

Spring 5-24-2018

# The Dynamics of Higher Education in Countries Experiencing Ethnic Conflict

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THE DYNAMICS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN COUNTRIES EXPERIENCING ETHNIC  
CONFLICT

A Capstone Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree Bachelor of Arts  
with Honors College Graduate Distinction at  
Western Kentucky University

By

Lillian Nellans

May 2018

\*\*\*\*\*

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This work is dedicated to my parents, who have always nurtured my curious and adventurous spirit, my wonderful advisor, who pushed me to keep going, and the people of Kosovo, who welcomed me with open arms.

## ABSTRACT

My thesis investigates how higher education institutions influence and interact with students and professors, policymakers, the economy, and the general population following ethnic conflict. I use a mixed-method comparative analysis of universities in Kosovo, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Turkey and an in-depth case study of Kosovo to analyze the dynamics of higher education in post-conflict environments. The majority of my research is drawn from personal interviews conducted between June 2017 and October 2017. I interviewed students, alumni, faculty, and administrators from Kosovo's three most prominent universities: the University of Pristina, the University of Mitrovica, and the Rochester Institute of Technology Kosovo.

The relationship between higher education and ethnic conflict can be broken down into four areas: ideology, language, intergroup contact, and the economy. Comparing universities in Kosovo, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Turkey, reveals that higher education can be used as a means of marginalization by nationalists and the government. Fortunately, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and Kosovo, have, at least in part, also begun to use universities as a tool of recovery and reconciliation. In Kosovo, both public universities, the University of Mitrovica and the University of Pristina, struggle to overcome identity politics and reform at the pace the country needs. While RITK implements more effective teaching strategies and attempts to transcend ethnic boundaries, its small class size and high tuition limit its impact. Ultimately, the analysis suggests that those in charge of post-conflict reconstruction should prioritize rebuilding and reopening universities, assist public universities in reforming their curriculum, instructor training, and university policies, and reconstruct universities in a manner that intentionally encourages meaningful contact between ethnic groups.

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## INTRODUCTION

After a decade of conflict, the last Serbian troops withdrew from Kosovo in 1999. Kosovar Albanians endured ten years of the Serbian government's discriminatory policies, which escalated to violence and ethnic cleansing in 1998. In 1999, US-led NATO forces bombed Serbia and Serbian positions in Kosovo, ending Serbia's occupation of the country and preventing ethnic cleansing from progressing to full-scale genocide. From 1999 until 2008, Kosovo was self-governed and overseen by the United Nations. In 2008, the country declared full independence. Throughout it all, the University of Pristina's campus, located in the bustling heart of Kosovo's capital city, has borne witness to unthinkable strife. Today, evidence of the conflict is still apparent on campus. When Serbs took over the university in the early 1990s, they began constructing an Orthodox Christian church just past the library. When Albanians reclaimed the university in 1999, they halted construction, even though the church was not yet complete. Nearly twenty years later, it still sits abandoned on the edge of campus. To demolish the church would be an affront to Kosovo's Serbs, but Albanians, who were driven from the university and the country, would be outraged at efforts to finish it. So it stands, overrun by weeds and graffiti, visited only by teenage troublemakers and tourists. However, this dilapidated church symbolizes the significant position universities and their campuses held during the conflict in Kosovo and their continued importance today.

I traveled to Kosovo in July of 2017 to investigate the dynamics of higher education in the country, in an effort to better understand Kosovo and other post-conflict states. My research seeks to answer the following question: How do institutions of higher education influence and interact with students and professors, policymakers, the economy, and the general population following armed ethnic conflict? I hypothesize that institutions of higher education in countries



that have experienced or are experiencing ethnic conflict shape societal attitudes and behaviors towards interethnic relations, while also being influenced by cultural shifts. Due to their ability to influence large cross-sections of society, universities contribute to both the escalation and de-escalation of ethnic conflict. And changes in university policy and campus climate can signal the direction a conflict is headed.

Until recently, academics and policymakers have undervalued the impact of higher education on post-conflict reconciliation and recovery processes. The roles of the mass media, religious and political rhetoric, and K-12 education in post-conflict states have been widely explored. However, despite the elevated social position institutions of higher education occupy, little attention has been paid to their ability to influence and be influenced by societal changes. As a result of the dearth of academic literature, as well as the prioritization of rebuilding other areas of society, domestic and international actors often overlook these potential engines of progress when reconstructing countries following armed conflict.

Approximately 1.86 million people call Kosovo home. According to Kosovo's most recent census, 92% of the population is Albanian and the other 8% of the population is a mix of Bosniaks, Serbs, Turks, Ashkali, Egyptian, Gorani, and Romani. However, this census was boycotted by Serbs, so they are underrepresented. In reality, Serbs constitute a much larger percentage of the population and live primarily in Northern Kosovo and enclaves scattered throughout the country.<sup>1</sup> The primary conflict in Kosovo for the past several decades has been between the majority Albanian population and the Serb minority. Research connecting higher education and ethnic conflict in Kosovo began in 2004 when Marc Sommers and Peter Buckland, specialists in education policy, examined how ethnic divisions in education impact

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<sup>1</sup> "Kosovo," *The CIA World Factbook*, May 7, 2018.

international efforts at reform. They conclude that the international community fails to acknowledge the important place education occupies in the national histories of both Serbs and Albanians, stymieing efforts to assist Kosovo in reforming and rebuilding its institutions of higher education. Higher education is not ancillary to processes of state building and identity construction in Kosovo, rather it is at the center of these processes.<sup>2</sup> Political scientist Denisa Kostovicova supports Sommers' and Buckland's conclusion in her 2005 book *Kosovo: The Politics of Identity and Space*, a foundational work on the topic. She argues that as a result of the charged history of higher education in Kosovo larger conflicts over politics and territory have become inseparable from conflicts over education.<sup>3</sup>

Sociologist Jana Bačević further develops this concept in her 2014 book *From Class to Identity*, a seminal piece on the connection between education and nation-building in the former Yugoslavia. She contends that there are two simultaneous processes unfolding side-by-side in Kosovo. The first is the development of more inclusive policies which promote interethnic mingling at the state level, supported by the United States and the European Union. However, the second process consists of continued fragmentation along ethnic lines within Kosovo, most notably marked by the existence of a national university for Albanians and a separate one for Serbs.<sup>4</sup> Bačević does not believe that Kosovo is either moving towards progress or towards ethnic division. Instead, she argues Kosovo is engaged in both processes simultaneously. She contends that the possibility of fragmentation on the local level could undermine larger-scale pluralistic progress.

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<sup>2</sup> Marc Sommers and Peter Buckland, *Parallel Worlds* (Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Denisa Kostovicova, *Kosovo The Politics of Identity and Space* (Routledge, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Bačević and other scholars from diverse fields such as political science, sociology and public policy, pinpoint 1968, 1981, 1989 and 1991 as critical moments in the evolution of Kosovo's higher education system. In 1968, Kosovo's Albanians erupted in protest. Included in their list of demands was a call for a separate, Albanian-language university. In 1969, Yugoslavia's President Josip Broz Tito relented and the University of Pristina was formed. With few indigenous academic resources, the government of Yugoslavia brought many Albanian-language professors and learning materials from Albania to Kosovo. As a result, Bačević contends, professors at the University of Pristina taught content that was more distinctly Albanian than Yugoslav. For example, history classes focused on the history of the Albanian people rather than the history of Yugoslavia.<sup>5</sup> In 1981, violent student protests broke out at the University of Pristina. While the students stated they were protesting poor living conditions at the university, Bačević points out the media and people outside of Kosovo immediately blamed the University of Pristina for cultivating Albanian separatism amongst the students. In 1989, when Serbia stripped Kosovo of the autonomous status it had enjoyed since 1945, the University of Pristina continued serving as a flashpoint of conflict. During the 1991/1992 academic year, the government in Belgrade banned Albanian students from enrolling in the University of Pristina.<sup>6</sup> Only Serb students, professors, and administrators were allowed to remain.

In the subsequent decade of Serbian occupation and repression, Kosovo's Albanians developed an underground education system that included primary, secondary, and higher education. Kostovicova argues both Serbs and Albanians tied the fate of their national movements to their respective educational institutions.<sup>7</sup> For an education system that struggled to

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<sup>5</sup> Jana Bačević, *From Class to Identity: The Politics of Education Reforms in Former Yugoslavia*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Kostovicova, *Kosovo the Politics of Identity and Space*.

employ qualified educators and met in scattered houses and office buildings, the Albanian education system of the 1990s was remarkably successful at producing students who met international educational benchmarks. As such, Sommers and Buckland reveal it has become a point of pride for Albanians since 1999. Albanians relay stories of its development as a signifier of their resilience against Serbian occupation.<sup>8</sup>

After NATO's bombing campaign and Serbia's military withdrawal from Kosovo in 1999, Albanian students, professors, and administrators returned to the University of Pristina and the university's Serbs fled. In 2001, the Serbian administrators, professors, and students who had previously occupied the University of Pristina established the Serbian-language University of Mitrovica. The University of Mitrovica, located in the predominantly Serb area of Mitrovica North, falls under the jurisdiction of Serbia. Bačević and Armend Tahirsylaj, an expert in education policy at the University of Pristina, argue that The United Nations Mission in Kosovo and other international actors only tentatively pushed the two universities to integrate. When it became too hard to ignore the reality that the University of Pristina would only serve Albanian students and the University of Mitrovica would only educate Serb students the international community relented. In fact, international leaders and organizations often celebrate the University of Mitrovica as a mechanism for guaranteeing minority rights.<sup>9</sup> Today, Both universities still serve as symbols of national identity for their respective communities. Following the end of the conflict in Kosovo in 1999, a third prominent institution was introduced to the higher education environment in Kosovo: The Rochester Institution of Technology

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<sup>8</sup> Sommers and Buckland, *Parallel Worlds*, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Bačević, *From Class to Identity*, 2014. And Armend Tahirsylaj, "Higher Education in Kosovo: Major Changes, Reforms and Development Trends at University of Prishtina and University of Mitrovica and their Role in Peace Building and Reconciliation During Post-Conflict Period," (*Proceedings of the 4th International Barcelona Conference on Higher Education, Vol. 5. The Role of Higher Education in Peace Building and Reconciliation Processes*, 2008).

Kosovo (RITK), previously known as the American University in Kosovo. This university teaches in English and educates Albanian and Serb students, but at a cost. RITK's yearly tuition is equivalent to an average Kosovar family's annual income. These three universities, the University of Pristina, the University of Mitrovica, and RITK dominate the higher education landscape in Kosovo today.

The literature to date contains three, interrelated gaps. First, while there has been research on higher education reforms in post-conflict states and research on higher education in Kosovo, these approaches have yet to be combined with an in-depth case study of how higher education institutions in Kosovo function. Second, to date, no one has conducted a comparative analysis of universities in states that have experienced or are experiencing ethnic conflict. Third, there is no research on how the presence of international higher education institutions, such as RITK, alters the dynamics of higher education in post-conflict states and the impact of RITK on Kosovo has not been evaluated. This paper seeks to add to the small, but growing, body of literature surrounding post-conflict higher education with a mixed-method comparative analysis of universities in Kosovo, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Turkey and an in-depth case study of Kosovo. A comparative approach is critical because it helps uncover what is unique to Kosovo and where patterns exist. This helps establish what policies are successful, which higher education policies are ineffective, and how future higher education reforms can be tailored to Kosovo's distinct situational factors. Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Turkey were chosen for comparison because they all have or are currently suffering from ethnic conflict in which the opposing groups also speak unintelligible languages. They also represent three distinct geographic regions and stages of conflict.

