sharing principles that are based on narrow, tripartite, ethno-national labels, as opposed to any notion of accountability to all citizens' (Irwin et al, 2013). ECRI (2011:23) also drew attention to this by pointing out how such a theme of discourse 'hurts citizens doubly,' because 'concrete problems affecting society as whole' are overlooked and ignored during election campaigns in favour of 'us-against-them arguments,' and thus remain unsolved, and because it contributes to the 'virulent nationalistic rhetoric' increasingly seen as the norm, and the normalised way of scapegoating.

This notion of ethnic identity taking priority over national decisions can be most evidently seen in the way Bosnia and Herzegovina handles and responds to both nationalistic hate speech and hate crime, as well as hate acts directed away from the national constituents and towards national minorities, specifically Jewish and Roma members of the population. Arguably each nationally recognised constituent group overvalues their own sense of cultural identity and heritage and this shapes their sense of superiority, which in turns inflicts on their judgement of discriminatory treatment of the socially-ascribed nature of the 'other,' and this has been allowed to become naturalised. The level of hate speech is described as being high, and 'significantly increased during right before elections' and this is a direct reflection of the 'level of nationalism within the hate speech discussion forae as well as weak editorial policies of the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina.' (Civil Rights Defenders, 2015). Only the Republic Spraska has any form of hate speech provisions, but both entities lack specific legislation regarding the issue and neither explicitly prohibit the use in the media. As well as this, there is a new far right, neo-Nazi group that is growing increasingly within Bosnia, that 'champions anti-Semitism' (JNS.org, 2012) in the country. The Bosanski Pokret Nacionalnog Ponosa (Bosnian National Pride Movement) is comprised of 95% Muslim membership, and is said to echo the alliance between Nazis and Muslims during World War Two, with an ideology based on Bosnian nationalism, white supremacy, and socialism. Unlike many other European countries, Bosnia does not ban Neo-Nazi groups and does not prohibit affiliation with them. Feelings of anti-Semitism have also been witnessed in football, with Bosnian fans waving Bosnian and Palestinian flags and chanting "kill the Jews" over and over' on June 12th 2015 in a friendly game against Israel (Gellar, 2015). It can therefore be very clearly that because there is very little legal scope and a fundamental lack of punishment for such types of behaviour, and because politics deems nationalistic and hate rhetoric acceptable both during campaigning and scapegoating, that this type of discourse has become the norm, that the media reiterate. ECRI (2011:24) strongly urged that they needed to 'ensure reporting did not contribute to creating an atmosphere of hostility and rejection towards members of any ethnic and religious group' and they needed to be 'proactive' in countering any such an atmosphere through 'supporting initiatives aimed at reaching out all communities simultaneously.' Through treating all the constituents as equal, as well as ethnic minorities, feelings of ethno-nationalism could be overcome.

Modern day educational apartheid

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, clear ethnic tensions of the past are echoed in the predominant system of education. Accurately labelled as 'two schools under roof,' introduced in 2003, it is an effective and key process of racialisation, which teaches and instils segregation and intolerance. Children of different nationalities are taught separately, they are taught at different times, sometimes in different schools, and often completely different curriculums. Although its intentions were to be a temporary measure, to allow families who were displaced during the war and then returned to Bosnia to properly educate their children in adequate facilities, many schools remain this way. It is largely a direct legacy of the war and a 'system that fanned nationalistic feelings and fear of 'others', while teaching distorted versions of history (especially recent) to fit in with each side's agenda' (Dotto, 2014). A common theme throughout all institutions, and here specifically schools and the broader education system, within Bosnian society is the emphasis on the importance of the tripartite system and the significance of retaining ethno-national identity, as can be clearly seen in this instance. Such educational segregation both at primary and middle schools essentially is a way of teaching intolerance, and creating and affirming this 'alien' status of any other ethno-religious group or minority. It is a highly irresponsible system that does not allow for children to have a clear and complex understanding of other communities that surround them, and in particular by teaching the history of the war from just one standpoint, spawns ignorance and narrow mindedness which is also perpetuated in wider societal discourse.

Whilst this system of schooling has been challenged both by society itself and more influentially elite political members, some see no problems with it. A Bosnian Croat member of the state parliament, Ivo Miro Jovic (2011) stated that

> 'The divisions don't start at school, but at home. We are being raised differently from the day we are born. A man is what he is - he is being raised by his family who instil in him a sense of belonging to his community.'

Very clearly rather than taking governmental responsibility, blame for inter-ethnic tensions and societal segregation is pushed onto families and parents, which to some extent must be acknowledged as contributing factors, but if there is a lack of other schooling options, and educational policy dictates that separate ethno religious identities will be taught differently, it is the norm for parents to want their children with mixing with similar children, and learning about their own cultural heritage. However, the issue over distinct curricula taught to different groups of children has been described as an 'excuse for the local authorities in ethnically-mixed communities to continue with the segregation of children' (Kamber, 2011). ECRI (2011:27) stressed how crucial a common curriculum was in its report, in that it will help 'build bridges and foster a sense of common citizenship.' If everybody received identical or near enough identical education then rather than separate identities being a defining feature that ultimately structure the information that a child is entitled to receive, these boundaries can be allowed to blur to help in creating one national identity.

