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Human Costs of Temporary Refugee Protection: the Case of Slovenia

“…to show how ‘gender’ is constructed in our multinational world, feminist research has demonstrated that we also need to deconstruct the concept; that is, to show how identities and experiences are simultaneously structured by class, culture, race, nationality, religion, age, sexuality, individual experience, as well as by ‘gender.’”

Warren B. Kay and Bourque C. Susan (1991)

Introduction

Asylum on a temporary basis has a long history, however, it became widely spread especially after the collapse of ex-Yugoslavia (Goodwin-Gill 1996). Many Bosnian refugees, and later refugees from Kosovo, were protected temporarily. As both groups of refugees went into exile in a foreign country in great numbers (an estimated 1.2 million Bosnians and 900,000 refugees left Kosovo), the response of the host countries in dealing primarily with the immediate needs of refugees, providing mainly food and shelter, seems logical. It seems logical during the initial arrival period to the host country, but not as a long-term solution. My

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1 This article was supported by a grant funded by the Foundation Open Society Institute. I would like to thank Sasa Boskovic for his comments on the earlier draft of the paper.
2 The number 1.2 million is an UNHCR estimation, because the exact number of people who were forced to leave Bosnia-Herzegovina during the war is unknown. I took the number from the study written by Alice Edwards (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) with the assistance of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Sarajevo in April 2000. The number 900,000 for the refugees who fled Kosovo was provided by the Pristina office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in January.
claim is that temporary refugee protection in the case of ex-Yugoslav refugees inefficiently replaced long-term durable solutions and thus lowered the quality of the lives of refugees considerably. Namely, they were in most countries granted fewer human rights than the refugees who received the formal status of a refugee according to the Geneva Convention about a Status of a Refugee from 1951 and its Protocol from 1967.

This is certainly the case in Slovenia, where the refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina have had a temporary status for eight years. This temporary refugee protection caused many negative consequences for their way of life. For the purpose of this paper I will analyse those consequences, focusing primarily on the Slovenian example.

In order to enable the reader to understand the situation of refugees in Slovenia as fully as possible, I chose a more holistic approach and focus on different themes to render an anthropological understanding possible. It is necessary to discuss the causes that influence the refugees’ way of life at the beginning. Therefore, in the first part of the paper the focus will be on the global aspects of the refugee question, including some brief statistical data worldwide and for Slovenia. I will proceed with an explanation of my methodology and then describe the sociocultural context in which refugees live. Namely, the conditions in the host country largely shape life in exile. Therefore, I will describe the refugees’ living conditions which resemble ghettos. I will then give a brief analysis of the Slovenian refugee law and refugee policy. In the second part of the paper I will analyse the consequences of this refugee law and policy on the refugees’ way of life of refugees in tracing them in intergenerational, gender and interpersonal relations as well as in feelings of prolonged liminality. Finally, I will mention briefly the changed ethnic conditions and repatriation and give some policy recommendations.

In addition to enabling an understanding of people in exile in Slovenia (through the reconstruction of their perspective) and giving policy recommendations, this paper will serve to document human suffering.

I will use the word “refugees” in my paper, although according to the Slovenian Law of 2000.
Temporary Asylum from 1997 the refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo in Slovenia have a legal status of “persons with temporary asylum”. Technically, Slovenia has only three refugees according to the Geneva Convention, where the term refugee was defined. According to the Geneva Convention definition a refugee is a person who experienced a well-founded fear of being persecuted on the basis of race, religion, nationality or because he or she belongs to a certain social group or because of his or her political opinion and is outside of the country of his or her origin and is owing to such fear unwilling to return to country of his or her origin.

The term forced migrant\(^4\) is often used nowadays, although it is not a legal term yet. It emphasizes that people in question were forced to leave their countries. Its increase in use could be attributed also to the fact that the stigma of a helpless victim which is connected to the term refugee, is not (yet) attached to the term forced migrant. The Slovenian expression for forced migrants pregnanci, is mainly used by some NGOs and sometimes in media, however, the refugees in Slovenia, refer to themselves as refugees, Bosnians, Albanians from Kosovo, and not pregnanci.

I use the term refugee according to the definition set forth in the Geneva Convention and also as a reminder that all those refugees from ex-Yugoslavia could have been given refugee status according to the Geneva Convention if the governments’ interpretation of it would take human rights into account.

