

Reeducating the Hearts of Bosnian Students: An Essay on Some Aspects of Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Gordana Bozic*

The article looks into the present education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the influence of politics in the creation and maintenance of segregated schools. It analyzes the concept of “educational protectionism,” which underlines the difference between “ethnically correct education” and “adequate education,” the latter being embedded in the human rights for group minorities to have education that reflect their language, culture, history, and religion. The article presents a preliminary case study of a multiethnic school in Popov Most, Eastern Bosnia, analyzing parents’ attitudes toward controversial educational issues such as language, religious teaching, and history.

Keywords: nationalism; education; integration; educational protectionism; school segregation; national subjects; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Interim Agreement

The aim of this article is to introduce the reader to the education system of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and its role in influencing ethnic integration in the region. It focuses on primary education and significant factors—historical, political, and environmental—that determine its structure as well as the decision making of relevant stakeholders. The first part of the article looks at the current political landscape of the country and its impacts on education, reflected in its politicization and fragmentation. The second half of the article examines the case study of Popov Most, Eastern Bosnia,

* The article is a summary and revision of the author’s M.A. thesis, “How Can Education Help Integration in Bosnia and Herzegovina? Rethinking the Interim Agreement” (Ottawa, Canada: Carleton University, 2004). All interviews cited in the article are taken from the thesis. It is important to note that this article is based on data collected in 2002 and 2003; thus, any recent developments on the topic are not discussed. Thanks to all interviewees, especially the pupils and teachers from Popov Most school and the OSCE Education Department. Special thanks to the author’s research supervisor, Piotr Dutkiewicz, and Prof. Joan DeBardelebe, Carleton University, for their comments, advise and research support. Thanks to Lisa Greenspoon for her patient proofreading.

with a focus on parents' attitudes toward a controversial educational policy aimed to address unequal access to education and reduce or eliminate the existing school segregation. Specifically, the essay analyzes the Interim Agreement on Accommodation of Specific Needs and Rights of Returnee Children (the Interim Agreement) in the context of two polarized behavioral patterns of parents.

Although the article underlines the strong influence of divisive politics of nationalism in education, it argues that the interplay of nonpolitical factors is just as influential. In some areas, certain environmental factors, such as geographical isolation and the ethnic makeup of adjacent areas, significantly determine parents' behavior and considerably constrain or facilitate the efforts of the international community (IC) in reestablishing multiethnic schools in BiH. Thus, the main question is not why parents opt for monoethnic schools and segregation, but rather why parents, whose children have the same or similar educational opportunities, differ in their decision making.

The existing school segregation is the result of two interdependent forces converging under favorable socioenvironmental conditions: those forces are the politicization and fragmentation¹ of education. The former is embedded in a strong and systematic educational protectionism, carried out primarily through the means of biased and ethnocentric curricula and textbooks. The aim of this protectionism is twofold: to reinforce the national consciousness of a respective ethnic group and link it to a specific territory or territories and to exclude the other group(s) from its education system. Thus, the source of school segregation is attributable to this dimension of education.

The latter reflects the political structure of the country, founded in the 1992 to 1995 war and consolidated, with some territorial adjustments, by the Dayton Agreement.² The country has been

1. "Fragmentation" refers to decentralization of education to entities and cantons. Unlike the latter, fragmentation has a negative connotation because of its roots in the current political structure and its exploitation for educational protectionism.

2. The Dayton Accord/Agreement was signed in Paris, 14 December 1995, bringing an end to the 1992 to 1995 war. It consists of two aspects, military and civilian, and serves as the foundation for the Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) constitution. The implementation of the civilian aspect is supervised by the Office of High Representative (OHR).

divided into two entities, Republika Srpska (RS) and the Federation of Bosnia Herzegovina (FBiH, the Federation), the latter being divided into ten cantons, mostly ethnically defined. This political structure has been replicated in the education sector, dividing it into two autonomous but asymmetrical education systems at the entity level. This asymmetry is attributable to different educational responsibilities granted to the two entities. The Federation's education system is decentralized, with each canton responsible for "making education policy, including decisions concerning the regulation and provision of education."³ Since most cantons are ethnically defined, this decentralization has ultimately resulted in *de facto* Croat and Bosniak education systems. In contrast, RS has highly centralized education.

It is instructive to make some preliminary points before any analysis of BiH education. First, the current education system and practices do not create any problems in ethnically homogeneous areas. Because the incidences of school segregation occur only in mixed areas affected by the return of displaced people, the forms of school segregation presented in this article cannot be generalized to the whole system.

Second, the dynamics of return are commonly perceived as an important function of education reform in BiH. It is beyond the scope of this article to analyze all factors influencing such a complex process as return. Generally, barriers to return can be categorized into the following groups: unfavorable economic conditions (unemployment, slow reconstruction of property), adverse political climate (discrimination, harassment), a lack of social security (health, education, social welfare), legal constraints (repossession of property), and the psychological state of both the returnee and nonreturnee population (mutual bias and distrust). Although all those factors are equally important and interdependent in influencing return, the article focuses on those dimensions identified by the study respondents as decisive.

