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Experiencing forced migration in childhood: the case of refugees from the former Yugoslavia in Norway

Summary

This article discusses how former child refugees from Yugoslav wars, who have permanently resettled in Norway, narrate their past refugee experiences, and how they negotiate their belonging and integration in the present. The article argues that child refugees are particularly important research subjects in the field of migration and forced migration studies: refugees and forced migrants are the most vulnerable of all migrants, while children are the most vulnerable and powerless among all forced migrants. Turning back to the past experiences and memories of people who went through this type of experience in the not so distant past, might helps us understand what challenges the numerous refugees of today are facing, and help answer what receiving societies can do in response to the arrival of the new refugees.

Keywords: child refugees, forced migration, former Yugoslavia, Norway, integration

Europe is currently facing the most serious refugee crisis on its territory since the end of Second World War. With this in mind, it is more important than ever to research the individual experiences of forced migrants arriving in, and staying on in, receiving European societies over the last decades. Before the ongoing global refugee crisis, the 1990s used to stand out in terms of the scope and seriousness of refugee related issues. This was primarily owing to the refugee crisis and devastation accompanying the breakup of Yugoslavia. This article will therefore discuss how former child refugees from the Yugoslav wars who remained in Norway narrate their past refugee experiences, and how they negotiate their belonging and integration in the present. Norway was one of many receiving societies where refugees from the former Yugoslavia ended up in the 1990s, owing to the wars and violence in their homelands.

Child refugees are particularly important research subjects in the field of migration and forced migration studies: refugees and forced migrants are the most vulnerable of all migrants, while children are the most vulnerable and powerless among all forced migrants. This traumatic experience in childhood is bound to shape the identifications of people even when they are not refugees, and not children anymore. The people in focus of this study were all still permanently settled in Norway at the time of the interviews conducted for my doctoral study at the University of Oslo, parts of which will be used in the article. The findings are based on those twenty in-depth interviews conducted with former child

refugees between 2011 and 2014. In this sample, the people were 2–14 years of age at the time when they became forced migrants, and 17–35 at the time of the interview. Because of the chronologically delimited focus of the study on the wars of the early 1990s, this particular research is limited to the refugees of the Bosnian war (1992–1995) and refugees of the war in Croatia (1991–1995), excluding people fleeing conflicts in Kosovo and other parts of the former Yugoslavia.

The former refugee children I am here interested in fall into a group that for research purposes, and using the quite useful term from migration studies, can be labeled as “1.5 generation migrants” (one and a half generation migrants, see Rumbaut 1991: 82). Ruben Rumbaut, an influential sociologist of migration, himself 1.5 generation Cuban-American, was among the first in academia to use this term (see also Rumbaut and Rumbaut 1976, Rumbaut 2004). I would argue that this “in-between” generation produces especially important and interesting reflections on transnational belonging and identification. These people moved to the receiving country when they were underaged children. They typically speak the language of the receiving country as well and as fluently as the natives do. They were brought, educated, and socialised “abroad”. They are often the ones to “hyphenate”¹ their identities and culture. However, many of the former child refugees still bear personal memories of their past lives in their “original” homelands, or they grew up exposed to the memories and narratives about homeland transmitted by their families, friends, media, and other types of sources to which they were exposed. In many cases, these were quite traumatic memories of migration caused by violent conflict.

Stories about arrival, reception and return

The migration from the former Yugoslavia to Norway that the chosen interlocutors went through features as a significant rupture in their biographies, and the most important relocation in the interlocutors’ lives. A retracing of the steps in the movements of these individual people is needed first, in order to explain which locations and localities figure as important in the lives of the individual interlocutors. Discussing memories on migration, in part, explains how individual migrants practically and emotionally relate to all of those places today². That is why I here start with the testimonies about this relocation from the “homeland” to the country of permanent residence. These testimonies are presented along with accounts about the interlocutors’ experiences upon arrival in the receiving society. The aim is to pay attention to how interlocutors narrate the arrival and, and to contextu-

¹ For a theoretical and empirical analysis of what they call *hyphenated selves*, see Sirin and Fine (2007). The authors also refer to Fine 1994 (ibid.: 152), by stating: “By hyphen we refer to the identities that are at once joined, and separated, by history, the present socio-political climate, geography, biography, longings and loss.”

