

Internationalization in the educational system of a weak state: examining multiple identities of Bosnia and Herzegovina's higher education

Amra Sabic-El-Rayess*

Department of International and Transcultural Studies, Columbia University, New York, USA

Higher education has often acted as the nucleus of progressive thought, the instigator of societal transformation, and the center of cultural exchange and understanding. However, in conflict-ridden societies, higher-education systems have shown a proclivity towards the multiple personality syndrome: their ability to solidify, connect and unite diverse communities within a society is almost always juxtaposed with higher education's tendency to separate, regionalize and exclude. This paper analyzes a local setting of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where higher education has had a dichotomous role in the society. Most notably, the analysis scrutinizes the globalizing and 'EU-nionizing' forces and values as they collide with the local tensions, traditions and identities presently existing in the higher education of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Keywords: Bosnia and Herzegovina; higher education; EU-nionizing; globalizing; externalization; ethnic identities

Introduction

In a globalizing world in which social, political, economic and educational spaces intersect, educational systems cannot exist in a socioeconomic and political vacuum. Whether a higher education system enhances mutual understanding or helps reproduce divisive societies is principally a function of contextual factors. In the words of Sir Michael Sadler, it is of essence to understand 'the intangible, impalpable, spiritual force' that drives the nation's educational system (Sadler 1900, 309). This contextualized understanding of an educational system is particularly pertinent in countries where the internal cleavages ensuing from ethnic conflicts dilute the potency of higher education to bring differing communities closer together and to enter the ongoing process of educational internationalization.

This paper begins by briefly reviewing the contextual factors that have triggered the proliferation and divergence of educational identities in the intricate setting of Bosnia and Herzegovina ('Bosnia'). The analysis then scrutinizes the globalizing and 'EU-nionizing'¹ forces and values as they collide with the local tensions, traditions and identities presently existing in higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Specific to the educational arena, these forces permeate national educational systems and reveal themselves in the form of the borrowed educational policies. To elaborate on how EU-desired affiliation and international pressure have become the drivers of

*Email: amra.sabicearayess@gmail.com

educational borrowing in Bosnia, the paper applies Jürgen Schriewer's externalization theory (Schriewer 1990; Steiner-Khamsi 2003), a key tenet of a theoretical cluster that aims to understand the political rationale behind educational borrowing.

When borrowed policies imbue local milieus, they are virtually always molded to the local politicians' alikeness. In Bosnia's higher education, this tension between the EU-nionizing forces, on the one hand, and divisive internal politics, on the other, has led to the emergence of two trends: first, the proliferation of ethnic identities in education, and, secondly, the gradual emergence of the multiple realities regarding the state of Bosnia's higher education. First, the ethnic identities of micro-educational systems within Bosnia are political constructs aimed at maintaining ethnic divisions, thereby fueling nationalistic politics and weakening the prospects for Bosnia's long-term sustainability.

Second, despite this ethnic segregation of educational spaces, most Bosnian students perceive Bosnia's higher education as a dying species with a lack of funding and static mentalities. While Bosniaks', Serbs' and Croats' views about the current state of higher education are largely converging, local politicians paint a different picture. Political claims that higher education is structured according to the demands of ethnic communities are wrapped in the progressive jargon of borrowed educational policies. The educational policy adoption in Bosnia is often limited to discourse transference, aiming to appease the observing eyes of the international community rather than those to whom educational services are being delivered. Lastly, this paper ends its analytical endeavor by affirming that the convergence of Bosnians' views across ethnic lines regarding the alarming state of Bosnia's higher education has a salient side effect. This convergence of views offers a historical opportunity for the mobilization of interethnic consensus in support of a substantive transformation of a fragmented, non-transparent and lethargic higher education system into a more unifying, intercultural and productive academic space.