Finally, in addition to the above mentioned factors, the article introduces the environmental/geographical element, which broadens and facilitates the analysis of educational dynamics. Fur-

3. "Constitution of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina," in *Bosnia and Herzegovina: Essential Texts*, 3rd ed. (Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina: OHR, 2000), 71.

thermore, it suggests a question of whether the educational protectionism established at the system level is as functional at the micro level, that is, from the perspective of an individual parent. This point should not be interpreted as an attempt to generalize the research results of the case study presented in this article. On the contrary, this study is preliminary and calls for a more extensive research and analysis of parents' decision-making processes.

Education in the historical perspective

Many in BiH think, and many others have come to terms with the fact, that postwar political organization and ethno-demographic changes have determined the structure of the education system. By implication, it is commonly believed that revising the Dayton Agreement-based constitution is a *sine quo non* for any reforms. Although favorable political changes are instrumental for effective and sustained education reform, explanations that are limited to the recent development (the 1992 to 1995 war and its outcomes) obscure the continuity of the "educational question" irrespective of the prevailing political structure and systems.

BiH is still tackling the same educational issues that emerged with the establishment of its modern education system by Austria-Hungary. When Austria-Hungary occupied Bosnia Herzegovina in 1878, the country was crying out for all-sector modernization. The agricultural sector notwithstanding, education was the most difficult area to reform due to numerous conflicts arising from the existing ethno-confessional structure of the BiH society. Likewise, in another part of Austria-Hungary, in the Triune Kingdom (presently Croatia), educational issues divided Serbs and Croats even when its political coalition between the two groups reached its summit.⁴ It is interesting to note that in more complex BiH, politics spilled over into education, whereas in Croatia educational issues had an important linkage to politics.

Although modernization of education resulted in the establishment of few secularized schools open to all students irrespective of their religious and ethnic backgrounds, Austria-Hungary was

4. Charles Jelavich, *South Slav Nationalism: Textbooks and Yugoslav Union before 1914* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1990), 52.

unable to prevent the fragmentation of the education system along ethno-confessional lines in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Each ethnic group—Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs—struggled for and gained autonomy in educational affairs as a means to preserve and protect their respective identities, in effect giving schools a strong ethno-confessional character.⁵ As a result, education became a mechanism for translating *confessionalism* into nationalism, with each group striving to establish its primacy in the two provinces.⁶ At that time, the alphabet and language and religious instruction in schools were the most decisive factors for maintaining group identity, which eventually translated into an ideological struggle between Serbs and Croats for Bosnia Herzegovina.⁷ In contrast to present-day BiH, in the nineteenth century, it was primarily the clergy rather than the civil authorities who guarded the group identity and thus determined the orientation of education.

Special emphasis was placed on selective school subjects, such as mother tongue, history, geography, literature, and religious instruction. Textbooks for those subjects were carefully designed to mold the student's national identity and induce national pride: during the Austro-Hungarian rule, "the Serbian authors saw the South Slav lands as part of their unique heritage; their Croatian counterparts emphasized their own history and their leading role among the South Slavs of the Habsburg Empire."⁸ Furthermore, because education was criticized based on political and ideological criteria, not only ethnocentric and biased education was criticized, but a secularized and relatively objective education was perceived as a threat to the opposition group. Often, this politicization of education was exacerbated by politically motivated preferential treatment of minority groups by the Austro-Hungarian administration.⁹

5. The Austrian administration attempted to promote the ethnic identity of Bosnian Muslims, as opposed to that based primarily on religion. The initiative was politically motivated and aimed to check Croats and Serbs in their political and ideological organizations and activities.

6. Srećko M. Džaja, *Bosnia and Herzegovina u Austrougarskom razdoblju (1878-1918)*, trans. Marijan Cipra and Milan Lončar (Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina/Zagreb, Croatia: Ziral, 2002), 242.

7. *Ibid.*, 70-76.

8. Charles Jelavich, *South Slav Nationalism*, 175.

9. *Ibid.*, 46-52.

Perhaps the most interesting historical period to analyze in this context is socialist Yugoslavia, a “success” story of centralized education with a relatively high record on human rights in regard to the education of national minorities. The issue of group identity and the “educational question” was, nevertheless, present throughout communist rule, with a political crisis exploding in the 1960s. The language crises in Croatia¹⁰ and growing nationalism in both Croatia and Serbia did not, however, result in the fragmentation of education along ethnic lines. Although education was eventually decentralized at the republic level, the state retained a firm control. Any attempt to use education as a tool for addressing “the national question” and the creation of an ethno-national consciousness was condemned by Tito as “un-Marxist, uncritical and unscientific appraisals of events and personalities in national history.”¹¹

Although in socialist Yugoslavia “the difficulty of reconciling various national and ideological points”¹² rendered writing history and the status of the Serbo-Croatian language as controversial as today, the firmly established ideological framework—socialist democracy—minimized the manipulation of education by nationalists. Regardless of students’ mother tongue, cultural, ethnic, or religious backgrounds, they all followed a unified curriculum designed “to educate the students as conscious citizens of socialist society” and studied from the same textbooks produced by the Communist Party.¹³ As the ideological environment changed with the fall of communism, the ideological orientation of curricula changed too. However, “the spirit of intolerance for another’s opinion [and] the evaluation of every disagreement with national myth and national historic rights as a political crime,”¹⁴ a character-

10. Croatia’s nationalists sought the revival of the Croatian language as unique and independent from the Serbian language. Official status of Croatian, as opposed to Croat-Serbian or Serbo-Croatian, was demanded. Also, the Croatian orthography and new, often archaic, words were introduced as a way to accentuate differences between the two languages.