² Location is here understood as a position and a more general concept than locality, which refers to concrete predefined areas such as village, town, region, etc. Location can be used instead of locality, but not vice versa, as the term locality is narrower than the term location.

alise their narratives in relation to the influential discourses in the societies in which they live. After a focus on the original displacement and refugee experience, some reflections on the idea and reality of return, and the relevance of that idea in migrants' lives will follow. How do these people talk about the possibilities and wishes to "return" to the sending societies, and what is it that they actually did and still do in that regard?

Recalling the reasons to leave home and come to Norway shows how conflict migrants, pressured by necessity and life circumstances, often end up spending their whole lives in a place in which they never thought they would live. The choices made when they were escaping conflict were often shaped more by limiting circumstances than by their own free will. However, these choices defined their life paths and opportunities, and continue to define them and their everyday realities to this day. These migrants are being defined by the fact they are in Norway, and not somewhere else, by the language they speak and the society by which they are surrounded. As stated by the interlocutor P11:

I of course think that since, because if it had not been for the war, I would not have been living in Norway. I would not be living here and then Norway would not be creating my id, identi, identity. Cause Norway did create my identity! And what the fuck, like, I can speak Norwegian?! That is a part of my identity! Yes I can speak the Norwegian language. I mean, that is, that is a strange thing, that I am, I am now like, from Bosnia, but I live in Norway. That is a part of my identity.

The profanity that P11 uses, expresses the surprise that can still to this day be generated when she reflects on the fact that her everyday life functions in the Norwegian language. That kind of sudden realisation can occur even after many years of living in Norway, as shown here. This is probably not something the interlocutor will regularly reflect on and be puzzled by; however, it is significant that her recognition of living in Norway and speaking Norwegian can still cause this type of confused reaction. The ideologies that promote sedentarist logic (see Jansen and Löfving, 2009: 14), and imagine belonging as real, signal that it is not natural and expected that one from somewhere else should be "here". This discourse finds its way into P11's self-reflection; however, she claims this as, nevertheless, a part of her identity. This re-claiming happens after the initial questioning of her right and her likeliness to be here, speaking this language.

When looking at the migration paths of the interviewed interlocutors side by side, several interesting commonalities can be found amongst the twenty key interlocutors. One of those commonalities is the fact that most of them did not arrive directly in Norway: they lived for various periods of time in one or more different "temporary stations" on the path that brought them there. At the point when they left their homes, most of them had no idea that they would end up in Norway, or that they would not return home soon, or even ever. These migration paths often created bonds to several localities, especially to places to which they had some emotional attachment, whether because they were imagined as their "rightful" ethnic nation-states or for other reasons.

Another commonplace, perhaps even more important for the topic of this research, is how the former refugees I talked to very often emphasised the lack of real choice, agency, and power in choosing their refuge destination(s). Most families and individuals were reportedly limited by various circumstances (financial, political, psychological, family-related, and other reasons). Most people report that they did not really want to go anywhere, but they were forced to leave their homes because of the violent conflict. In that sense, what people “want” and choose is very hard to grasp. Most people never wanted to leave their homes, in particular not under such terrible circumstances. However, they did in a sense want to move to a safe place, because of these dire wartime conditions. The lack of possibility to actively choose locations, according to free desires, knowledge, and wishes (as would ideally happen when people decide where they want to live), often applies to both the choice of country they would settle in, as well as to the actual concrete localities within that country to which they were sent. Life circumstances, political situations, official political institutions, or regulations often really or partially decided this for people.

