

EDUCATING ABOUT PREJUDICE

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Seferović: In Europe and the United States

of America there are forces of thought, which opposed this kind of a future assessment, more precisely said, this type of design of the future opposing aspirations of globalization and internationalization, which connect people and different cultures. According to Balić "there should not be divisions among nations based on racial, religious or ideological affiliation. Precisely this kind of endeavor reflects equality, pluralism and tolerance of Islam." Balić's book *Forgotten Islam* falls under those "boundary" books which acknowledges differences but exalts a mutual foundation.

Something that is particularly current and socially dangerous is the development of a theory about the conflict of civilizations, a thesis that should replace the world division that was overcome during the Cold War, into communist and capitalist countries. The goal and motivation of these kinds of theories is the intensification of prejudices among the nations, races and religions which originate foremost as a result of ignorance and without a wish to learn about different cultures, as a justification for the economic, territorial and political pretensions and conflicts between the countries and nations in the present age.

Samuel Huntington, in his book *Clash of Civilizations*, states:

"In the post-Cold War world, the most important distinctions among peoples are not ideological, political or economic. They are cultural. Peoples and nations are attempting to answer the most basic question humans can face: Who are we? ... People use politics not just to advance their interests, but also to define their identity. We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against... Western universalistic pretensions come into conflict with other civilizations, most seriously with Islam and China..."

Huntington is one of the leading professors at the respected Harvard University who is not alone in these kinds of deliberations, writings and behaviors. This imposed thesis was best noted by Smail Balić and he called it "the imaginary 'conflict of civilizations', which gives Islam the characteristic of a tyrannical religion and which replaces communism as yesterday's number 1 enemy."

In Europe and the United States of America there are forces of thought, which opposed this kind of a future assessment, more precisely said, this type of design of the future opposing aspirations of globalization and internationalization, which connect people and different cultures. According to Balić "there should not be divisions among nations based on racial, religious or ideological affiliation. Precisely this kind of endeavor reflects equality, pluralism and tolerance of Islam."

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INTOLERANCE AS A SOCIAL DISEASE

Appreciation of a collective development is found precisely through respect, nurture and introduction to different cultures and the so-called different civilizations which in either way should not be recognized and determined based on who we are against. Theories and practice based on the thesis of clash of civilizations are deepening and justifying intolerance of individuals, groups and nations based on prejudices.

The problem of intolerance among people of different ethnic, racial and religious affiliations, was not nor is it going to be only a problem for our parents and various generations, but a *social wound which has to be treated through educational process of each young generation*. The role of political structures and religious centers, ethnic groups and communities, appeared in many cases, through history and the present time, insufficient for preventing intolerance, and in a great number of cases they play a role of an instigator of wars and other kinds of non-democratic actions. At the same time the family, which according to its organization is the essential part of nurturing the tradition and culture of the individual and his nation, was not able to become a carrier of tolerance among different ethnic and religious groups as well.



Misconceptions from the past and superficial knowledge often are the cause of conflicting reactions among nations. Instead of collapsing, walls of ignorance are built up. In that context, it is necessary that learning about the causes and destructive consequences of prejudiced thoughts and the ways of fighting against discrimination, oppression and genocide become an integral part of the course of study, whose outermost goal is shaping of young people when it comes to the democratic pluralistic society.

Until now traditional, according to subjects segmented lectures (history, language, literature, social studies), showed to be insufficient for understanding and decreasing of destructive influences of ethnic, religious, racial hatreds which lead to tragic social disorders. In order for the general picture to be even more disturbed, education is colored with political ideologies of the ruling structures and with the narrow ethnic and national viewpoints. In schools throughout Chicago at the desks are seated together Mexicans, Indians, Pakistanis, Belarusians, Russians, Vietnamese, Bosnians, world in a smaller version, but that diversity is characterized by stereotypical deliberations of each other, which transcend through association and thoughts, and the educational processes do not do much when it comes to development of pluralistic courses and behaviors. Various music, national costume and food festivals are only superficial forms which do not enter the essence of complexity of multiethnic, multicultural, multiracial and multireligious societies and are not the origins of knowledge and experience as preventions of a tolerant pluralistic society. The Institute for education at the national level of the United States of America noted this problem and pointed out a need of discovering stereotypical, subjective and false writings in textbooks in which history was not even researched until the year 1970, for example, about the American Indians, a genocide on this continent was completely erased. Later on, again, it was taken to a different extreme and everything that could have been controversial was thrown out of the textbooks so that it would not be seen as discrimination of ethnic groups and minorities, and the soul and essence of many historic, sociological and educational processes was taken out.

There are also extreme cases, about which writes a columnist from Sarajevo.

“Even when the school is under the same roof, the students are completely separated, they take classes at different times and under different programs of study. Figuratively said, the janitor at those schools rings the bell twice: before noon for the students of one, and after noon for the students of the other nationality.”

From Stereotypes to Genocide

General William T. Sherman also reports his experiences in *“Letter to Major R. M. Sawyer, 1864”* “People from the South entered into a clearly defined joint government, but through the organization of its countries they kept the forms of special organization, with special interests, history and prejudices. Those prejudices have become increasingly stronger, until they finally caused the war and gave rise to the most bitter fruits.”

Writing of a poet and author from Mostar about the fate of the distinguished poet Aleksa Šantić is impressive.