On the other hand, some people in society have recognized how detrimental a system of education such as Bosnia's is on society, with Kamber (2011) noting '[Bosnian] society is segregated…and education is largely to blame for this situation. If we want a brighter future, we have to change our education system to a great extent.' And, that consequently is what many have done, through campaigning for a change to the system, and through strategies of integration involved in extracurricular activities. As well as this, in an increasingly technological world, and with the dominance of social media, children and teenagers have progressively become more aware of the injustices of the system and begun to campaign for change themselves, as well as mixing with other children of other ethno-religious identities outside of schooling. For example, in the region of Stolac, a brass band has been set up, which is open to anybody 'of all ages, sexes and nationalities and it represents the only organisation in Stolac in which nationality and religious affiliation do not matter' (Kamber, 2011). Organisations such as these provide opportunities for children to integrate and better understand diversity. In the wider context, students have taken part in a project hopefully named We Are Stronger Together, with the aim of ending school divisions. Whilst Bosnia has a long way to go before anything drastically changes, there are hopeful signs that discrimination, stereotypes and prejudice can be overcome, particularly as observers have commented that such divisions are a 'catalyst for future instability' and that separated students could result in 'generations of young people

who lack a vision of a shared future' (Kamber, 2011). As ECRI (2011:28) noted, authorities must 'encourage mutual understanding of and openness to cultural and ethnic differences,' if they are to avoid furthering ethnic tensions.

The use of separate employment rights to further divide identities

Just as was the case with political participation prejudice, the same discriminatory treatment is applied within employment, particularly with reference to public sector jobs. ECRI (2011: 29) explained in their report how 'public sector employment remains far from respecting the ethnic breakdown of Bosnian society' and that where figures were available, that the composition of local administrations was often weighted in favour of the majority constituent group in that area, at the expense of all other groups. Here, the processes of racialisation, that of the segregated areas discriminating against those that do not fit within their defined ethno-religious identity are excluded and consequence is to the economic disadvantage and detriment of others.

Such employment discrimination again stems from the context of wartime Bosnian society. As a report by Amnesty International (2006) explains 'tens of thousands of workers in these territories were discriminated against and unfairly dismissed because of their ethnicity' and in many cases 'discriminatory dismissals were the first step in aggressive campaigns of ethnic cleansing.' It is fairly viable to suggest that this process of racialisation has continued to exist, with 'minority returnees often struggling to overcome persistent and endemic discrimination in accessing employment' (Amnesty International, 2006). ECRI (2011: 29) also were very aware of this when they noted that, this lack of access to employment was one of the factors that seriously hampered minority returns.' Although there is a number of human right standards and actual laws within Bosnia and Herzegovina outlining that an individual should be free from discrimination, and have the freedom to work, these laws and provisions often fall short and discrimination does persist. As was the case with hate crime and speech, the legal framework in Bosnian society acts in favour of the majority constituent of the locality and often does little to support and rectify the injustices faced by ethnic minority groups or other members of the tripartite system.

A particular group that has suffered immensely under employment discrimination in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the Roma, who make up the largest of the seventeen nationally recognised minority groups. Although one of the countries part of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, an internationally established initiative active between 2005-2015, Bosnia has struggled with improving employment rights for members of the Roma community, who face strong prejudice and negative stereotyping as a result of ethnic chauvinism and superiority from Bosnian nationals. Some positive gains have been made such as the development of an Action Plan for Roma Employment that includes five key areas for change, but at current it is not being fully implmemented and monitored. ECRI (2011: 36) emphasised the need for a much more integrated approach, which could be achieved much more effectively with an integrated education system that instilled tolerance and acceptance from an early age. A process of de-racialisation is essential to create awareness of the disparities that persist, that only contribute to the complexities of the intersectionality of ethnic, religious and cultural differences. The more they are economically disadvantaged, the larger the target they become for discriminatory treatment, as they are used for scapegoating by politicians during times of economic crisis, and this does nothing but contribute to an already segregated society.

Conclusion

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country haunted by the war of 1992-1995, whose legacy has infiltrated and affected every part of society and manifested itself in clear, hostile segregationist ethnic tensions, and this is largely the result of structural accommodation in areas such as politics, the media, the education system, and more personally employment rights. The continued societal emphasis on the importance of maintaining ethno-religious national identities is the key process of racialisation, and has largely hindered this society's chances of integration, and moving beyond the horrors and heartaches of the Bosnian War.

Some have noted that Bosnia already constitutes a 'pluralistic culture since mosques, synagogues, Catholic and Orthodox churches stand side by side, (Sells, 1996: 148) yet this has not equated to tolerance, understanding and unified living.

Whilst at present there seems very little hope for Bosnia and Herzegovina to be a post-racial society, there is possibility for the future in the long term. If the country wants to fulfil its wishes of joining the European Union, than 'reform of the constitution is one of the main conditions [in obtaining] EU candidacy status' (EUbusiness, 2012). And, the constitution is one of the key elements that outlines the ethnic tripartite way of life, if this was to change, altering political participation and the education system with it, integration would be a much greater possibility and segregation and differing nationalistic outlooks reduced to create a much united Bosnia and Herzegovina that does not reflect the outdated Dayton Accords and wartime context that led to such well-defined and embedded processes of racialisation.

Gilroy (1993) outlined the idea that identities are fostered and adopted within society, and this is largely the case for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ethno-religious identities evolved so as to collectivise the various different groups of people that coexisted in the nation. Yet as he goes on to note, they are fluid, dynamic, and a construction. There is therefore always hope for the future for a post racial, undivided society if identities were to become less dominant, and collective citizenship was to be valued higher than ethnic, religious and cultural heritage.

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