Many refugees narrate their arrival by using discursive devices that express passivity and powerlessness such as “being sent”, “being transferred”, “transported”, “thrown over”, and “ending up”. P2 explained their arrival to Norway in these terms; “We went where we could”(Išli smo tamo gdje smo mogli). These are all discursive ways to denote a certain lack of power, lack of choice, of control, and of agency. It also suggests that there were places where they were not wanted or admitted. They also employ other discursive devices to denote the randomness and fatality of their paths, such as for example the fixed expression “igrom slučajeve (as fortune would have it³), or passive constructions such as “zadesilo nas je” (it befell us). A number of interlocutors recall their feelings and fears at the time of relocation: being aware of their family’s uncertain and even humiliating position, borders closing in front of them, heading where they were and still are not declared unwanted. This powerlessness, being deprived of agency and human dignity, had an effect on the dynamics of family life. The whole situation, starting from the outbreak of war through refugee status and relocations, redefined and challenged the role of their parents and caregivers, and the faith in their ability to protect their children. A big break with childhood for many of them was marked by these experiences. P6 talks about his loss of certainty in the following way.

So now, you have to, think on your own, because a child, when it is small, it does not know anything. And it thinks that, dad and mom, they are God. That they know everything, like, and all that. I figured that when I was, nine or ten, when I had to escape. That is the first time I saw, in my mother’s eyes that she was afraid, get it? And that, “where will we go, what will we do?” – She DOES NOT KNOW! I saw that she did not know. I saw that my old man did not know. Then I figured, OK. They actually don’t know. You know, and then I felt, lost! Because as a child you are not, you had, like you know, parents were always firm, man,

³ “Igrom slučajeve” literally translates as “by the game of chances”. The method of crowdsourcing offered “as fortune would have it” as in my view the best English counterpart of this expression.

like, the point of safety. And when that very point of safety does not itself know where it is located, then the child REALLY feels...like, you know...

Steven Vertovec (2013: 83) discusses how in Great Britain the National Asylum Support Service made a lot of effort to disperse asylum seekers all around the country. A similar policy was followed in Norway, and people were dispersed all over the country. In the view of Valenta and Ramet (2012), the official settlement policy that scattered people all around Norway has crucially affected their successful integration into Norwegian society⁴. However, the way I read the transcript of the interviews, for many people a further sense of powerlessness was to come after the arrival, in “being sent” and placed around Norway. It is fair to note that people were offered an opportunity to list their choices; however, for some of them it did not really matter where exactly they would go, because any place they could have chosen was equally unknown and foreign. Some people wanted to stay in the south and avoid the cold north, and most people wanted to stay in the larger cities, primarily Oslo and Bergen. This was not always possible or accepted by the authorities. Some people wished, on the other hand, to go to places where they already knew someone. Occasionally, those kinds of wishes were reportedly taken into account and respected by the state officials. Still, many people describe their re-settlement as P6 did: When talking about where in Norway the family ended up living: “Nismo imali izbora” (we had no choice), “stavili su nas na autobus” (they set us on a bus), “zapalo nas” (it befell us). P2 also says “dobili smo komunu” (we got a municipality⁵), which also infers that it was assigned to them and they were told where to settle. This indicates the awareness about who holds the almost absolute power in these types of situations, and one’s own powerless position in it. Also, choosing the expression “we got it” has slightly less forced and less passive overtones than “being sent”.

P13 and her family did not have any concrete plans or possibilities to migrate abroad, until the last year of the war when they, along with other people from their village, were chosen by the Norwegian authorities and literally picked and brought to Norway from Bosnia. She recalls:

Yes, I know that they were gathering the refugees, we were still refugees as there was a war, and the plane needed to be filled, departing for Norway. My parents did not even know where that was exactly, or what, but in a short time they decided. There was me, mom, dad, and my grandma. And we came with my aunt and uncle, those are the only ones of our family here. And first we got to Oslo, we were in Tanum, don’t know if you heard about it, that... asylum centre. Before we got accommodation in Northern Norway, in one smaller

⁴ I agree with the authors that integration patterns developed by the host society affect the actual integration of a group. However, there are many other factors that determine the integration, such as attitudes of the majority group, and unfortunately, as many examples show, how visibly or culturally distinguishable a group is from the majority of citizens.

