

Describe your research project and/or internship:

Over the course of seven weeks spent in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, I conducted human subject and archival research on the topic of circular migration between the countries of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Germany. Specifically, I was interested in learning about the emigration and return migration of Gastarbeiter to and from the Federal Republic of Germany during the 1960s and 70s and of migrants whose uprooting and relocation were motivated by the 1992-1995 war. By comparing the experiences of these two groups of migrants, I hoped to gain a better understanding of and clarify current-day and historical attitudes in Germany towards foreign migrants, the nature of Bosnia's relationship with its diaspora, and the hybrid and transnational identities that have been created and shaped by these migrants' experiences.

Discuss your overseas experience:

Overall, I believe my project was an eye-opening introduction to conducting research independently in a foreign country. The effort necessary to actually procure research participants was not insignificant. I spent the first month of my stay contacting and meeting with various individuals and organizations in Sarajevo with connections to Germany or the topic of migration in attempts to find potential interview subjects, while simultaneously conducting supplementary research at the Archive of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the last few weeks of August I spoke with nine individuals ranging in age from their early twenties to late forties who had either fled themselves in the recent war or belonged to families who had. In 45-minute to hour-and-a-half-long interviews, subjects were asked questions about their personal background, the process of migration and, if applicable, return migration, their experiences living in Germany, and their thoughts on all of the above. The results were extremely helpful for me in beginning to address some of my initial research questions and formulating others, and the interviews themselves were, I believe, fascinating and enlightening experiences for all parties involved.

What do you hope to contribute to your field and to the global community as a result of this fellowship experience?

Beginning this project has proven to me the viability of this particular topic and led me to believe that I should continue with this line of inquiry in my Senior Honors Thesis. Ultimately, I would like my thesis to address the relationship between these two groups of Yugoslav/Bosnian migrants in Germany. Thus far, my research has suggested that guest workers and refugees in Germany can in fact be seen as socially distinct, set apart from one another socially by class, political orientation and, perhaps most fascinatingly, perceptions of ethnicity and religion. I would like the thesis to show how refugees tapped into existing networks of people of Yugoslav origin living and thriving in Germany upon their arrival, and to examine the disparities in these two groups' experiences—of the acculturation process, connection with the home country, attitudes towards and perceptions of them in Germany and at home, forced repatriation, and readjustment—as reflective of staggering social and political changes that occurred in Germany, ex-Yugoslavia and beyond in between these two waves of migration.

How have you developed personally as a result of this experience? Or, how has your overseas experience caused you to see the world differently?

In my interviews with Bosnian refugees returned from Germany, I was exposed to viewpoints, accounts and experiences that forced me to rethink the framework I had previously encountered in secondary scholarship, relegating many of my questions to irrelevancy and creating entirely new ones to fill their place. With each interview, I became a more qualified researcher, capable of asking better questions and facilitating discussion on a deeper level.

As my first experience doing independent, self-designed research, this project was also an invaluable opportunity for me to learn and experience the intricacies of conducting effective and thorough research. Aside from the routine challenges of searching out and uncovering sources, this project contained significant ethical and political challenges that I worked hard to recognize and mitigate or address. In preparing for and conducting my interviews, I was keenly aware of my position as an American student in a country with a complex and tenuous political relationship with the West, where historical and other scholarship on the Balkans, and in particular on the recent war, has been flawed and incomplete.

II Fellowship Report

Furthermore, I initially had reservations about the goals and methods of my project, grounded both in my own inexperience as an undergraduate and with the risk of doing harm inherent in research with human participants. I did not take these considerations of due process and researcher responsibility lightly, and was duly cautious in planning and conducting my interviews. In the end, I am very happy with the way my interviews turned out and do not think that any ethical problems arose out of conducting them.

What was most valuable about your experience?

I do not consider my project completed at this point; rather, I feel as if the past summer was the first step in and trial period for what I hope will become a much larger project. One of the most valuable results of the summer was the network of contacts in Sarajevo I built in pursuit of subjects and archival sources. The NGOs and governmental organizations, academic institutions and individual historians, other students, and scholars I came in contact with in Sarajevo became invaluable resources and guides for me in breaking into and orientating myself in what is at times a convoluted and impenetrable scene for researchers. It was through talking to individuals I met constructing my project that I was able to navigate the ethics of my own positionality as not only a novice student, but also as a party looking in from the outside on cultural and political affairs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This network of contacts, acquaintances and even friends I now have in Sarajevo will be extremely useful to me in any future research there; and all academic endeavors aside, I feel that this experience has only strengthened my already considerable personal ties to, understanding of and identification with Sarajevo and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Briefly state your future goals.

Beginning this project has proven to me the viability of this particular topic and led me to believe that I should continue with this line of inquiry. I feel that my interviews thus far have, valuable as they are, only scratched the surface of what I would like to do in the coming months, during which I hope to conduct additional interviews in Germany and return to Sarajevo for shorter stays. I have a large numbers of potential subjects both in Sarajevo and in Germany—the former people with whom I did not have time to speak this past summer, and the latter the relatives, friends and acquaintances of people I met in Sarajevo—with whom I would like to speak. Furthermore, I have only begun to explore the materials available in historical archives in Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Zagreb, and Belgrade. I am confident that this project will continue to yield results as I continue with it, and am currently planning my next steps, which include a month-and-a-half-long visit to Sarajevo, and perhaps to other parts of the former Yugoslavia, on my semester break in March and April. At this time I hope to continue both my work in local archives and my interviews with both groups of subjects.