The majority of analysis is drawn from personal interviews conducted by the author between June 2017 and October 2017. Interviewees were sampled using a snowball method, beginning with contacts made through the assistance of several Americans acquaintances connected to Kosovo. From there, I solicited my interview subjects for people they thought I should speak with. Throughout the process, I attempted to interview a balance of students, alumni, faculty, and administrators from all three of Kosovo's dominant universities. My goal was to acquire a complete picture of the educational environment in Kosovo and its development since 1999. Interviews included students, alumni, faculty and administration at RITK, The University of Pristina, and the University of Mitrovica, in addition to policymakers in the US and Kosovo. The interviewees consisted of:

- Four RITK alumni
- Three RITK students
- Two RITK professor
- Four members of the RITK administration
- One member of the RITK board
- Two University of Mitrovica students
- Two University of Mitrovica administrators
- the Director of the EU Information Center in Mitrovica North
- Two employees of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
- Five professors from the University of Pristina
- Two University of Pristina administrators.
- Two former US State Department employees involved in the creation of RITK
- Two current State Department employees

In addition to analyzing these interviews, information is drawn from publications created by the institutions themselves and secondary reports on higher education in Kosovo.

This paper is organized into two chapters. The first chapter is a comparative analysis of higher education in Kosovo, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Turkey. It is divided into four sections based on the different means by which higher education influences society: ideology, language, intergroup contact, and the economy. Most of the analysis in chapter one is based on secondary sources. Chapter two uses primary sources and interviews to craft an in-depth case study of higher education's role in Kosovo. It is also divided into sections on ideology, language, intergroup contact, and the economy. The paper concludes with brief remarks about Kosovo's future and what the international community can glean from Kosovo's experience with higher education. Ultimately, it is my hope that this research can inform future attempts to reform universities in the Balkans and around the world. Ideally, domestic and international policymakers will use higher education as a mechanism to promote tolerance and inclusivity and combat ideologies used to incite ethnic violence.

## CHAPTER 1: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF KOSOVO, SRI LANKA, SUDAN, AND TURKEY

Around the world, universities operate not just as educational institutions, but as places of identity development and conflict. When Serbia removed Kosovo's autonomous status in 1989, it also demanded instruction in all public schools be conducted entirely in Serbian. By 1991, Albanians had been banned from public schools in Kosovo altogether. However, by January of 1992, most of these students were back in school – as students in Kosovo's Albanian parallel

education system.<sup>10</sup> In less than two years, Kosovo Albanians moved over 100,000 elementary, secondary, and university students from public schools into a network of 3,200 private homes, basements, and garages that served as temporary schools. Hasan Aruzallxhiuv, now an eye surgeon in Prizren, completed most of his university education in a crowded home that served as the University of Pristina's Faculty of Medicine.<sup>11</sup> While Albanian students like him were barred from the official University of Pristina campus at the time, all of their diplomas were stamped with "Issued by The Republic of Kosovo."<sup>12</sup> Even today, this parallel education system established during Serbia's occupation of Kosovo is a point of pride for many of the country's Albanians. In Kosovo, one cannot discuss the war or relations between Albanians and Serbs without discussing the University of Pristina.

Much like in Kosovo, during conflicts in Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Turkey universities have taken on literal and symbolic significance. In all four countries, the government has, at some point, made higher education inaccessible to certain ethnic groups as a means of marginalization. Fortunately, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and Kosovo, have also, at least in part, begun to use universities as a tool of recovery and reconciliation. The relationship between higher education and ethnic conflict is complex. It can be broken down into four distinct, but interconnected areas: ideology, language, intergroup contact, and the economy. Comparing the dynamics of higher education in post-conflict Kosovo, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Turkey illuminates how universities function in all four ways to shape interethnic relations before, during, and after armed conflicts, including civil wars and genocides.

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<sup>10</sup> Besa Shahini, "Lessons in Resistance: Kosovo's Parallel Education System in the 1990s," *Prishtina Insight*, October 14, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Colette Rausch, *Speaking Their Peace*, (Berkeley, California: Roaring Forties Press, 2015), 204.

<sup>12</sup> Shahini, "Lessons in Resistance."



## UNIVERSITIES AS IDEOLOGICAL BATTLEGROUNDS: EXCLUSIVE NATIONALISM VERSUS COSMOPOLITANISM

Many of society's cultural and political ideas originate in universities. Formally, higher education serves to educate young people and generate research. The facts, narratives, and terminology students learn about politics, economics, ethnicity, race, religion, nationality, and history influence their opinions on those topics for the rest of their lives, leaving an indelible mark on popular opinion. Further, in most societies, academics enjoy greater trust from the general public than non-experts. So, when academics start to promote certain ideas, like ethnic cleansing, they quickly gain social currency and become easier to justify. The primary difference between Serbia and Sudan and Turkey, is that in Serbia nationalism began in the academy and spread to politicians. By contrast, in Sudan and Turkey, politicians ordered academics to come on board with their campaigns of ethnic exclusion. While professors and other intellectuals were certainly willing to support exclusionary policies in Sudan and Turkey, this demonstrates that academics can either instigate violence or be used as tools of the state's agenda.

In 1986, the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences (SANU) published a memorandum in the Serbian newspaper *Večernje Novosti* (Evening News) that blamed Serbia's economic and political problems on Croats, Bosnian Muslims, and Albanians in Kosovo. In fact, it goes so far as to label the situation of Serbs in Kosovo a genocide. The authors write, "The acts of violence which down through the centuries have decimated the Serbian population of Kosovo and Metohija are here and now, in our own era, reaching their highest pitch." Then, it demands the supposed oppression of Serbs in Kosovo be stopped immediately, adding, "the four decades of passivity on the part of Serbia have proven to be detrimental to the whole of Yugoslavia."<sup>13</sup> It is

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<sup>13</sup> The Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 1986.

widely accepted amongst those who study the dissolution of Yugoslavia that the SANU memorandum played a critical role in stoking Serb nationalism and creating a political environment in which the invasions of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo were possible.<sup>14</sup> Authored by sixteen academics and public intellectuals, the SANU memorandum illustrates how ideas developed in the academy disseminate throughout society and affect state policy.

A similar process unfolded in Sudan during the early 1990s. Perpetrated primarily by the Muslim Arab military from the north against Christians and Animists in the South, The Sudan conflict culminated in the 2003 genocide in Darfur. Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir began the process of Islamizing and Arabizing Sudan at a higher education conference in 1990. The conference resulted in the *1990 Higher Education Act* which, along with changing the primary language of university instruction to Arabic, demanded professors Islamize their curriculum in order to promote Islamic values and norms. With this law, Al-Bashir hoped to strengthen the idea of Sudan as a Muslim nation and marginalize non-Muslim communities. As a result, universities designed humanities, social science, and hard science classes to align with an “Islamic worldview” and mandatory Islamic studies classes were added to the national curriculum. While instigated by politicians, prominent Muslim scholars and academics led these efforts.<sup>15</sup> Much like the SANU Memorandum offered politicians and the populace an intellectual justification for genocide, including talking points, the Muslimization of Sudanese universities at the hands of trusted academics laid the groundwork for popular support of genocide in Sudan.

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<sup>14</sup> Christina Morus, “The SANU Memorandum: Intellectual Authority and the Constitution of an Exclusive Serbian People,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 4, no.2 (2007): 142-165. AND David Bruce MacDonald, *Balkan Holocausts*, (Manchester University Press, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Gamal Gasim, “Reflecting on Sudan’s Higher Education Revolution Under Al-Bashir’s Regime,” *Comparative & International Higher Education* 2 (2010): 50-53.

The Turkish government takes a similar approach to that of Sudan's. Contrary to Serbia, where academics drove the government towards nationalism, in both Sudan and Turkey the government exerted control over academics. After recognizing the importance of universities to state missions, Sudanese and Turkish leaders coerced academics into supporting objectives like ethnic cleansing and genocide. Laws regulating higher education in Turkey ensure academics support the idea of mono-ethnic and mono-lingual Turkey.<sup>16</sup> Article 130 of Turkey's Constitution states "Universities, members of the teaching staff and their assistants may freely engage in all kinds of scientific research and publication. However, this shall not include the liberty to engage in activities directed against the existence and independence of the State, and against the integrity and indivisibility of the Nation and the Country."<sup>17</sup> In 2016, a group of 1,128 university professors calling themselves "Academics for Peace" broke from this norm and published a document calling on the Turkish government to end its war against the Kurds. Government officials accused the signatories of treason and prosecuted them under Turkish anti-terrorism laws. University leaders suspended or dismissed most of the professors involved in this initiative and the state imprisoned many.<sup>18</sup> Aware of the influential role academics play in shaping public opinions about intercultural relations and government policy, the Turkish government strictly controls what professors are allowed to research, present, and teach.

Universities can serve as sites of conflict origination, but they also assist in conflict resolution. If those in charge are supportive, institutions of higher education can instill democratic values and promote messages of peace. Universities play a critical role in determining how people remember and discuss a particular conflict. Constructing these spaces as

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<sup>16</sup> "Academic Freedom in Higher Education," *Human Rights Watch*, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> "Constitution of the Republic of Turkey," 1982.

<sup>18</sup> Mehmet Ugar, "Academic Freedom Under Threat in Turkey," *Times Higher Education*, April 14, 2016.

part of the peacebuilding process establishes narratives that promote truth and reconciliation. Just as governments use universities to create antagonistic identities and stoke conflict, universities also promote new ways of thinking.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, along with explicitly teaching objective and pluralistic versions of events, universities can teach the critical thinking skills that enable students to challenge established truths, and decode and resist the messages of authorities and ideologues who wish to incite violence.<sup>20</sup>

When the United Nations began administering post-conflict Kosovo in 1999, they quickly began reforming the University of Pristina with these aims in mind. Reforms focused on three areas: curriculum, learning strategies, and assessments. These reforms aimed to teach a peace-oriented curriculum, critical thinking skills, and meet the demand for skilled public administrators and educators. Kosovo's Ministry of Education, Science and Technology recognized in their strategic planning documents that higher education "endows people with necessary knowledge, aptitude, and values to cover for a wide range of social functions and to become effective citizens."<sup>21</sup> Policymakers designed the curriculum throughout the social sciences and liberal arts, including the new Faculty of Education and Faculty of Political Science, at the University of Pristina to make students agents of democratization and multiculturalism.<sup>22</sup> In regards to teaching skills, international stakeholders hoped to orient professors towards student-centered models based on discussions. However, most professors at the University of Pristina still teach in an instructor-driven way, with lectures dominating class-

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<sup>19</sup> Harvey Weinstein et al., "School Voices: Challenges Facing Education Systems After Identity-Based Conflicts," *Education, Citizenship, and Social Justice* 2, no.1 (2007): 43.

<sup>20</sup> Sansom Milton and Sultan Barakat, "Higher Education as the Catalyst of Recovery in Conflict-Affected Societies," *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 14, no.3 (2016): 413.

<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Kosovo, *Strategy for Development of Higher Education in Kosovo (2005-2015)*, (Pristina: 2004).

