

Reclaiming Lives: Variable Effects of War on Gender and Ethnic Identities in the Narratives of Bosnian and Croatian Refugees

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Introduction

In 1989, the Berlin Wall came down and the two Germanys were unified. Throughout Eastern Europe socialism fell to popular movements which favored democracy. The world looked on with optimism and expectations for positive change, particularly for greater unity and understanding among the peoples of Europe. Yet events in the former Yugoslavia had already begun to move in quite a different direction - towards fragmentation, the resurgence of nationalism, and war (Denich 1994: see especially 376-7). Fragmentation and nationalism have become problems throughout Europe and the Central Asian states of the former Soviet Union, though nowhere quite so tragically as in the Balkans. These disturbing trends are exacerbated by war and forced migration, creating a vicious circle where nationalism fuels the flames of war, and war continues to create homeless people who are, by and large, unwelcome elsewhere, in part because of their nationalities.

Often these "others" are blamed for their own plight, even when they are the victims of war. Migrants and refugees are stigmatized as burdens on the local economy, as potential competitors for jobs, as socially and culturally disruptive or undesirable, and in other ways as threats to a nation's or community's well-being. Sometimes they are even resented as people who receive special treatment because of their refugee status. For example, a Croatian journalist reports feeling angry about the free passes given to refugees for public transport. Although she later recognizes the irrationality of her own feelings this may not always be the case among members of a host population (Drakulic 1992).

Displaced persons and refugees are often the forgotten casualties of war. The fact that worldwide the majority of refugees are women with their dependent children contributes to this

neglect. War takes greater toll on the lives of men (in sheer numbers of lost lives), and often requires them to stay behind in war-torn homelands as soldiers, often as conscripted soldiers. Refugee women face three potential forms of discrimination in the communities where they have taken refuge: as women, because of nationality or ethnicity, and as refugees.

Many of these women are unprepared for their new roles as single heads of households. Even those whose husbands or other male kin are with them must adjust to altered role expectations in a new context. Life in a refugee camp itself affects gender roles and relations; old roles become difficult or impossible to fulfill. The refugees must adapt to new patterns in daily life, and new relationships with family members and others both in the camps and in the local community. They have also lost work that gave meaning to their lives and roles that gave them identities and purpose. The theme of "nothing to do" echoes in the narratives of Bosnian and Croatian women among whom we carried out interviews (Huseby-Darvas 1994). Identities based on culturally-defined gender roles, or on work or occupations, must often be reconstructed in the changed circumstances (Olsen and Rudan 1992). This reconstruction, moreover, has to be done in conditions that are anything but favorable to dispassionate rationality. Displaced persons and refugees may spend months, even years, in refugee camps. They wait, often in vain, for news of missing relatives, neighbors or friends. They must struggle to cope with trauma and loss, and at the same time, adjust to life in a new and often inhospitable social and cultural environment. In 1993 we carried out research among displaced persons and refugees on the island of Hvar in Croatia.¹ We had three objectives. First, we wanted to collect narratives of war and of refugee experience before the passage of time had dulled the sharp edge of that experience. We believed that these narratives would provide an important historical record (Green 1994: 229-30; Plejic 1992:229). We also hoped that the telling of stories by refugees, and our listening to and recording the stories, might be of some therapeutic benefit to the individuals. Second, we were interested in collecting information about previous family life, particularly gender roles and the relative distribution of authoritarian and egalitarian family structures (Olsen, Spoljar-Vrzina, Rudan and Kersic-Barbaric 1991; Olsen and Rudan 1992; Rudan and Olsen 1992). Many refugees in Croatia come from isolated, homogeneous village communities and may find themselves living semi-permanently or even permanently in communities that are structured very differently. We were looking for information that might help resettlement and other programs

aimed at facilitating refugee adjustment. Third, we were interested in the gendered aspect of the refugee experience because so many refugees are women.

