73 | Bosnian refugee women in (re)settlement: gender relations and social mobility

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abstract

Bosnian refugee women adapted more quickly than their male partners to their host environments in Vienna and New York City because of their self-understanding and their traditional roles and social positions in the former Yugoslavia. Refugee women's integration into host societies has to be understood through their specific historical experiences. Bosnian women in exile today continue to be influenced by traditional role models that were prevalent in the former Yugoslavia's 20th-century patriarchal society. Family, rather than self-fulfillment through wage labor and emancipation, is the center of life for Bosnian women. In their new environment, Bosnian refugee women are pushed into the labor market and work in low-skill and low-paying jobs. Their participation in the labor market, however, is not increasing their emancipation in part because they maintain their traditional understanding of zena (women) in the patriarchal culture. While Bosnian women's participation in low-skill labor appeared to be individual families' decisions more in New York City than in Vienna, in the latter almost all Bosnian refugee women in my sample began to work in the black labor market because of restrictive employment policies. In contrast to men, women were relatively nonselective and willing to take any available job. Men, it seems, did not adapt as quickly as women to restrictions in the labor market and their loss of social status in both host societies. Despite their efforts, middle-class families in New York City and Vienna experienced substantial downward mobility in their new settings. Women's economic and social downward mobility in (re)settlement, however, did not significantly change the self-understanding of Bosnian women. Their families' future and advancements socially and economically, rather than the women's own independence and emancipation remained the most important aspect of their being.

keywords

Bosnian refugee women; gendered employment; self-perception of men and women; social mobility; patriarchy; family

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Discourses on refugee and migrant gender relations, as they exist today in the context of particular Western interpretations of gender, race, and class, are not sufficient to understand refugees' interpretations of their own status, rules, needs, and aspirations. Most American/Western European feminist scholarship in the field examines refugees' and migrants' status and role changes in the light of a liberal pluralist *Weltanschauung*. The scholarship frequently lacks the historical depth to provide an adequate understanding of their experiences; the questions asked, variables analyzed, arguments developed, and conclusions drawn about refugee and migrant women do not reflect these women's experiences and realities (Davis and Sherman Heyl, 1986; Foner, 1986; Prieto, 1986; Simon and Brettell, 1986; Lamphere et al., 1993; Pessar, 1995; Espiritu, 1997). Parminder Bhachu (1996) makes the point that certain cultural forms that Westerners might suppose to be oppressive, such as the dowry system or arranged marriages, can be liberating for the women involved.[1] She argues that the frequently used triple oppression model of analysis – the status of one subordinated by class, gender, and ethnic minority – implies that the cultural values that these women hold are themselves oppressive. That refugees and migrants, based on their own individual historical experiences, may actually choose to continue their traditional forms of living and customs of their home societies rather than adapt to the Western models of, for example, the double-income, nuclear family, once they relocate, is often overlooked or dismissed as 'false consciousness.' In short, the fields of refugee and migrant studies lack understanding of refugees' or migrants' historical, cultural, and socioeconomic experiences and of the refugee women's own construction of their current lives.

Change in the personal, social, and economic lives of refugee women and men is neither simple nor unidirectional, and frequently it is not desired or welcomed by the women and men themselves upon relocation. In this article, I explore changes in Bosnian refugees' gender relations and their social mobility (or the lack thereof) in two host societies. The fieldwork for this and a broader comparative study was conducted in Vienna, Austria, from November 1998 to March 1999, and in New York City, USA, from May to September 1999. The bulk of my research focused on interviewing Bosnian refugees about their experiences of flight and (re)settlement.[2]

I found that a number of assumptions of gender relations in refugee and migrant studies did not hold true in the case of the Bosnian refugees in my sample. In this article, I illustrate that for Bosnian women emancipation in their households and equal treatment by legal and other institutions (and lately by the society at large), such as equal pay for equal work and reproductive rights, were much less important than frequently assumed. For Bosnian women in Yugoslavia and those who later fled war-torn areas, the issues have been far more complicated in the Janus-faced political, ideological, and social contradictions of the system of self-management in Yugoslavia and in their (re)settlement in Vienna and New York

1 I do not want to become entangled in the inherent dangers and difficulties of employing and applying Western feminist thought to non-Western groups. Western feminist theory is, in Biance Petkova and Chris Griffin's words, 'taken from the more powerful and [applied] to the world of the less powerful, that is from West to East' (1998: 439–440). An important part of any interpretation is my position as researcher. I was born in Austria and lived for nearly two decades in Carinthia, a province bordering Yugoslavia (now Slovenia), and Italy. My position, however, is such that I speak from being located more in the West, which means there is a danger of 'appropriating' the words of the Bosnian refugees I interviewed. As a countermeasure to this possibility I view this article as unfinished; it reflects an attempt to have an ongoing discussion with Bosnian men and

City. To understand these complexities it is crucial to explore the sociohistorical and cultural experience of Bosnian women in the former Yugoslavia and their socioeconomic position in the host societies. In Austria and the US, the refugees' agency illuminates the individual women and men's adaptation efforts to two vastly different host environments.

Bosnian women's social position in the former Yugoslavia

Women's roles in the former Yugoslavia have been the focus of little systematic sociological or anthropological research. Moreover, few writers have dared to generalize about the complex cultures and societies that once made up socialist Yugoslavia, a country that exhibited a broad spectrum of regional differences, ethnic variations, and distinct rural/urban and class differences. Women's social position in the former Yugoslavia was, overall, a peculiar one.