<sup>22</sup> University of Pristina administrators and professors in discussion with the author, 2017.

time.<sup>23</sup> Many professors from the Albanian parallel system resent that international stakeholders have dominated the reform process, often ignoring the opinions of those who sustained the Kosovo's education system during the conflict. This resentment has slowed the reform process because these professors and administrators are reluctant to listen to outsiders.<sup>24</sup> Further, very few Serb students enroll in the university. While the University of Pristina currently struggles to serve as a catalyst for democracy and tolerance, international and domestic stakeholders recognize that the potential for it to do so exists.<sup>25</sup>

Much like in Kosovo, following the cessation of the decades-long civil war between the Sinhalese government and the Tamils, in Sri Lanka, the government acknowledged the critical role higher education plays in peace-building and reconciliation. However, reformers in Sri Lanka emphasized the ways in which universities can support reform in primary and secondary education, instead of framing improving universities as the end goal. In 2008, the Ministry of Education established the Social Cohesion and Peace Education Unit to implement the National Policy and Comprehensive Framework of Actions on Education for Social Cohesion and Peace. The National Policy strives to create a "culture of peace" through changes to K-12 schools. Amongst these changes include instructing in Tamil, Sinhalese, and English, integrating schools, and teaching conflict resolutions skills. In order to accomplish this, the Social Cohesion and Peace Education Unit has called upon universities to change their teacher education programs to meet these goals and do further research on how K-12 schools can promote peace.

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<sup>23</sup> Tahirsylaj, "Higher Education in Kosovo."

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Sri Lanka has placed different and fewer expectations on the higher education sector than Kosovo.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps, this indicates why reforms in Sri Lanka appear to be more successful.<sup>27</sup> Although universities are powerful engines of social change, it takes time for their ideas to disperse and not everyone completes a college degree. In contrast, far more students are enrolled in K-12 schools. Thus, Sri Lanka's strategy of using universities to support the K-12 system, rather than primarily emphasizing universities, as Kosovo does, may actually maximize the impacts of university reforms.

Cumulatively, the examples above demonstrate the way political ideologies flow between politicians, academics, and the public. In Serbia, academics developed nationalistic ideologies that spread to politicians and the public. In Sudan and Turkey, the government directed professors to research certain subjects and teach in certain ways. Here, the government used the academy as a tool to manipulate public opinion. In post-conflict Sri Lanka and Kosovo, the government also attempts to use universities to shape interethnic relations, however, they try to sow interethnic harmony, rather than discord. All of this demonstrates that ideologies do not flow between these three parties in a top-down manner. Rather, the three groups constantly engage in ideological conversations, influencing and shaping one another. For example, the government may dictate what language of instruction a university must use, influencing the ideology the university promotes and the ideology adhered to by a university may encourage the government to adopt exclusionary or inclusionary linguistic policies. This connection will be explored further in the next section.

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<sup>26</sup> Kosovo Ministry of Education, *National Policy and a Comprehensive Framework of Actions on Education for Social Cohesion for Peace*, 2008.

<sup>27</sup> This assumption comes from a review of the literature, which primarily praises Sri Lanka's education reforms while critiquing efforts in Kosovo.

## LANGUAGE(S) OF INSTRUCTION AS A BELLWETHER OF CONFLICT

Debates about what languages should be used, by whom, and when, often center around universities. In post-conflict countries like Kosovo, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and Sudan, where people speak multiple languages, teaching primary and secondary school in students' first languages makes logistical sense and children's proficiency levels require it. By contrast, there are far fewer universities than there are primary and secondary schools. Consequently, universities have several choices when it comes to the language of instruction. First, if a country has several official or widely spoken languages, classes can be offered in all of these languages. This promotes tolerance of linguistic diversity and allows all groups access to education. However, it can result in segregated classrooms within a unified university, which blunts the impact of cross-cultural contact. Second, a country can teach in a language that is no one groups' first language, but many people know, such as English or French. This appears most commonly in post-colonial countries, such as Sri Lanka. While this method does not favor one group over another, it de facto privileges groups with more access to language learning opportunities. Finally, a university can choose to teach in only one of the widely spoken or official languages of the country. When a university does this, often at the government's demand, it signals the favoring of one linguistic group. In some cases, it also indicates a breakdown in the government's and society's levels of tolerance and inclusion.

Since the end of British rule in 1948, Sri Lanka has experimented with several of these methods. Sri Lanka's rapidly changing linguistic environment heavily impacts the education sector. State laws regarding the primary language of instruction govern Sri Lanka's education system, which is, by and large, public. Until 1960, primary and secondary school students were educated in their national language, either Sinhalese or Tamil, and all universities taught in

English.<sup>28</sup> Only those privileged enough to be fluent in English could attend university. The cosmopolitan nature of Sri Lankan universities broke down. In other words, while an educated elite had the linguistic tools to engage in interethnic mingling, most citizens did not. After 1960, intense Sinhalese nationalism resulted in education, at all levels, only being offered in Sinhalese. This policy excluded Tamils from educational institutions, including universities.<sup>29</sup> When the Sinhalese majority gained control over the universities, they also won the ability to influence public thought through expert opinion in Sri Lanka and access to high-paying jobs. Locked out from higher education, more and more young Tamils joined militant groups like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and became involved in violent separatism. It was not until 1987, the same year English was declared an official language in Sri Lanka, that the government also recognized Tamil as an official language.<sup>30</sup>

A decade later, the government of Sri Lanka passed an education reform bill designed to support economic development in Sri Lanka. However, as a side-effect, it also increased the ability of Tamil and Sinhalese people to speak to each other. The education reform bill emphasized English, once again, as the primary language of education in Sri Lanka.<sup>31</sup> Today, in primary and secondary school, students learn in their national language, either Tamil or Sinhalese. However, schools require all students to study Tamil, Sinhalese, and English.<sup>32</sup> Public

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<sup>28</sup> Nick Clark, "Sri Lanka to Welcome Foreign Universities in a Bid to Address Higher Education Capacity Constraints," *World Education News & Reviews*, May 1, 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Mieke T.A. Lopes Cardozo and Anika May, "Teaching for Peace – Overcoming Division? Peace Education in Reconciliation Processes in Sri Lanka and Uganda," in *Opportunities for Change*, ed. Susan Nicolai, (Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning, 2009): 205.

<sup>30</sup> Dilini Chamali Walisundara and Shyamani Hettiarachchi, "English Language Policy and Planning in Sri Lanka: A Critical Overview," in *English Language Education Policy in Asia*, ed. Robert Kirkpatrick (Springer, 2016), 309.

<sup>31</sup> Walisundara and Hettiarachchi, "English Language Policy and Planning in Sri Lanka, 309-311.

<sup>32</sup> Cardozo and May, "Teaching for Peace," 306.



universities, where the majority of students enroll, offer courses in all three languages. Policymakers anticipate trilingual graduates of secondary and tertiary education in Sri Lanka. A lack of resources and qualified instructors has slowed progress, but young people are increasingly bilingual and trilingual.<sup>33</sup> The Sri Lankan government hopes these efforts will lead to faster economic development and improved interethnic relations. For example, the government policy requires all civil services be offered in Tamil, Sinhalese, and English. However, implementation of this policy demands trilingual civil servants. Currently, Sri Lanka's higher education institutions strive to train them.<sup>34</sup>

Since 1991, universities in Kosovo have chosen a different strategy - to teach in one language. Prior to 1991, the University of Pristina was the only public university in Kosovo. Since Albanian-speakers made up a majority of the students, classes were offered primarily in Albanian, although many classes were also offered in Serbian, the second most widely-spoken language in Kosovo. In 1991, Serbia took over the University of Pristina, changing the language of instruction to exclusively Serbian. When Albanians reclaimed the university in 1999, the sole language of instruction reverted to Albanian. Meanwhile, the Serb faculty and students driven from the University of Pristina fled to Mitrovica North, where they established a Serbian-language university. Today, the University of Pristina teaches in Albanian and predominantly educates Albanian students while the University of Mitrovica teaches in Serbian and serves mostly Serb students.

During the Yugoslav period in Kosovo, most Albanians in Kosovo learned Serbo-Croatian (which is what the common language of Yugoslavia was referred to at the time) for

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Sreemali Herath, "Language Policy, Ethnic Tensions and Linguistic Rights in Post War Sri Lanka," *Language Policy* 14, (2015): 257.

social mobility. While the government did not legally mandate all Albanians learn Serbo-Croatian “Albanians became acquainted with Serbo-Croatian through formal instruction in schools, and also informally: on the streets...In short, even within Kosovo, Serbo-Croatian was pervasive; it would thus be difficult for an Albanian citizen not to acquire familiarity with it.”<sup>35</sup> Serbo-Croatian, but not Albanian, was one of Yugoslavia’s three official languages. By contrast, many Serbs did not learn Albanian, creating asymmetrical familiarity with each other’s language.<sup>36</sup> Albanians in Kosovo, who constituted a numerical majority, came to resent the subordination of their language. Albanians scored a major political victory when Albanian was accorded the status of dominant language of instruction in all departments at the University of Pristina.<sup>37</sup> This change occurred in 1969, after widespread protests from Kosovo’s Albanians the previous year. In 1989, when Serbia began its occupation of Kosovo, the University of Pristina’s Kosovar Albanian administrators, professors and students were replaced by Serbs. During the 1991-92 academic year, the government in Belgrade banned Albanian students from enrolling in the University of Pristina and all courses were taught in Serbian.<sup>38</sup> In 1999, when Serbia’s forces withdrew from Kosovo, the University of Pristina began teaching only in Albanian, while the University of Mitrovica decided to teach exclusively in Serbian. The Albanian and Serbian populations of Kosovo have become more and more linguistically polarized, driven mainly by the separation of Albanian and Serbian schools.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Janet Byron, “An Overview of Language Planning Achievements Among the Albanians of Yugoslavia,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 52, (1985), 67.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Byron, “An Overview of Language Planning Achievements Among the Albanians of Yugoslavia,” 68.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Tomasz Kamusella, “The Idea of a Kosovan Language in Yugoslavia’s Language Politics,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 242, (2016): 232.

In Sudan, the linguistic exclusion of animists and Christian southerners has been direct – the government ordered all public universities be taught in Arabic. This move precipitated much of the violence against those in the south. Until recently, the status of the Kurdish language in Turkey resembled non-Arabic languages in Sudan. Between 1980 and 2010, no university offered courses in Kurdish, only Turkish or English. However, in 2010, the Turkish government approved the opening of a “Living Languages in Turkey” institute at Mardin Artuklu University. Along with Farsi, Arabic, and Syriac, this institute teaches Kurdish. However, requests from other universities, including Dicle University which is located in an area with a large Kurdish population, to offer similar courses were denied.<sup>40</sup> The lack of Kurdish-language university courses has long excluded Kurds from higher education in Turkey, but as the government begins to wind down the decades long conflict with the Kurds, the creation of new Kurdish languages programs indicates this may be changing.