Foundations of Bosnia's post-war education

Prior to the 1990s, Bosnia's educational system was characterized by 'the existence of an adequately established net of educational authorities, professional bodies and institutions, legislation and appropriate pedagogical documentation, net of school objects, equipment and teaching aids, enviable enrollment of students and satisfactory teachers' professional qualification' (UNESCO 2000, n.p.). During the 1992–1995 war, however, the educational system underwent major changes: the curriculum was cut in half, the academic year reduced, classes shortened, and teachers and students frequently killed (UNESCO 2000). Three separate educational systems emerged: the territory controlled by the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina established its own curricula, while the areas controlled by Serbs and Croats adopted curricula and textbooks from Serbia and Croatia, respectively (UNESCO 2000). Given that Serbs controlled approximately 70% of the country during the war, their educational system became dominant, aiming ideologically to support the Serbs' political goal of creating a Greater Serbia (UNESCO 2000). UNESCO-led (2000, n.p.) research further finds that the Serbs' educational system used curricula built upon their Orthodox religion, literature, history, culture and a 'negation of other peoples living in the area'.

Political forces in Bosnia's two post-war ethnic entities – the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina ('Federation') and the Serb Republic – have continued to differentiate between each other's political, cultural and educational identities. Unlike other

European countries, Bosnia does not have a central Ministry of Education, and matters in the educational sector are principally under the jurisdiction of various ministries of education. The country's already fragmented educational system has also been weakened by a further division within one of its entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where each of the 10 cantons has its own ministry of education with a high level of authority over educational policy, legislation and other organizational issues at the local level (UNESCO 2000).

To complicate matters further, Bosnian Croats from the Herzegovina region in the Federation have made substantive efforts to distance their own educational system from that of the Bosniaks. Consequently, the Federation suffers from the existence of two educational ideologies: one prevailing in the Croat-dominant areas and influenced by the curricula of neighboring Croatia, and the other functioning in the remaining parts of the Federation and influenced by the Bosniaks' hope of creating a multi-ethnic state (UNESCO 2000). To exemplify, the University of Mostar has been split into two universities, one belonging to Bosniaks and the other belonging to Croats. While ethnic segregation may not be as explicit within other universities, the workings of local politics are deeply entrenched in the cantonal ministries of education and leaderships of the faculties.

The extent of ethnic segregation within Bosnian education is best depicted by the phenomenon of 'two schools under the same roof' (Bozic 2003; UNICEF 2007), where students of different ethnicities share the same physical space, but not the curriculum. In one of such schools in the town of Vitez, Bosniak and Croat children are not allowed to mix during the lunch breaks, and their teachers are segregated across ethnic lines (Bozic 2003). Even though Bosnia's membership of the Council of Europe was dependent on turning the country's education into an intercultural institution that would espouse a common program for all, education remains a tool of nationalistic politics (Mulic-Busatlija 2001). As of August 2007, 54 schools remained ethnically segregated (statement by Causevic-Podzic, in *Dnevni Avaz* 2007) despite commitments to eliminate segregation in Bosnian schools (Mulic-Busatlija 2001).

The diverging political ideologies on how to build a European model of education in Bosnia are well captured in the opposing rhetoric of Gojko Savanovic, former Minister of Education in the Serb Republic, and Dubravko Lovrenovic, former Deputy Minister of Education for the Federation. While Lovrenovic affirmed that, within a period of three months, only seven individuals were needed to design a common curriculum in the most contentious subjects of literature, history and language, Savanovic could not specify the timeframe within which the same could be accomplished (Bozic 2003). When there is a legacy of past hostilities, educational structures often serve to deepen the line of differentiation among the main ethnic groups rather than to solidify national identity (Heyneman 2000). Bosnia's inability to move its higher education effectively towards a process of internationalization seen elsewhere in Europe stems from these conflicting political aspirations.

Building interpretative framework: theory of externalization

Historically, Western European societies have mobilized their educational systems to build their national identities and enhance social cohesion. Heyneman (2000, 177) finds that '[t]his social purpose originated from the time when the first multiethnic nations were being constructed'. While parting with their communist mentalities and

associated educational models, many formerly communist states are now redefining the role of education in their societies. In doing so, they are often working towards adopting EU-driven educational models. In higher education, these newly envisioned educational systems are to provide a modern and mobile workforce that is to build a stable and harmonized Europe.