In order to define temporary refugee protection let me follow Goodwin-Gill’s choice, namely, the UNHCR definition. According to it, temporary refugee protection is considered “a flexible and pragmatic means of affording needed protection to large numbers of people fleeing human rights abuses and armed conflict…, who might otherwise have overwhelmed asylum procedures” (1998, (1996), pp. 200). The word “needed” could be questioned here, because human needs are much wider, especially in the long run, than merely the immediate needs, of food and shelter, on which temporary protection practices usually focus on, despite

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\(^3\) In the following text it is referred to as the Geneva Convention.

\(^4\) Helton (the director of the ex-Forced Migration Project) wrote a proposal for a definition of forced migrant. It is more liberal and inclusive as it encompasses also the flights due to natural disasters, human rights’ violations, discrimination, persecution etc. I hope Helton will finish the definition and it will become legalized as it will be much more convenient than the old definition of a refugee from Geneva Convention.
the fact that they vary from country to country. It is quite evident also from the definition that
the UNHCR became the main proponent of contemporary temporary refugee protection,
though this may seem to oppose their mandate, which is to promote the Geneva Convention.

**Global Aspects of the Refugee Question**

While the history of asylum as a protection from persecution dates back to the Greeks and
Romans, the number of refugees in the 20th century is even greater than ever before. The
number of refugees is rising, especially in the last decades. In the 1970s, there were three
million refugees in the world, in the 1980s eight million (Loescher 1993). According to the
UNHCR data, in 1995 there were 27 million people who were forced to migrate outside their
country of origin. In 1999, this number fell to 22 million, but there were also 30 million of
internally displaced persons; persons forcibly displaced inside the country of their origin.
Thus, out of every 280 people in the world is a refugee. More than 90 % of refugees are
outside of Europe.

Refugees are often approached as a humanitarian catastrophe, however, it is too often
forgotten that they are also a political and security question, which can be solved only in a
global strategic context (Loescher 1992: 5). Let me use two recent examples: the masses of
refugees from East to West Berlin who helped to crush down the Berlin wall in 1989 and the
Rwandan crisis in 1994. This crisis in Rwanda was started by refugees who were under
temporary protection for many years and without any prospects for a suitable, durable
solution. Because the country was not willing to address social cohesion and integration, the
Rwandan situation resulted in a large scale genocide. Anyway, the interrelatedness of the
security question and refugee movements is a very rare topic of refugee studies.

The main causes of refugee movements (both direct and indirect) are still wars, dictatorial
regimes that violate human rights, natural disasters, arms industry, disintegrating states,
colonialism, global economic inequalities and racial discrimination.

**Some brief statistical data for Slovenia**
The refugees started to arrive in Slovenia soon after the ten days' war for the independence of Slovenia in June 1991. Unfortunately, the war followed in two other former Yugoslav republics. Refugees from Croatia started coming to Slovenia in September 1991 and the majority of refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina arrived in the Spring 1992. At that time there were approximately 45,000 refugees in Slovenia with the local population of two million people. The number 70,000 that was frequently mentioned was just an estimation. In September 1993, the first official counting was issued and there were 31,100 refugees from the former Yugoslavia in Slovenia.

Refugees from Kosovo came sporadically. They were not given a status according to the Geneva Convention for reasons I will explain later on; they mainly stayed with their relatives and the total number was unknown. Following the NATO attacks on Belgrade they started arriving in greater numbers. Slovenia decided to accept 1,600 refugees from Kosovo. The Ministry of Exterior’s decision on this number was based on the fact that Portugal accepted 1,500 refugees, which was the lowest number of all the European Union countries. Slovenia decided to accept a higher number than Portugal. By accepting refugees on an individual basis, Slovenia tried mainly to achieve family reunion. In addition, Slovenia issued a status of “persons of temporary asylum” after the initial legal insecurity to more than 2,500 refugees from Kosovo that came on their own. At the beginning of April 2000 there were 3,100 refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina left in Slovenia and 1,116 of those from Kosovo.

Research Methodology

The method of my research was ethnographic and exemplifies qualitative research. I did the fieldwork mainly with the refugees in refugee centres, however, I also spoke and associated with individuals who live in private arrangements. From August 1992 to December 1994 I focused on two locations of the refugee centre in Celje (the third biggest town in Slovenia). Beginning in 1995, I conducted participant observation in Ljubljana, where I worked in the refugee centres Vic and Smartsinska Street. After the closure of the collective refugee center on Smartsinska street in Spring 1998, I continued with occasional visits to Vic. My approach

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5 On May 1, 2000 their status of temporary protected persons ended, as the government of Slovenia considered the conditions in Kosovo safe enough for the refugees to return. The refugees from Kosovo have to return to their homeland by June 30, 2000.
was emic as I tried to reconstruct refugees’ point of view.