As we listened to the experiences of refugee women and men we realized that, as always, their experiences, perceptions, hopes and expectations varied considerably.² So also did their relations to one another, and their feelings about members of the host communities (Povrzanovic 1992). "Ethnic cleansing" which is still a part of the current Balkan war, means that some refugees find themselves living among, or accepting refuge from people they now define as "the enemy", a situation which can only give rise to ambivalence and confusion. Others, however, resolutely deny that the war has anything to do with religion or ethnicity at all. They have found ways to maintain relationships and friendships across ethnic lines, and to make a distinction between those who caused them harm and members of those same ethnic groups who may, indeed, be relatives, neighbors or friends, or who may simply be innocent victims, like themselves (Plejić 1992).

There was, in short, much variation in the actual responses of refugees, whether Croatian or Bosnian, Catholic or Muslim (there were no Serbs living in the Croatian refugee camps where we worked, or at least none came to our attention there). It is this variation that interested us most. The Western media habitually homogenizes ethnic or national groups in the Balkans, and therefore overlooks individuals who do not fit the stereotypes. There are, for example, Serbs who protest the actions of their own government (Prosić-Dvornić 1993:108), and there are Croats who provide refuge to Muslims. Many individuals have lived peacefully with neighbors, colleagues and kin who are members of "other" ethnic or national groups, and there are of course a significant number of people who are "mixed" nationalities. This essay directs attention at certain variables that influence the perceptions refugees have of their own situations, their abilities to look forward to a future life, and their relations with others in and outside the refugee centers. First we examine the changing roles in families of refugee women who have lost fathers, husbands and sons. In the second part of the essay, we address the often ambivalent feelings of refugee groups towards each other in refugee centers, and the by no means uniform process of ethnogenesis, by which communities in the former Yugoslavia are reconstructed along the lines of ethnic and religious affiliation.³

"All We Can Do Is Wait"

Eva is a 38-year old Croat from Bosnia, a wife and mother of three. Fourteen months before we met her, war in Bosnia forced Eva and her children to leave their home. Eva's husband, eligible for conscription, had to stay behind. Eva now lives with her daughters in two rooms at a refugee center. "The worst of it is not having anything to do," she said in a matter-of-fact, uncomplaining tone. At home, Eva managed a household and family. She worked with her husband in the fields. She interacted with members of her extended family, and with neighbors in the community where she lived. She was proud of her house, which she and her husband had built, adding rooms as money was available (see Plejic 1993:234-5). Eva had a position of respect in her community. She worked hard, and enjoyed her life, or so she told us. Now she lives without her husband. She has little besides meals (which are provided by the center), laundry (which she does in the bathtub, or a small bathroom sink) and worry to occupy her time, and mark the passing of each day. "I sometimes can't remember which day it is," she said, "They are mostly all alike." Like hundreds of others she waits -- for news of a husband, father or son -- and for the war to end.

Kata is a middle-aged Croatian woman from Vukovar, in Eastern Croatia, which was devastated early in the Serb-Croat war. Her home was burned to the ground by Serbs, and several family members were killed, including an elderly aunt. She lives with her husband, also at a refugee center. "We are among friends here, truly," she said. "People have been very kind. But we miss our own place. We're used to land, flat, green; not sea, rocks and fish. It's beautiful here, but it isn't home. It's not what we know."

Zara is a 27-year old Muslim from Sarajevo. She had worked as a physical therapist, and is a wife and mother of two small daughters. "Muslim, Croat, Serb," she said, "what does it mean? We all speak the same language, we're not that different from one another. Now I'm a Muslim because my father is Muslim. In fact, he was a communist. I don't know what being Muslim really means." Zara came to her interview in a mini-skirt and T-shirt. She had taken care to make herself as presentable and fashionable as she could in second-hand clothing from the Red Cross. She and her husband had also lost their apartment and everything they owned. Still, she looked forward to a future she seemed determined she would have, rather than back to the past. She expressed a desire to return to her home, even if there was nothing left of the place

itself. She was restless without a job. "But maybe we will stay," she said as the interview drew to a close. "Who knows. It's nice, and I would be happy if I could only find a job." I asked her what she would do. "Anything. I would work as a cleaning lady if I could find a job. Anything to make some money, have something to do, and begin to live my life again." Before the war, she said, she made more money than her husband because she also had a business on the side. "I have never before been unable to take care of myself."