To adequately situate Bosnia into this broader and ongoing interplay between the EU-nionizing forces, borrowed policies and contextual factors, one is compelled to introduce a theoretical framework that aids in understanding the workings of educational borrowing. Specifically, this paper uses Jürgen Schriewer's externalization theory that has led to a theoretical shift in educational borrowing: no longer are researchers solely preoccupied with what is being borrowed, but also with why borrowing is taking place (Schriewer 1990; Steiner-Khamsi 2002). Externalization is the process of referring to policies and educational systems external to a national education system in question, often with a particular political agenda in mind (Steiner-Khamsi 2002, 2003). As Steiner-Khamsi (2002) saliently observes, even the transfer of a particular discourse constitutes borrowing, while Silova (2004) notes that the political rationale behind educational borrowing – be it at a discourse or policy level – is not always aimed at legitimizing domestic reforms or at adopting external policies, but rather at reinforcing the workings of the old system.

While Philips (2004) specifies that educational borrowing transpires because of some internal shock to the educational system or political context, Steiner-Khamsi (2002, 2003) claims that external references are introduced when internal referencing becomes idle. Simply, externalization is often drawn upon when domestic reforms are 'politically highly contested' (Steiner-Khamsi 2002, 10). In fact, Steiner-Khamsi (2002) further argues that a particular set of circumstances determines the adequacy of self-referential approach or externalization; for instance, a domestic stalemate can create a powerful incentive to search for appropriate external references to induce educational borrowing (Steiner-Khamsi 2002).

To add to Philips and Steiner-Khamsi's invaluable input, the imbalanced aid relationship between international agencies and national governments is another powerful instigator of educational borrowing. Under pressure from international institutions, similar reforms are transpiring throughout the developing world because of 'the nature of the aid relationship and funding arrangements and the dominant role of external agencies in this relationship' (Samoff 1999, 253). To maintain aid relationships with the West, many developing countries have adopted external discourses if not actual policies. In Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, for instance, the borrowed policies have been 'hijacked' and presently serve local political agendas (Silova 2005, 53). This brief introduction to externalization theory satisfies the needs of this study by providing the grounds for explaining a complex interplay between educational borrowing and contextual factors in Bosnia.

Can EU-nionization of Bosnian higher education help sustain Bosnia?

The ideological shift from socialism to capitalism, the horrifying war of the 1990s and Bosnian aspirations to join the EU have magnified Bosnia's proneness to referencing external policies as the country embarks on educational reforms. Once a policy is imported, whether the local milieu will resist or open up to change is always a function of local politics and the perceived attractiveness of foreign policies to the local power-holders. Indeed, local settings are resistant to external policies when such

initiatives do not converge with the aspirations of local politicians. In these instances, the borrowed policy is either not implemented or it is adapted so that the originally intended impact is rarely allowed to pierce through the institutional layers and reach the classroom level.

In addition to Bosnia's ethnic fragmentation, its post-war recovery was further complicated by the country's transition from communism. For the formerly communist countries desiring to become EU members, the Bologna Process has provided a clear set of pointers as to which policies are the top candidates for educational reform. The Bologna Process and the cluster of associated policies are aimed at harmonization of educational space within Europe that would gradually generate a competitive and fluid workforce. Despite Bosnia's 2003 Bologna endorsement (European University Association 2004), higher education in Bosnia tends to operate in old ways: rote learning is common, and students lack opportunities to apply their knowledge practically. In 2005, Croatia spent 12 million US dollars while Bosnia made no budget allocations to support the Bologna Process (Center for Investigative Reporting 2004a).