Despite the official rhetoric about gender equality, a division between the private and public spheres was maintained during the period of workers' self-management in Yugoslavia (Morokvasic, 1986). Moreover, the family in the former Yugoslavia was traditionally characterized by enduring patriarchal traditions (Simic, 1999). For example, women typically prepared and served meals in the (usually extended) family situation. Vera Erlich (1976) describes that in the Balkan area wife-beating was such a part of the prevailing ethos that a woman who had never been beaten might consult her doctor, thinking there must be something wrong between her and her husband. Mirjana Morokvasic (1986: 133) explains that some fathers still considered the birth of a daughter a family tragedy, for which the mother was 'responsible', whereas they boast of a newborn son, which *he* 'made'. A double standard of sexual morality dominated in the former Yugoslavia throughout the latter half of the 20th century (Morokvasic, 1986: 120–138). Indeed, what Andrei Simic (1999) has called 'machismo and cryptomatriarchy' allowed the male population to find certain social outlets in violence or chauvinist behavior while those means of expression remained impossible for women. These behavior patterns and stereotypes developed in the Balkan (and other Central European) societies generations ago and – combined with the norms of socialism and consumerism – have remained influential in the varying Bosnian social and ethnic groups today.

As in other socialist countries, women's emancipation – notably their heightened participation in production, which should *ipso facto* have brought them economic independence and liberation according to communist ideology – consisted in reality of working a 'double day'. As well as a full-time job in the factory, school, or office, women had to manage the home, look after their children, and remain socially and politically active. The ideal communist woman had the quality of 'social activism',

women living in Vienna and New York City.

2 I conducted multiple interviews with most interviewees to gain a fuller sense of their attitudes, adaptations, and aspirations. Semi- and unstructured interviews allowed the respondents to provide detailed information with least restraint. While interviewing refugees I listened 'in stereo,' as Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack (1991: 11) have called it, receiving both the dominant and muted channels, tuning in to them carefully to understand the relationship between them. I conducted the interviews mostly in the homes of the interviewees, but some were also conducted in restaurants, cafe shops, parks, and other public places. My aim with the interviews was to receive a broad understanding of the refugees' social situation, experiences, and problems in their new countries of settlement. The average length of the interviews was two hours. Only one interview, in a refugee camp in Austria, was completed with the help of an interpreter. The other interviews were in German, in Austria, and in English in the USA. During the interviews I took notes that I fleshed out and detailed immediately afterward. The term settlement is applied to Bosnian refugees in Austria who held originally only temporary residence rights; the term resettlement is

commonly applied to Bosnian refugees in the US because the resettlement program's initial objective was to re-settle refugees who have not found permanent residence in another country.

which was to allow her to develop fully her potential and personality (Petkova and Griffin, 1998: 438). The term referred to women who, being actively involved with the collective at work, also became better mothers. Petkova and Griffin (1998: 438) emphasize, that women who had no children; and whose interests 'selfishly lay solely in the home (a bit like 'housewives' in the West?) were dealing a 'severe blow' to their 'social activism''. Lingering patriarchal views required even women doing 'men's jobs' to have a feminine touch.' One result of this latter view has been that all Bosnian women I have met put an astonishing emphasis on looking professional even when coming from their cleaning jobs. Thus, women in the labor force in the former Yugoslavia and in exile today not only carry the double burden of work in and outside of the home but must also remain feminine and womanly throughout their hectic days. They continue to be influenced by traditional role models prevalent throughout the 20th century in former Yugoslavia's patriarchal society, in addition to expectations in their new host societies.

After Tito' s death in 1980 and especially during the wars of the 1990s, women were the first to lose their jobs. A masculinization of the emerging economy and politics meant work opportunities outside the family decreased for women. Structural changes were, however, not accompanied by the diminishment of traditional ideologies.

During the 1991—1995 wars and for many refugees during (re)settlement in host countries afterward, the symbolic meaning and value of the private and public arenas have been radically redefined. The increased poverty experienced has not only strengthened women's patriarchally-induced self-denial, but it has also given them new control over others in the family, producing 'a self-sacrificing micro-matriarchy' (Papic, 1999: 160—161). At the same time, a *de facto* reduction of men to the state of powerless objects of autocratic (and in the host societies, seemingly arbitrary) rule has drastically diminished men's power over women in the private sphere (Magas, 1999: 285). It is too early to speculate on the long-term effects of these changes on gender relations. In the short term, however, Bosnian women in (re)settlement in Vienna and New York City seem to have embraced and held on to their former roles in the patriarchal tradition of their home country while engaging in the socioeconomic challenges of the host societies. Most women in this study have adapted quite successfully to their new environments but uphold above all their families and traditions.

(re)settlement in Vienna and New York City: prohibition to work vs. early self-sufficiency

In Austria, more so than in the USA, the vast majority of Bosnian refugees experienced severe discrimination in the labour market. They were granted temporary residence rather than the 1951 Convention status (which would have

granted them the same social and economic rights as citizens hold), and became the so-called *de facto* refugees. During the initial phase of the Bosnian relief scheme in Austria, the *Bund-Länder Aktion*, Bosnians were denied the right to work or to travel freely on Austrian territory (Franz, 2002). In contrast, after their arrival in the US, Bosnian refugees could take advantage of an extensive resettlement program, a public–private partnership which provided a wide variety of services. This resettlement program was based on the premises of permanent residence and early economic self-sufficiency through employment; thus, Bosnian refugees in the US had direct and immediate access to the job market and to public assistance (PA) schemes (Franz, 2002).

