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Ethnic Violence Creates Separation

It can be easy to take a stable government for granted- for example, the United States. Having the consistency of the Democratic and Republican parties campaigning for local and national positions has been the norm for the past centuries. United States citizens are never in fear of persecutions because of their religion or ethnicity no matter who is leading the country. We assume, and rightly so, that when we wake up tomorrow things we be pretty much the same as they were at this current moment. Growing up with this type of community allows for the establishment of different religions, ethnic groups and sets of beliefs and morals to coexist in harmony. For the former Yugoslavia, this did not apply in anyway; the ethnic discrimination and warfare faced by the citizens of Yugoslavia created a community of fear, hatred, and confusion for the citizens. In general, the constant uprooting of ethnic groups as well as unstable governments with conflicting laws and policies led to the racial hatred and misunderstandings that were shared between all ethnic groups in the area, including Bosnian Muslims, Serbians, Albanian Moslems and Macedonians. The past events and social patterns that were due to this, such as constant changing of political groups and leaders and what was viewed through the allotted eyes of the media gave citizens an impulsive and skewed view of life. The racial violence, slurs, attitudes, etc cannot be blamed on the citizens alone; the different leaders of the ethnic groups and political parties are the ones to account for most of the behavior at this time period.  
 The constant political changes in the former Yugoslavia attribute a large majority of the reasons for ethnic warfare. The Croatian Regime during World War II is an excellent example of the ethnic violence that was faced by the Serbians. Outside actions by the United States, Europe, France, etc were taken alongside the United Nation to help create a sense of unity between the groups once again and end the ethnic warfare. “In spite of the UN actions, the war continued and in the late summer and autumn of 1992 reports of concentration camps and crimes against civilians began to fill the media,” (Rogel 32). This was not the only instance of ethnic violence. Ethnic cleansing had also been established in late 1991 in Croatia, trying to Serbianize certain Croat locations by ridding them of non-Serb citizens (Rogel 33). Seeing as both groups were going against each other, governments besides the national government had to be involved. Having the EU and UN attempt to create conferences to establish peace treaties and boundaries did not do much to help, as this ethnic violence went on for many years. When citizens of these different ethnic groups learned of such ethnic cleansing actions taken towards their own ethnicity, they were more than ever eager to join the fight against the enemy. Laza represents the average citizen in *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* by doing exactly this. When he sees reports of ethnic violence and warfare against his people on the TV through his local news program, he wants to join to help the Serbian population. He immediately makes this irrational decision to join up with the army instead of trying to bring awareness of what both sides are doing to each other. “The confrontation in Croat-ruled Bosnia featured a struggle between Croats and Serbs. The Serbs, who were singled out by the Croats as the enemy, suffered terribly. They were executed, deported or converted to Catholicism. For Serbs, Jasenovac, where tens of thousands of Serbs were brutally killed, stands as a symbol of Croat extermination policies,” (Aftermath 46). It can be understood why Laza would want to take up arms against the Croats; to see your people treated in such an inhuman way without much interaction from outsiders would create a rise in most citizens under attack. Laza’s actions are not considered out of the ordinary.  
 Through the struggles that Bosnians, Serbs, Croats, etc faced during the late 20th century, one person did make an attempt to join all the forces and settle the differences of the ethnic groups: Tito and his communist regime. “Tito in a way was the country’s last unifying force; for many he was the glue that had held Yugoslavia together until 1980,” (Rogel 14). While he did attempt to create racial unity within these groups and satisfy everyone, he went through with his plans in the wrong way. Instead of addressing the issues between the different ethnic groups, Tito and his Communist Partners wanted to move on from the tensions created and establish a new, unified Yugoslavian society. However, without addressing such issues, more racial violence and warfare can only ensue. A visual example of this was in the beginning of *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame.* In the scene of the fake newsreel, we see the leader cut his finger; instead of fixing his injury properly, they try to bandage it up and try to move on, ignoring the constant flow of blood pouring out. This shows the attitude the communists had towards the Serbs, instead of wanting to fix their problems with other ethnic groups, they just wanted to pick up and move on- no repair was necessary in their eyes.   