The firm grip of ethnically charged local politics has engaged discursive devices to customize the EU-nionizing and globalizing policies a priori their implementation. When asked about the implementation of the Bologna Process in particular, former Minister of Education in the Canton of Sarajevo Emir Turkusic simply, yet powerfully, stated: 'Take an old ... [car] and put a Mercedes sign on it and start telling people that it was a Mercedes – well, that's the state of Bologna [a]round here' (Center for Investigative Reporting 2004a, 8). For years now, international institutions have been pushing Bosnia's politicians to formulate and adopt a Unified Law on Higher Education for Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter, 'the Law'). The Law was to become the legislative basis for bringing Bosnia's higher education in line with the Bologna obligations, and the World Bank conditioned its assistance to Bosnia's education upon the passing of the Law. As of 7 May 2004, the Law had not been adopted, leading the World Bank to withdraw 12 million US dollars that were to assist Bosnia's higher education reform. At the time, the World Bank explicitly criticized the Serb Republic for rejecting the Law, thereby jeopardizing the future reform of higher education (Voice of America 2004).

While Serbs refused to pass the power over higher education from the entity to the state level, Croats were adamant about keeping their dominion over higher education at the cantonal level (Voice of America 2004). Such a political rationale unveils the unwavering determination of Serb and Croat politicians to preserve their ethnic dominion over educational structures in Bosnia. This resistance to educational reform, at the risk of losing international funding, is occurring at a time when Bosnia's higher education is labeled as one of the worst in Europe (Center for Investigative Reporting 2004a).

Ultimately, the Law was adopted in June 2007, when the leading Serb nationalist party, called the Serb Democratic Party (SDS or Srpska Demokratska Stranka) alarmingly warned that the passage of such a law would be the first step towards creating conditions for the formation of a ministry of education at the state level (Srna 2007). Serb politicians feared that having a state ministry of education would connect and harmonize educational processes in the country and beyond, thereby threatening the foundations of the segregated ethnic identities in Bosnia's education. However, while the Law allows the formation of a state-level accreditation agency, it also gives a stamp of approval for divisive and ethnicity-driven decentralization by allowing the highly decentralized system to remain almost intact; to specify, the

entities and cantons will award accreditations to universities, while the state agency will set standards for accreditation (Fena 2007). Similarly, the control over education financing will remain at the entity rather than be moved to the state level. Even at the cantonal level, there have been notable differences in the distribution of funds to varied faculties, and the preferential treatment of the cantonal governments towards particular faculties have been attributed to the linkages of these institutions with local politics (Center for Investigative Reporting 2004a).

In Bosnia's higher education, political affiliation and being born into the right ethnicity, rather than one's competence, is likely to determine one's suitability for professorships and leadership positions within the faculties. In fact, each faculty has an executive board that consists of two professors and three members of the political leadership in the locality (Center for Investigative Reporting 2004b). Many from academia also hold powerful positions in government – including Parliament of Federation, National Assembly of Serb Republic, Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and ministries both in the Federation and in the Serb Republic – confirming the existence of a firm relationship between the leading political bodies and higher education (Center for Investigative Reporting 2004c).

An ethnically fragmented educational system makes Bosnia's higher education system susceptible to non-transparency and high costs. An estimated 30 to 50% of the higher education budget is spent on administrative costs (Center for Investigative Reporting 2004a). When asked about the financial accountability of higher education institutions, Hasib Gibanica, from the Sarajevo Canton's Ministry of Finance, asserted that communication between his Ministry and those faculties that the Ministry finances was 'poor' (Center for Investigative Reporting 2004a, n.p.). He further noted that the faculties were obliged to submit financial reports to the Ministry, but his Ministry was unable to verify the financial reports provided by the faculties (Center for Investigative Reporting 2004a). In addition, faculties produce revenues independent of the funds obtained from their respective Ministries of Finance, and a germane regulatory framework that would guide the spending of the revenues generated by the faculties simply does not exist (Center for Investigative Reporting 2004a). Apart from earning revenues through their cooperation with private enterprises, faculties generate additional revenues through student-examination commissions. This practice encourages professors to fail students repeatedly to boost the revenues of their faculties, increasing the individual earnings of professors while severely thwarting the 'in-time college completion rate' to a shockingly low 3% (Center for Investigative Reporting 2004a).