“That son of yours – says Adža to Mara – took up with a Croat girl! God forbid! – the mother crossed herself... Listen you, Aleksa, and inculcate upon your mind once and for all... I forgave you everything, but to pollute Šantić’s blood, eh, that you won’t, even if you were the apple of my eye. Is that settled?”

Social turmoil and brutal settling in many countries are greatly imbued by prejudices, such as Kosovo and Northern Ireland as it is pointed out in one enclosure: “From lack of knowledge grows prejudice, from prejudice grows fear of each other, from fear grows hatred, with it come tensions and it is only a question of time when they will culminate with violence... In Northern Ireland they had a war motivated by religious differences. The same people, language, physiognomy, but they conflicted to the point where it was worse then it was here (former Yugoslavia), and it lasted twenty-five years. In the end they sat down, came to an agreement, created institutions which they became part of, they believe in institutions, even though they do not solve the question of status. They put status to the side for a little while, for when their viewpoints become more similar...”

At the same time I noticed that study and conversation about the most sensitive, so-called controversial themes are avoided: racial tensions in America, ethnic tensions in the area of former Yugoslavia, polarization of religion, responsibility for crimes, which were actually the essence of many historical conflicts and unsolved problems of the present age. History is taught as a series of events, sociology as a series of different theories, scientific and technological experiences are humanly unpainted. Through all of these educational developments conversation about justice and injustice, historical and social responsibility of young people is avoided...

The intensity of showing prejudices is different, starting from, at first sight, harmless stereotypical thoughts, to discrimination, violence, and all the way to culmination – genocide. Factors which lead to creation of prejudices are different – historical, social, psychological, and biological, and together with them are theories which explain the causes of the emergence of prejudices. For example, sociologists see prejudices as a social problem when it comes to overpopulation of urban environment, as a consequence of unemployment, competition, and the victims of urban life are blamed for the growth of violence in cities. Exploitation of work force contributes to prejudices towards minorities. Psychologists believe that prejudices are a natural, universal psychological process of showing frustration and behavior. Prejudices are also carried through families, from generation to generation, like for example, that women always cook, certain people are more aggressive, and so on. Many people follow aggressive leaders full of hatred for others, and kill in their name and for them. Even though a theory does not exist which explains all of the causes of the emergence of prejudice, students and college students should acquire a solid basis for understanding the roots of prejudices to offer their own thoughts whether prejudices are inherited as a natural state of man or are a consequence of a society, environment and milieu, different circumstances, or are they in fact something completely different. Students and lecturers need to reexamine their own prejudices and based on their findings and experiences to give their vision of the emergence of prejudices.

Analysis and research should definitely include the most impressive historical forms of these kinds of understandings and discrimination aimed at Jews, Muslims, Latin Americans, women, blacks, Roma, and American Indians. American institute of education before all pointed out the still insufficient study about discrimination of American Indians, women and Latin Americans.

The most current shape of stereotypical and politicized vision and activity is the treatment of the Muslim world after the events on the American land, September 11, 2001, which are seen as a terrorist act. Anti-Muslim frame of mind would have a special weight about the study of prejudices.

As a member of the Bosniak nation, acquainted with the laws of former Yugoslavia, with a Master’s in Social Studies, a humanitarian, a lecturer in the American elementary schools, high schools and colleges, a tireless volunteer first in the former Yugoslavia, and now in the Bosniak society in America, I became aware of the crushing effect of prejudices among different ethnic, racial and religious groups.

For us it is especially essential to have gatherings of young people on a theme of Bosnia and Herzegovina, multicultural, religious and multiethnic society, as a notion of tolerance, it has a universal and world dimension which goes beyond geographic frames. Srebrenica, an irrefutable example of discrimination and genocide of the Bosniak nation, is a reminder to young generations about the destructive impact of prejudiced thoughts and actions.

New forms of discrimination, violence and genocide toward Armenians, Ukrainians, Cambodians, in Rwanda, Sudan, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, are mentioned in the law brought out from the side of the governor of the state of Illinois and that in the study of history it is obligatory, next to the holocaust of the Jews, these crimes are written as well.

The impulse to studying other kinds of discrimination, and new ideas how to minimize destructive effect of prejudices should either way be the goal of the conversation and study about prejudices. Inclusion of youth into social activities and humanitarian organizations which are tied to this kind of action is a preventive response and the final goal of this kind of educational process in creating a democratic and pluralistic society in America, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the entire world.

Bosnian library in Chicago, where I am the director of the section Educating Against Prejudices, is organizing lectures and cultural educational program on April 25th based on the theme of preventive effects and influences on the public based on the events in Darfur, genocide of the Bosniaks in Bosnia and other genocides which happened during the 19th century. On the occasion of preparations of our program and establishing of our contacts for cooperation with the organizations and ethnic communities (Armenians, Kurds, Jews, Rwanda, Cambodia) we also found out that the organization Dream for Darfur proclaimed April as a month dedicated to preventive action against genocide/ Genocide Prevention. Together with them we are going to denote this and all of the coming Aprils.

Observation and organization of these kinds of activities is not only my professional and research and social task, but also an integral part of a family sensibility and pedagogy, as a parent of two students, and I hope that they are also carriers of tolerant behavior and action.