Despite various differences, the socioeconomic profile of the Bosnians interviewed in New York City and Vienna was quite similar. Most had come with their families or had arranged for family members to follow them to Austria or the US; most had characterized themselves as belonging to the middle-class in Bosnia, and had held professional jobs in their areas of origin. The vast majority of Bosnians interviewed also came from urban rather than rural areas. The exception to this were three refugee women in the Austrian refugee camp, St Gabriel, who had lived all their lives in the rural areas around Zvornik, Derventa, and Prijedor. Every Bosnian women I talked to worked regardless of her age or marital or socioeconomic status. This was not the case for all male interviewees though the large majority also worked, in both host countries.

the peculiarities of temporary protection in Austria

The Austrian administration opened the labor market to Bosnian refugees only reluctantly after 1993 and only for certain jobs – specifically, those not wanted by the Austrian population. The main concern of the government has traditionally been to limit the employment of foreign workers to protect Austrian workers. The granting of work permits to Bosnians was therefore closely linked to a quota for foreign employees in the country; defined by federal law, the number of foreign workers employed in Austria is not to exceed 8 percent of the total number of native employees. Nevertheless, the Minister for Labor and Social Affairs is entitled, under special circumstances, to issue a decree to raise this number to 9 percent as a special reserve (EU/ICMPD, 1999: 25–26). These regulations have saliently contributed to an increase in the number of illegally employed foreigners, especially Bosnians, because the exclusion of foreigners from the labor market was not market-driven and thus initially affected only formal employment and not actual employment.

The administration's reluctance to allow the more than 90,000 Bosnians on Austrian territory between 1992 and 1996 to work legally manufactured a peculiar situation for Bosnian families. All the refugees I interviewed in Austria worked illegally at one time or another. The Bosnian women and men who lived in the Caritas refugee camp, St Gabriel did what they called 'work therapy,' which,

according to Irma,[3] a 62-year-old Bosnian Muslim from Zvornik, was 'any work that distracts my mind from the memory of the war experience.' Initiated and managed by the Caritas camp management, the program put the men to work as gardeners in the neighborhood while the women grew vegetables in the camp's garden or knitted socks and sweaters all year round to be sold at special refugee bazaars.[4] Such seasonal occupation of refugees in camps seems to have been tolerated by the local authorities.

Many people in the refugee camps, which were for the most part located in rural areas without appropriate infrastructure, had to rely only on work therapy. Refugees in private accommodations,[5] however, soon adapted to the restrictive policies of the legal labor market. For example, the 46-year-old Bosnian Muslim Besim, a former manager of an export company in Sarajevo, worked illegally on the farms around Hainburg, a village in Lower Austria, only two months after his arrival in Austria. He lived with his family and other Bosnian refugees, put up in housing through the *Bund-Länder Aktion* in a bed-and-breakfast in Hainburg for two years. Wherever they lived, however, the Bosnians needed money to support their relatives at home and to buy school supplies for their children. As Besim stated:

> One year Zlata [Besim's and Selma's then 9-year-old daughter] needed a typewriter for school, and I went to work illegally in the fields of the farmers in the area to earn the money. The next year, she needed a computer and I worked illegally in the woods as a lumberjack to earn the money.

Similar to a number of Bosnian refugees in Austria and the US who initially were resettled in rural areas but then moved to Vienna or New York City because of anticipated professional or educational opportunities, Besim moved his family from Hainburg to a suburb of Vienna in the fall of 1994 and continued to work odd jobs illegally in the construction industry. In the meantime, his wife Selma cleaned people's households. Because construction jobs came infrequently, Selma's income provided the main support for the household, and Besim began to study German and took some computer courses. Besim finally found legal employment in a grocery store. Recently promoted, he was the head of the produce section in that store at the time of the interview, whereas Selma still worked in housekeeping in a Viennese hospital. Semsa, a 22-year-old Bosnian Muslim from Rudo, who arrived with her brother Sead in Vienna at the end of June 1992 (after spending two months in a refugee camp in Belgrade), had a similar story. While studying German and architecture, Semsa cleaned the households of middle-class Viennese families because her brother could not find work. When Sead finally got a job in the construction industry, his hands became 'too blistered to hold a spoon', according to Semsa, and she decided her brother should quit the job immediately. She wanted to work harder and provide the family income rather than see her brother in agonizing pain. Selma's and Semsa's stories about their economic acclimatization are like those of Azemina, Irma, and Rijalda.

3 Confidentiality has been of utmost importance, and accordingly, the anonymity of the Bosnian respondents and informants has been protected both in the research and in the writing. I selected interviewees initially based on contacts that I had established with members of the refugee communities in each research site. Also, I endeavored to select a sample representative of the Bosnian refugee community as a whole for each area and included refugees from each ethnic group in my samples. The sample, however, cannot be seen as statistically representative of the Bosnian refugee communities in the USA and Austria. Furthermore, the sample is of course to an even lesser degree representative of the population in Bosnia. Since I was introduced to my interviewees by fellow Bosnian refugees, I generally experienced fewer problems with access than I had expected. Everyone approached in this way, except one, accepted the invitation to take part in the research. The establishment of a trustful relationship was also facilitated by the absence of sensitive questions relating to the refugees' experiences during the war. (A surprisingly large group of refugees, however, volunteered information about their war experiences.)