11. Michael B. Petrovich, “Continuing Nationalism in Yugoslav Historiography,” *Nationalities Papers* 6:2(1978): 161.

12. *Ibid.*, 163-64.

13. Stavro Skendi, “Education,” in Robert F. Byrnes, ed., *East-Central Europe under the Communists: Yugoslavia* (New York: Fredrich A. Praeger, 1957), 178.

14. Petrovich, “Continuing Nationalism in Yugoslav Historiography,” 174.

istic present in different degrees in both Austria-Hungary and socialist Yugoslavia, continued into present Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The reduction of segregation by contact hypothesis

Segregation in schools based on ethnic, religious, or racial criteria is not unique to Bosnia Herzegovina. Other regions and countries, such as Northern Ireland and Israel, have been tackling this problem for years. In Northern Ireland, for example, schools have been segregated along confessional, gender, and ability criteria. Although segregation is not the cause of a protracted hostility between the Catholics and Protestants, there is a consensus that the conflict in Northern Ireland has been reinforced by the existing school system. Based on the premise that “the segregated schools themselves are symbolic of the attitudes, values and aspirations of each cultural group” and are as such conducive to intolerance, a system of integrated schools was established in parallel to segregated schools.¹⁵ The aim of integrated education is to bring students of different religions and traditions together in approximately equal numbers to “be nurtured in their parents’ religious and national traditions and identity, while respecting the identity and appreciating the traditions of others.”¹⁶ To respect this principle, integrated schools pay special attention to curriculum and the choice of school textbooks that reflect both Irish and British interpretations of Northern Ireland’s history and ensure equal representation of Irish and British literature.

The concept of integrated education is based on the “contact hypothesis” first introduced after World War II and later advanced in response to racial segregation in the United States in the 1970s.¹⁷ The contact hypothesis teaches us that bringing children and youth into intimate and frequent contact may reduce intolerance and lead to a better intergroup understanding. However, organized intergroup or interpersonal contact often ends in fail-

15. Murray Dominic, “Educational Segregation: Rite or Wrong?” in P. Clancy, Sheelagh Drudy, Kathleen Lynch, and Liam O’Dowd, eds., *Ireland: A Sociological Profile* (Dublin, Ireland: Institute of Public Administration, 1986), 259.

16. Statement of Principles of the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education, Dublin, Ireland.

17. The most prominent advocates of “contact hypothesis” are G. W. Allport and S. W. Cook. Although they differ in their approaches to contact hypothesis—intergroup approach versus

ure: generally, children demonstrate their old pattern of behavior and perceptions once they return to their segregated residential quarters.¹⁸ The existing residential segregation combined with basic inequalities within society are significant limitation to sustained and effective outcomes of integrated schools.

In contrast to Northern Ireland, Bosnia Herzegovina exhibits a feature conducive to desirable contact results. Because school segregation generally takes place in small towns or rural areas where refugees and displaced people return, segregation is limited to schools while the community as a whole remains multiethnic. This in turn provides good opportunity for frequent intergroup contact and cooperation, potentially leading to a mutual acceptance as well as a change in attitudes toward and perceptions of others. Unlike in Northern Ireland, an attempt to bring children together in BiH schools is not, however, accompanied by a significant change in school ethos, reflected in objective teaching and pluralistic curricula and textbooks.

Segregation in BiH schools seems to be related to the return of displaced people. Although their return *per se* is not the cause, it nevertheless often results in different forms of (school) segregation. To a certain degree, the existing political structure determines what form segregation will take. The current education system of Bosnia and Herzegovina exhibits three types of systematic practices of segregation: (1) “two schools under one roof,” (2) busing children to monoethnic schools, (3) and the teaching of so-called “national subjects.” Although the group of national subjects appears as the least of the three evils—it effectively limits segregation—paradoxically, its rationale governs the other two forms of segregation. And the rationale is to educate the hearts of Bosnian students through “ethnically correct education.”¹⁹ This term

interpersonal approach—they both agree that it is necessary to manipulate the contact situation in order to produce a desirable result. Both of them developed taxonomy of factors that are friendly to a positive change, such as participants of equal status, institutional support, and cooperation in achieving common goals.

18. Miles Hewstone and Rupert Brown, “Contacts Is Not Enough: An Intergroup Perspective on the ‘Contact Hypothesis,’” in Miles Hewstone and Rupert Brown, eds., *Contact and Conflict in Intergroup Encounters* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1986), 17.

19. Mladen Ivanic, BiH Foreign Affairs Minister, interview by the author, 23 January 2003, in Ottawa, Canada. (All interviews cited in the article are taken from Gordana Bozic, “How Can Education Help Integration in Bosnia and Herzegovina? Rethinking the Interim Agreement” [M.A. thesis, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, 2004].)

refers to the exclusivity and ineffability of one group in interpreting a common history, a shared geography and linguistics and literature. It differs from a universal human right to education in accordance to cultural and religious belief in a sense that it establishes the barrier of intolerance for different opinions as a way to prevent other groups from entering. As a result, returnee parents reject curricula and textbooks found in the area of return and demand the type of education they had in the area of their displacement, where their ethnic group is the majority. The first solution to this dilemma was the establishment of “two schools under one roof.”