In Sri Lanka, Kosovo, Sudan, and Turkey the language of instruction at public universities has been a signifier of the state of the conflict and cross-cultural relations. When the relationship between different ethno-linguistic groups is peaceful or improving, the language of instruction is treated as merely a logistical question. The government attempts to educate as many students, some of whom may speak different languages, as possible. In contrast, when tensions are high or increasing, the language of instruction becomes laden with symbolic importance. It is important to note, however, that it remains unclear whether ethnic tensions cause linguistic segregation and exclusion, or if linguistic segregation and exclusion in universities contributes to ethnic tensions. In all four case studies, the processes of escalation or de-escalation and linguistic policy change seem to happen simultaneously. Thus, it is most likely

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<sup>40</sup> *Today's Zaman*, “Kurdish to be Taught in Turkish University for First Time,” July 26, 2010.

that the connection between language of instruction and interethnic tensions is dynamic. Changes in language and changes in ethnic relations create a feedback loop; when they are both present the escalation or de-escalation of conflict is sped up. Intergroup contact is also interwoven with these processes because one cannot make meaningful contact with another without a language to communicate in, particularly if linguistic exclusion results in one group's absence from the university setting altogether.

## UNIVERSITIES AS SITES FOR INTERGROUP CONTACT

While the rest of society may be divided along identity-based lines, traditionally, universities facilitate the mixing of people from different national, ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds. Groups come together to study because most countries house fewer universities than social cleavages. Young people who grow up in identity-specific enclaves may not have meaningful interactions with someone of a different identity until they reach university. There, they make friends with, work alongside, date, and marry members of other groups. In this way, universities typically aid in the development of tolerant attitudes. Universities losing their multicultural nature indicates a purposeful rejection of cosmopolitan attitudes and the mixing of different groups.

This certainly held true in Sri Lanka. When Sri Lanka gained independence from British rule in 1948, internal conflict between the Sinhalese government and Tamil separatists began almost immediately. During occupation, the British favored Tamils in education and employment. The post-independence Sinhalese government resented, and subsequently oppressed, the formerly privileged Tamil minority. In 1983, the simmering tensions transformed into civil war between LTTE and the Sinhalese-dominated government. In an effort to appeal to

post-colonial Sinhalese nationalism, the Sri Lankan government passed the 1956 Official Language Act, which made Sinhalese the official language in Sri Lanka. Tamil university students who wished to continue studying at public universities in Tamil took to the streets to protest. These protests gave way to the Tamil separatist movement, demonstrating the important connection between linguistic politics, higher education, and ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

A similar process unfolded in Kosovo. In 1968, protests erupted amongst Kosovo's Albanians. Included in their list of demands was a call for a separate, Albanian university. In 1969, the government agreed and the University of Pristina was formed. When Kosovo lost its autonomous status in 1989, the University of Pristina once again ended up in the crosshairs of political conflict. By 1991, the government in Belgrade banned Albanian students from even enrolling in the university.<sup>41</sup> Following this, Kosovar Albanians suffered from five years of progressively violent ethnic cleansing perpetrated by Serbia and Kosovo Serbs. Heightened tensions surrounding public universities marked the escalation of conflict in both Kosovo and Sri Lanka.

Theoretically, this process can also be reversed. Following armed conflicts, segregation along lines of identity and the creation of ethnic, national, racial, or religious enclaves increases. Increased division cements the development of opposing identities and primes the country for future conflict. However, universities, if reconstructed properly, offer a place where “many students have their first possibility to meet the other, whether based on ethnicity, race, religion, gender, nationality or political position.”<sup>42</sup> This contact between groups previously on opposing sides of the conflict can potentially prevent future fighting. Intergroup contact between students

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Barakat and Milton, “Higher Education as the Catalyst of Recovery in Conflict-Affected Societies,” 414.

of different ethnic backgrounds at universities is beginning to become a reality in Sri Lanka, primarily due to flexibility in the language of instruction. However, universities still struggle in this area in Kosovo, Turkey, and Sudan, where linguistic segregation translates into ethnic and religious segregation as well. Differing languages create an easy, more politically correct way, to keep different ethnic and religious groups apart. Rather than admit to discrimination, governments can claim it is simply logistically impossible to teach students of different groups in the same space. This is largely the situation in Turkey; however, some Kurdish students do attend universities where the language of instruction is Turkish or English. A survey of 536 students enrolled at Turkish universities found students in Kurdish-Turkish friendships viewed multiculturalism more positively.<sup>43</sup> This study demonstrates when universities encourage multicultural attitudes on campus and opportunities for Kurdish and Turkish students to make contact, the result is positive.<sup>44</sup> However, right now, this effect is limited because anti-Kurdish higher education policies, including laws concerning the language of instruction, restrict opportunities for intergroup contact at the university level.

As the examples discussed illustrate, universities constitute places where people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds should form meaningful relationships. Prior to the Sri Lankan civil war, universities became a predominantly Sinhalese space, exacerbating tensions between the country's Sinhalese and Tamil populations. In Kosovo, political battles over the control of universities preceded armed conflict. In these countries, the homogenization of universities served as an early sign of the violence to come. In Sudan and Turkey, the government prevents opposing groups from forming meaningful relationships by keeping

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<sup>43</sup> Sabahat Bağcı and Elif Çelebi, "Cross-groups friendships and outgroup attitudes among Turkish-Kurdish ethnic groups: Does Perceived Interethnic Conflict Moderate the Friendship-Attitude Link?" *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 47, no.2 (February 2017): 59-73.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

universities divided. Yet, as also shown in Turkey, even in these highly polarized societies, when members of opposite sides do come together in a university setting, the result is improved perceptions of each other. Diverse universities (or lack thereof) signal how tolerant a place really is, at least in part. Universities, however, do not operate in a vacuum. One of the largest factors in conflict is competition over economic resources. When there is enough scarcity, no amount of intergroup contact can prevent identity-based conflicts. Universities can either exacerbate or ameliorate economic scarcity, and thus, conflict.

## THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF UNIVERSITIES IN POST-CONFLICT COUNTRIES

Universities are important in conflicts because whichever group controls access to the university, controls access to corridors of power. The contemporary economic environment dictates that those who have university degrees are more likely to be successful economically and socially because they hold political and economic power, and more respected positions in society. This holds significance for practical and symbolic reasons. Pre- and post-conflict, groups battle over control of the university in order to ensure the favoring of their group in admissions and hiring. As such, the group in charge of the university possess the most influence.

Universities gain symbolic significance when politicians and the public recognize the practical impacts of presiding over universities. This is one of the primary reasons fights over university leadership sparked civil war in Sri Lanka and Kosovo. Battles over the university act as a microcosm for fights over the country as a whole.

After fighting has ceased, opening and expanding universities can also assist stabilization efforts. Research has suggested high youth unemployment, especially among young men,

contributes to conflict recidivism.<sup>45</sup> However, increasing higher education enrollment can be used as a tool to address this challenge. In fact, a study examining the connection between education and peace duration in a set of 1,815 intra-state conflicts during the period 1975-2008 found that “increased enrollments in higher education in the first five years after the end of a conflict significantly decrease the likelihood of the restart of a civil war.”<sup>46</sup> Young people, including students and professors, constitute a sizeable portion of the combatants during intra-state conflicts. Thus, reopening universities helps reintegrate combatants into civilian life.<sup>47</sup>

Reconstructing universities after a conflict can also help encourage economic recovery by assisting a country in restoring its pre-conflict assets and infrastructure. Following armed conflicts, countries face dual problems. They need more highly skilled workers to rebuild physical infrastructure, the government, the education sector, and the health sector. Yet, armed conflict drains countries of skilled workers due to war time fatalities, the fleeing of refugees, and the disruption of education. “Post-conflict countries face a skills gap at a time when human capital is in high demand.”<sup>48</sup> Of course, aid organizations and foreign governments bring outside assistance, such as engineers, doctors, and teachers. But if a country aspires to long-term recovery they have to build domestic capacity. Here, universities play a critical role. Ideally, universities focus on specific areas of instruction, such as engineering, medicine, education, and law that prepare students to be involved in the rebuilding of their country.<sup>49</sup> While foreign workers can fill the skills gap in the short-term, domestic populations must be trained in critical

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<sup>45</sup> Therese F. Azenge and Theiry U. Yogo, “Youth Unemployment and Political Instability in Selected Developing Countries,” *African Development Bank*, May 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Barakat and Milton, “Higher Education as the Catalyst of Recovery in Conflict-Affected Societies,” 414.

<sup>47</sup> Barakat and Milton, “Higher Education as the Catalyst of Recovery in Conflict-Affected Societies,” 407.

<sup>48</sup> *World Bank*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Barakat and Milton, “Higher Education as the Catalyst of Recovery in Conflict-Affected Societies,” 408.



fields in order for post-conflict countries to prosper. However, it should be noted, the training of skilled workers must be equitable across identity groups. If universities train only one group in these high-skilled, high-paying jobs, then the divisions and resentments that sparked the conflict reemerge.<sup>50</sup> Simply having people with the skills does not prevent future conflict.

In Sri Lanka, the government has prioritized reconstructing universities in its post-conflict policies. The Sri Lankan government does want higher education to improve relationships between ethnic groups, but, first and foremost, the government uses education policy to encourage economic development. The architects of Sri Lanka's higher education system designed it to build domestic capacity in industries critical to post-conflict rebuilding, such as civil engineering and public health. In 2017, Sri Lanka received \$100 million in financing to support their higher education sector from the World Bank. When the funds were presented, Idah Z. Pswarayi-Riddihough, World Bank Country Director for Sri Lanka and Maldives, commented:

The higher education system must produce a pool of highly skilled scientists, engineers, doctors, entrepreneurs, policy makers, academics, and teachers, who can contribute to sustainable economic development of the country. Improving competitiveness and growth of the country is a key focus of the Sri Lankan Government and we are pleased to be supporting them in this endeavor.<sup>51</sup>

Sri Lanka and its international donors strive to use universities as a mechanism of reconstructing a country that was physical devastated by war. Physically rebuilding necessitates rebuilding

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<sup>50</sup> Barakat and Milton, "Higher Education as the Catalyst of Recovery in Conflict-Affected Societies," 414.

<sup>51</sup> "Sri Lanka to Improve its Higher Education with World Bank Support," *The World Bank*, May 12, 2017.

human capital as well. Though both domestic and international stakeholders hope lasting peace will be a side-effect of physical and intellectual restoration.

In Kosovo, rebuilding the University of Pristina also plays a critical role in the government's and the international community's reconstruction plans. After the cessation of violence in Kosovo, for the first time in its history, Kosovo enjoyed independence. Tasked with building a government from scratch, the country required civil servants and public administrators to form the new government. In order to meet this increased demand, the University of Pristina introduced new political science and public administration courses. After addressing these immediate needs, the government began to view education as linked to economic performance. The government aspires to use higher education as a mechanism to increase labor productivity, innovation, and the use of new technology.<sup>52</sup> In service to these goals, the University of Pristina has begun to invest in its science, engineering, technology, and math programs. For example, the medical school at the University of Pristina has been partnering with universities throughout Europe and the US to revise their curriculum and update their labs. Not only do they hope to improve students' educational experience, but primarily, they aim to improve healthcare in Kosovo. In Sri Lanka and, to a degree in Kosovo, universities strive to provide people with employable skills, regardless of ethnicity. However, in Turkey and Sudan, continued exclusion of minority groups allows the Turkish and Arab communities to maintain their economic advantage.<sup>53</sup> This difference exists primarily because armed conflict in Sri Lanka and Kosovo has ended, while it is ongoing in Sudan and Turkey.