4 Illegal occupation deprived the refugees of their social

The Bosnian Muslim Azemina arrived in Vienna at age 33 with two children, while her husband, an engineer, remained in Travnik. Three times he came to Vienna and tried to acculturate to the city. By the third time, Azemina, established with the children in her own apartment, had even arranged a job and a work permit for him. In spite of all this, he returned to Bosnia. Azemina at the time of the interview lived legally separated from him. Rijalda, a 29-year-old Montenegrin, came from Brcko to Vienna in June 1992 with her Bosnian Muslim husband Aljia and their two daughters. Aljia had been the owner of a sawmill and a cafe back home and was determined to open a restaurant in Vienna. When he failed to do so, he fell into a severe depression lasting two years.

Irma, a 43-year-old Bosnian Serb, came from Doboj to Vienna with her Muslim husband and their two daughters in October 1992. Irma's husband, who had been the manager of a plumbing company, wanted to return by any means to Doboj; in Vienna, he became depressive, alcoholic, and violent towards other family members. He committed suicide in Vienna less than 5 years after settling there. Shortly after their arrival, however, Azemina, Irma, and Rijalda began to work illegally as cleaning women.

Restrictive Austrian employment policies resulted in increased participation of Bosnian refugees in the black labor market because of financial need. Women were relatively nonselective and willing to take any available job, whereas men, it seems, did not adapt as quickly as women to the discriminatory segregation and in the subsequent loss of their social status. Azemina explained Bosnian refugee women's motivations: 'Bosnian women wanted to prove to their relatives that they were industrious and hard-working. They wanted to demonstrate to their families that they were worthy, ... worked hard and were successful.' The women considered the house or office cleaning work-although often strenuous and causing detrimental skin conditions and diseases — a flexible part-time occupation that left them time to take care of their families. A social worker at the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Beratungszentrum für Migranten und Migrantinnen in Vienna, Angela Ivezic, herself the daughter of a migrant family from Herzegovina, explains that, even though they were victims of war and exodus traumas Bosnian women behaved more 'pragmatically' than Bosnian men during the time of adaptation in the host society.

Ivezic explains that although many of the women had had professional careers in Bosnia, in Austria, they took on any job, legal or illegal, that was available:

> A job in tourism or cleaning services is a woman's job. It was more difficult for the men to deal with the flight and the loss of the land. Women deal with this easier. They see it more pragmatically: 'Ok, I am now here and I have to rebuild my existence here. I have to think about my children and how we will survive here.' It is more difficult for men because they were very depressive and passive and also hoped to find a job in their old profession. Women saw it simply more pragmatically: 'Ok, even if I have a university degree I need to

benefits and health insurance. During my interviews with the women in the camp, I recognized that they seemed to knit or crochet all day long. They continued with their needle work while talking to each other. They liked to do it and it seemed to have had a distracting and calming effect on them. During the off-season the men in the camp, however, could only watch television for escapism. The TV shows, however, were broadcast only in German.

5 Whether refugees found themselves in camps or in private accommodations depended on many factors. Bosnians who had relatives or friends in Austria more likely stayed with them in private homes, while refugees who had no acquaintances in Austria, were older and severely traumatized and were more likely to remain in camps throughout the *Aktion*.

begin in the cleaning industry. It does not work any other way. And then I will see if I can get a job in my old profession and how all develops.'

Bosnian women found themselves working illegally as maids, baby-sitters, or dishwashers shortly after arrival and thus, in some instances began earning the main income for their families. These women took advantage of both the city's infrastructure and its demand for unskilled labor. Although the illegal jobs in Vienna did not provide for health or other social benefits, the vast majority of Bosnian *de facto* refugees in Austria were enrolled in the *Bund-Länder Aktion,* which provided them with health insurance. In 1994, the local Viennese authorities estimated that about 40 percent of the Bosnian refugees, mostly women, were working as cleaning staff, baby-sitters, or in other illegal occupations in the black labor market (Fréchet, 1994: 32). When it became possible after 1993 to apply for work permits, Bosnian women urged their employers to do so for maid service or tourism jobs. Bosnian women therefore not only provided the main family income in some cases for years but also were frequently employed in legal occupations sooner than were Bosnian men. By eventually holding legal employment, Bosnian women secured their families' residence rights in Austria as well as such social benefits as health insurance.

the peculiarities of the US resettlement scheme

Bosnians experienced substantial differences of legal residence status in the US and in European host countries. The US considered Bosnians as refugees according to the 1951 Convention and the 1980 Refugee Act. Although the American resettlement scheme lagged about a year behind similar efforts in Europe, by 1997, two years after the Dayton Peace Agreement, American resettlement for Bosnian refugees was the most generous of all categories of resettled refugees in that country. Bosnian refugees in the US gained immediate permission to work, enjoyed free travel and settlement options according to their own individual preferences, and were encouraged to become American citizens after their first five years of their residence.