I found the participant observation particularly appropriate for studying refugees, especially when I realized that my findings were very often different from those who came to the refugee centre once or only a few times. Very often they misjudged the refugees’ spiritual and psychological condition by focusing on the impoverished material conditions. Although the collective refugee centres in Slovenia are not really the most desirable place to live, this reflects incomplete conclusions based on limited observations.

However, I agree with Hammersley who writes about ethnographic method that in spite of the high probability of the facts collected by ethnographic research in comparison with other methods, all descriptions are selective and they never reproduce what they describe (Hammersly 1992). He writes that "all we have are interpretations, and the ethnographer's account is just as much an interpretation as are those of the people that he or she is studying" (Hammersley 1990: 14).

In my attempts to understand the experience of refugees in Slovenia, I used the so called partial identification, which was developed in gender studies. It sprang from the awareness of differences among people and represents "an attempt of the construction of feeling of closeness in everyday life and dialogue, an attempt of sharing the experiences and problems in spite of the different sociocultural contexts" (Rosker 1996: 53). The focus on common experience despite the fact that I was not a refugee made me understand the emphasis of Malkki that refugees are not an isolated tribe. Malkki emphasized that most of us experienced many of the losses that refugees encountered by escaping into exile: most of the adults experienced at least one loss of a dear person, many experienced a decrease in standards, many changed social relations by moving or migrating, lost jobs, etc. What is characteristic for refugees is that they experience many of those losses in a short period of time (Malkki 1995 a). Therefore the experience of resonance that was characteristic for my fieldwork, was also accompanied by the awareness of the fact that this intertwined refugee experience was, on the whole, understood only by themselves. The experience of Loizos was similar when he described the Cypriot refugees, although he was of Cypriot origin himself (1981).

**Living Conditions**
Most of the refugees decided to flee to Slovenia because they had relatives there. The ex-Yugoslav heritage, with a similar Slavic language and cultural proximity were probably other factors attractive to 45,000 refugees.

After their arrival, the majority settled in the apartments of their relatives. At first, they thought they had come only for a few days and the situation in the home country would calm down. As that did not happen, the living conditions became intolerable because of crowded conditions in the small flats. Therefore, many of them went to one of 58 refugee centers, which were provided upon. These refugee centers were comprised of the military barracks that the former Yugoslav People's Army left behind and of workmen's dwellings. Today, there are ten such collective refugee centers still open in Slovenia. They are always too crowded. At the arrival of refugees more families lived in bigger rooms and the whole family in smaller rooms, sometimes accompanied even with a wider family member. The lack of space for intimacy is characteristic. It also makes it very difficult for school children to find room to learn.

Most of the collective refugee centers are in the suburbs. Because of the absence of integration models in the Slovenian society, the centers resemble ghettos. They might have had some positive effect when refugees first arrived, because they lessened the culture shock. Namely, it was important for the refugees that they were able to share the experience. Some refugees from private arrangements even went to live in refugee centres, because it eased the psychological burden of isolation. However, the Slovenian refugee centers are not an appropriate place to stay, especially for a longer time. According to the psychiatrist Oravecz, people should not live in them for more than six months (personal communication).

Another negative aspect of refugee centers in Slovenia was that most of the centers were under the direction of Serbs and some of the directors' wives worked there as social workers. Taking into consideration that the Serbs were the aggressor in the Bosnian war it is not too difficult to understand that the refugees interpreted this as a provocation, although it was not. It was an unfortunate intertwining of circumstances; most of the Yugoslav National Army officers were Serbs and some wished to stay in Slovenia after the Yugoslav National Army had withdrawn. Since the Serbian officers remained unemployed after deserting the army,
they were available at the time people were needed for leading the refugee centers. Those who employed the Serbs simply forgot that they were dealing with people and did not take ethnic issues as important and into consideration. Unfortunately, this lack of sensitivity is frequently the case with governmental institutions.

The organization of refugee centers depended to a large extent on the person in charge. Some of the heads of centers, for example, let the refugees put stoves in the rooms and cook their own food. The preparation of traditional food was an important element of cultural continuity as it enabled them to preserve some of their customs. Others were given Slovenian food and were not allowed to give many suggestions for the menu, nor did they participate in preparing the food or in other activities connected with the organization of life in refugee centers, except to do the cleaning.