⁵ Norway is divided into 428 municipalities, which are in Norwegian called “kommuner” (singular form is *kommune*).

settlement, (the name of the settlement). There we stayed for many years before we decided to move over here.

The choice of words such as *skupljati* (to gather, to collect) when referring to people and “trebalo je napuniti avion” (the airplane needed to be filled), provided as a reason for the family’s inclusion among the people transported to Norway, reflect the lack of power. This shows the occasional partially dehumanising and collectivising nature of the entire humanitarian process and policies. The family did have a somewhat active role as well, in that sense that the term “decided” signals. However, they were only offered a short time to think through such a life-changing decision.

What most of the interlocutors and other people I talked to agree about, is that placement by the state did not in any way mean that they had to permanently stay where they were initially placed. Most people had the opportunity to eventually relocate freely, according to personal choices and wishes, once they re-established their lives and had the economic and other means to relocate.

What about the possibility and wish to relocate “back home”? The following section deals with possibilities and realities of return migration to the sending societies.

Returning where “we” come from

According to the sedentarist logic, human beings are seen not only as being collectively rooted in a particular place, but also as deriving their meaningfulness, or their culture, from this very rootedness. As a result, people on the involuntary pole of the movement continuum in particular become a deeply problematic phenomenon, and their anticipated return reestablishes the ‘natural’ way of the world. (Jansen and Löfving 2009: 14)

The ideas about return, and in some cases the actual stories about possible and attempted cases of “moving back”, are crucially related to emotions, the feeling of belonging. Whether the reasons are related to family or sentimental reasons, or to some type of nostalgia or patriotic feelings, the feelings are the key for decision-making. The idea that one should want to return to where one comes from can be interpreted as a type of long-distance nationalism (see Anderson 1992) in some cases. However, the return happens for many other types of reasons and combinations of reasons; for example, practical, financial and business-related, and numerous other reasons. In some cases, the return is completely or partially involuntary. For people included in this study, their potential return would predominantly have to be voluntary, as the migrants chosen to be in focus all have the right to reside in Norway. Fulfillment of such individual tendencies, in the case of individual war refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, is in need of both more research and more advocacy. The right of all forcibly displaced persons to return is officially and formally guaranteed; however, the circumstances in the sending societies make it very hard for the former refugees to decide to return. This was particularly the case for many of those people who grew up and settled in what is often considered “Western” societies, such as

the developed European countries, Canada, Australia, the US, et cetera. The majority of those not returning do not take such a decision lightly: The wish to return is very strong among former refugees, perhaps in particular older generations.

People, who were children at the time of migration, or even the so-called second-generation “migrants” born abroad, also sustain this myth of the real homeland, from where they actually come⁶. This presumed naturalised link between people and place promotes the sedentarist logic, and an embodied attachment to a particular territorialised home and nation⁷. When discussing long-distance nationalism in particular, the myth of return is an important phenomenon in migration studies. This myth is common to and nurtured in many diasporic “communities” (see for example Safran 1991 and Markowitz and Stefanssen 2004).

Remembering the family arrival in Norway and the desires and possibilities to return home after the war, interlocutor P16 stated the following, about which many of the interlocutors and other former refugees would agree:

Um, what can I say, and when we came to Norway it was, the plan was never to stay here. To remain living, here. Um, the plan has always been to move back, to Bosnia, and when I asked my parents about when we would go home, when we would go back, they would always say that, we would move back once the war was over. And now it has been twenty years. And we never moved back because, after war it takes many years, many generations before, um, in a way feet, before a land gets back on its feet. And Bosnia is a very special case because it is about ethnic um, war and... yes. So that, it is very, the politi, politics is wrong, very, in Bosnia. And the system itself, right, for different ethnic groups to, attempt to run one another, and very little is being done, so much money goes on administration, which is a great shame, so that... yes.