“Two schools under one roof”: Separating the Bosnian hearts

This section looks at the phenomenon of two schools under one roof, a form of segregation shaped by the existing political structure of the Federation and conceived as a function of return, in effect both factors compromising the need to address the real cause of segregation.

Although the two entity education systems have many problems in common, such as outdated teaching and learning methods, extensive curricula, untrained and underpaid educators, and so on, there are a few issues that are present in one but not in the other entity. For example, the establishment of two schools under one roof is an infamous hallmark of the Federation’s education system but is absent in its RS counterpart. Two features underpinning the political character of the RS determine the absence of this form of segregation in that entity: a high degree of ethnic-homogeneity (Serbs) and consequential centralization in education. Unlike the RS, the Federation’s mostly biethnic composition (Croats and Bosniaks) and its resulting decentralization of education at the cantonal level proved to be conducive to segregation. When displaced people return to their homes, they inevitably alter the local ethnic composition, facing two choices in the process. Depending on the socioenvironmental conditions, returnee parents may accept the existing educational practices, or they may demand changes in the school system according to their needs.

The latter contributes to segregation, such as two schools under one roof.

The first school operating as two schools under one roof was established in 2000, and in the period of the next three years, this number increased to fifty-two, mainly located in Zenica-Doboj Canton, Central Bosnia Canton, and Herzegovina-Nerveta Canton. Although this number is relatively small compared to the total number of schools operating in BiH, the nature of segregation and its consequences are worrisome. In those schools, Croat and Bosniak students and teachers are both psychologically and physically segregated. Although located in the same building or under one roof, the schools have separate legal identities, administrations, school boards, school directors, teacher's rooms, and so on. Often, Croat and Bosniak students attend different shifts or attend the same shift but use different entrances. Expecting that this system of "parallelism" would increase the return of displaced people, the IC "played a mediating role." After three years, however, it was evident that "such a system only exacerbates segregation," with the IC ultimately abandoning it.²⁰ As of September 2003, both political and educational stakeholders have been instructed to carry out administrative unification of two schools under one roof.

From the results achieved thus far, one can expect that the problem of two schools under one roof will be solved only gradually. In the 2003-04 academic year, only a small number of schools had their administration unified, illustrating the expected resistance of some local stakeholders, such as parents, school staff, and municipal/cantonal authorities. For example, for the students of Novi Seher School, Doboj, the first week of the 2003-04 academic year was marked with violence: the front door of the school was set on fire in protest against ordered administrative unification. Even in those few schools that successfully carried out the administrative unification, the effected change does not necessarily imply students' integration, where their interaction is encouraged by school staff and the community and goes beyond sharing the

20. *Strategy Paper for Unification of "Two-Schools-under-One-Roof"* (Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe [OSCE] Education Department, 20 May 2003).

same facility:²¹ Bosniak and Croat students still follow different curricula and textbooks and attend separate classes taught by teachers belonging to their respective nationality. Nevertheless, it does represent a step forward because it eliminates the duplication of school administration, improves financial management, enables registration of schools as one legal entity with a single name, and encourages school staff to cooperate in planning activities. It was to be seen how many more schools will abolish their parallel systems in the academic year 2004-05.

In such a political environment, where the IC initiates and dominates education reform, the establishment and maintenance of segregated schools provide grounds for criticism of its work. Therefore, it is easy to overlook the factor of ethno-national rivalry, which has significantly contributed to the “reluctance” of the IC in some domains of education reform. In the postwar period, this rivalry continues to express itself through the “historiography war,”²² with its battles being passed onto the teaching of linguistics, geography, and religious instruction. As mentioned earlier, existing biased and exclusionary curricula and textbooks create unfriendly learning environments for minority returnees. The prospect of such an unfriendly learning atmosphere as well as the lack of political momentum in regards to the textbook revision contributed to the perception of two schools under one roof as a lesser and temporary evil.

Aware that some school subjects are more politicized than others and determined to limit existing segregation, the IC (Office of the High Representative [OHR]) introduced the idea of “national subjects.”²³ Thus, segregation of returnee and nonreturnee students is supposed to be limited to the teaching of those “national subjects,” facilitating the ongoing effort in abolishing the system of “parallelism.” However, for some of the critics, this measure repre-

21. Phyllis A. Katz, “Attitude Change in Children: Can the Twig Be Straightened?” in Phyllis Katz, ed., *Towards Elimination of Racism* (New York: Pergamon, 1976), 225.

22. Dubravko Lovrenovic, Former Deputy Education Minister in FBiH and a historian at Sarajevo University, interview by the author, 20 June 2003, in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

23. The group of “national subjects” includes the following subjects: history, geography, nature and society, mother tongue and literature, and religious instruction.

sents a convenient tool to slow education reform. For others, it is created according to the “logic of a war solution and the logic of an ethnically divided country.”²⁴ Even those who see it as an exercise of human rights are concerned about its potential adverse effects on students’ integration.

“National subjects”: Reeducating the heart of Bosnian students

This section analyzes grounds for criticism of “adequate education” as well as the circumstances in which the provision of adequate education is necessary and produces positive effects.