In the majority of cases, the monetary allocation ($740 per refugee) in the US did not provide the necessary means for refugees' survival in the first month. Therefore, refugees were encouraged to enter the job market as soon as possible, which make many of the Bosnian refugee stories about their first weeks of acculturation similar. Then-27-year-old Bosnian Muslim Enes, for example, began to work in a factory two days after his arrival in New York City in December 1994; then-50-year-old Bosnian Muslim Enisa began to work as a cook and dishwasher for a pizzeria two weeks after her arrival in February 1996, and after eight months of working there 12 hours a day, six days a week, she realized that she did not earn enough money and then took on an additional night-shift job as a cleaning women for another restaurant. Her husband finally arrived in the US in November 1997, but Enisa stated with certainty, 'He does not like it here,' nor does he have a regular

job. The now-40-year-old Bosnian Serb Sabrija took on a job as a maid after she arrived with her husband and two daughters in New York in 1995; her husband became an apprentice at a small photo store, where he did not earn any money. Two weeks after her arrival in San Francisco in March 1995, then 19-year-old Bosnian Croat Tamara began to work in a toy store. While none of these cases used their resettlement agencies' job placement services, they were available.

Early self-sufficiency of the refugees through employment was the primary aim of the resettlement agencies because both the survival of the refugee and the continuous funding of the agency depended on it. When entire refugee families arrived in New York City, refugee agencies encouraged and sought to find employment for at least one person in the family as soon as possible. Frequently, Bosnian fathers and husbands gained employment through job placements before their wives did in New York City. Amelia Mufarevic, a Bosnian case worker for the Interfaith Community Services, helps her clients to apply for Social Security, Medicaid, and food stamps, and to enroll adults in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and children in schools. She also refers the refugees to the job placement officer in her agency. Mufarevic emphasizes that, in her experience, male Bosnian refugees adapted easier to the American life than female refugees did because mourning over family members left behind in Bosnia seemed to be more intense for women than for men. Moreover, job placement itself seemed to favor the employment of men because the agencies hold contracts mainly with construction companies and factories.

Indeed, in my American sample women's participation in low-skill labor appeared to be at the discretion of individual families' decisions and dependent upon the medium- and long-term objectives of those Bosnian families (Franz, 2003). The Bosnian Muslim Admira, who arrived when she was 32 years old with her husband and two small children in 1995, stayed home the first couple of years while her husband attended ESL classes and got a job as a construction worker. She then got her first job as a housekeeper in a hotel. Similarly, the 52-year-old Bosnian Muslim Hussein, a former high school teacher, has been working as a doorman since 1996. His 49-year-old wife Najla, a former nurse, at the time of the interview could not work in her old profession and suffered psychological problems related to war trauma and to the continuous worries about family members left behind in Bosnia. She stayed home when in New York but visited Sarajevo frequently. Thus, the thriving American economy in the 1990s allowed some Bosnian women to remain at home while their male partners provide the families' main income.

For a number of male refugees the jobs they were placed in, however, were detrimental. Nenad, a Bosnian Muslim in his early 40s who held a professional job in Mostar, was placed by the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) job referral service into one construction job after the other. In one of these, his job consisted of carrying cement bags. His co-workers, mostly Latin Americans, harassed him day-in and day-out, and his repeated requests for other job placements fell upon

deaf ears at his refugee resettlement agency. By then, Nenad labeled himself as being 'without direction,' depressive, and 'suicidal.' One morning he went into the IRC office and told his case worker that he would 'bind dynamite around [his] waist to blow up [himself], the IRC office, and the entire building' if nobody helped him find a different job. Certainly this characterizes an extraordinary case of acculturation shock and was resolved peacefully. Yet, within a deeply traumatized population of war refugees and concentration camp and rape victims who previously had held professional and thriving jobs, this response is not entirely unexpected (Franz, 2003). In the large scheme of resettlement, economic integration ranks as the most important objective to achieve as soon as possible after arrival. Though seemingly crucial for this objective, aid to find career opportunities and ESL training, or advice on how to present oneself at job interviews is secondary at best. Imperative for both the funding of the resettlement agency and the refugee's immediate survival is to provide him or her with any job available.

gendered employment, public assistance, and social mobility in the US

Women gained employment prior to their male partners in cases when the latter attended job training programs or other educational courses with the objective of working in the professions they held in Bosnia. Bosnian families and individual refugees in the US sought to gain public assistance (PA) if they wanted to improve their socioeconomic position through education.[6]

The 56-year-old Bosnian Muslim accountant Jasmina followed her sons and her husband from Banja Luka to New York City in November 1994. After their arrival, her husband declared he would only seek work in pediatrics, his old profession. Over the next five years, Jasmina took a number of minor jobs to support her husband in his endeavor to become a licensed doctor. In addition, while the majority of Bosnians in my American sample did not receive any substantial PA for long periods of time, Jasmina managed to receive some. Her story illustrates that not disabled or elderly Bosnians, as may be expected, but rather former professionals, such as medical doctors, received PA. The latter perhaps had the patience and endurance to apply for and eventually obtain this benefit.

For Jasmina, her husband was able to 'study for the New York state exams because of my support and his ambition.' Both of her sons earned scholarships to go to college, and her husband works as a physician's assistant while he continues studying for the numerous medicine equivalency exams. Jasmina, who holds a degree in economics and worked as an accountant in a hospital in Banja Luka, worked at the time of the interview as an administrative assistant in a private high school. Her family's life, however, has not always been happy and without struggle.