Another negative aspect of collective refugee centers was that their number decreases steadily. With each closure of a refugee center, refugees move to another center, usually in another town. Because of changing social networks and loosing opportunities for occasional work, the refugees are very reluctant to move. They experience every move as another uprooting.

Refugee centers seem to be more appropriate for the elderly than other social groups. Namely, the identities of the elderly are less flexible than, for example, children’s. Every adaptation to the exile requires formations of new identities. The elderly do not have the opportunity to mix a lot with the local population; very often they do not wish to associate a lot with the Slovenes, or to learn the Slovenian language. Children, however, learn it very quickly at school and also have many Slovenian friends. There is an increase of regional identities, especially among the elderly in refugee centers, because they prefer to associate among people who come from the same Bosnian region.

Living conditions of refugees in private arrangements are far from ideal either. Many of them live with their relatives and the rooms are crowded. Refugees who live in private arrangements do not get adequate financial support from the state, nor they are in an equal

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6 For many years they did not receive any financial means, however, starting in 2000, some started receiving a
position with their relatives. Since refugees are dependent on their relatives, this leads to an increase in tension over time. According to de Levita’s analysis of intercultural data, refugees who live in private arrangements very often experience the losses of personality characteristics as they try to be cautious all the time that they to not disturb their hosts. This is especially true in the case of children, who are very often hindered at play (1993). The difficult economic condition of refugees also extends to the host families; this unfavorable situation for those hosting people from Bosnia-Herzegovina is now in its eight year. Stubbs uses Ellis’s syntagm and speaks about “collectivization of poverty” (1996: 36) in private host families.

Refugee law

Slovenia approached the situation of refugees as a temporary one, although the status of temporary refugees was not legally defined until 1997. When the refugees from Croatia came, they were treated as displaced persons according to the agreement between Croatia and Slovenia. When the refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina arrived, they were treated as temporary refugees (Grizold 1994). On August 10, 1992, Slovenia tried to seal its border to prevent more refugees from coming. The status of the newcomers was considered illegal. However, a status of a temporary refuge was given to those who got a letter of guarantee from a Slovene citizen that they would live in his/her apartment. The refugee also had to have a similar letter of guarantee from a second country of asylum, which meant that the refugee would be permitted to stay in Slovenia only temporarily. Once the refugees came, they were not forced to leave the country. In September 1993 all those who came illegally had an opportunity to apply for the status of a temporary refugee and receive the same rights as those who came before August 1992.

Although Slovenia signed the Geneva Convention in 1992, the country has only three refugees according to this convention as I have already mentioned. The legal status of temporary refugees was defined in 1997 when the Law of Temporary Asylum was put in force. This law still applies to the refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina. In certain aspects it is symbolic sum.

7 A lecture given by de Levita on May 26, 1993 in the seminar about the psychosocial help to refugee children, which was organized by the Counselling Center for Children, Adolescents and Parents in Ljubljana, Slovenia.
a denial of Geneva Convention. I would especially like to focus on two basic human rights that it denies. Firstly, the right to work. Refugees are allowed to work only eight hours per week, which, of course, is not sufficient to solve their economic problems. Secondly, refugees are denied the right to participate fully in the social and cultural environment of the society in which they live.

In 1999 the new Law of Asylum was enacted. This law is more liberal and allows refugees the right to work. The benefits of the right to work would allow for a more natural integration, namely, the refugees would have a means to actively participate in the society. However, the problems of all the refugees who came from Bosnia-Herzegovina will not be solved by this new law, because it does not apply to them. Instead, the Law of Temporary Asylum from 1997 remains valid for them. Therefore, the problems of Bosnian refugees remain unsolved for eight years and unfortunately, the government does not seem to have a long-term solution.

The question remains how often will the new Law of Asylum be applied? Especially if we remember that Slovenia signed the Geneva Convention, but applied it only four times in eight years. It should also be kept in mind that this law was forced upon Slovenia by European Union. The issues of asylum and migration became very important to the negotiations for joining European Union, especially after 1997. Since the Slovenian government is in favour of joining European Union, it really had no choice in the matter.