The governing force behind the introduction of national subjects is the concept of adequate education. The term refers to the internationally recognized right of minority groups to education in their mother tongue and according to their cultural and religious beliefs, respecting and promoting school, community, and national pluralism.²⁵ This pluralism is preserved by a mandatory training of minority students in the language, history, geography, and culture of the majority group in addition to education reflecting the minority needs. In the BiH context, however, the concept of adequate education acquires different features with a particular bearing. First, it does not apply, at least not in practice, to minority groups, but rather it is designed to meet the needs of constituent peoples—Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs. Second, because it affects the constituent peoples, adequate education is commonly interpreted as complete autonomy in all educational matters with no mandatory training in the language, history, and geography of the constituent entity where minority returnee students attend the school, that is, other constituent groups.

As a result, adequate education translates easily into an “ethnically correct education” as defined earlier, driving all stakeholders involved into the national identity trap. National subjects, which have traditionally been regarded as guardians of national identi-

24. Dubravko Lovrenovic interview.

25. In BiH, the measure of “adequate education” targets the constituent groups (Croats, Bosniaks, and Serbs). As constituent groups, they enjoy equal rights as a group across the whole territory of BiH, and thus, the terms “minority” or “majority” are used only to indicate numerical status of returnees in the areas of return.

ties, are the most politicized school subjects.²⁶ Some of them, such as geography and to some degree “nature and society,” are more amenable toward harmonization and revision (evident from the success of the 2003 textbook review commission), while others, such as history and language, are not responsive to the processes of integration (again, evident from the work of 2003 textbook review commission).

As in the case of two schools under one roof, the introduction of national subjects was driven by the dynamics of return. On 5 March 2002, the education ministers of each entity signed the Interim Agreement on Accommodation of Specific Needs and Rights of Returnee Children, introduced by the OHR. This agreement acknowledges “the increasing number of *returnee* families, their constitutional rights and the right of their children to receive *adequate education*, and having in mind that the lack of it is often quoted as one of the main obstacles for *return*.”²⁷ It is important to make a few points with respect to the interplay between return and education.

First, based on their intention to return, the return population can be generally categorized into three groups: (1) displaced people with no intention to return, (2) those who engage in semireturn,²⁸ and (3) and those to whom return comes as a lesser evil in comparison with the life of the displaced person.²⁹ Thus, the relevance of adequate education should be analyzed in relation to the respective return category, rather than to return in general. For example, the third, “worst-off,” category tends to be indifferent or acquiescent in regard to the lack of adequate education. For the second category, adequate education may produce mixed effects (discussed below under Busing Children to Monoethnic Schools).

26. All things being equal, to say that the introduction of a common core curricula that excludes “national subjects” helps de-politicization of BiH education is misleading.

27. The Interim Agreement, OHR (Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 5 March 2002), emphasis added.

28. “Semireturn” means that displaced people return to farm or reconstruct their houses in the summer but set off again to the area of displacement in the fall when schools start. Generally, it is the elderly that remain behind.

29. For those people, economic opportunities in both the area of return and the area of displacement are approximate (they are extremely limited). The advantage of return lies in a successful repossession of the prewar property: by the same token, the disadvantage of displacement is the eviction from illegally occupied houses.

Second, return is not taking place on a large scale and thus limits the implementation of the agreement (more on this later). Third, in the long run, the envisioned benefits of the Interim Agreement may be outweighed by its potential negative effects. Let us analyze both benefits and potential adverse effects. Although the degree to which adequate education encourages return is controversial, it does create a friendly school environment for returnees, nevertheless. The Interim Agreement enables returnee parents to choose textbooks and curricula for the group of national subjects, while “general subjects” shall be taught according to the local curriculum. Thus, it prevents a situation where students would be forced to take courses that are incompatible with their religious beliefs and biased against their ethnic and cultural backgrounds, while potentially creating an environment for contact between students in the general subjects classes.

Furthermore, the Interim Agreement makes it possible for returnee teachers to teach the national subjects. This measure, where implemented, achieves two goals: it contributes to a welcoming environment for returnees, and it alleviates the existing hiring discrimination based on ethnic and religious backgrounds. As often happens, however, it is easier said in theory than done in practice. For example, the implementation of this provision is limited by a small scale of return in general and a slow return of qualified teachers in particular. As a result, in some places, the teachers identifying with the “majority” ethnic group engage in teaching the national subjects to “minority” returnee students: often those teachers are not trained in dealing with controversial issues and have their own prejudices. Another provision that certainly contributes to a friendly environment for returnees but is limited by their small number is the establishment of multiethnic school boards. All these measures are effective in mitigating segregation but not in addressing its real cause.

Unlike its benefits, adverse side-effects may be of a long-term nature. First, although it is envisioned to be a temporary expedient underlying a need to find “a permanent solution for the education of returnees and accommodation of the specific needs and rights of all constituent people,”³⁰ the Interim Agreement helps sustain the fundamental cause of segregation by maintaining a system that

30. Interim Agreement.

shields politicization of education (national subjects). In turn, the solution eventually becomes a part of the problem. By enabling the utilization of ethnically correct education, it only maintains the culture of intolerance for critical thinking and different perspectives, despite the original explicit intent to contribute to critical thinking in a pluralistic environment. Hence, it represents a paradox where school segregation can be reduced only by consolidating the fundamental problem.