When she arrived in New York, Jasmina moved with her husband, her two teenage sons, and her sister into the one-bedroom apartment that the family still occupies today. While she and her husband studied English in ESL courses she applied six

6 A state-government pamphlet used by resettlement agencies and their case workers to determine the standard PA allowance in New York state sets the allocation of financial support according to the number of household members. A one-member household is entitled to $137.10 per month; two-member, $218.50; three-member, $291; four-member, $375.70; five-member, $463,70; six-member, $535.20; seven-member, $607.70; eight-member, $680.20. According to Mufarevic, refugees are eligible to receive about $140 per month in food stamps, up to a maximum of $270 per family. The City of New York's Department of Health

times for PA. Finally, she managed to receive PA monthly benefits of $125 per person for her family for 18 months. At least a third of this amount, she remembered, was in food stamps. She was miserable every month when she had to go to the local social welfare office in the Bronx and wait in line 'with all those people.' Each time she went, it reminded her of her refugee camp experience in Croatia, where she spent one and a half months separated from her family, in a tent with 262 people, sleeping on the asphalt floor. She 'began to cry a lot' and gained weight during the months she received PA. For her, 'the worst thing was PA. It was really, really awful. I cannot describe it.' To survive, Jasmina frantically collected coupons from newspapers. In 1997, she got a job as a receptionist with the organization where she attended her third ESL class and ceased applying for PA.

started a campaign to ensure the health coverage of every child up to age 19 and offers free or minimum-fee health coverage for all New York state resident children.

The data collected during my research on Bosnian refugees who arrived between 1993 and 1999 in the US suggest that short-term social upward mobility was not possible for Bosnian refugees. One family, however, managed to create in an astonishingly short time period a decent living in New York City. This was not possible, however, with the sparse public assistance granted to refugees. The Bosnian family that experienced economic upward mobility in the New York City sample had saved up enough money in Germany, where they had resided as temporary refugees, to start two businesses in Astoria, Queens.

After leaving Brcko in 1994, Natasa and her family moved to Munich, Germany, where her husband Damir had worked as a seasonal guest worker since 1972. A high school teacher by profession Damir is a jack-of-all-trades and worked as a carpenter in Germany, and Natasa worked as a housekeeper and gardener. Both had been able to save some money during their years in Germany and when the German administration ended their temporary protection for Bosnian refugees and began to – in some cases forcefully – repatriate Bosnian nationals, Natasa and Damir resettled in Astoria. Her husband opened up a carpentry business and became a handyman. Natasa opened her own Bosnian grocery store in Astoria, Queens, in 1998, and works there 10 hours a day seven days a week. In her store she is not only store-owner and salesperson but also mother when her two daughters come to chat, eat, and socialize with her after school. In 1999, the family moved into their own home, most of which Damir himself built.

Not all Bosnian refugees were as successful as Natasa and Damir in carving out a life for themselves in New York City. Indeed, Natasa and Damir's economically successful adaptation was exceptional in my New York City sample. Most Bosnians did not have the fortune to arrive with substantial savings, and their economic situation remained shaky at best. Most middle-class families in New York City (and Vienna) experienced substantial downward mobility since they had to leave their Bosnian home towns. Professional doctors, lawyers, accountants, nurses, journalists, CEOs, and managers could not find work in their old professions. They instead had to begin working as construction workers, cashiers, maids, dishwashers, and housekeepers.

self-perception of Bosnian refugee men and women

At the time of the interviews, the Bosnian men frequently had not yet adapted to their new communities and accepted their loss of social status especially in Austria, but the women – in spite of their war experience, exodus traumas, and the loss of social status – quickly responded to the new economic demands. In general, men frequently focused in more detail on their lost belongings and properties, the war, and the misfortunes they had experienced. Women instead emphasized their families as a main source of motivation and their struggle to improve socioeconomically in their new environments. While some of the Bosnian men turned towards alcoholism and other drug abuse, the women remained focused on the tasks at hand of providing for their families. Such variation was based more on gender than on education, age, or place of origin, although these latter variables also influenced successful adaptation to the host society.

Based on an identity not rigidly linked to a particular area of origin or a social status, the motivation and intent of women interviewed seemed to be anticipatory and creative while simultaneously economically and socially negotiating within their new environment. Women refugees quickly realized the need for personal sacrifice during adaptation to the host society and defined themselves through their family relations, their cultural and religious traditions, and their individual projects of adjustment to the host society (Franz, 2000). In their narratives, women tended to disregard entirely notions of ethnic identity and the politics of national exclusivism. They minimized or even joked about the humiliation and harassment they experienced, but emphasized their social and economic aims and achievements. They were deeply engaged in their children's education, the search for bigger, more comfortable apartments, the responsibilities entailed in taking out loans, and the pursuit of jobs in their former professions. Women's self-understanding seemed to be marked by their experience of everyday life struggles, such as their children's sickness or their encounters with bureaucratic officials. The women's narratives manifested a dense modeling of problems deeply seated in the psychological conflicts of socialization as well as in political and economic conflicts; but they manifested even more strongly solutions – ways to plan and begin to rebuild their new existence and identity. In contrast, Bosnian men appeared to hold on to their previous ethnic and social identity by continuous nostalgic revelations of their lost privileged social status and economic position. Male Bosnian refugees' identities seemed to be linked to their places of origin, their homes, and their economic and social status in their communities of origin.