In P16’s statement, the ethnic divisions and political situation in the sending society are identified as the main reasons for not moving back, despite the expectations and plans that she recalls her family had upon their arrival to Norway. In addition to other types of reasons, this reasoning implicitly includes also the normative assessment and othering of the people back home; as the ones perpetuating that kind of situation, which causes “us” (the family) not to be able to go back. In this sense, “we” in this narrow sense are implicitly painted as the ones who do not want to live in that kind of political situation, the ones who assess that situation as wrong and bad. In this understanding, this narrow “we” is positioned as more advanced and unable to return to such a shameful, corrupt, and ethnically divided system.

The potential and actual reasons for returning were as mentioned plural and very individual, both practical and sentimental in nature. Some young people brought up abroad

⁶ Jansen and Löfving (2009: 51) explain that the Dayton agreement stipulated the right of all those displaced to freely return to their homes of origin and ample resources were invested in this.

⁷ The foreign intervention agencies promoting return often subscribe to this logic, not only ordinary people.

implied that the feeling that you are not a stranger might be a strong reason to want to return. Being able not to be immediately recognised as different, as you are in “*svoja zemlja*” (your own country) where people can pronounce your name correctly; this was described as a “priceless feeling” by one young woman brought up and educated in Sweden, who returned to Bosnia and Herzegovina several years before the interview. However, many discuss their belonging in the “homeland” as contested in many other ways. The fact that they grew up abroad makes them outsiders in certain regards. In some cases, this is related to the fact that a number of such young voluntary returnees returned to a certain city (usually the capital), from which they and their parents do not “really” originate. Local and regional patriotism is a very salient phenomenon in these societies, especially in terms of urban-rural divisions, and it is particularly strong in the capitals of the states and regions. Besides all of this, it is important to have in mind that, as Jansen and Lofving (2009: 54) note, the war-related displacement had strengthened earlier migration into the cities. The two authors describe the increased preference for urban residence as an underestimated factor in what they call Bosnian transformations of home. My additional fieldwork in the former Yugoslav countries confirms that the actual return of refugees from abroad led them to move to the larger cities in the sending society, and not necessarily the smaller towns and villages from which they were originally displaced.

Although there are many opportunities and ways for the returnees’ belonging to be contested, their “origin” is usually considered a solid argument for some level of uncontested “ethno-national” belonging. At least, they are typically not immediately coded as different and foreign, provided they speak fluent Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian. In this sense, the myth of return to “where we are from”, from a sentimental point of view, has to do with ascribed belonging and the avoidance of contestations; even more than with salient ethnic self-identifications and feelings of belonging and attachments related to patriotism and nationalism.

For the conflict migrants in focus in this study, most of whom have not ever returned or do not even plan to, that myth of return nevertheless figures as an important and present discourse in their lives; if not for them personally, then through stories and plans of parents and relatives. However, the wish and reality of return are not in any way proportionate in these particular cases. As all of the people included in this research have the right to permanently reside in Norway, their potential return would happen on a voluntary basis. The return-related concerns and intentions of the people in this sample reflect fairly well the trends by which most of those refugees who migrated to Norway: People were allowed to permanently settle; therefore, most of them consequently decided to remain in Norway⁸. The lack of return is due to many reasons, most prominent being the political situation and economic concerns.

Advice such as “do not move back” or questions such as “why did you move back?”, or even “are you crazy”, are some of the typical reactions people that decide to return

⁸ See the empirical data about Bosnian refugees in Norway in Valenta and Štrabac 2011.

report hearing “back home” in the sending society⁹. P20, who was going through an open-ended return and lived between Norway and Bosnia and Herzegovina at the time when he was interviewed, explained that he has always had a wish to return, which he cites as a constant sub-conscious desire (*podsvjesna želja*). However, he was concerned about whether he would be able to provide a decent living for himself “back home”, corresponding to the one he had in Norway. Several years before the interview, P20 got an offer to invest in a business started by some friends who returned, and he gave the offer a shot. For a while he participated in the business long-distance, but as the business expanded, he began spending more and more time “there” and eventually decided to move to the capital, Sarajevo. However, he still left open the possibility for re-return to Norway, if he has to, while hoping that would not be necessary.