 While Tito wasn’t perfect, he was able to unify the ethnic groups of the former Yugoslavia, which ended up declaring civil wars and creating ethnic discrimination after his death. This time period of struggle and conflict between the ethnic groups is seen in the movies *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame, Before the Rain, Fourth Part of the Brain,* and *No Man’s Land.* Also in *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* we can see the difference between average citizens and higher military officials liking the new communist government. Velja discusses with the Captain as to how he believes that this Communist government is only fit for those with higher status and how for the average poor citizen, there are not many benefits. This unequal opportunity lifestyle was also not good for the citizens of the former Yugoslavia and led to other feelings of unrest and disapproval and ultimately, more ethnic warfare.  
 The attitudes and feelings that the Bosnian Muslims, Serbians, Albanian Moslems and Macedonians had towards each other cannot be fully blamed on them alone. As discussed above, the unstable governments and policies led to much unrest that was building for years. After all, hardly anyone in this area is racially pure. “Few individuals in the entire Balkan peninsula could honestly claim a racially pure ancestry for themselves,” (Malcolm 1). One would tend to think that this ethnic mix would allow for people to be more accepting and tolerant of other ethnicities, however it instead is just the opposite. New ethnic groups were constantly moving into, around, and out of the Balkans, including Asiatic Huns, Iranian Alans, Avars, and Slavs (Malcolm 6). The territory disputes and political arguments led to racial tensions, slurs, warfare, etc that had never really stopped, which dates back to the 7th century CE. These different ethnic groups had different languages with different cultures and, which included different ideas of other cultures. Some forms of ethnic discrimination, such as racial slurs and views of other cultures, go back to this idea.   
 With these different ethnic groups always being caught in turmoil and never able to receive the full truth in regards to any news of ongoing events, it can be understood as to why they really disliked other ethnic groups. When receiving news reports, citizens believed what was shown to them, and why should they believe any different? They did not know that what they being informed on was untrue or false in anyway. In addition, it is known that it is easier for humans to often believe the bad of someone over the good- how often does this happen in daily life? Considering this it is easy to understand where the different groups were coming from, especially with older generations that lived before the Communist regime of Tito who tried to join everyone together. The older generation had these ethnic discrimination policies ingrained within them.  
 With the media that covered the events in these countries, the news was hardly correct. “The nationalists also controlled television, which became the most important medium in the countryside, where in some areas literacy was minimal. The medium was used to spread lies and fear about the enemy (false war information was regularly broadcast) and about political opponents in elections,” (Aftermath 49). Spreading false information was an easy way for different ethnic groups to hold grudges against one another and continue the violence. This is easily displayed in *No Man’s Land* when Nino and Chiki are arguing over their villages being bombed. Nino talks about how he was being bombed, but Chiki refutes with saying how he saw his village being bombed with his own eyes. The conclusion that we are to come to is that while Nino was being told Chiki’s people were bombing his villages, the footage Nino actually was being reversed and falsely reported; the news was showing Chiki’s villages being bombed as their own, creating even more ethnic violence. Were average citizens to blame for this? No. But what could they do about it, or how could they prove it wrong? When Laza joins the army, he does because of what he views on TV; he sees the way the Germans and Turks interact and speak and believes that this is the truth and wants to correct the ethnic discrimination on behalf of the Serbs.   
 Milan and Halil also demonstrate this idea of believing what you hear over what could be true; Milan is told that his mother has been killed by members of the Bosnian squad, which includes Halil. It is found out later that Halil did not kill Milan’s mother, but Milan chose to believe that he did instead of seeking the real truth from Halil until the end. By choosing to believe what he heard, he only added to some of the issues that these people were facing about not receiving correct information. The way these cultures were being represented in the media held true for not only in the former Yugoslavia, but throughout the world. “The Western media discovered the detention and death camps of Amoarska, Trnopolje, and Manaca in July of that year and widely publicized the horrors, which they compared to the Holocaust against the Jews during World War II,” (Rogel 33). The whole world was now receiving news of the ethnic violence and whether or not it was being publicized correctly, all people could see that what was going on needed to end.   