Here lies the strongest juxtaposition of contrasting points of view based upon gender. In their stories, women focused on their families' future and on compromises that could advance their social and economic acculturation, while men more frequently compared their current living situation with memories of the

past. In their stories, Bosnian men tended to link their identity to material possessions and social status. For example, Alija's narrative included many comparisons of his current life to his life in Brcko. He had been a well-known innkeeper, but in Vienna nobody knew him. Borrowing money and trusting each other had been the norm in Bosnia. In Vienna, he was cheated out of the restaurant he tried to rent. He had been a respected person in Brcko, while in Vienna the *Fremdenpolizei* (foreign police) harassed him and his guests with frequent searches during the year he managed a restaurant.

Male Bosnian refugees still struggle more than do their female counterparts with political events, their personal loss of belonging and status, and the war that changed their lives forever. The men have more trouble accepting the exodus and status degradation than do women. All Bosnians identify themselves as Europeans and now feel abandoned by Europe. Men expressed this in their narratives. For example, Bosnian Muslim men frequently pointed out that Bosnians are Europe's 'Palestinians.' Some of them emphasized that Europe did not act according to its democratic responsibilities toward the Bosnian people. In their stories, Muslim men frequently focused on the effects of Serbian nationalist politics on their particular Bosnian identity and on their lost feeling of belonging. The definition of the Bosnian people became the ethnic definition of Bosnian Muslims in some parts of the stories. Ethnicity defined in a primordial sense, as an exclusivist marker based upon blood and land, frequently appeared in the men's narratives. Rijalda described her and Alija's different approaches to Bosnian politics: 'My husband listens to the Bosnian news every night. I have not listened to it for quite a while.... Now I have been here for seven years. They went by fast.'

Through their exodus and the loss of social status and material possessions, however, it appears that important social and ethnic boundary markers of men's identity disappeared. Because of this loss, many Bosnian men still felt paralyzed, it seems, in a limbo, unable either to move forward into a new life or to return to their roots. They lived in a world of memories, idle talk, jokes, folkloristic references, and parables. Women, however, were more likely to find inspiration and renewal in the spaces in which they encountered Austria and the US.

a gendered explanation for adaptation variations

Although many Bosnian women began to provide the main family income (and in Austria their eventually legal jobs provided health care and residence permits for the other family members) they did not perceive their successful socioeconomic adaptation to their host environments as a step toward emancipation. They rather emphasized the importance that traditions and family relations held for them, because they perceived themselves as mothers, sisters, and daughters rather than as feminists or female independent-minded professionals. Moreover, many of them lived through and remembered the emancipation efforts in Tito Yugoslavia, which *de facto* resulted in the double exploitation of many women.

Although the League of Communists in Yugoslavia (LCY) passed some of the most progressive legislation concerning women's rights in Europe, it was unable to replace the older traditional patriarchal values that had dominated social life with new ones. As in other socialist countries, women's emancipation comprised in reality of working a 'double day.' Thus, many women in the labor force in the former Yugoslavia and in exile today carry the double burden of work in and outside of the home throughout their hectic days. In exile, however, they also seek to hold on to traditional role models prevalent throughout the 20th-century Yugoslav patriarchal society.

Bosnian refugees transferred and adapted rather than completely changed their traditional gender roles and behavior patterns in their host societies. Consequently, very few of the overworked Bosnian women in my sample complained about their household work or the lack of help they received from their husbands. Bosnian women like to be mothers, adore their children, and, in some cases, see daily chores, such as cooking traditional meals, as a blessing rather than as a curse even if it means working a double shift at their job site and at home. Even the young professionals and those active in feminist political movements, such as Women in Black, did their household chores mostly without help from their male partners.

Female Bosnian refugees were neither interested in their emancipation nor did they seek to adapt their lives to be gender-neutral. For example, in my sample some Muslim families from Sarajevo had to redefine the norms of social and sexual behavior for women after they arrived in New York City. The interaction of unmarried women, in particular, with men (especially unrelated acquaintances) came under very strict control. While frequent contact between young men and women was happening daily in educational and recreational encounters in Bosnia, some Muslim parents began to view similar contacts between unmarried women and men in New York with suspicion. Therefore, some Bosnian Muslim parents introduced more restrictive rules to control, especially, their young unmarried daughters and to protect them from immoral influences. What parents considered to be an infringement of moral codes was often seen by the young women as normal. One of my informants put it this way: 'If a girl wants to go away to college she is classified as a prostitute. You are supposed to stay at home until you get married. Over there [in Sarajevo] I had a lot more freedom than here [New York City].' This example shows that, as with other manifestations of gender relations, analyses should not rely upon overgeneralizations (e.g., that wage labor liberates women), but rather should examine the differences among families and how these define structures as much as broader patterns and trends do.

Throughout the post-World War II decades, according to a 1971 statement by Josip Bros Tito (cited in Morokvasic, 1986: 126), the most salient characteristic of Yugoslav social structures became women's increased participation in industry, agriculture, health, and education, and their simultaneously declining involvement

in representative organs. In political decision making and participation Yugoslav women were largely absent or silent. Socialism and its progressive laws of gender equality were not able to cross the threshold of gender relations within the family. For Yugoslav women the entire postwar experience spawned far-reaching changes in the public sphere and the continued dominance of old customs, values, and attitudes in the private sphere. Patriarchal gender relations were largely preserved despite progressive marriage and family legislation. As in other socialist countries, women's emancipation in Yugoslavia was demonstrated only through their enhanced participation in production. According to the party line, this increased participation should have brought women economic and social liberation. However, women remained in fact oppressed by the patriarchic society.