Many other countries offered temporary protection to the refugees from ex-Yugoslavia. The rights granted to refugees differ from country to country. Belgium, France, Finland, United Kingdom and Portugal gave people with temporary protection permission to work. Even if the permission to work is granted, refugees very often face difficulties accessing the labor market and experience downward mobility. The permission to work is more conditional in other countries such as Spain, Germany and Austria. In Spain it is granted only for specific jobs. It is the same in Germany, but only after the job is first offered to Germans and EU

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8 One refugee has already returned the status.
9 Several non-governmental organizations and the Peace Institute where I am employed are now preparing to put The Law of Temporary Asylum from 1997 to the Constitutional Court as it violates Slovenian constitution as
nationals. Austria also gave temporary protection to the refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo; they had a status of de facto refugees. Austria granted the right to work to the Bosnian refugees in July 1993. However, the third priority rule was applied meaning that the jobs were available to de facto refugees only if nationals and resident migrants did not take them. De facto refugees from Kosovo were not granted the right to work. More than 60,000 refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina changed the status of de facto refugees to the status of economic migrant, because it provides for residence and work permits. Despite this provision, it remain very difficult for them to find work. Compared to Slovenia it is slightly easier to get the status of a refugee according to the Geneva Convention in Hungary and be granted the right to work. But again it is very difficult to find work in practice. Hungary also has temporary protection for the refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina, and those under temporary protection do not have the right to work.

According to the guidelines of the Parliament of the European Union, temporary refugee protection should not last more than five years. It is obvious from the above that this guideline is not practiced.

Adaptation to the European Union Acquis Communautaire leads to increasing restrictive policies in Central Eastern European countries, namely, the European Union refugee policy is extended to the East. This policy is especially discriminating to non-European refugees, but let me focus on the Slovenian refugee policy.

Refugee policy

Upon the arrival of refugees, Slovenia adopted the so called “relief” model in order to solve refugee problems. Harrell-Bond, one of the founders and ex-director of Refugee Studies Programme at Oxford University, together with Sue Elliot gave a critique of the "relief" model. They were advisers to the Slovenian government in 1993 and criticized the relief model, because it approached the crisis as a temporary one. The relief model treats refugees as a burden and not as an opportunity for development for both refugees and hosts as it ignores the resources of refugees and of the local population (1993). Harrell-Bond further
developed the critique of the relief model. According to her, the relief model fosters bureaucracy, staying of refugees in one place in refugee centers, it fosters authoritarian styles of management, presumes that the needs are uniform and, thus, fails the most in need, it increases costs and xenophobia, because the host population resents that refugees get everything for free while they have to work. The fact that the refugees are not allowed to work at all is usually forgotten.

The situation is similar in Croatia, where the relief model was also adopted. According to Stubbs who wrote a critique about the integration and of humanitarian aid in Croatia, the relief model enforces the territorialization of social control and fails to promote the development of a local infrastructure (Stubbs 1996: 33).

The refugee policy of the Slovenian government resembles the behaviour of the ostrich. Namely, it does not confront the problems at the beginning nor does offer an adequate solution when later, more complex problems arise. Unfortunately, the advice of Harrell-Bond and Elliott were not taken into consideration. The same holds true for the advice of non-governmental organizations.

**Partial Integration of Children**

Refugee children are allowed to enroll in schools in Slovenia. However, this integration into the Slovenian society is only partial, as the adult family members do not have opportunities to integrate.

Although children are a vulnerable category per se as they are not the adults yet, they do not represent the most vulnerable category of refugees in Slovenia since most of the help, foreign and of a host country, is targeted at them. Unfortunately, some of them did experience trauma during the escape and pre-war psychological pressure. All of the children experienced losses. However, most of them came soon after the war started with relatives who endeavored to maintain the homely routine in exile.

Children seem to most quickly recover from the stresses of conflict and have the least
difficulties in adaptation to the foreign country. They also learn the new language more quickly than the adults. The care of the parents, especially mothers who maintained the homely routine in exile, lessened the culture shock effects and functioned preventively in the psychosocial condition of the children. Another important factor that functioned preventively was school (Mikus-Kos 1992), which structured their time and enabled them not to lose school years.

While school attendance was beneficial for refugee children, it was, unfortunately, not unproblematic. The problems and negative factors included: numerous changes in school facilities, access to proper levels of instruction and difficulties being admitted.