I still leave some option to have a place to go, because I hold citizenship, a job can always be found. I think that if this company keeps working as it should, maybe there will be no need to return.

Leaving an option to return abroad, and holding onto citizenship and residence abroad is a typical strategy of the returnees. Fairly common is also what P20 testifies he encounters as a reaction to his action of moving “back”: Being regularly told that one is “out of one’s mind” or asked if he was a fool or an idiot, by both people “back home” and those left in the *dijaspora*. P20 explains how people often do not understand why he would ever move from Norway back to Bosnia, as he and many other people claim that most Bosnians want to emigrate. Reportedly, people also ironically ask him if he returned out of patriotic feelings. His explanation in the interview is that he feels that of course patriotism is a part of the reason for people who wish to return, but it cannot be the only reason for such a controversial decision.

Refugee return to Croatia has similar challenges and obstacles as return to Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a lot of refugees from Croatia are self-identified Croatian Serbs, a lot of whom left Croatia in August 1995 and never returned¹⁰. According to the US Committee for Refugees World Survey 2001 – Croatia (I.S.53), up to 315,000 refugees from Croatia remained outside the country in need of a lasting solution, including 290,000 in Yugoslavia¹¹ and 25,000 in Bosnia at the end of 2001. A few “Croatian” refugees in this study all left Croatia during the war and expressed neither a wish to leave Norway, nor the desire

⁹ This is something that I heard in many conversations related to my study, and it is also reported by several interviewees in a special edition of the NRK show “Migrapolis” (part 2.) where the host, himself a Norwegian Bosnian, interviewed young Norwegian-Bosnian professionals who voluntarily returned from Norway to Bosnia and Herzegovina, with plans to stay more-or-less permanently (I.S.46).

¹⁰ According to the report to the Security Council of the UN (I.S.76), by the Secretary General, in August 1995, the UN estimated that only 3,500 Serbs remained in Kordun and Banovina (former Sector North) and 2,000 remained in Lika and Northern Dalmatia (former Sector South), while more than 150,000 had fled to Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), and 10,000–15,000 had arrived in the Banja Luka area.

¹¹ Back in 2001, Yugoslavia was still the official name of the state union between Serbia and Montenegro.

ever to return to Croatia. The obvious explanation for this would lie in the fact that the majority of those “Croatian” refugees interviewed claim Serbian or partially Serbian origin and identification. The nationalist ideologies that both they themselves adhere to, and that caused them to be exiled from their homes by others, do not ever fully lose their power. The majority of the respondents in the overall study, not only the main interlocutors, including both “Bosnian” and “Croatian” refugees of any ethnicity, claimed they had no current plans to leave Norway in order to return “home”.

For many of the migrants I conversed with, who do not plan to resettle, visits to “homeland(s)” are nonetheless an extremely important part of their annual holiday. Many make sure to travel to those areas as often as possible. While not permanently returning, a large number of people visit the perceived homelands on a more or less regular basis. Many people explicitly talk about looking forward to the visit all year long, as an important and joyous part of their life. The main impression is that it is typical to try to go “*bar jednom u godini*” (“at least once a year”), most typically during the summer. Some of the interlocutors reported that they used to go back to visit more often in previous periods of their lives, but ended up reducing the visits in other periods. Others have reportedly almost completely stopped going, as for example P7. P7 said: “*Kad moram idem dolje*” (I go down there when I have to). Interlocutor P5 reported going very often at an earlier point of her youth, as for many at that age, it is more fun “down there”. At the time of the interview, having established her own family, she does not go as often anymore. P17 also stated that she goes back to visit very seldom. In particular, during several years after the end of the war, she reported that she had no wish to go back at all. When she went back for the first time after a long absence, she went through a difficult time due to this visit. Reportedly, this visit caused her to become depressed. Now, she occasionally (still very rarely) goes and visits. This is how she describes the experience: “*Mogu ti ispričati, kako je meni bilo doći u, u Bosnu nakon, dvadeset godina, maltene, mislim i ja, i ja henger etter på nittitallet*”. (“I can tell you, how it was for me to, to come to Bosnia after, almost twenty years, I mean I as well, I am stuck in the 1990s.”) As she explained further in her statement, the society “there” in a way had moved on, while the relocated refugees perpetuate bad memories of how the society was back when they left. Many of them cannot move on, for this reason.

