Environmental Case Study
Living in Bosnia-Herzegovina

From 1992-1995, the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina were involved in a war that was largely internal. The war was so brutal that it resulted in the worst case of human suffering in Europe since the Second World War. The world community learned of concentration camps in such towns as Omarska and Trnopolje in northeastern Bosnia where Muslim prisoners were routinely tortured and starved. Further horror was revealed with stories of systematic rape, mass expulsions, and the targeting of unarmed and helpless individuals by soldiers of war.

Many politicians and scholars have argued that the source of the conflict was embedded deep in history. True or not, the trigger for the war was more recent. Bosnia-Herzegovina was a republic within the country of Yugoslavia for most of the twentieth century. Unlike the other five republics of Yugoslavia, Bosnia-Herzegovina was not named after an ethnic group that inhabited it. Instead, it was named partly after a river and partly after a medieval territory. Bosnia derives its name from the Bosna River. Herzegovina stems from the German word Herzog which means "duke." Therefore, Herzegovina literally means "dukedom." Bosnia-Herzegovina most likely kept its historical name because no single group occupied the territory to justifiably change its name for that group.

According to the 1991 census of Yugoslavia, Bosnia-Herzegovina was 44% Muslim, 31% Serb, 17% Croat, and 8% other. For a long time, Bosnia-Herzegovina’s multi-ethnicity worked very well. The people of the republic were even able to showcase their ethnic harmony to the world when they hosted the 1984 Winter Olympics in Sarajevo. After the republics of Croatia and Slovenia declared independence in 1991, armed conflict resulted as the Yugoslav army attempted to prevent secession. Bosnia-Herzegovina’s government attempted to avoid becoming ensnared in the armed struggle because the republic’s ethnic character meant that the loyalties of the people were very divided and that a spread of the war from...
neighboring Croatia into the republic would mean neighbor turning against neighbor. After it became clear that Slovenia and Croatia would break away from Yugoslavia, the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina found themselves in a country more dominated by Serbs than ever before. Therefore, the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina decided that the best course of action was to seek independence as well.

Independence was not welcomed by many of Bosnia's Serbs though some supported their government's decision. In April 1992, the government presented the issue of independence to its people. Most Serbs boycotted the election resulting in 99% approval of independence among those who voted. Bosnia's Serbs declared their own republic and a war quickly ensued. For a time, most Muslims and Croats supported the Bosnian government. As the war progressed, many Croats and even some Muslims turned against their government and the war became extraordinarily complicated with increased variations of alliances that frequently shifted. With pressure from Western governments, the war was finally brought to a halt in late 1995 with the Dayton Peace Accord which effectively froze the boundaries between a Serb Republic (Repulika Srpska) and a Croat-Muslim Federation but with the intention of eventually restoring a single government to Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The war caused many in Bosnia to flee and seek refuge somewhere else. Miro Paunovic and his family are one such example. Miro was born in Mostar and lived there for most of his life until the beginning of the war in 1992. Mostar is the main city of Herzegovina and is internationally known for its stone bridge. Referred to locally as the 'Old Bridge' (stari most), it was built by the Ottoman Turks in 1561 and came to symbolize ethnic harmony within all of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Sadly the bridge was destroyed by Croatians on November 9, 1993, the anniversary of Kristalnacht. Miro has fond memories of the bridge and will never forget how people would travel from all over Yugoslavia every summer to compete in a bridge diving contest.

Miro also misses the old town center where people would come to shop and meet at cafes to socialize. In terms of its site, Miro says that Mostar is not unlike Cumberland, Maryland, where he now lives. Both cities are crowded down along rivers which wind their way through mountains. Mostar's river is the Neretva which flows south into the Adriatic Sea, some 50 miles away. The short distance to the sea made it easy for Miro and his family to travel to the beaches of Adriatic, often for just one day. For vacations, Miro's family would typically spend a couple of weeks on the coast, usually traveling to the famous cities of Dubrovnik and Split. Mostar's proximity to the coast means that both the summers and winters are relatively mild. Skiing is popular in this mountainous country but those interested in doing so must travel farther inland, to the north and east, to places like Sarajevo before they can find enough snow to ski.