In line with Silova's (2004) assertions that externalization frameworks are at times used to reinforce the status quo, politicized discourses in Bosnia appear to have shifted from those of communism to those of European integration, decentralization and democracy, only to solidify an already existing and fragmented educational system. The political forces have mobilized discursive mechanisms through a myriad documents, discussions and nominal endorsements of external policies propagated by international institutions, but without a willingness to reform higher education. The preceding discussion on the non-existent changes in structural organization of higher education, extensive bureaucracy maintaining a highly decentralized system via independent faculties, the absence of regulatory frameworks and the lack of harmonizing agency at the state level have jointly corroborated the thesis that nationalistic politics has created a discursive reality surrounding the popularized educational policies to – only *discursively* – adopt external policies, thereby seemingly satisfying the international community's appetite for a change in Bosnia's higher education.

Political leaders, primarily from Serb and Croat communities, insist that separate educational systems mirror the needs and expectations of their respective electorate. This conflicts with research from 2006 conducted by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The OSCE (2006) randomly selected 2130 of Bosnia's citizens aged 15 and above. Of the total sample, 43% were Bosniaks, 36% were Serbs, 14% were Croats, and 7% were others (OSCE 2006). Interestingly, 53% of the sample agreed that the state should play a greater role in the financing and organization of education (OSCE 2006). Within the Federation, 60% of those surveyed believed that the state should have a greater impact on education; most surprisingly, a slight majority within those surveyed in the Serb Republic agreed that the Bosnian state should play more prominently in the arena of education (OSCE 2006). By ethnicity, 88% of Bosniaks, 72% of Croats, and 51% of Serbs wanted Bosnia to establish a ministry of education at the state level (OSCE 2006). The increasingly positive attitudes of all ethnic groups towards state involvement in education can be further exemplified through a comparative evaluation of equivalent survey data from 2005 and 2006. Namely, in 2005, only 22% of the surveyed Serbs supported a more active role of the state in education, while that number more than doubled in 2006 (OSCE 2006). Even though Serb and Croat politicians resent any reforms that enhance the control of the state over education, the OSCE findings point to a salient divergence of views between local politicians and the ethnic communities of Bosnia.

The OSCE's 2006 research further underlined that, in the Brcko District, the only locality in the country that exists outside the two entities and has been under the protectorate of the US since 1997, educational reform was being aggressively implemented. As a result, reforms have advanced more rapidly than in any other part of the country, and Bosnians from Brcko are significantly more pleased with the reforms in education than are Bosnians living elsewhere. Resulting from the international pressure to make cultural diversity and tolerance a requisite for education in this multiethnic city, Brcko citizens have gradually developed a more progressive vision of education and an affinity towards tolerant and inclusive educational structures. Comparatively, Mostar is another city into which the international community has poured significant assistance, but educational reforms were not forced upon a segregated educational system. Unlike those of multiethnic Brcko, citizens of Mostar remain generally dissatisfied with the educational reforms (OSCE 2006).

The propagation of a highly decentralized model of education for Bosnia is pursued via discursive promulgation of cultural diversity and democracy in Bosnia's influential policy circles. Research by the Council of Europe (1999, 4) also points to the need to recognize the 'cultural diversity' in Bosnia and calls for a decentralized model of education. However, the international community has been unable to correct for the failures of Bosnia's indigenous version of decentralization that presently translates the adoption of cultural and participatory diversity into the reproduction of ethnic divisions. However, Bosnians themselves are increasingly in doubt as to whether the current educational micro-systems of Bosnia offer equal access to education. More specifically, 52% of those surveyed believe that the educational apparatus of Bosnia does not provide equal access to all its citizens (OSCE 2006).