Some children had to move twice, even five times, as the number of refugee centers in Slovenia continuously decreased. So many changes meant they sometimes missed a school year. Though they also had the opportunity to go to secondary schools and universities, they were limited to those with spaces available. This meant children could not freely choose a secondary school or a university they would wish to attend. Third, some persistence was sometimes needed to get the proper information about the enrollment in schools and for some, foreign language represented a barrier. Those children who decided not to finish the secondary school which they had started in Bosnia-Herzegovina could also be regarded as a vulnerable category. This is because they are usually at home, without prospects, and very often focus mainly on negative sides of their life. This is in contrast to those who are successful in school, and plan to stay in Slovenia, move to Canada or elsewhere, or they wish to repatriate after completing their studies.

By allowing only the partial integration of children and not the integration of the whole family, Slovenian refugee policy caused tensions in many of those families and deepened the generation gap in them.

**Gender and Interpersonal Relations**

I find the approach which is sensitive to gender particularly appropriate for understanding both interpersonal relations between men and women and for life in exile in general. Although much has been said and done in the last decades in refugee studies to promote
gender issues, most of that work focused mainly to improve the rights of women and to include them in the programmes of planning, in the organization of refugee lives, and so on. Recent research has emphasized that although women and children usually represent the majority of refugees, this is not often the case (Harrell-Bond 1995). It has also been emphasized that a gender sensitive approach must pay attention to both, the female and male; and neglecting the gender needs of the male is also a form of gender insensitivity (Voutira et al 1995).

This approach seems appropriate to tackle the problems of refugees in Slovenia. It is true for Slovenia that the majority of refugees (80%) are women and children and that women without husbands represent a vulnerable group. However, another vulnerable group consists of men who could not get a work permit and have lost their principal roles as breadwinners. They experience this loss as a very severe one. Refugee men usually seek occasional work and find themselves in informal work situations. However, they are frequently disillusioned by them, because they work hard for a very low salary, often they do not receive it at all.

According to the Muslim tradition men are principal wage earners and women usually stay at home. This is very often the case with those from rural areas, a majority of whom are still in Slovenia as refugees; many intellectuals have already repatriated. In spite of the fact that many Muslim women lived primarily in the domestic sphere, it was common that women with secondary and higher education worked in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Some of the wives tried to save the family economy by doing household chores for Slovenian families. The situation is similar with other migrant women in Europe who predominately find employment as domestic workers in private households (Anderson, in: Kofman, Sales 1998: 387). The problem with this work is that it is a low-status, informal labor without labor contracts and as such, it does not grant any social security and pension benefits. Traditional family relations are being changed because of this, and for the first time, many women are becoming independent from men. This adds to the insecurity of their husbands and sometimes causes frictions between wives and husbands.

Even if the woman works, she is still responsible for the household, and anyway, women do not expect any help from them at home. Only one female student held the opinion that a
husband and a wife should share the chores in the domestic arena. Therefore, mothers are important bearers of the traditional culture which is maintained through the homely routine. Most of them do not eat food from the refugee center, but prepare their traditional meals and also make carpets, cushions and other hand-made embroidery. Cultural heritage is preserved also through religious rituals, but many people do not attend them very regularly.

It is characteristic for the new marriages in exile that the female refugees marry Slovenes, usually workers who came to Slovenia from Bosnia-Herzegovina many years ago and are now Slovenian citizens. I have not heard of a marriage of a male refugee to a Slovenian woman. Sometimes girls married very quickly, even if doubts about the relationship were present before the marriage. Obviously, these women could not bear the refugee condition anymore and tried to change their situation through marriage in order to live a more fulfilled life.

Refugees in Slovenia are not involved in aid programs or the organization of refugee centers. It would be important to include them in these issues as they would have a possibility to structure their time in exile. It is also necessary for non-governmental organizations which provided many of the cultural and holiday activities for refugee children to target the whole family. There have already been cases where volunteers from Italy invited the whole families for holidays to Italy, however, most of the activities were organized for children only.

The question posed is if the contact with a different culture will leave traces in gender relations, even in the case of eventual integration or repatriation and if the undertaking of an economic role by women was not just an adaptation to hard living conditions in exile, but also a positive influence of the sociocultural system of the host country. This topic would be an interesting future research in Slovenia. However, it would also be interesting to trace this change after the refugees’ return to Bosnia-Herzegovina as well.

**The Experience of Prolonged Liminality**

It is impossible to understand how the refugees feel in the exile in Slovenia without taking into account what Van Gennep called the liminal phase of *rites de passage*. If *rites de passage* are by Van Gennep’s definition "rites which accompany every change of place,
state, social position and age," then the transition is marked by three phases: separation, liminality and reincorporation (Turner 1969: 78).