Second, reversing discrimination in school hiring practices by entitling returnee teachers to teach the national subjects may in the long run result in discrimination itself. In effect, students and parents are getting used to teachers of their ethnic background, reducing or preventing the building of trust toward teachers coming from other ethnic groups: the dominance of national subjects over general subjects may offset the positive effects of integrated teaching of the latter. For example, in October 2003, Croat students and parents in Nova Spionica, Tuzla, organized a ten-day protest requesting a Croat teacher, ultimately resulting in the firing of a qualified teacher because of her Bosniak ethnicity. What is equally worrisome is the fact that this community did not experience interethnic tensions during the 1992 to 1995 war.³¹ Furthermore, it is equally worrisome that there are places in BiH where the availability of adequate education does not appeal to returnee parents who opt for monoethnic school instead. This is further discussed in the following section.

Busing children to monoethnic schools

This section looks at two polarized patterns of parents' choices—segregation versus integration—and places them in a wider environmental context.

Whereas the phenomenon of two schools under one roof is confined to the Federation only, busing children to monoethnic schools is an instrument for segregation present in both entities.

31. Mirza Karic, "Uciteljica otpustena samo zato sto je Bosnjakinja," *Oslobodjenje* (Sarajevo), 15 October 2003, 15.

Although the implementation of the Interim Agreement generates a friendlier environment in local schools for returnee students, some parents reject proposed accommodation and opt instead for the nearest monoethnic school. This practice of busing children to monoethnic schools is taking place in a symbiosis between parents and local authorities: the former demand or agree to the practice, the latter finance it (the travel costs). However, parents have different reasons and justifications for busing their children to monoethnic schools.

In some places, busing to nearby schools is a necessity; it takes place in the absence of appropriate schooling levels in the area of return. Return often, but not always, takes place in rural areas with branch schools accommodating only students between grades one and four. In turn, this problem inevitably affects both return and education in the area of return. As regards the former, the lack of an appropriate level of schooling may be the most determining factor in making return decisions by people from the “semireturn” category. For example, in the village of Jelec, Eastern Bosnia, the majority of parents with school-age children decided to return to the area of displacement, often citing the lack of appropriate grades in the local school as one of the main reasons. The complexity of the issue is illustrated below.

In the 2002-03 academic year, the Jelec village witnessed significant infrastructure and residential reconstruction for returnees, most of whom were the elderly. Those with school-age children faced a dilemma. There were a number of returnee families with siblings requiring different levels of schooling (first through fourth versus fifth through eighth grades). As a result, those parents faced two contradictory prospects: one child (below the fifth grade) receives the Interim Agreement type of adequate education in the local multiethnic school, whereas the other one is required to attend a monoethnic school in a nearby town with no minority returnee students (central school). Furthermore, due to an insignificant number of returnees, the organization of national subjects in those central schools is often not financially feasible. As a result, the parents decided against return and continued to educate their children in the area of displacement: this problem was

exacerbated by unfavorable economic factors, such as unemployment in the area of return.

As for education in the area of return, whereas the lack of appropriate schooling levels makes busing children to *a nearby school* a necessity, busing children to *a nearby monoethnic school* represents a choice. There are two factors that contribute to the choice of monoethnic schools over nearby schools dominated with another ethnic group: relative geographical isolation of the area of return and its vicinity to ethnically homogeneous areas, where the majority group is the group that returnees identify with. If the place of return is not geographically isolated and is in close proximity to communities reflecting ethnic affiliation of returnees in question, then parents tend to disregard the school that is closest to them but is dominated by another ethnic group.³² Thus, extending local schools to grades five to eight, such as Konjevic Polje in Eastern Bosnia, is a way but not always a guarantee of ending the practice of busing to monoethnic schools. The termination of this practice may be facilitated by one or both of the following factors: the creation of a returnee-friendly environment in the local schools and the political will of the local authorities to cease financial support for the transportation of returnee children to monoethnic schools.³³

As long as the transportation costs are paid by the municipality, parents may prefer to bus children to monoethnic schools despite the fact that both the appropriate level of schooling and adequate education are secured in the area of return. The question of interest to us is whether parents choose monoethnic schools because they refuse to mix their children with the children of other ethnic/religious backgrounds or whether their decision is determined by some other factors. Why do some parents reject ethnically correct education (national subjects) in multiethnic schools but accept it in monoethnic schools? Or why does the number of bused chil-

32. The reader should keep in mind that those parents who opt for monoethnic schools continue to live and/or work in the respective multiethnic community; by definition, minority return implies multiethnic composition of the area in question.

33. It is important to note that the same instrument—busing children outside the designated catchment areas—is used to promote integrated education in Northern Ireland, in effect being appraised as a positive practice.

dren not decrease with the increase in the number of hired returnee teachers?³⁴ A possible explanation is that those parents may oppose ethnic mixing of children based on their beliefs and principles, but this contradicts their willingness to live and/or work in multiethnic communities (generally, the return areas are multiethnic by definition). How to explain the fact that some other returnee parents, who are the product of the same political environment, work consciously toward building integration among their children in multiethnic schools?