Mostar is a regional center for southern Bosnia-Herzegovina (see map on page 344 of the textbook). Its factories produce a number of different goods: aluminum, military airplanes, car and truck parts, and clothing. The mountainous character of Bosnia-Herzegovina means that the country produces far less...
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agriculturally than many of the other Balkan countries. Nevertheless, some agricultural goods are produced. The area around Mostar is known for wine grapes, nectarines, and plums. Not surprisingly, Mostar has a winery and a distillery which makes a hard alcohol called *Loza*.

When Miro went to school as a young boy in Mostar, the educational system was somewhat different than what his children are now experiencing in the United States. All children went to elementary school which lasted until the eighth grade. Foreign languages were taught in Miro's school beginning in the fifth grade. English, German, Russian, and French were the choices. Miro selected English, probably the most popular foreign language at the time. From the ninth through twelfth grades, young people went to specialized high schools of which Mostar had five. The *Gymnasia* was for those bound for university. Another school emphasized automotive training while a third focused on working with industrial machines. A fourth specialized in food technology and the fifth centered its curriculum around economics. According to Miro, this latter school went through the greatest transformation in recent years. During communism, the school emphasized the teachings of Marx and Engels but has since changed to the modern principles of capitalism. Miro states that school was quite rigorous in Mostar. He considers what his children are now learning in school in the United States and notes that he learned the same information when he was two to three years younger than American students.

Miro went to the automotive school and received a diploma in auto mechanics. Like all young males at the time in Yugoslavia, Miro had to complete a year of military service before pursuing his career. When he returned to Mostar after his military service, Miro immediately accepted a job in a bar before ever looking for a job as a auto mechanic. He had the position for about three years when the war broke out in April 1992. Like most people in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Miro did not fit easily into any of the ethnic categories: Serb, Croat, or Muslim. Usually people were identified according to their father's status. In
Miro's case, his father was a Serb from Serbia, not Bosnia-Herzegovina. Miro's father had came to live in Mostar many years before while serving in the Yugoslav army. While in Mostar he met and married Miro's mother, a Muslim, and stayed to raise a family. Like many Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Miro's mother was non-practicing. With Mostar also having a large Croat population, it meant that Miro did not force himself into any one category nor did he have to for most of his life. As far as he was concerned, he was a Yugoslav. He, like everyone else, had the right to travel anywhere throughout Yugoslavia and associate with whomever he pleased regardless of religion.

When the war began in 1992, his family found itself in a difficult situation. Serbs were a minority in Mostar. Moreover, Miro's parents were not categorized together in the same group although it should be noted that Miro's parents were divorced for a few years by this time. The Yugoslav army offered Serbs where they were minorities in Bosnia-Herzegovina safe passage to Serbia proper. Miro and his sister Maja were airlifted to Zajecar in Serbia to join their father who had moved back to his hometown following his divorce from Miro's mother in 1988. Miro's mother, Melva, stayed in Mostar until some of her family became victims in the war. Her niece Maja, who had the same name as her own daughter, was wounded. Maja lost her leg when the shell from a bomb landed in front of her apartment building in Mostar. The war prevented Maja from receiving proper medical care and her leg had to be crudely amputated. Maja then fell victim to a bone infection. Thanks to the help from Veteran's for Peace, Maja was taken to a hospital in Cumberland, Maryland for proper medical treatment. By the time Maja was ready for transport to the United States, her father was wounded himself and could not accompany his daughter. Maja's aunt, Miro's mother, undertook the journey with her. Maja's father was able to join his daughter later.
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After Miro's mother was settled in Cumberland, she contacted Miro and his sister in Serbia and asked them to join her, their cousin, and their uncle in Cumberland. By this time, Miro had met a woman named Natasha and married her. They had a son named Milan. Nevertheless, Miro welcomed the opportunity to go to America so he and his new family moved with his sister to Cumberland.

Miro has a construction job and must drive 70 miles to work everyday. Even though Miro never had to commute so far for work in Bosnia, he is happy to be working and living in a place that is peaceful. After some time and with a lot of hard work, Miro and his mother were able to purchase a house in Cumberland. Miro's mother and his sister Maja live in the lower half of the house while Miro lives with his young family in the upper part. Since arriving in the United States, Miro's wife Natasha has had another child, named Nina. Miro is happy to have his relations in close proximity as is custom in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In many ways, Miro's new family is as complex as the one that he was born into. Miro has Bosnian citizenship while his wife Natasha and son Milan are citizens of Yugoslavia (now only Serbia and Montenegro). Miro's youngest child Nina is an American. However, Miro eagerly awaits for the time in the near future when the whole family will officially become Americans.