EXTREME CASE OF INSECURITY: VIOLENCE NARRATIVES OF SURVIVORS FROM WAR IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Abstract

The Bosnian war can be seen as a particularly illustrative case of war sociology, based on the ethnic mix of the population prior to the war. War antagonists often knew each other from before the war. Serbian soldiers and policemen carried out mass executions, forced flight, and systematic rape and set up concentration camps in their effort to drive away Bosniacs and Croats from northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina. The warfare was directly targeted against civilians. The material for the study was gathered through qualitative interviews with 27 individuals who survived the war in northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina. This study joins those narrative traditions within sociology where oral presentations are seen as both discursive- and experience-based. An interactionally inspired perspective on human interaction, through symbols and an ethno-methodological perspective on human stories is a general starting point. In addition, I perceive the concept of war violence as an especially relevant component in those specific stories that I analyzed. Previous research on violence during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina presents a one-sided picture of the phenomenon “war violence”. Researchers have emphasized the importance of narratives but they have not focused on narratives about war violence, nor have they analyzed the stories of war violence being a product of interpersonal interaction and meaning-making activity. This article tries to fill this knowledge gap by analyzing the narratives of survivors of the war in northwestern Bosnia in the 1990s. The aim is to analyze how the interviewees describe violence during the war, and also to analyze those discursive patterns that contribute in constructing the category “war violence”. The analysis shows that the individual's interpretation of the biographical consequences of war violence are intimately related to the subjects own war experiences. All interviewees describing war violence as morally reprehensible. Narratives retelling violent situations, perpetrators of violence and subjected to violence does not only exist as a mental construction, stories live their lives after the war, and thus have real consequences for individuals and society.

Key words: violence, war, perpetrator of violence, subjected to violence, narrative, Bosnia.