To unveil further complexities related to the Bosnian context, the phenomenon of highly decentralized higher education and the existence of individually strong faculties dates back to the period of communist Yugoslavia. The formerly totalitarian regime feared student protest, powerful universities and anger consolidation. Thus, the politics of the time deliberately diluted the power of universities, whilst fostering the

independence of individual faculties (Council of Europe 1999; Center for Investigative Reporting 2004a). In post-war Bosnia, ethnic politics has replaced communist ideology, but the dissection of higher education into less powerful units remains essential for the survival of the current political system. This highly decentralized and divisive higher education system continues to preclude the fusion of student populations and accumulation of the kind of critical mass that would generate needed educational reform, an indispensable element of Bosnia's long-term sustainability. In other words, old aims have been expressed in new jargon at the expense of generations of Bosnians awaiting substantive change in higher education.

Conclusion

Creation of separate ethnic identities in education is a salient and irreplaceable source of power for local politicians. For those power holders desiring to further fragment and weaken the state, largely mono-ethnic schools and universities are suitable sites for the reproduction of ethnic tensions which, in turn, fuel nationalistic politics allowing for the further dilution of social cohesiveness and the deepening of ethnic hatred. This circular conundrum has not only fueled proliferation of ethnicity-based educational identities, but has undoubtedly debilitated Bosnia in solidifying its statehood and internationalizing its education. For instance, Heyneman (2000, 177) rightly claims that public agreement on creating ethnically tolerant classrooms is one of the essential building blocks of social cohesion within a nation. With social cohesiveness absent at all levels of education, the long-term sustainability of Bosnia as a stable and multiethnic society is in question.

Being a highly decentralized segment of Bosnia's education, higher education fits seemingly well into popularized discourses on decentralization, cultural diversity and democratization of educational processes, even though this localization of power through which faculties gain excessive independence suits the nationalistic politics and ethnic division of the post-war Bosnia. To note, this analysis of the educational system in a weak state in no way insists that the inadequacy of decentralization is a universal finding. However, the study does suggest that Bosnia's setting, with its statehood in infancy and in absentia of fully enforceable regulatory and supervisory frameworks, is presently premature for a fully decentralized model of education. The decentralization model arrived too early to Bosnia and allowed for ethnic segregation instead of creating an intercultural, democratic and transparent educational apparatus. Consequently, this organizational model has retarded the solidification of Bosnia's national identity, a process that is fundamental to society's long-term sustainability.

Ethnically driven fragmentation in education has also impaired international efforts to EU-nionize and harmonize Bosnia's educational systems with the rest of Europe. Indeed, the Bologna Process clashes head on with segregationist views that remain powerful in political circles across the country. Despite international pressure to implement higher education reforms, the mindset of local power holders remains impervious, thereby limiting the implementation of the Bologna Process to the adoption of a discourse that is utterly resistant to making any substantive changes. As Grant (1997, 11) cautiously observes, '[u]nless we can educate children and adults to value their own cultures and those of others and sensitize them to the unavoidable pluralism that we all live in now ... the alternative is terrifying to contemplate'.

While the endeavor of optimally mixing the cocktail of decentralization and centralization elements in building a modern and effective higher education in Bosnia should be an object of an additional inquiry, a collective dissatisfaction of ethnic communities with educational modalities in Bosnia should be leveraged to reform Bosnia's higher education so that it evolves into a source of intellectual and reformative power in all facets of political, social, economic and educational life of the country. In the process, the successful and unifying educational reforms and the manner in which they were conducted in the District of Brcko should be internally referenced to justify progressive reforms in the rest of the country. Alternatively, should the higher education system of Bosnia continue to exist without a unifying, intercultural and tolerant educational identity, the question of Bosnia's survival as a political entity will remain open, continuing to destabilize the region of the Balkans and beyond.

Note

1. The term 'EU-nionizing' forces refers to a set of political, social, cultural and educational forces that are tasked with synchronizing the family of European societies.

Notes on contributor

Amra Sabic-El-Rayess is a PhD candidate in Comparative and International Education at Columbia University, specializing in economics and focusing on Eastern Europe. Her research interests include educational corruption, post-war societies, economic development, ethnicity, mobility and nation-building. She earned her BA in Economics from Brown University and her MA in Economic and Political Development from Columbia University.

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