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<sup>52</sup> "Education and Economic Development of Kosova," *Institute for Development Research*, February, 2004, 6.

<sup>53</sup> "Progress at Risk: The Case Study on Income and Social Inequalities in Turkey," *Regional Human Development Report*, United Nations Development Program, 2016. And "Poverty in Sudan Today," *The Borgen Project*, June 17, 2015.

For economic reasons, universities become flashpoints of conflict, but rebuilding universities can aid a post-conflict country's economic recovery. In today's economy, university degrees make a critical contribution to economic success. Thus, oppression can take the form of denying a group access to universities. In Turkey and Sudan, the government deploys this tactic. In Sri Lanka and Kosovo, where violence no longer occurs on a daily basis, the government primarily uses universities to spur economic growth. After a conflict ends, universities serve to prevent violence from starting again and supply the workers necessary to rebuild the country.

## CONCLUSION

It is evident from analyzing the university systems in Kosovo, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Turkey, four countries that have experienced (and continue to experience) ethnic conflict, that this conflict connects with higher education. The results of education reforms in these countries vary, ranging from reforms that exacerbate tension to those that mitigate them. Sri Lanka can most reasonably of the four be labeled a success story. While the process is still ongoing, Sri Lanka effectively uses universities to aid the reconciliation and recovery process. Sri Lanka does this by reforming higher education institutions based on economic needs and encouraging inter-group contact through inclusive language policies. Sudan and Turkey, where efforts to reform universities in a multicultural way have been virtually nonexistent, are stories of failure. Both countries continue to use higher education to promote the supremacy of one ethnic group. Kosovo's higher education system shares similarities with all three countries. While members of all of Kosovo's ethnic groups have access to higher education, they are segregated, and access is inequitable. As such, Kosovo teeters between success and failure. Predicting which outcome is

most likely requires a detailed, in-depth examination of Kosovo's higher education system as it relates to ethnic conflict.

## CHAPTER TWO: AN IN-DEPTH EXAMINATION OF KOSOVO

During the month of June, all three campuses of Kosovo's most prominent universities buzz with the energy of students preparing for exams. By July first, however, the campuses are all but deserted, as students return home or to the seaside for their summer holiday. Regardless of what language they speak or their ethnic background, the students are all still students. The main ingredients at the University of Pristina, the University of Mitrovica, and RITK, are the same: students, professors, administrators, classrooms, textbooks, labs – everything one would expect a university to have. They also all share the goal of graduating students.

However, beyond the similarities listed above, the three universities differ in significant way. Their ideological priorities, language of instruction, student populations, and results diverge, sometimes dramatically. Comparing and contrasting these three institutions reveals the integral role higher education plays in Kosovo's recovery and reconciliation process. According to the most recent numbers, public universities in Kosovo cater to 75,000 students a year.<sup>54</sup> An additional, 500-560 students are enrolled at RITK at any given time.<sup>55</sup> In a country of only 1.86 million people, where 42% of the population is at or approaching college-age, a significant portion of Kosovo's population is impacted by higher education.<sup>56</sup> Recognizing the success and shortcomings of particular universities, and the higher education system as a whole, provides

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<sup>54</sup> Xhavit Rexhaj, "Higher Education in Kosovo: A Prolonged Transition," *International Higher Education* 84, (Winter 2016): 29.

<sup>55</sup> Lavon Bajrami, Admissions Officer at RITK, in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>56</sup> "Kosovo," *The CIA World Factbook*, May 7, 2018.

insight into the state of ethnic relations in Kosovo and guidance for further higher education reforms.

## THE PREVALENCE OF EXCLUSIVE NATIONALISM ON KOSOVO'S CAMPUSES

Kosovo's contemporary disputes, and the conflict that devastated Kosovo in the 1990s, revolve around highly contested historical and political narratives. As the SANU memorandum, a document written and signed by academics calling for increased Serbian nationalism, demonstrated, academics and universities play a critical role in shaping these narratives. While outright nationalistic rhetoric is now considered taboo, to a point, the University of Mitrovica and the University of Pristina still promote it. Meanwhile, RITK propagates its own form of nationalism – American exceptionalism. When it comes to universities in Kosovo, exclusive nationalism prevails over cosmopolitanism.

Of Kosovo's three primary universities, The University of Mitrovica's displays its ideology most prominently. Throughout this paper, this university has been referred to as the University of Mitrovica, the name used by the international community, other scholars, and the name the university itself must use when dealing with international partners. However, the university's official name is "The University of Priština temporarily located in Kosovska Mitrovica." This name reflects the way the university understands, and teaches, history. According to the University's website

"During the war in 1999, around 1,500 professors, administrators and other employees of the University in Pristina, together with 16,000 students (whose lessons were in Serbian),

were expatriated and evicted from the University. Their property was usurped and their return has never been made possible.”<sup>57</sup>

Administrators, faculty, and students maintain that they are the rightful University of Pristina and will eventually return to reclaim the campus in Pristina. In other words, they perceive themselves as the victims of the war in the 1990s, not the Kosovar Albanian students who were banned from attending university and ethnically cleansed.

Interviews with administrators at the University of Mitrovica confirm this narrative. When referring to Kosovo, they almost exclusively referred to it as “Kosovo and Metohija,” the name of the region when it belonged to Serbia. They explained that the university is accredited by higher education authorities in Serbia, not Kosovo, and funded by Belgrade. Further, administrators blame their “displacement” from Pristina for their lack of buildings and poor facilities, noting that some departments are forced to share buildings. They also lamented their inability to work with US schools or the US State Department. The United States refrains from partnering with institutions in Kosovo, like the University of Mitrovica, that do not recognize the country’s independence. Interestingly, the university does have official partnerships with Turkey, Russia, and Spain. All three countries are home to regions that wish to secede against the will of the central government, making them sympathetic to Serbia’s claims over Kosovo.<sup>58</sup> The University of Mitrovica’s arguments that they have been exiled by Albanians at the University of Pristina and that Kosovo is part of Serbia, support the narrative of Serb victimization at the hands of Albanians and Serbia’s right to Kosovo. The dissemination of this ideology is not limited to University of Mitrovica students. Administrators remarked that the University of Mitrovica’s

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<sup>57</sup> “About the University,” *University of Pristina Kosovska Mitrovica*, <https://en.pr.ac.rs/university/>.

<sup>58</sup> University of Mitrovica administrators in discussion with the author, 2017.

narrative is important to the local community and the region.<sup>59</sup> In this way, the University does not just educate students, it furthers the spread of Serb nationalism.

The University of Pristina does not pursue a nationalist ideology so blatantly, but it would be a mistake to argue they do not have an exclusive perspective. Much like the University of Mitrovica holds symbolic significance for Serbs, the University of Pristina is a pillar of Kosovar Albanian society, representing progress and independence for Kosovar Albanians.<sup>60</sup> In fact, the University of Pristina holds such an important place in Kosovar Albanian life that it plays a central role in politics. Almost every interviewee affiliated with the University of Pristina mentioned its highly politicized nature. Politicians view it as impressive to teach at the University of Pristina, so they appoint themselves to tenured positions, often never actually showing up to class.<sup>61</sup> Throughout the country, people follow university business. The faculty senate is televised and its happenings covered on the national news.<sup>62</sup> A University of Pristina professor explained that for Kosovar Albanians the university symbolizes Albanian strength and resilience because they were able to keep it running during the Serb occupation, operating entirely out of private homes.<sup>63</sup> Its campus seems to hold an almost holy status in Albanian narratives of the 1990s conflict. As such, the architects of the post-1999 University of Pristina have ingrained the idea the Kosovo is rightfully independent in the university's day-to-day operations and classroom instruction. For example, students from the university represent Kosovo, as an independent state, in international competitions and conference. The University of

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> University of Pristina professor in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>61</sup> RITK alumni in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>62</sup> Marjan Dema, Rector of the University of Pristina, in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>63</sup> University of Pristina professor in discussion with the author, 2017.

Pristina's very existence, as Kosovo's national university, is a testament to Kosovo's independence.

At first glance, RITK may appear to be much less ideologically driven than the University of Mitrovica or the University of Pristina. However, it promotes American ideals of individualism, globalization, free market capitalism, and democracy. Benefactor Richard Lukaj explained that one of the primary goals of the university is to export American society and culture. He furthered that exporting American values, in particular, exceptionalism, is critical to creating global citizens and the type of leaders that can bring countries "out of isolation and into the modern era."<sup>64</sup> An RITK graduate echoed Lukaj's sentiment, commenting that RITK makes students believe they are change-makers.<sup>65</sup> Some of these American values, like democracy and a desire to make social change, certainly have a positive impact. However, the impact of other American values, like exceptionalism and capitalism, is murkier. Further, the United States supported Albanians during the conflict and bombed Serbia, creating anti-American sentiment in Serb communities. RITK wants to present itself as the "neutral" option in Kosovo, but it does promote an American ideology. Equating "American" with "neutral" fosters a problematic, US-centric, model of statebuilding.

The most positive contribution RITK makes to the ideological development of its students is teaching them to think critically and question authority. While the University of Mitrovica and the University of Pristina instruct students to accept their professors' words as fact, RITK encourages students to challenge their professors and disagree. RITK also teaches students how to research topics for themselves, construct and deconstruct arguments, and form their own opinions. As one RITK alum noted, even graduates with the worst grades have their

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<sup>64</sup> Richard Lukaj, member of the RITK Board, in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>65</sup> RITK alum in interview with the author, 2017.



own opinions on historical and political debates that they could explain and justify.<sup>66</sup> Critical thinking skills help inoculate people against politician's nationalist, often illogical, rhetoric. However, while RITK teaches students to debunk politicians' empty claims, its reach is not wide enough to prevent nationalism, populism, fascism, or other dangerous political ideologies from spreading. Though, since its students are emboldened to be leaders and change makers, its impact could still be outsized, reducing the spread of these damaging ideologies.

The spread of nationalist and political ideology by universities in Kosovo demonstrates how foolhardy it would be to overlook them in the reconciliation process. If universities teach young people to think in divisive and nationalistic ways, they will continue to support divisive, nationalistic policies and leaders, which does not bode well for Kosovo's future. However, teaching students in a way that glorifies the United States and encourages the copying and pasting of American values onto Kosovo is not the answer either. Universities should instill cosmopolitanism and minimize the importance of ethnic values, while also teaching students the skills they need to dissect and dismantle nationalism and construct a vision for a peaceful and pluralistic Kosovo, one that does not just look like America 2.0. In some ways, RITK does this, but a domestic university system that fosters tolerance and inclusivity in a larger number of students would be preferable.

#### DANGER AHEAD: LANGUAGES OF INSTRUCTION IN KOSOVO'S UNIVERSITIES

For each of Kosovo's official languages (Albanian and Serbian) there exists a university. Accredited by Serbia's central government and regulated by their higher education laws, but located within the internationally recognized borders of Kosovo, the University of Mitrovica

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

conducts classes in Serbian. Accredited and regulated by Kosovo, the University of Pristina's courses are taught in Albanian. And the privately-owned RITK offers classes exclusively in English, not an official language of Kosovo, but a widely used one. More by accident than intentional planning, Kosovo has chosen a hybrid approach to what languages university instruct in. Multilingual countries can either have universities that teach in every language, universities that only teach in one language, or universities that teach in a common second language. In Kosovo, separate public universities exist for each language, limiting intergroup contact. What makes Kosovo unique, however, is the additional existence of a university where classes are taught in a common second language. In this space, students from different backgrounds coexist. Understanding these two, disparate, approaches to language of instruction highlights that in higher education, as in many sectors in Kosovo, actors with similarly stated goals deploy vastly different approaches in reaching them.