For example, there are places where parents also reject or are indifferent to their rights underlined in the Interim Agreement, but for a different reason. First, those returnee parents belong to the “worst-off” category of return, whose struggle to survive overshadows other important issues, such as the quality of education. Those parents often agree to send their children to the local school without being aware of or ambivalent about the Interim Agreement (more on this below).³⁵

In addition, the geographic and demographic factors, more pronounced in one region than in others, are locally important obstacles to the establishment of school segregation, such as busing children to monoethnic schools. Some areas of return are geographically isolated, with poor communication and transportation infrastructure. Since school segregation often suggests itself by observation of how other parents behave, the lack of communication infrastructure potentially reduces segregation.³⁶ In combination with the ethnic makeup of the adjacent areas, where returnees are the minority in numerical terms, geographic isolation may be the major determinant of parents’ attitude toward educational issues.

34. For example, in some cantons, such as Canton Six, the number of bused children increased by 10.86 percent, while at the same time the number of hired returnee teachers increased by 6.67 percent (the 2002-03 and 2003-04 academic year). A similar trend is recorded in Canton Four, while in other cantons, the number of busing children remains unchanged. Only in Canton One (Una-Sana Canton) did the number of bused children to monoethnic schools decrease congruently with the increase of the number of hired returnee teachers. *Statistical Report on the Implementation of the Interim Agreement* (Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina: OSCE Education Department, November 2003).

35. Returnee families (5), interview by the author (anonymity granted), 5 June 2003, in Popov Most, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

36. For example, the Skelani village, Eastern Bosnia, has a multiethnic school established, but exists in a complete isolation from the BiH media.

One such case is a school accommodating eleven returnee students (Bosniaks) and eleven nonreturnee students (Serbs) in a small village of Popov Most in Eastern Bosnia. It may be useful to look at parents' behavior from a small-scale example, such as Popov Most, before we analyze the problem on a larger scale encompassing all forms of segregation in BiH. It may help us learn about differences, if any, in the attitudes toward adequate education among returnees.

The case study of Popov Most: On the road to integration

This section presents the case study of the Popov Most multiethnic school to illustrate how some environmental factors shape parents' decision-making processes and attitudes toward controversial educational issues.

Popov Most school is one of twenty-four schools in BiH with national subjects organized for returnee students and that, by definition, is a multiethnic school. It is located in the municipality of Foca/Srbinje in Eastern Bosnia. It accommodates Bosniak returnee and Serb nonreturnee students in two combined classes. One class consists of first- and second-grade returnee students, while the other consists of both Bosniak and Serb students between the third and fifth grades: thus, students are organized into classes according to age (grade) criteria rather than ethnic criteria. Since the efforts of parents are imperative for school integration, we must ask a crucial question: what is it that makes the Popov Most school parents inclined to integration, as opposed to those parents who opt for busing children to monoethnic schools? I argue that Popov Most parents differ markedly in their attitudes toward controversial educational issues, such as language, history, and so on, because their decisions are a by-product of environmental factors such as the relative geographical isolation of their village and the ethnic composition of adjacent regions.

First, Popov Most returnee parents come from the third, "worst-off" returnee category, where return is seen as a lesser evil in a

comparison with the life of the displaced person. All returnee parents interviewed were chronically unemployed or underemployed or had regular but insufficient sources of income (pension, for example). In addition, they were hit hard by the implementation of property law in the area of displacement; most displaced people live in illegally occupied houses, which they have to vacate in compliance with property law. If they wanted to remain in the area of displacement, they had two options: they could move to a collective center (if eligible), or they could rent a place for themselves (for which they had no disposable income). Their choice was to return to their prewar homes, where they continue to be unemployed but at least have had their property returned.³⁷

To illustrate the point, it is instructive to contrast Popov Most with another village with returnees located in the same municipality. For example, the aforementioned village of Jelec is the example of “semireturn,” where returnees with school age children return only in summer. Prior to the academic year of 2002-03, Jelec returnee parents could not be convinced to register their children in Jelec village, even though the local school would have been Bosniak, reflecting the prewar ethnic composition. At that time, those parents still enjoyed economic opportunities in the area of displacement (a great number of Jelec households were not supplied with electricity, let alone employment prospects). In addition, the lack of appropriate level of education explained earlier also played a role in their decisions. Thus, since the two cases face the same sociopolitical environment in the area of return, their different decisions are attributable to different opportunities in the area of displacement, that is, to different categories of return.

Second, Popov Most is a relatively isolated area with limited communication and war-damaged infrastructure. Communication with nearby towns is especially difficult in the winter, which causes occasional closures of the local school, let alone long-distance transportation to nearby monoethnic schools. In addition, Popov Most is far from the nearest Bosniak-dominated area with Bosniak schools. Hence, returnee parents have no choice but to send their children to the local Popov Most school, displaying a positive atti-

37. Returnee families interview.

tude toward controversial educational issues, which are also shaped by still fresh memories of the prewar relatively harmonious coexistence among different ethnic/religious groups.

First, Popov Most returnee parents registered or decided to register their children at the local school without having prior knowledge of their rights highlighted in the Interim Agreement. This does not mean, however, that they were not concerned about the issues addressed by the agreement at the time of their return. Second, once the Interim Agreement was introduced and explained to them by the IC representatives, they did not insist on its full implementation, were indifferent to it, or rejected it altogether. Below are examples of parents' attitude toward some controversial educational issues.