 Perhaps the common experience of having to go through such ethnic discrimination and violence was able to bring people together of different ethnicities, even if just for a little while. In *The Fourth Part of the Brain* we see the way the kids interact with each other, not phased by the different ethnicities that separate them. Their friendship seems to matter most to each other. The film never identifies their ethnicity, just states that they are all Serbs. Kiril and Zamira also display affection for each other in *Before the Rain*. They are of two different ethnicities, and seemed to fall in love. Putting aside ethnicities and sharing friendship is also shown in *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame.* Milan and Halil have set aside the ideas of ethnic discrimination and became good friends at a very young age. However, maybe this idea of not thinking about the current ethnic violence or discrimination going on between these cultures occurs to only young children- after all, Milan and Halil end up fighting against each other during the war. We also feel a sense of previous love between Alex and Hana in *Before the Rain*. It is inferred that when they were younger, Alex, a Macedonian, and Hana, an Albanian Muslim, were lovers. We can see the way they look at each other when Alex is sitting in her house, as well as the glance and hand gesture she gives to him through the window. Their love was permitted when they were younger, however, now tolerance of the joining of ethnicities is not allowed. They carry this idea that when one is young, ethnic discrimination does not seem to matter. In fact, some youth tried to avoid the violence altogether, such as Velja’s brother in *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame.* Velja’s brother is an archaeology student try to dodge the Bosnian Serb draft, and Velja goes in his place. Also, one can look at the Losage twins in *The Fourth Part of the Brain*. They consider that only youth who were unemployed and not good in school ended up having to enter the war. The sense of youth trying to avoid the ethnic violence also shows that they did not wish to participate in such events, and perhaps wanted to forget about the ethnic discrimination. However, as you grow into adulthood and are surrounded by others who preach such horrible ideas of other ethnicities, you have no choice but to listen and in some cases, change your point of view on ethnic discrimination to survive.  
 Sometimes common experiences could unite strangers and enemies, even if just for a little while. Nino and Chiki share a similar experience when residing in the trench. In *No Man’s Land*, while waiting for the UN to send for help, the two men start discussing this woman they used to know, coming to the conclusion that it’s actually the same woman. Not only does this show that they have something in common, it alludes to the idea that perhaps they could have lived in the same town or even had other similar acquaintances.   
 Considering these common experiences that these characters endured, whether they were young or not, can initiate questions as to why these friendships and bonds not enough to stop the ethnic discrimination. It is hard to pinpoint just one reason for this, as many things contributed to and fueled the ethnic discrimination that was occurring. First off, even though Western media was presenting the ethnic violence acts, very little was done to stop the anti-Muslim genocide (Rogel 33). Without outside help and intervention, it was hard for the violence to end and the ethnic groups revert to a calm way of living, and the newer generation to formulate new and welcoming ideas of all ethnicities in the area. “Literacy, education, and the media in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries later helped sharpen the ethnic or national awarenesses of the subgroups of the Balkan Slavs,” (Aftermath 43). This holds true in many ways, even though sometimes youth decided to forget about what was going on around them and focus on the good they saw in people- we see this represented in the movies with *The Fourth Part of the Brain* as well as the relationship between Zamira and Kiril in *Before the Rain.* Regardless, what the youth and even adults were being told by the literature available, their education, and the media kept them from preventing ethnic violence and creating stable and sustaining bonds with others. In addition to the media, the constant governmental changes after Tito’s death played a role in the stopping of friendships and bonds between ethnic groups. The battles of power between the groups all had one goal, to keep themselves separate from the other ethnic groups. Sharing common experiences and creating friendships between ethnic groups violated the idea of nationalism and intolerance of other groups, and citizens were afraid of being punished for such.   
 Those who lived in the post-Tito former Yugoslavia had to face many challenges to even survive, not to mention create unity and friendships with those of other ethnic groups. The ethnic discrimination and violence that ensued was partially due to the constant change of governments and policies in short time periods, as well as coverage from the media and older ethnic tensions that had existed from centuries ago. Seeing as hardly anyone was racially pure, the confrontations in regards to ethnicity seem a little out of place; nonetheless, the violence and discrimination continued against and within the Bosnians, Serbians, Albanians, and Macedonians. Outside forces could only do so much to stop and aid the violence. Perhaps sharing common experiences and building friendships between the groups would help lessen the tensions, and for some young people, it did. Overall, the tensions between them due to the violence and government shifts prevailed and prevented lasting bonds. The former Yugoslavia was in turmoil and the only way to completely overcome the discrimination was for the people themselves to recognize the issues and put it to a stop.

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