Certainly not everyone we interviewed could distance themselves from ethnic sentiments. Sarina felt isolated from all others in the refugee center except fellow Muslims. Ankica, a Croat, said she was sympathetic to the plight of Muslims, but increasingly had come to hate Serbs, because she saw them as the primary aggressors in the war. Others, who came from mixed families or regions, found it hard to believe that people could turn on each other when not long before they had lived amicably together. Similar sentiments are expressed in narratives collected by Croatian fieldworkers among refugees in Zagreb. Croats from a village near Sibenik, which was under attack from neighboring Serb villagers asked "How can they, when it was only yesterday that they *ate* and *drank* in our homes ...?" (emphasis in the original) (Povrzanovic 1993a:135)

Certain themes appeared and re-appeared in the narratives of these refugee women, whatever their sentiments about ethnicity. All of them had suffered losses, but most of them had less to say about the loss of and separation from loved ones, or about the loss of property, than about the difficulties of coping with day to day life. Almost all had lived in the refugee centers for at least 14 months (using May 1993 as the ethnographic present). Almost all of them remembered the exact day and month they came to the centers, sometimes even the day of the week. But more than half had forgotten which year. That particular forgetfulness is a symptom of the day to day quality of their conversations, their concerns, and their lives.⁴ With no certain future, no meaningful occupations, no idea where they will eventually live or what they will do, these women have a strong sense of , their powerlessness, of being no longer in control of their own lives. "All we can do is wait," said an older Muslim woman. Like many, she had grown resigned to this fate. These people had lost their past. This was brought home most poignantly by those who regretted the loss of photographs more than the loss of any other possessions; photographs made memories and past lives concrete, and reminded people that homes and intact

families had indeed been theirs before the war (see also Huseby-Darvas 1994; Plejic 1992:234-5). For many, perhaps most, the future was, at best, uncertain.

Reconstruction of Gender Roles

The women we interviewed talked about the loss of husbands (if only temporary), the loss of homes, and the loss of work, whether in their houses or the fields or at other jobs. They talked about present uncertainties, about the decisions they had to make now, and about what the future held for them. When the future is so uncertain, it is expected that the here and now will take on greater significance and that people will, so to speak, live for the day. Women were eager to make sure that we appreciated that at home they had been important - in their families and households, at their jobs, in their communities. For women in the former Yugoslavia, whatever their nationality, reputation in a community and self-worth were largely tied to hard work and self-sacrifice for the sake of family (Olsen 1989; Olsen and Rudan 1992). Reaffirmation of such a reputation, and of a woman's success as a wife, mother or worker, come from other women in the community, both their family members and peers (neighbors and colleagues at work). A virtuous woman, one who is admired and respected by others, works hard on the farm or in the house, or at an outside job. Having one's own house is a goal most women and men share. Working hard to bring in money, to keep the house clean and well-appointed, and to give one's family a good life is particularly significant for rural and small-town women, whose families and neighbors are ready to pronounce on who works hard and who does not. These values, in my experience, are also shared by women in cities, perhaps to a lesser degree but still significantly (Gilliland 1986, Olsen 1989, 1990; Olsen, Spoljar-Vrzina, Rudan, Barbaric-Kersic 1991). But in the refugee centers, women (and men) no longer had work and no longer had traditional family roles to define themselves to others around them or to themselves. They no longer had reputations to care about (or at least in this new setting their reputations were not firmly established). They had become uncertain about who they were. They fell back on stories about their past lives, and to the extent that they could, they reconstructed for the present images of what they had been in the past.

Finding some kind of occupation seemed helpful to all the refugees, both women and men. Women, however, seemed to find work more easily than did the men. We only spoke with

four men who had jobs or regular activities to occupy their time. One became a handyman in a refugee center. A second, along with his wife, had begun to make leather key chains and coin purses to sell. They had only sold a few, he said, but it gave them hope that they could do something to take care of themselves. They were lucky enough to have escaped with some money, and to both have skills and to be in a place where materials could be acquired. They were also young and looked forward to rebuilding their house when the war was finished. "We had just finished building it two months before it was destroyed," the husband told me. "What can we do but start again? At least we are alive." Two other men worked for the Catholic Church; one drove a van, primarily for a bakery set up to provide both work for refugees and affordable bread for the community at large; the second had been hired to set up a newly-acquired computer system. All four of these men were Catholic Croats, displaced from Vukovar.