Many scholars of migrant and refugee studies follow the same model as LCY's 'institutional equality' when looking at gender relations in migrant and refugee groups. Both Yugoslav women in Tito's world of self-management and Bosnian refugee women in the free market economies of their host countries realized that 'emancipation' consisted, in reality, of working a double day: after a full-time job, they had to manage the home and look after their children. In cultural and social structures patriarchal traditions remained salient. Furthermore, throughout the succession wars, the public sphere became increasingly unreachable for Yugoslav citizens in all republics, and the real hardships were felt in the private sphere. Especially in the cities under siege, survival itself more than ever depended upon the performance of household chores, causing a reevaluation of the domestic. Their war experiences, however, did upgrade the cryptomatriarchal dimensions of women's self-understanding, particularly their feelings of guilt and necessary self-sacrifice for their families, rather than notions of independence and emancipation.

Even given their life experiences, no married or unmarried Bosnian woman of my sample wanted to achieve individual emancipation or even economic independence from her husband or families. Even in less than happy marriages, the progress of the entire family remained at the center of Bosnian women's ambitions. This rejection of Western feminist values and the maintenance of traditional family values is not surprising when one considers Bosnian refugee women come from a culture in which the family is the central, most important reason for being and living – in which the family ideally maintains a delicate equilibrium between maternal powers and patriarchal traditions but actually, in many cases, is dominated by the female in household issues and decisions. The 1990s wars and sieges split up a substantial number of families, created food and medication shortages, and, in numerous cases, caused lasting illness or death. Bosnian refugee women today in Austria and the US therefore cherish their children above all else. They embrace wage labor not because they seek independence from their male partners by active engagement in the public sphere or because they want to escape the oppressive patriarchal traditions in their home. They work outside the home simply out of economic necessity.

conclusion

I have demonstrated here that Bosnian refugee women and men describe and understand themselves and their acclimatization processes in Vienna and New York City differently because of the gender-based dimensions of their identities. Overall, the women in my sample adapted more quickly to their new socioeconomic environments (and to economic segregation in Austria) than did their male counterparts. They quickly found regular illegal work in the first years of their residence (and many were legally employed later in the same low-wage jobs in tourism and room attendance in Vienna). Thus, the relatively rapid acclimatization of Bosnian women in Austria was paradoxically advanced through a discriminatory labor market policy, which at first excluded Bosnian *de facto* refugees entirely from the labor market and then gradually opened it up but only for unskilled laborers. In the extensive resettlement scheme in New York City, Bosnian families could decide which family member would join the labor force. The goal of social upward mobility in resettlement remained for all but one Bosnian family and all individual Bosnian refugees in my sample thus far unattainable. Both women and men, who had successful careers in their countries of origin, at least initially experienced a sharp downward mobility in their host countries. Moreover, female Bosnian refugees especially were frequently forced into low-pay, low-skill jobs because they could not afford to attend acculturation programs, such as language schools, in the host countries. The social support and acculturation schemes did not provide refugees with sufficient tools to improve their language skills to the levels necessary for jobs in their prior professions. Instead, they had to worry about bread-and-butter issues immediately after their arrival, and in Austria the brunt most often fell on the women. Survival and integration for themselves and the possibility of social mobility for their children were the motivating factors, it seems, for Bosnian men and in particular women in host societies.

In comparison to Bosnian men in both societies, the women defined their Bosnian identity through cultural and religious traditions such as traditional methods of food preparation or, for Muslims, fasting during Ramadan. Thus, the women understood their own ethnic identity as not being necessarily linked to a particular place, primordial ties, or even political categories. Based upon their own interpretation of the refugee situation and their construction of identity, which manifested through cultural and religious traditions and focuses on the family and children, Bosnian women in both host societies realized that they had to act pragmatically and thus began rebuilding their future from the bottom of the economic ladder. The men's identity seemed to be intrinsically linked to their places of origin and the social status they had lost. In the best-case scenario, they found employment after attending language and special-skills courses. In the worst-case scenario, they remained unemployed, became alcoholics, or left their families.

The findings in this article do not support the positions put forth by feminist scholars who argue in a nutshell that work liberates migrant and refugee women in Northern/Western host societies (Davis and Sherman Heyl, 1986; Foner, 1986; Simon and Brettell, 1986). Rather, I illustrate that the self-perception of Bosnian women in this study is focused culturally upon being a good mother, daughter, and sister, and socioeconomically upon 'making it' as Bosnians in Austria or the US with all the social, cultural, and economic dilemmas and hopes. I do not reject the idea that exodus and adaptation to a host society based on status decline has nonetheless led a number of these women to increased notions of economic independence within their families. What is more important for the women, however, is the survival and well-being of their families rather than their own individual development or progress. The women's energies and ambitions are focused on the dynamics of processes that they anticipate will improve their families' social and economic lot, rather than their own.

author biography

Barbara Franz teaches at the State University of New York at Ulster. She is interested in what Christopher Hill has called 'International Relations and the voice from below' and with her work seeks to delineate the processes at work in the spaces between international and state politics and the individual. She has written articles on Bosnian refugee settlement experiences in Europe and the United States and recently on American patriotism and nativism after September 11.

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