

REFUGEES ARE NOT NUMBERS! UNDERSTANDING THE FATE OF THE REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS DURING THE CONFLICTS IN FORMER YUGOSLAVIA



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Keywords: Yugoslav conflicts, refugees, Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia

Context

Apart from the standard contents and topics related to the dissolution of Yugoslavia such as the rise of nationalism or the ethnic wars, this lecture will examine an often neglected issue related to the fate of the refugees and displaced persons in the Yugoslav conflicts.

According to UN High Commissioner for Refugees and displaced almost 3 million people were forced to leave their homes in former Yugoslavia during the decade of conflicts.

All former Yugoslav republics and provinces have faced the challenge of refugees and displaced persons. At the same time, this was the biggest refugee crisis in Europe after the end of World War II.

The questions that will be discussed within this important topic in post - 1945 Yugoslav history include: What were the reasons for such a large number of refugees and displaced persons in Yugoslavia? What were their fates and what challenges did they face? Do they have any commonalities?

At a time when there are still different national narratives about what happened in the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the issue of the fate of the refugees becomes even more important.

In that direction, the focus of the lecture will be put on personal experience of the people and not on general political events in the country's demise.

Aim

- Increase the knowledge of students regarding the fate of the refugees from former Yugoslavia by using formal and non-formal methods;
- Develop effective listening and analytical skills of the students in respect to conflicts in former Yugoslavia;
- Motivate students to promote critical thinking on specific events and processes in history;
- Strengthen presentation, argumentation as well as time-management skills of students.
- Connect with refugee stories and
- Correlate to current events

Learning Outcomes

- Improved knowledge regarding the fate of the refugees and displaced persons from former Yugoslavia;
- Strengthened analytical and critical thinking skills;
- Developed ability to analyze video material and present their own observations and views.

Material & Equipment Needed

Projector, flipchart paper, speakers

Duration

45 min.

Lesson Activities Overview (Process)

Part I Introduction (5 min):

At the beginning of the lecture, the professor/lecturer will offer a short overview of the key events and processes that led to the refugee crisis and present the basic parameters. Depending on the interest and age, students could receive a list of relevant readings from different sides in the conflict in advance to prepare for the class. At the same time, students should be informed in advance about the issues that will be discussed and encouraged to conduct research on their own.

Part II Presentation of video material (10 min):

Following the introduction, short video material related to the fate of the refugees from different ethnic, religious and social origin from different part of former Yugoslavia will be presented to students. The material will be selected to depict different situation, context and circumstances during the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Students will be exposed to real life stories of the refugees and consequently, inspired to think critically about the misfortunate events and their consequences for ordinary people. Each refugee story anywhere in the world is unique and special. The selected videos do not incline to present absolute truth about the political processes and wars. Their main role is to inform the student, raise awareness and encourage them to discuss issues that are often forgotten or neglected during regular history classes. The prepared video material will serve as a basic framework for the class as the professors are free to include additional short and relevant videos in order to develop a more appropriate basis for discussion.

Part III Discussion and Presentation (25 min):

Following the interviews, the students will be divided in groups and instructed to discuss and present their views on the challenges refugees faced during the Yugoslav war. Each group will be given different question/s and the participants will have 10 min to discuss the issue at hand. In that direction, the students will be expected to identify the reasons for such large influx of refugees. Through the use of flipcharts and cards, students will be expected to identify the key commonalities of the stories as well as refugees' main challenges. At the end of this part of the class, a representative of each group will present the group's conclusion. In this way, the groups could learn from each other during their presentations.

Orientation questions

- What were the reasons for such a large number of refugees and displaced persons in Yugoslavia?
- What was their fate?
- Are there any similarities in their stories?
- What challenges did the refugees and host countries face?
- The fate of the refugees of "other"?
- Who filmed the video and why?
- What is your emotional reaction to the video?
- Refugee life after?
- Refugees today -correlate the video to current events

Part IV Conclusion (5 min):

Following the students' discussion in groups, the professor/lecturer will sum-up the discussion and invite students to reflect on the final discussion question:

What can we learn from history and how could we address the current refugee crisis?

Additionally, the professor/lecturer will offer students to write a short reflection paper (up to 500 words) about the lessons learned from Yugoslavia's refugees as homework.

Through this activity the students will be stimulated to further contemplate, express and memorize the lessons learned in class.

Sources

Depending of the age, profile, interest and language abilities of the students the lecturer could make a selection of the relevant readings for the students.

Further Readings

Relevant readings for preparation of the class :

- Glenny, M, (1996) *The Fall of Yugoslavia: Third Balkan war*,
- Jelavich, B., (2009), *History of the Balkans – Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press.
- Korac, M., (2009) *Remaking Home: Reconstructing Life, Place and Identity in Rome and Amsterdam*, Berghahn Books, Oxford.
- Lampe, J.R., (2000) *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country*, Cambridge University Press.
- Morokvasic, M., *Yugoslav Refugees, Displaced Persons and the Civil War in: Refuge*, vol. 11, No. 4, (May 1992).
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, (2010) *The State of World's Refugees: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action*, Oxford University Press.
- Opacic, G., Vidakovic, I., Vujadinovic, B., (2005), *Living in Post – War Communities*, Belgrade, 2005.

Relevant video material:

BBC Death of Yugoslavia, Frontline – The Yugoslavia wars and other available video

Assessment options

Students could be evaluated through their participation and quality of argumentation in the discussion as well as their presentation.

Homework ideas

- Short 500 word reflection paper on the lessons learned.
- Find your own video of a refugee story today

Adaptation ideas

Teachers are free to include additional videos or discussion questions if necessary to achieve the goals of the lecture.

This lesson plan was produced within the project "Historija, Istorija, Povijest – Lessons for Today." It is implemented by the Anne Frank House in cooperation with local partner organizations Youth Initiative for Human Rights and Humanity in Action (Bosnia-Herzegovina), HERMES (Croatia), Youth Educational Forum (Macedonia) and Open Communication (Serbia).



This project was funded by the European Union. The views and content of this lesson plan is the sole responsibility of its authors and does not reflect the views of the European Union or the implementing organizations.