Bosnians, men and women, and Croats as well as Muslims, seemed at a greater disadvantage in finding employment; none of those we spoke to had tried, though one man in his late twenties expressed a desire to find some kind of work, particularly since he believed he would have to stay in the center for many more months, and possibly even remain in Croatia when the war was over. Women found work cleaning, working in the dining halls of the refugee centers, and in the bakery referred to above. Women more easily found ad hoc jobs (not necessarily for money, mainly to occupy their time). They baby-sat for each other. They did the laundry for their families, and they cleaned their own rooms. Interestingly, none of them extended their cleaning efforts beyond their rooms and into the hallways, although no one was slow to complain about the debris that "other people" left about. They mended clothes and they did needlework (knitting and crocheting), often hoping to sell what they made. They also tried to make their rooms more comfortable and to give them a personal touch with a scattering of doilies, and photos of family members or of houses now abandoned or destroyed, and with attractive cut-outs from magazines, which they taped to the walls of their rooms (see Plejic 1993:234-5). Drinking coffee with women friends became, for many, part of their daily routine (Huseby-Darvas 1994). Middle-aged women looked after the elderly who were in the center alone, making sure that they had company from time to time, and collecting them for meals, or offering to bring back a bowl of soup. An elderly unmarried woman comes to mind; she had diabetes, and was very depressed. Her adopted son (a biological nephew) remained behind in her home village. She had given up her own chance to be married in order to raise this child. The one

photograph of him that she brought with her was her dearest treasure. She often did not want to go to meals; Eva, mentioned earlier, made sure that she got enough to eat and was particularly concerned about the physical illness, the diabetes.

Women more often than men seemed to maintain some semblance of "normalcy" in their daily roles. It was still their responsibility to look after the needs of their families. These roles, along with other activities that simulated life at home, were often exaggerated. I will come to that later. Certainly women sometimes gave voice to anger (particularly the Muslims from villages in Bosnia) or sadness or grief or confusion. There were signs of depression, particularly among the elderly. But for the most part, women more often than men were matter-of-fact about their situation. "We mustn't give up," said one. That was the attitude of many other women we met. Responses from men were less varied. Young men, particularly Muslims and those without any kind of job, were angry and aggressive. Young Muslim men were very reluctant to speak with us at all and what we were doing made them suspicious (understandable in wartime). Older men, Muslim and Croat, were meek and resigned and, together with those in poor health, seemed to depend more on their wives than their wives did on them, which is a reversal of the expected pattern (that the expectations were otherwise voiced by the women who felt their men were dependent). Older couples mostly came from villages, where men worked on the farm and women took care of the house and the needs of the family. As refugees, men could not fulfill their traditional role, and had lost their authority and their standing as those who did the "more important" work. They responded in one of two ways. Either they gave up their authority to their wives and looked to them more as a child would to a mother for emotional nurturance and for decision-making (such as there was), or, in a few cases, they became excessively authoritarian, which made life still more difficult for the women. A few couples seemed to depend on each other, to offer mutual support, and to have become closer in the sharing of hardship. "I feel more like his mother than his wife," commented 67-year old Nevenka. "He wants me with him all the time, and doesn't even want to let me have coffee with the other women. So I stay by his side, but we really don't have much to say."

"He yells at me for the least little thing," complained 55-year old Ana, whose husband has become more difficult since they have been at the center, she says.

"It seems I don't do anything right. If I ask him how I should do something, he gets angry, and if I don't ask him, why he becomes crazy."

Nevertheless, women who are in the centers without their men envy those whose husbands are still with them. Being a woman alone is, for a married woman, both an emotional loss and a loss of personal identity. For adult women in villages and small towns (see Olsen 1990; Olsen , Spoljar-Vrzina, Rudan and Barbaric-Kersic 1991; Olsen and Rudan 1992), the married status is a prime marker of identity. As refugees, they find themselves making decisions for their families and contemplating futures without the economic and emotional assistance of a husband. Some of them are already widows; others face the possibility of being widowed. Understandably this was a salient concern among the women we interviewed.