The Serb students and faculty who fled Pristina in 1999 established the University of Mitrovica as a Serbian-language university. Today, University of Mitrovica students, alumni, and faculty take pride in the fact that it serves as the only Serbian-language university in Kosovo. As a result, the vast majority of Kosovo Serbs who do not seek degrees outside of Kosovo attend the University of Mitrovica. In fact, unless they also speak Albanian or English fluently, it constitutes their only in-country option. Thus, students come not only from the northern part of Mitrovica itself, but from other Serb enclaves in Kosovo, like Gračanica and Kosovo Polje, both of which are located minutes outside of Pristina, but over an hour away from Mitrovica. In addition, students from southern Serbia and eastern Montenegro also come to Mitrovica to attend

university. The University of Mitrovica offers these students an education in their native language at a location closer to home than Belgrade.<sup>67</sup>

Professors at the University of Mitrovica teach all classes, with the exception of foreign language classes, in Serbian. Thus, students must be fluent in Serbian to attend the university. The University of Mitrovica houses foreign language programs, like English and Russian, but Albanian is notably absent. It would not be possible for a student at the University of Mitrovica to learn Albanian. However, the university does offer classes in Serbian to help its small international student population adjust. Representatives of the University make it clear, however, that Serbian classes do not exist to facilitate the inclusion of Albanian-speaking students. Rather, the University of Mitrovica hopes to attract an increasing number of students from Russia and the European Union. Students from Russia already attend the university. And, it hopes offering Serbian courses will make it more likely students from the EU begin studying for a semester or a year in Mitrovica North. The University of Mitrovica recently joined the ERASMUS exchange program, a program that facilitates students from European countries studying abroad in other European countries. Currently, the University of Mitrovica sends students abroad through ERASMUS, but strives to begin accepting students as well. Despite new efforts at internationalization, offering courses in English and/or Albanian does not seem to be a priority. The policies and practices of the University of Mitrovica inadvertently foster a Serbian-language environment, where anyone who does not speak Serbian would be almost unable to function as a student or community member.

However, Albanian-speakers, the majority in Kosovo, are not excluded from higher education in the country—far from it. The University of Pristina, Kosovo’s largest university,

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<sup>67</sup> University of Mitrovica administrators and students, including one student from Serbia who cited economic reasons for attending the University of Mitrovica, in discussion with the author, 2017.

caters to Kosovar Albanians. Technically, the University of Pristina does not have an official language. However, almost all courses are taught in Albanian. The few that are not, are either foreign language classes or high-level science classes taught in English. For instance, some professors in the Medical Faculty teach in English because the scholarly material on their subject is published in English.<sup>68</sup> Despite these exceptions, it is not a misnomer to label the University of Pristina an Albanian-language university. In fact, in an interview, the university's current Rector, Marjan Dema, referred to it as the largest university in the Albanian-speaking world and the only Albanian-language university in the former Yugoslavia.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the lack of an official language is merely semantics. The University of Pristina is an Albanian-language institution.

That being said, university administrators and faculty members are taking steps towards making the university more accessible for non-Albanian speakers from Kosovo. The university's admissions exam can be taken in a student's native language, like Serbian or Turkish. However, that student will not be able to take classes in their native language. As such, whether or not they pass the admissions test has very little bearing on how successful they will be. A student can apply in Turkish, but in reality, must also know Albanian in order to attend the University of Pristina. Moreover, students are technically allowed to write their exams in whichever of Kosovo's languages they wish. However, not every professor knows every language indigenous to Kosovo. If a professor receives an exam in Serbian, but cannot grade it, they must ask the student to translate it into Albanian, negating the benefits of the exam-language policy.

The University of Pristina also hopes to widen its English-language offerings. Already, professors at the University of Pristina International Summer School instruct entirely in English. Students from across Kosovo and the world, including Serbia and Montenegro, come to Pristina

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<sup>68</sup> University of Pristina Professor in the Faculty of Medicine in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>69</sup> Dema, 2017.

to study a variety of subjects, together.<sup>70</sup> Further, professors in both the Faculty of Medicine and Faculty of Law indicated their departments are designing more English-language classes. While all the professors admitted bringing Serb and Albanian students together on campus is not the goal of these new programs, they also acknowledge it could be a result of the programs existing.<sup>71</sup> The University of Pristina, at least on paper, is more open to being a multilingual environment than the University of Mitrovica, but, in practice, is just as monolingual and as exclusive to non-Albanian speakers.

Students who do not wish to study in either Serbian or Albanian, and who can afford the cost of private university tuition, have a third option: The Rochester Institute of Technology Kosovo. All RITK classes are taught in English by a combination of Albanian, Serbian, American, and international professors. In addition, all extracurricular groups, like the popular Volunteering Club, conduct their business in English. In fact, the faculty even encourage students to speak English during their free time on campus to improve their skills and ensure all students feel included.<sup>72</sup> In order to make certain all RITK students are proficient enough in English to thrive in this environment, applicants to the university must pass the TOEFL exam to be admitted. While all enrolled students meet this benchmark, it still may not be enough to guarantee their success. So 40% of RITK students take remedial English classes during their first semester.<sup>73</sup> All of these steps make the RITK campus an almost exclusively English-language environment.

The University of Mitrovica and the University of Pristina adopt the problematic approach, discussed in the previous chapter, of having linguistically divided universities, de facto

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<sup>70</sup> University of Pristina administrators in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>71</sup> University of Pristina Professors in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>72</sup> Visar Jasiqi, Chief Operations and Outreach Officer at RITK, in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>73</sup> Lavon Bajrami, Admissions Officer at RITK, in discussion with the author, 2017.

segregating universities by ethnicity as well. They are both public universities, thus, they are mired in the ethno-political conflict that still limits governing in Kosovo. However, RITK is a private university, supported by people and organizations whose primary interest in Kosovo is recovery and reconciliation. When RITK's was founded in 2002-03 and today, most of its funding comes from private American donors and donors in the Albanian diaspora. RITK's independence from governments in Belgrade and Pristina has allowed it to choose the more palatable option for operating in a multilingual environment—teaching in a lingua franca. As a result, it is mono-lingual, but multi-ethnic.

RITK is the only multiethnic higher education institution in Kosovo because young people in Kosovo do not learn each other's languages. Albanian students cannot attend a Serbian-language university, and vice versa. However, the most popular second-language in Kosovo is English. Part of the state-mandated curriculum is proficiency in English, though schools struggle to hire qualified English teachers.<sup>74</sup> Theoretically at least, students of any ethnic background have access to English and, thus, access to RITK, as long as they can afford it or receive a scholarship. Visar Jasiqi, Chief Operations and Outreach Officer for RITK noted that seventeen non-Albanian students from Kosovo have already graduated from RITK and the number of enrolled minority students is growing. He cites the university's use of English as an important contributing factor to the lack of discrimination on campus. A Serb student at RITK commented that before arriving on campus, her family worried that she would not be able to make friends with Albanian students because of the language barrier. After starting at RITK, however, she “met other people and changed ideas and perceptions [about Albanians].”

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<sup>74</sup> Hysen Kasumi, “The Implementation of Kosovo Curricula Regarding the English Language Teaching,” *International Conference on Linguistics, Literature, and Culture*, June 2016.

Eventually, friendly acquaintances became “really great friends.”<sup>75</sup> The use of English at RITK breaks down the language barrier between Albanians and Serbs on campus.<sup>76</sup>

However, RITK’s reach is limited, not only by its small student body, but by an unequal distribution of English resources amongst Albanians and Serbs at the K-12 level. After the US-led bombing of Serbia during the 1999 war, anti-American sentiment still runs high in Serb enclaves in Kosovo. As a result, schools reluctantly fund English classes and parents are unenthusiastic about educating their students in what is perceived to be the language of the enemy. Many Serbian schools in Kosovo teach Russian as a second language instead of English.<sup>77</sup> Further, most international aid for English language programs has been directed at Albanian schools and communities. Kosovo Serbs lament that their high school education does not prepare them to study for a university degree in English.<sup>78</sup> Until this disparity is addressed, RITK will continue to be more accessible to Albanian students than Serb students. As the influence of the university and its graduates grow, this has the potential to breed resentment and distrust of RITK amongst Serb communities, damaging the multiethnic project.

Kosovo cannot rely on one, private, English-language university to bridge the linguistic gap between young Albanians and Serbs. RITK does not have the capacity to educate the number of students in a multiethnic environment needed to influence interethnic relationships in a significant manner. The University of Pristina has begun to offer more and more classes in English. This is a step in the right direction because it makes it possible for students from different ethnic backgrounds to study together. However, teaching university classes in English

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<sup>75</sup> Current RITK student in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>76</sup> All the RITK students and faculty, and half of alumni interviewed mentioned the development of interethnic friendships as a benefit of RITK.

<sup>77</sup> US State Department Official in Bureau of Culture and Education in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>78</sup> University of Mitrovica administrators and students in discussion with the author, 2017.

is an imperfect solution as long K-12 English education remains unequal between Albanians and Serbs.<sup>79</sup> Kosovo risks resembling pre-1960 Sri Lanka in which only those educated in English have access to universities, and thus, only an educated elite holds multicultural values.

## INTERGROUP CONTACT IN KOSOVO'S UNIVERSITIES

Before the dissolution of Yugoslavia, people from different ethnic backgrounds lived together, worked together, and studied together. Kosovo was no exception. Albanians and Serbs came into frequent and sustained contact and formed close relationships. However, following the cessation of hostilities in 1999, the two communities became more segregated. Albanians returned home from refugee camps in Macedonia and Albania and, fearing reprisal attacks, Serbs moved into their own enclaves. Today, rather than living in mixed-neighborhoods, Kosovans primarily live in mono-ethnic communities. Thus, growing up, children usually do not encounter anyone of another ethnicity. For many, universities represent the first chance to engage in meaningful cross-cultural contact. However, for most young people in Kosovo, this opportunity is not realized.

The University of Mitrovica's physical and educational environment does not promote contact between Kosovo's disparate ethnic groups. While it does not explicitly deny Albanian students admittance, none apply.<sup>80</sup> All classes at the University of Mitrovica are taught in Serbian and university administrator contends that they operate the rightful University of Pristina, which they claim, is located in Serbia. None of this makes for a very welcoming

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<sup>79</sup> Interviews with UM students and faculty and Kasumi, "The Implementation of Kosovo Curricular Regarding the English Language Teaching."