Not everyone perceives the attitudes and ways of getting over the 1990s (the wars) in the same way: Some people believe nationalism and divisions are stronger “back home” than among the diaspora, sometimes assessed as generally more open-minded and tolerant. However, many others believe, similar to P17, that regardless of all the problems, society there had to move on; soon after the conflict, people had to go back to “living side by side”. In opposition to them, the conflict refugees abroad can get “stuck” in the conflict and past due to their long-distance position. Both assessments are true on some occasions, and for some people, but false for others. In any case, these visitors from abroad always go through strong emotional and psychological experiences when visiting the country that they had to leave twenty and more years ago. This shows that Kaldor (1996) is right to

point to the presence of both cosmopolitan anti-nationalist and reactionary ethno-nationalists within the diasporas.

Life after permanent resettlement

According to the sociologists Valenta and Štrabac (2012, 2013), Bosnians' experiences in Norway share certain similarities and differences with the experiences of Bosnians in other receiving countries: They initially got collective temporary protection, they were warned upon arrival that they would be sent back, but later they were offered the opportunity to permanently settle. Valenta and Bunar (2010) indicate that state-sponsored integration assistance in Norway was more extensive than in many other countries. In this country, as pointed out, there is a comparatively much smaller population of Yugoslav war refugees than in many other receiving countries. However, the majority of former Yugoslav refugees in Norway were conflict migrants and, in that sense, their number is comparably significant. Valenta and Štrabac measured several integration outcomes and standards of living, and concluded that in particular Bosnians in Norway are doing comparatively well (2012). They consider that the Norwegian case teaches us that scattered settlement in small local communities of the receiving society may result in a high degree of social integration. However, it is added that this is valid only provided that immigrants are not perceived as culturally very different from the native local populations. Another important point they conclude with is that what they label as the Bosnian experience in Norway teaches us that increased social integration may go together with active transnational engagements. Kelly (2003), in her findings about Bosnian refugees in Britain, self-admittedly ran into a conundrum, because of the following fact: There were Bosnian associations in most areas of the country where Bosnian refugees had been settled, although the people themselves had many divisions and rivalries. Nevertheless, there was little evidence of a community. Community in this sense, rather than being a genuine construction of community, can be a convenient label applied to a disparate group of individuals (see Burrell, 2006: 176).

My research can confirm many of the above-listed claims based on the evidence in my own research in Norway. When it comes to the living, networking "patterns" and tendencies of the conflict refugees already established in the receiving society, it seems that most people do not tend to live in anything similar to the so-called "immigrant ghettos" or other "special" areas. Although new and sometimes undocumented migrants from the former Yugoslavia do sometimes tend to live in cheaper areas such as "Groruddalen"¹², the settled and more established migrants involved in this study all report never having

¹² Groruddalen, or the Grorud valley, is a suburb built in the broad valley in eastern Oslo. In generalising views, the West side of Oslo is considered more expensive, posh, predominantly "white" and "Norwegian", while Eastern Oslo, in particular city parts such as Grønland, Tøyen, or Grorud are cheaper to live in, "multicultural", and considered to have a large percentage of the population with so-called immigrant background. For research on Groruddalen, see for example Vestel and Eriksen (2012).

lived in a part of town that could be considered to be a predominantly Yugoslav, Serbian or Bosnian neighborhood. Certain towns or regions are known to have larger numbers of people originating from the former Yugoslavia than others (for example Fredrikstad or Kristiansand), but there are no predominantly Yugoslav or Bosnian neighborhoods, or evidence of community to be found.