The second phase is marked by its ambiguity because some characteristics of the past are still present in the new situation, as well as some characteristics of the future. However, the situation is unstable as they did not yet acquire the stable state of those reincorporated, where customary norms and ethical standards, as well as their roles and obligations are clearly defined. Turner developed this concept further and wrote that "liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention or ceremonial... Liminal entities, such as neophytes in initiation or puberty rites, may be represented as possessing nothing... It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition..." (1969: 81). In Malkki’s words refugees become “the embodiment of pure humanity” only (1995b).

It is the temporary status of the refugees’ condition that is very similar to the liminality phase. The refugees are not sure when their temporary status will end, and that makes it uncertain if integration to the host society or repatriation will follow at all. Although in some tribes with such rites de passage the reincorporation phase with its stability follows. The question remains also if repatriation would offer any firm prospects to achieve the stable condition. Refugees do not expect such a condition upon their return to Bosnia-Herzegovina because of slow rebuilding. Cross-cultural data support the evidence of the universality of the refugees’ liminality experience (cf. to Eastmond 1993, Malkki 1995, etc.).

The refugees thus live between the memories which tie them to their home country and their life in Slovenia. The latter is transitory, a preparation for their future return, so future, however unsecure, is for most of them tied to Bosnia-Herzegovina as well.

The feelings of prolonged liminality were reinforced also by the fact that refugees were not sure when their center would close down and whether or not they would have to move again. Events in Bosnia-Herzegovina where some areas became safer sooner than others also affected feelings of prolonged liminality; it added to the already unstable condition regarding the termination of temporary asylum. That uncertainty caused additional psychological stress and was very often a result of information given without sufficient notice, sometimes
resulting even in misinformation. This could have easily been avoided by more efficient organization.

The refugees' feelings towards their past tradition were also reinforced by the fact that at the time of their escape, Bosnia-Herzegovina was becoming an independent state. This aroused patriotic feelings. The pride in Bosnia-Herzegovina, however, calmed down after the war. Current politicians who do not fulfill the Dayton's agreement, especially those parts where all of the refugees would have an opportunity to return to their homes, create even more disillusionment. The arousal of patriotic feelings also functioned preventively as it added to the refugees' positive self-esteem when they made new contacts in Slovenia; it was emphasized that it was good to be Bosnian.

We should bear in mind that the refugees came to Slovenia in large numbers after the country separated from ex-Yugoslavia. The prevalent sentiment in Slovenia was to forget the Yugoslav past and to join the European Union. Refugees were faced with feelings of xenophobia by some Slovenians as was often the case toward economic migrants from other ex-Yugoslav republics as well. However, the xenophobic reaction was limited to a segment of the Slovenian population, many Slovenians were compassionate toward refugees. According to the public opinion survey from 1992, 68.7% of the Slovenian respondents helped or donated to the refugees and 66.1% agreed with the Slovenian government's decision to accept such large numbers of refugees and give them a temporary status (Tos, ed. 1999: 203). Although most of the respondents agreed that refugees are entitled to a certain quality of life, only 81.5% agreed to granting temporary refugee protection and were against permanent integration to Slovenia, even if only for a limited number of refugees who would be willing to stay in our country.

Public opinion echoes the government's rhetoric and policies. It is no wonder that refugees who wish to stay in Slovenia live in limbo and experience an uncertainty, which is more intense than the one that is characteristic for the transformation period in Central and Eastern Europe in general. Namely, the situation for people who go through transformation in Central and Eastern Europe is difficult as well, despite the fact that they have citizenship of the country in which they live.
Interethnic Relations and Repatriation

Although interethnic relations changed much between the Serbs, Muslims and Croats because of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the conflict did not cause major conflicts between these ethnicities living in exile in Slovenia. The refugees were successful in maintaining the neighbourly life they lived before the war, where they usually respected other ethnic groups and where different religion usually did not cause any conflict. Some Serbs and Croats, however, complained of minor offenses and said that it is not always easy to be a minority. There was a silent rule in refugee centres that politics were not discussed with the members of other ethnic groups.

Refugees are aware that after repatriation the situation will not be very easy, because the war changed the interethnic relations to a great extent. Therefore, many are reluctant to repatriate. A seventy-three year old Croatian woman was crying to her Muslim neighbour in a refugee center because she was repatriating to Mostar and had been advised by her Croatian community in Mostar that it was not desirable to mention or associate with her Muslim friends.