<sup>80</sup> Tahirsylaj, "Higher Education in Kosovo: Major Changes, Reforms and Development Trends at University of Prishtina and University of Mitrovica and their Role in Peace building and Reconciliation During Post-Conflict Period."



environment for Albanian students. Representatives do describe the university as “diverse.” However, by diversity, they do not mean Albanian students, rather they mean the Bosniak, Gorani, and Roma students who attend the university (all of whom know Serbian) and the few international students who trickle in from Russia and Montenegro.<sup>81</sup> The Erasmus Exchange program offers the only opportunity for cross-cultural contact associated with the University of Mitrovica. Erasmus allows students at European universities to spend a semester or a year at a university in another European country. Both the University of Mitrovica and the University of Pristina participate in Erasmus. As a result, in a few instances, Kosovar Albanian and Serb students have met at universities in third-party countries while on exchange. The administrator in charge of the University of Pristina’s Erasmus office commented that Albanian students benefit from this contact because they have never met a Serb. However, administrators in the University of Mitrovica’s Erasmus office made no mention of Serb students meeting Albanians abroad.<sup>82</sup> In reality, this type of intergroup contact affects only a minimal number of students, making a negligible impact on ethnic relations in Kosovo.

The University of Pristina does not constitute much more of a multicultural environment than the University of Mitrovica. It, too, is a monolingual university that stakes its existence on an ideological claim. As such, most Kosovo Serbs would not feel comfortable at the University of Pristina. However, several University of Pristina professors mentioned teaching Serb students, along with Turkish, Roma, and Bosniak, students. In addition, the university implements quotas for admitting minority students.<sup>83</sup> While rarely met, the mere existence of these quotas suggests a

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<sup>81</sup> University of Mitrovica administrators in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>82</sup> Coordinator of the University of Mitrovica’s Erasmus Office in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>83</sup> University of Pristina Professors in discussion with the author, 2017.

more open attitude towards multiculturalism than the University of Mitrovica. In theory at least, the University of Pristina recognizes the importance of on-campus intergroup contact.

In contrast to both the University of Mitrovica and the University of Pristina, RITK consistently brings together students of varying ethnic and religious backgrounds. RITK's founders intentionally designed it to be a multiethnic institution. While recruiting for its first class of students, RITK reached out to both Albanian and Serb communities and recruited throughout Kosovo, including in Serb enclaves.<sup>84</sup> Albanian students flocked to the university. In part, this can be attributed its location in Pristina, a majority-Albanian city, but also to the fact that many of its founders and bankrollers were Albanian. Further, the Albanians and Americans shared a close relationship following the US's support for Kosovo during the conflict of the 1990s. Thus, RITK was a natural fit for Albanian students. However, despite recruiting efforts, the university struggled to attract Serb students. Some high schools would not even allow RITK to recruit on their campuses. So the university relied on social media and advertisements to reach Serb students.<sup>85</sup> It worked and Serb students began attending RITK. From there, recruiting in Serb communities became easier because word of mouth from successful Serb students and alumni spread. Now, Serb students and alumni assist with recruiting and high schools are more cooperative.<sup>86</sup> As one Serb RITK student explained, once she came back to her community and told everyone how happy she was in Pristina, their prejudices and concerns faded.<sup>87</sup>

In addition to actively recruiting Serb students, the university offers full-tuition scholarships for members of minority communities in Kosovo, that includes Serb, Roma, Bosniak, and Turkish students. The university does not use affirmative action in admitting

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<sup>84</sup> Louis Sell in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>85</sup> Sell, 2017.

<sup>86</sup> Bajrami, 2017.

<sup>87</sup> Current RITK student in discussion with the author, 2017.

students, but this scholarship policy helps to attract a more diverse student body. Further, that Kosovo's government supports these efforts, demonstrating the government also recognizes the value of intergroup contact at RITK. Currently, the Office of Community Affairs, a government agency, covers seventy-percent of minority students' tuition and RITK provides the other thirty-percent. The scholarships played a tremendous role in bringing the first minority students to campus. While the scholarship still exists, there have now been Serb students willing to pay full tuition. This demonstrates the progress RITK has made in establishing itself as a welcoming environment.<sup>88</sup>

Interestingly, a partnership between RITK and Kosovo's Security Forces has also contributed to diversity on campus. In order to receive funding from the international community, Kosovo's Security Forces operate on a quota system, which means cadets from all of Kosovo's communities serve in the KSF. RITK offers KSF a discounted tuition and every year a number of cadets enroll in the university. Through this program, minority students in Kosovo's military participate in campus life.

For intergroup contact to make a difference, students must have meaningful interactions with one another. Students, professors, and alumni expressed that many opportunities for positive interactions between students exists. Extracurricular clubs and activities draw students from a variety of backgrounds. In fact, these organizations conduct business in English so everyone can participate.<sup>89</sup> And, in class, students discuss sensitive issues related to ethnic conflict in Kosovo with each other and their instructors. Fortunately, as one professor explained, these discussions are usually positive and affirming.<sup>90</sup> An Albanian RITK alumni continued

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<sup>88</sup> Bajrami and Jasiqi, 2017.

<sup>89</sup> Current RITK students in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>90</sup> RITK professor in discussion with the author, 2017.

“You get used to living in a diverse community, outside [of RITK] seeing a Roma person achieving or Serbian being successful, you’re used to it, so you don’t judge. This is very important. Growing in a diverse community helps you remove all the prejudices you used to have.”

Comments like this one demonstrate that RITK has served as a positive site of interethnic contact for both Serb and Albanian students.

Past social science research suggests that intergroup contact more effectively prevents identity based conflict than any other method of conflict prevention.<sup>91</sup> Thus, it appears as though RITK has adopted the right approach to promoting peace in Kosovo. However, with less than two hundred students in each class, the impact of this intergroup contact does not reach enough students to prevent renewed violence. The international community, particularly the United States, pours a tremendous amount of financial and political resources into RITK. One must wonder if the prospects for peace might be increased if those resources were instead spent on creating wider opportunities for intergroup contact, including at Kosovo’s affordable, much larger, public universities.

#### THE IMPACT OF HIGHER EDUCATION ON KOSOVO’S ECONOMIC PROGRESS

In a post-conflict country, much like in any country, universities play a critical role in developing one of the most important ingredients for economic success: human capital. Right now, RITK excels at producing qualified employees. This makes sense because one of the express goals of RITK when it was founded was to create a talented workforce to rebuild

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<sup>91</sup> Thomas F. Pettigrew, “Intergroup Contact Theory,” *Annual Reviews of Psychology* 49, (1998).

Kosovo. By contrast, the University of Pristina and the University of Mitrovica, are pre-war, public institutions designed to serve pre-1990s Kosovo, a small region of a large, socialist country that had not experienced conflict since World War II. In many ways, these universities have not adjusted to the new economic realities of post-war Kosovo. Namely, that Kosovo is now an independent country, recovering from conflict, and transitioning towards a more capitalist economic model. As a result, they lag behind RITK in producing graduates qualified for post-graduate education and employment.<sup>92</sup>

When US diplomats, Kosovars, and members of the Albanian diaspora joined together to form RITK they envisioned establishing a university that would prepare students to be the “future leaders of a democratic and prosperous Kosovo.”<sup>93</sup> As one of the founders of RITK and the current Chairman of its board, Richard Lukaj, articulated Kosovo’s postwar economy needed talent, particularly “English language technical skills.” In the fifteen years since RITK’s inception, it has delivered.<sup>94</sup> Employers across a multitude of sectors describe RITK graduates as highly desirable due to their proficiency in English, transferable soft skills, creative problem solving, critical thinking skills, and ability to work as a member of a team.<sup>95</sup> Not only do employers benefit from hiring skilled employees, RITK graduates have a much lower unemployment rate than Kosovo’s population whole. Kosovo’s unemployment rate is 32.9% and for youths is even higher at 57.7%.<sup>96</sup> By contrast, RITK’s graduates have a 95% placement rate, including jobs and graduate school.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Jasiqi, 2017.

<sup>93</sup> Sell, 2017.

<sup>94</sup> Lukaj, 2017.

<sup>95</sup> Jasiqi, 2017.

<sup>96</sup> “About Kosovo,” *United Nations Development Project*, 2018, <http://www.ks.undp.org/content/kosovo/en/home/countryinfo.html>.

<sup>97</sup> Jasiqi, 2017.

RITK's success preparing graduates for employment and graduate school is not a mistake. When choosing a US university to partner with, RITK's founders were attracted to the Rochester Institute of Technology because of its focus on preparing students for jobs. As co-founder Louis Sell explained, the university was founded with the intention of giving young Kosovars skills they could use to rebuild the economy.<sup>98</sup> RITK bases its career preparation programs off of ideas developed at RIT's New York campus. Throughout their college career, students take skills-based classes that teach them business communication, writing, public speaking, research, and teamwork, in addition to the courses required for their chosen major.<sup>99</sup> This contrasts with the University of Pristina and Mitrovica, where students only take classes in their major and learn primarily through lectures and tests.<sup>100</sup> In addition to special classes, RITK students are also required to work eight-hundred hours as an intern with either a government agency, nonprofit organization, or business. Over two-thirds of students are offered full-time positions with their internship organization upon graduation, and about half of these students accept their offers. In addition, RITK graduates have lifetime access to the university's career services center.<sup>101</sup> A 28-year-old RITK graduate I spoke with is already the executive director of one of Kosovo's largest and well-known nonprofits. She said she never expected to achieve such a high position at such a young age. Another RITK alum I interviewed worked for the World Bank and United States Agency for International Development upon graduation. Today, he is pursuing an MBA at a prestigious university in the United States. RITK's alumni are flush with success stories like these.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Sell, 2017.

<sup>99</sup> Current RITK students and alumni in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>100</sup> University of Pristina and University of Mitrovica students in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>101</sup> Jasiqi, 2017.

<sup>102</sup> RITK alumni in discussion with the author, 2017. And "Alumni Spotlight," *The Rochester Institute of Technology Kosovo*, <http://auk.org/alumni/category/alumni-spotlight/>.

RITK strives not just to help its own graduates, but to support Kosovo's overall economic progress. Many of the university's graduates open their own small business and nonprofits, which aim to have a multiplier effect on Kosovo's economy.<sup>103</sup> This multiplier effect is one of RITK's primary goals.<sup>104</sup> It is also home to several programs which explicitly help students from other universities. For example, RITK is a testing center for all common standardized tests, from the TOEFL to the ACT and GMAT.<sup>105</sup> So students from across Kosovo who wish to apply to study in Europe or the United States can come take their required tests at RITK. RITK also provides support for Kosovar students selected to study for graduate degrees in the United States under various scholarship programs. In part, this is due to the fact that a significant number of the students awarded these scholarships are RITK graduates. While RITK students account for less than one-percent of higher education students in Kosovo, they win forty-percent of scholarships to study abroad.<sup>106</sup> For example, the Transformation Leadership Program supports approximately fifty students from Kosovo, both Albanian and Serbian, in pursuing fully-funded Master's degrees in the United States.<sup>107</sup> All TLP students, regardless of where they graduated university, are prepared for their time abroad by the faculty at RITK. American master's programs require extensive research and writing. However, as RITK President Dr. Sharon Hart noted, many non-RITK graduates have never so much as written a term paper. As such, RITK faculty help these students develop their research, critical thinking,

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<sup>103</sup> RITK alumni in discussion with the author, 2017. And Jasiqi, 2017. And author visits to businesses started by RITK alumni.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Bajrami, 2017.

<sup>106</sup> Jasiqi, 2017.

<sup>107</sup> "About TLP-SP, "United States Agency for International Development," December 8, 2014, <http://www.usaid-tlp-sp.org/En/per-tlp/>.

and writing skills before they leave for the United States. In this way, RITK serves more than just its graduates.