Just as in other places, it was not possible to fully implement the Interim Agreement in the Popov Most school. For example, the lack of interest among displaced teachers to return or to work in the school left returnees with no choice but to accept Serb teachers to teach both general and national subjects. In addition, not all subjects from the national subjects group are organized for returnees, religious instruction being one of them. Unlike their Serb classmates and in contrast to their experience from the area of displacement, returnee students do not have religious instruction because of financial constraints faced by the Islamic community. It is worth noting that this partial implementation of the Interim Agreement is the direct or indirect result of the same environmental effects explained earlier.

Furthermore, returnee parents became indifferent to the language of instruction. Although at the beginning some of them expressed interest in having their children taught in the Bosnian language, they eventually accepted the Serb language (taught by a Serb teacher). The underlying reason why they compromised their rights to have instruction in their mother tongue lies in their memories of prewar education: to them, the Bosnian and Serb (and Croat) languages are the same from a linguistic point of view;³⁸ and they rightly acknowledged that most postwar teachers

38. According to them, the only difference between the two languages is softer pronunciation of "ch" by the Bosniaks.

of the Serb and Bosnian (and Croat) languages were actually the same teachers who taught Serbo-Croatian before the war.³⁹

Interesting, in contrast to the language issue, returnee parents seemed to be more adamant in exercising their rights with regard to the alphabet question. Returnees learned only the Latin script in the Federation schools, whereas the RS education law stipulates that Cyrillic shall be taught first, with Latin being introduced in the second semester of the second grade. At the beginning of the 2002-03 school year, returnee parents insisted that their children be allowed to write in the alphabet of their choice, which the school agreed to. Why did the parents insist on the Latin alphabet but not on the Bosnian language? The answer to this question lies in the adjustment factor. For example, in the first months of their return, Popov Most parents were still uncertain about their future and were still contemplating a potential return to the area where they were displaced during the war. In this context, instruction in the Latin script was imperative for students' mobility and readjustment to the Federation schools, if necessary. This perception, however, changed after a year of living in the area of return: when parents excluded any potential return to their previous lives as displaced people, they did not mind if *latinica* was introduced second.

A similar conciliatory approach was demonstrated with respect to the equally controversial issue of the content of school textbooks. In the 2002-03 and 2003-04 academic years, some returnee parents agreed to supply their children with the RS textbooks in order not to "single them out," although RS textbooks were highly ethnocentric and biased against other ethnic groups (Croats and Bosniaks). Still, others supplied their children with both the RS and Federation textbooks. Thus, there were cases where two siblings used textbooks from different entities, or where one student shifted from RS to Federation textbooks. Depending on the grade, some national subjects textbooks produced in both entities are almost identical (nature and society up to the third grade). In contrast, textbooks addressing national history, geography, and literature are most exposed to political influence, shaping the student's perception of his or her national identity and his or her relation to

39. Returnee families interview.

the state/entity. As a result, controversial topics are taught separately for Bosniaks and Serbs, regardless of what type of textbooks they use.

Conclusion

During and after the war, each constituent people embarked on reeducating the Bosnian heart through biased and ideologically driven interpretations of history, geography, language, and literature. In turn, textbooks and curricula became an obstacle for returnees' education, ultimately resulting in different forms of segregation. Although segregation in schools is caused by the politicization of education and enhanced by the fragmentation of the BiH education system, the Popov Most case adds a new dimension in explaining educational issues: based on this preliminary study, it is legitimate to ask whether educational protectionism established at the system level is as functional at the micro level, that is, from the perspective of an individual parent. It also poses the question of what should be done to complement and enhance parents' attitudes.

Although they had no appropriate training in teaching postwar multiethnic classes, the Popov Most school teachers did everything possible to accommodate returnee students, while parents encouraged cooperation among children in the classroom as well as during extracurricular activities, adamantly refusing to politicize children's quarrels. For example, the teacher, Rasevic Nedjo, complemented the returnee parents' decision to use both RS and Federation's textbooks by giving assignments from both textbooks to returnee students, ensuring that controversial topics are taught separately for the two groups. However, the shortcoming of this practice is that, controversial topics notwithstanding, only Bosniak students are introduced to different perspectives.

It is the multiethnic character of the community in general, whereby both parents and children interact outside the school environment, that facilitates intergroup contact among students. This favorable environment should be preserved and enhanced by encouraging teachers to teach both "national subjects" and "general subjects" together for both groups, the controversial topics

included. This is possible only by organizing comprehensive and systematic training for teachers with multiethnic classrooms. Primarily, the training should focus on how to adequately introduce and teach different perspectives of Bosnian history, geography, literature, and so on, as well as how to help teachers recognize and address their own ethnic and religious prejudices.

In addition, school authorities should provide regular workshops or meetings with parents informing them about the progress or difficulties of the teachers' training as well as the ongoing revisions of Serb, Croat, and Bosniak textbooks. Since the textbook revision is a long and painful political and educational issue, teachers dealing with multiethnic classes can make a difference, if trained to teach critically from a textbook printed by any constituent group. This will also facilitate the future transition from the notion of "national subjects" to just "school subjects."