Excerpts from my research also confirm what Valenta (2007) shows about how living in small Norwegian towns can influence social integration in two main and very different ways: If the migrants do not manage to be absorbed into the dense sociability of a small town, social stigmatisation and exclusion will be experienced more intensely than in the city. Some other migrants, on the other hand, benefit from settling in small towns and experience a strong sense of belonging there.

Migration to Oslo and other large centres from small settlements and scarcely populated regions is a general tendency, not only for these migrants, but for Norwegian society in general. In that sense, this is comparable to the migration to cities that Jansen and Löfving (2009) identify as a trend in the sending societies (as mentioned in section 5.1.1). People gravitate to the capital in the receiving society as well, or as P15 puts it, “svak’ ide u Oslo” (everyone goes to Oslo). Employment and educational opportunities seem mostly to bring people to Oslo, but there are some other reasons as well; as P4, for example, after having lived in the north of the country, remembers:

And then I wanted to go to Oslo, both because of our church and our people up there I have not been seeing our people for months. Back then I still had neither Internet nor satellite TV, so I was cut off from everything that was happening in the Balkans.

For P4, it was therefore important to live in Oslo, in order to be able to network with his compatriots and to go to church. He acknowledged the fact that the Internet and TV programme can function as the ways to network and connect, and the lack of access to these made his wish to move to Oslo even greater, until he finally acted on it.

Interlocutor P6 mentions that growing up in a small Norwegian town, he had only Norwegian friends; he only pursued friendships with “our people” when he moved to Oslo. At that point, he started feeling he had more in common with people originating from the former Yugoslavia than with “the Norwegians”¹³. He talked about how, at the present point, he divides his socialising in such ways that he has Norwegian colleagues and surroundings at work, and “our” friends outside. He also stated: “Dosta mi je tog norveškog na poslu.” (I have enough of that Norwegian at work). This type of division into a public, “more Norwegian”, and private, “less Norwegian”, sphere is common among many of these migrants. With whom individual people socialise and network is of course different for different people. While several of the interviewees reported to have a number of Norwegian friends, most of the interlocutors cited having just a few. Interlocutor

¹³ Valenta’s doctoral dissertation (2008) is, as mentioned earlier, a study of friendships after resettlement among immigrants from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Iraq in Norway.

P7 stresses that he has no Norwegian friends and never really had them. Growing up in Norway since the age of thirteen, he had many friends who were immigrants from many countries around the whole world, but not Norwegian friends. Interlocutor P8 also says his friends while growing up were from all over the world. P8 reports having a small number of Norwegian friends, and many friends who originate from the same society as he does. Among these “co-patriots”, however, he explicitly stated that only two of his friends were not his co-ethnics.

Conclusion

As noted at the beginning of this article, Europe and the world are currently facing a serious refugee crisis. Turning back to the the past experiences and memories of people who went through this type of experience in the not so distant past might help us understand what challenges numerous refugees today are facing, and partially answer what receiving societies can do in response to the arrival of many refugees. By exposing concrete experiences, vulnerability, and needs, we contribute to the wider societal discourses and hopefully help concrete agents and institutions with power to meet some of the challenges. As noted, although the research subjects are not children and not refugees anymore, this research is highly socially relevant, showing how the forced migration experienced in childhood influences their narratives of belonging, non-belonging, and their integration in the society people are a part of. The memory of childhood partially spent in war and refugee settings plays a significant role in integration in the host society, rebuilding lives and identities, negotiating of belonging and boundary construction: identifying the “self” and excluding the “other”.

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