

Abstract

The proposed research focuses on the intergenerational transmission of memory within families of those who lived through the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), 1992-1996. A central feature of the war was the Siege of Sarajevo, the longest in the history of modern warfare: a total of 1425 days from 5th April 1992 to 29th February 1996). However, as the conflict in the Former Yugoslavia diminishes in the public imaginary, the Siege of Sarajevo similarly recedes from public consciousness. For the inhabitants of Sarajevo, however, the effects of the Siege have been far-reaching and continue to the present day. Indeed, the war in Bosnia both devastated and transformed the social fabric of the country. This project will consider the specific historical legacies of the Siege of Sarajevo. The study of war memory transmission has great social and political significance. The past does not simply disappear; lived experience eventually becomes a narrative curated among one generation and passed on to another. What is more, collective memory may lie dormant ready to emerge generations or even centuries later. The past has a habit of haunting the present; and just when everything appears calm, it can re-emerge with political force and with devastating effect, which is what happened in Yugoslavia.

The principal aim of this study is to explore the dynamics of intergenerational transmission of the memory of war among families living in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the EU/UK Bosnian diaspora, with particular focus on how the past is remembered, e.g., selection, emphasis, recalibration, and for what purpose, e.g., identity construction, esteem needs, empowerment, social change etc. The proposed study offers an interdisciplinary approach (sociology combined with social psychology) in a multidisciplinary context, i.e., the research is open to insights from other disciplines, e.g., history, cultural studies, international relations etc. The study will broadly follow a methodological approach that combines in-depth interviews with different media used as stimulus materials (movies, books, photographs etc.). The data will be analyzed using qualitative methods. Interviews will be conducted with representatives of two generations in 12 families in Bosnia and 12 families in the EU/UK Bosnian diaspora. Participants will be recruited from the general population in the city of Sarajevo and within other European cities through established connections with diaspora communities, e.g., social media, Bosnian consulates, clubs, associations as well as personal recommendations, i.e., snowballing techniques.

The post-war, post-Yugoslav milieu has been examined from political and ethnographic perspectives, but little attention has been given to differences in family perspectives and family dynamics in relation to ethnicity. Because the transmission of collective memory in the Bosnian context is unclear, young adults may be struggling to make sense of their family history, and to locate it (and themselves) within meaningful relationships. The proposed project will be a study of the collective past in different social and political contexts, i.e., the nature of collective memory dynamics within families will be studied in contexts (a) where there is no agreed official narrative of the past and daily exposure to contestation and (b) where talking about the past is optional, the narrative often unknown or deemed not politically significant in the new environment and therefore uncontested by those who hear it. The study will also provide detailed accounts of the Siege of Sarajevo from multiple perspectives with competing narratives of the cause, resolution and outcome. The findings will add to our understanding of a complex and dynamic political situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and insights may provide a basis for reconciliation that would benefit future generations. Furthermore, given the current need to resettle refugees in Europe from other parts of the world, the findings may also inform practices involving counseling resource in the context of post-conflict psychological adjustment, implications for mental health, e.g., depression, anxiety etc.