Because interethnic relations have changed, some refugees fear to repatriate, even if their houses still stand and are unoccupied. This fear is especially prevalent in the case of mixed marriages. In Slovenian refugee centers repatriation is problematic for some. For example, the Serbian wives of Muslims are reluctant to go back as they fear to live among the Muslim majority. A forty-five year old woman who lived with her husband in Bosnia-Herzegovina wished that they would move from the Muslim village to a bigger town. They both thought that there would be a more suitable atmosphere for a mixed marriage outside the smaller village. But it also means they will have to start life again without relatives, possessions or a social network. The situation is even worse for a couple which lost their son during the war. He was killed by the Serbs, although his mother is Serbian (his father is a Muslim). Now she does not wish to return to the community where her son was killed out of revenge. The woman blames herself because she thinks that he was killed because of his ethnicity.

Most couples from mixed marriages have already moved from Slovenia to western countries as they search for more durable solutions. Many of them want to stay in the new country of
asylum permanently. No mixed marriage have ended while in exile in Slovenia, they just complained they were under more pressure as other marriages, because of the fear of repatriation and sometimes permanently changed relations with the wider family.

Refugees who are reluctant to repatriate extend beyond those from mixed marriages. Some are afraid of land mines in Bosnia-Herzegovina, many feel tense about changed relationships; they do not know which side was their neighbor or friend was on during the war or how they will rebuild their social ties. Many still do not have anywhere to go, because their houses are occupied by the Serbs. Most of the refugees say that they would go even to the barracks as long as they have somewhere to sleep. Unfortunately, some of the barracks are now in the Bosnian-Croat Federation. Another reason people are reluctant to repatriate is, because they have heard that there are conflicts between those who stayed in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the war and the returning refugees. This information about conflicts comes from both personal visits to Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as the media.

Most of the refugees wish to return to their homes and are therefore disillusioned with how their respective government fulfills the Dayton Agreement. The reluctancy of some refugees to repatriate can also be understood because it does not offer a solution to their problems. The process of repatriation causes insecurity and means that they will need a lot of strength and means to rebuild their lives. For the elderly, which is one of the most vulnerable groups of refugees in Slovenia, this goal seems to be unattainable.

The return to Bosnia-Herzegovina, unfortunately, is not a return to the pre-war Bosnia-Herzegovina where most of the refugees would, understandably, like to return to. Nevertheless, the voluntary repatriation would at least mean the end of the liminal phase and refugees would hopefully be able to regain stability in order to build their future. We can only hope that politicians will soon take all the points in the Dayton Agreement seriously. Stability will be most quickly achieved if they can return to their homes, especially in Republika Srpska. Unfortunately, the absence of durable solutions such as integration into the Slovenian society or repatriation to Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo resemble Beckett’s drama Waiting for Godot, namely, neither of them ever comes.

Conclusion
The most suitable solution for those refugees who wish to stay in Slovenia permanently and integrate, would be achieved if they were granted the right to work. The change of legal status of persons with temporary protection would be required in order to achieve that goal of integration. Besides, if the refugees are permitted to work, they would not be a burden for the state because they would be able to take care of themselves. They would enlarge the active population in Slovenia which would be an advantage for the country given its decreasing active population and demography. For the elderly, an agreement between the Slovenian and Bosnian governments regarding the transfer of pensions would be a partial solution. In order to successfully integrate into the Slovenian sociocultural system, language and computer courses would also be needed so that the refugees could more easily meet the demands of the labor market.

For Slovenia the refugees represent an opportunity for pluralism and an acknowledgment of cultural diversity. It should not be forgotten that in the age of globalization the myth of a culturally homogeneous state has become unrealistic anyway. It has also become clear that minority rights are central to the future of liberal tradition throughout the world (Kymlicka 1995).

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Natalija Vrecer

Human Costs of Temporary Refugee Protection: the Case of Slovenia

Summary

Most of the refugees from the former Yugoslavia were protected temporarily around the world. The claim of the authoress is that temporary refugee protection in the case of ex-Yugoslav refugees inefficiently replaced long-term durable solutions and thus lowered the quality of the lives of refugees considerably. Vrecer gives the analysis of the negative consequences of temporary protection on the everyday life of refugees in Slovenia. Beside enabling an anthropological understanding of people in exile, the aim of the paper is also to document human suffering and give some policy recommendations.