However, not everyone in Kosovo has such a rosy perception of RITK. Professors, students, and alumni from RITK and the University of Pristina expressed concern over its high tuition costs, at least when compared with public universities. Tuition at RITK is 6,300 Euros a year. At the University of Pristina and the University of Mitrovica students pay basically nothing.<sup>108</sup> 6,300 Euros is significant in a country where the average family's annual income is only 6, 228 Euros.<sup>109</sup> This means that one year of tuition at RITK is equivalent to more than a Kosovar family's entire yearly income. There are scholarships available for exceptionally talented and/or impoverished students and students from minority ethnic groups. However, most students at RITK pay at least part of their tuition out of pocket.<sup>110</sup> Several RITK students and alumni expressed that they are perceived as "rich kids." In reality, most RITK students and alumni are not rich, but middle class or upper middle class.<sup>111</sup> The truly wealthy in Kosovo go abroad for college and the only option for the working class is public university. That leaves RITK with predominantly middle-class students. Almost all of the students and alumni I interviewed were second or third generation college students whose parents worked in middle-income fields.<sup>112</sup> Regardless, many high school students believe the university is out of their price range, so they do not even apply.<sup>113</sup> One of President Dr. Sharon Hart's primary concerns is that the university is seen as an "expensive university [whose] doors are pretty well closed for

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<sup>108</sup> RITK administrators, University of Pristina administrators, and University of Mitrovica administrators in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>109</sup> "Level of Wage in Kosovo, 2012-2016," *Kosovo Agency of Statistics*, November 17, 2017, <http://ask.rks-gov.net/en/kosovo-agency-of-statistics/add-news/level-of-wage-in-kosovo-2012-2016>.

<sup>110</sup> Jasiqi, 2017

<sup>111</sup> This was mentioned by every participant interviewed by the author.

<sup>112</sup> RITK students and alumni in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>113</sup> RITK alumni in discussion with the author, 2017.



those who can't afford the luxury.” As long as most Kosovars perceive RITK as a university for an elite few, its economic and social impact will not be widespread.

The economic challenges facing the University of Pristina and the University of Mitrovica are not tuition-based. Rather, public universities struggle to graduate students that can find employment and contribute to Kosovo's economy. The University of Mitrovica does not serve as the primary university for Serb students from Kosovo. Middle class and wealthy Serb students go to university in Belgrade or Novi Sad. The University of Mitrovica provides degree programs for lower-income Serb students or students who wish to stay closer to their families.<sup>114</sup> As such, Serbs in Kosovo do not expect the university to ameliorate their economic hardship. Instead, Serbs in Kosovo, University of Mitrovica students, and professors blame the political situation between Kosovo and Serbia.<sup>115</sup> By contrast, Albanian Kosovars openly attribute some of the country's economic challenges on the shortcomings of the University of Pristina. While bright and talented students graduate from the University of Pristina, overall, graduates enter the workforce underprepared. Professors at the University of Pristina teach primarily through lecturing. Students memorize the information they learn in lectures and their readings and then regurgitate that information on a final exam. Professors do not ask them to research, synthesize information, write, present their work, or complete group projects. Professors also rarely encourage students to develop their own opinions on the material. As a result, students struggle with jobs that demand communication skills, critical thinking, and creative problem solving upon graduation.<sup>116</sup> In addition, students find it difficult to form close relationships with their professors. Many professors at the University of Pristina believe their job starts and ends at

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<sup>114</sup> Employee of the EU Information Center in Mitrovica North, University of Mitrovica administrators and students in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> University of Pristina and RITK professors in discussion with the author, 2017.

lecturing. They do not research, apply for grants, mentor students, or even investigate accusations of cheating and plagiarism. Without mentors, students must figure out their own professional development unaided.<sup>117</sup>

Fortunately, the situation at the University of Pristina appears to be improving. Most of the younger professors at the university received their graduate degrees abroad, exposing them to North American and European styles of teaching that do more to emphasize teaching skills. Right now, these professors constitute approximately 30% of the faculty at the University of Pristina.<sup>118</sup> As this number grows, the approach to teaching at the university will likely improve. For example, young professors in the university's faculty of law frequently hold mock trial and model United Nations simulations for their students and even developed an internship program for law students at the United States Agency for International Development.<sup>119</sup> Ideally, teaching tactics like these will become more common and students will be prepared for the job market. As one University of Pristina professor concluded, the university is in the process of "transitioning from a post-communist system to a student-oriented one." Post-communist education relies on a hierarchical relationship between professors and students, in which professors tell students what to know and how to think about it. By contrast, a student-oriented approach builds on discussions between students and professors, during which students form their opinions. When the transition from the later to the former is complete, the University of Pristina will be in a better position to benefit Kosovo's economy.<sup>120</sup>

It is the higher education sector's job to prepare students to be effective employees and engaged citizens. This role becomes even more critical in post-conflict states where the

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<sup>117</sup> University of Pristina professor in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>118</sup> Estimate from University of Pristina professor in discussion with the author, 2017.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> University of Pristina professors in discussion with the author, 2017.

economy, and people, have been decimated by the destructive violence of war and years of lost education. Right now, universities in Kosovo largely recognize this, but struggle to actualize it. The public universities reach a wide range of students, but their teaching methods leave much to be desired. Meanwhile, RITK is deploying the correct teaching strategies, but only impacts a limited number of students. Kosovo needs public and private universities to work together to provide the breadth and depth of education it will take to drastically improve the country's economy and attract new businesses to Kosovo. However, quality education can only contribute so much to economic transformation. While a skilled workforce would boost Kosovo's economy, universities will not scramble to train students for jobs if those jobs do not exist. To maximize the benefits of education reform, the country must also address other economic challenges, such as corruption, bureaucracy, and its dispute with Serbia, to convince employers to invest in Kosovo.

## CONCLUSION

After analyzing Kosovo's universities across four areas, it becomes evident that while all three universities strive to produce quality graduates they also all fall short in achieving this mission. The University of Mitrovica and the University of Pristina have both struggled to overcome identity politics and reform at the pace Kosovo needs. While RITK implements more effective teaching strategies and attempts to transcend ethnic boundaries, it only reaches a small fraction of Kosovo's university students based on family income level. Ideally, RITK's methods would be implemented more broadly, impacting thousands, rather than hundreds, of young people. In Kosovo, international resources are focused on developing one, high quality, expensive, private university. It appears as though the international community would be better

served in distributing those resources to public universities, and perhaps even K-12 institutions, encouraging faster reform and ethnic integration, while influencing a wider cross-section of Kosovo's society.

## CONCLUSION

While the conflicts in Kosovo and the Balkans occupied a significant space in conversations about geopolitics and international relations in the 1990s and early 2000s, since 9/11 they have largely taken a backseat to other regions, namely the Middle East. However, policymakers in the US and Western Europe are making a mistake in ignoring Kosovo and the Balkans. Many of the most pressing contemporary challenges, including rising ethnic nationalism, the radicalization of Muslim youth, and Russian interference are playing out in Kosovo and its neighboring countries. During the 1990s, tensions in Kosovo led to the rise of nationalist leader Slobodan Milošević and sparked the violence that set off wars in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Simmering ethnic conflicts in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina once again have the potential to destabilize the Balkans, a crisis which could draw in the United States, the European Union, and Russia, putting the West's great powers on a

collision course to conflict. Not to mention, renewed conflict threatens the lives and livelihoods of the approximately fifty-five million people who call the Balkans home, and who are still recovering from last century's wars. Safeguarding peace in Kosovo should be an international priority, and as my analysis demonstrates, higher education provides a crucial means by which to accomplish this goal.

If the international community had been paying attention to conversations in and about Kosovo's universities during the 1980s and early 1990s, the conflict that followed could have been more easily predicted. Today, much like then, Kosovo's universities promote ethnic segregation and divergent historical narratives. However, signs of progress exists. The University of Pristina's quota system, admissions process, and linguistic policies suggest a desire to diversify the student body and promote a more inclusive ideology. However, the old guard, a dearth of financial resources, and a lack of international support prevents progress from unfolding at a more rapid pace and reaching a wide enough audience. Meanwhile, Kosovo's most prominent private university, RITK, offers a model for how inclusive universities could function in Kosovo. RITK promotes pluralism and democratic values, teaches students critical skills, and provides valuable opportunities for intergroup contact. Unfortunately, its small class size and high tuition limit its impact. My research suggests RITK and its international supporters should consider partnering with the University of Pristina and diverting attention and resources to the University of Pristina. Doing so would widen the scope of higher education's impact, improving more young people's lives and the prospects for continued peace. In contrast, the University of Mitrovica seems entirely unwilling to adjust its language policies or exclusive ideology, indicating international pressure for reform would be futile. Though, if the University of Pristina provided a more welcoming environment for Serb students, perhaps they would

choose to enroll there instead of at the University of Mitrovica. This would be a step in the right direction.

The impact of higher education on ethnic relations, however, extends far beyond Kosovo. As the first chapter demonstrates, there are many similarities between higher education's contributions to the escalation and de-escalation of conflict in Kosovo, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Turkey. Sri Lanka represents a success story, Sudan and Turkey are failures, and Kosovo shows mixed-results. Despite differing outcomes, the dynamics of higher education as they relate to ethnic conflict are comparable in all four countries. Namely, the analysis suggests that higher education can, positively or negatively, contribute to the development of societal attitudes, linguistic policies, opportunities for intergroup contact, and economic development. As such, lessons learned from Kosovo can and should inform the creation of higher education policies in other states plagued by ethnic conflict, particularly states where members of different ethnic groups speak mutually intelligible languages.

There are three major insights peacebuilders and state builders should take from the rebuilding of Kosovo's higher education system. First, those in charge of post-conflict reconstruction should prioritize rebuilding and reopening universities. Universities provide support for the economy, political institutions, and the repair of interethnic relationship; these are building blocks essential to a peaceful recovery. The sooner universities are rebuilt, the earlier a country will have the benefit from this much needed support. Second, international actors should provide guidance and financial support to local universities for them to reform their curriculum, instructor training, and university policies. These reforms must aim to make the university more inclusive and effective at teaching critical thinking skills in order to combat ethnic nationalism. Third, domestic and international actors should reconstruct universities in a manner that

intentionally encourages meaningful intergroup contact. Examples of policies that foster intergroup contact include instruction in a widely-spoken third language and extracurricular activities whose meetings are held in this same third language. Afghanistan, Iraq, and, eventually, Syria are prime examples of states that could benefit from Kosovo's example. All three have experienced violent conflict between disparate ethnic groups that speak different languages. Further, conflict has devastated their physical infrastructure, human capital, and political systems—creating a need for the type of development support universities provide. While Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria are primed to implement these policies, the scope of where and when these lessons can be applied is even broader.

Finally, this paper represents only the beginning of research on higher education in Kosovo and other post-conflict states. The interviews conducted for this paper were not as extensive as they could be. More systematic interviews, perhaps including survey research, across Kosovo, and other countries including Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Turkey would reveal necessary insights. Establishing a causal link between certain attributes of universities and positive interethnic relationships would be tremendously beneficial for academics and policymakers alike. Future researchers should also investigate whether or not the dynamics of higher education are similar in states that have experienced non-ethnic conflict. How do institutions of higher education influence society after political conflicts? What about states that have been devastated by interstate war? As a burgeoning area of research, the potential for studying higher education as a conflict resolution mechanism is as endless as it is crucial.

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