

Mia Knezevic

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### Keylor Grant Reflection

Over winter break, I had the opportunity to travel to Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, for my senior thesis research due to the generosity of the Keylor Travel Grant. My thesis, *The Public Memory of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) during the Yugoslav Wars in Bosnia*, is a topic that is relatively new and understudied. Since there has been very little written subject matter exploring how wartime sexual violence is remembered and talked about in Bosnian society, the project necessitated primary source interviews. By traveling to Sarajevo, I had the chance to interview NGO leaders, journalists, researchers at the University of Sarajevo, and museum curators to gain a better understanding of how public memory of wartime sexual violence has been shaped in Bosnia. Talking to interviewees across various disciplines gave me a sense of what moments of public discussion have been most significant in Bosnian society, and how each of their subject fields have shaped public memory.

Due to the customs and culture of Bosnia, I do not think I would have been able to have such insightful conversations had they not been face-to-face. My family is from the former Yugoslavia, and I also lived in Sarajevo for one summer; from experience, I know that people in Bosnia often do not feel comfortable sharing information with you if you do not speak their language and cannot build an in-person connection. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, I do not think that Zoom interviews would have had nearly the same effect as in-person interviews. By traveling to Sarajevo, I gained a much deeper understanding of my thesis topic than I previously had from watching documentaries and reading articles online.

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Additionally, I visited four museums in Sarajevo — the Museum of Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide, the War Childhood Museum, the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Gallery 11/07/95 (Srebrenica Gallery) — which all gave me insight into whether and how wartime sexual violence is discussed in these museums, and also where it is absent from the historical narrative. Visiting these museums was extremely useful in understanding how museum exhibits may have shaped public memory. I was able to see artifacts from victims of wartime rape and also noticed how much of the physical space the items related to sexual violence took up in the exhibits, which may symbolize the importance of the discussion of sexual violence in relation to other aspects of the war.

Altogether, my trip to Sarajevo was extremely edifying. If I were to do the trip again, I would have gone for longer. I was in Sarajevo from Sunday, January 11th, to the following Sunday, January 18th, which gave me only five days to conduct interviews (Monday to Friday; no one was available during the weekends). I found that the longer I was there, the more interviewees I got, because people I interviewed would refer me to their friends or colleagues who were relevant for my research. I believe that two weeks would have been a more appropriate time frame; however, I am still satisfied with the 11 interviews I was able to complete.

I believe that I have grown both personally and academically as a result of this travel experience. Personally, this was my first time travelling alone, which was both exciting and slightly nerve-racking, especially when issues such as lost luggage came up. However, I feel like the experience made me more confident in myself and my ability to problem-solve. My Bosnian language skills drastically improved after even just one week, as several of my interviewees felt

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more comfortable speaking in Bosnian during the interviews. The travel experience was also great practice in making connections, reaching out to people, preparing for interviews, and conducting interviews most effectively. I will take lessons I've learned from this experience into every research project I do in the future.