"It came time for my daughter to enroll in secondary school. Because she is a good student, she had a chance to go to the *gymnasium* in Split. But she has never been away from me before. I wanted to talk it over with my husband, and really don't even know now if I did the right thing, but in the end I decided to let her go. She is my oldest daughter, and during the first year we were here [at the center on Hvar] I really depended on her. Now I feel even more alone than before." (Eva, a Croat from Hercegovina).

"I see her [indicating a young woman from the same village] living as I once did," said Mara, a widow from Hercegovina. "When I was young, I lost my husband in the second war. I waited and waited for news, but never saw him again. There I was, a young woman, alone with a child. This young woman is just like I was then. I know how hard it is for her. She has two little children, and doesn't know from one day to the next if she is a widow or a wife."

Uncertainty and Ethnogenesis

The women we interviewed were among the "lucky" ones in this war. They had not been raped, maimed or physically hurt. Some had suffered secondary health problems as a result of

war and ensuing hardships. Many had lost their houses and all their possessions, some had lost loved ones, and more than half were separated from husbands (often they did not know if their husbands were still alive). Most of the rest were separated from significant members of their families, including fathers, sons, daughters and grandchildren. They all shared an uncertain future. But the future was more uncertain for some than for others, at least as they themselves perceived it. Their conversations with us reflected these fears and uncertainties as women without homes or men or jobs, and about living far from the places where they felt they belonged.

During the time we carried out our interviews, the war between Croats and Muslims in Bosnia escalated. As it did, so did ethnic tensions between individuals in the refugee centers. But here again there was considerable variation. Confusions about national boundaries, a frequent insistence that there had been no such tensions in the past, the need to reconstruct understandings about those newly labeled "Others," and, in some cases, a new perception of themselves as "Others" in the land of strangers, all appeared in the tales they told.

The variation in manifestation of sentiments that indicated ethnic tension was loosely correlated with age, ethnicity, place of origin, social class and level of education, and previous identities and roles. In refugee centers where Croats and Muslims lived as neighbors, ethnic tensions were clearly present, although people claimed that in the past they had all been familiar with members of other groups, and even lived with them in a friendly way. But this too was not a constant situation. In two refugee centers, both with a mixture of Muslims and Croats, tensions were much more in evidence among the residents at one center (a "B" category hotel converted to refugee housing) than at the other (rooms in a clinic). In this second location, there was quite a lot of positive interaction across ethnic and religious lines. Those who were least fearful about their futures, and who had a wider range of experience and of cultural resources to draw upon, were the most willing to interact with a variety of others. Those who were most uncertain about their future constructed the most rigid boundaries. They also were the people who focused closely on day to day life and found security in doing so. They were the ones who became embroiled in contests for what would seem to an outsider to be trivial things (for example, jealousies over an extra kilo of sugar, or items of clothing given by the Red Cross or other relief organizations). With so much already lost and the prospect of losing yet more, small things took on a heightened significance.

The Bosnian women, Muslims and Croats, who lived in the hotel seemed to us to be the least secure, both psychologically, and in terms of their skills and experience outside their own social environments. They were unwilling to think about remaining in Dalmatia or Croatia (or perhaps they were not sure they would be accepted there or be able to find occupations if they did stay). They were the ones who had most to say about how hard it was to make decisions for their families without a husband to help them. They were the ones least likely to mingle across nationality lines. Muslim and Croat women from Bosnia saw themselves as culturally distinct from each other. But most of them came from the same kind of small town and village, most of which were ethnically homogeneous. None had more than a high school education. Some (more Muslims than Croats, and more older than younger women) had attended only four years of elementary school. Most had worked as housewives, in the fields on a family farm, or at unskilled jobs outside the home.

Both young and old women foregrounded the absence of men as their main problem. Most had married in their teens or twenties. They worried about having to make decisions and possibility support their families alone. "Sometimes I just want to scream or throw something," said a 36-year old Muslim mother, "but then I don't do it. My children look to me for reassurance. I have to stay strong for them." These women in the hotel seemed to feel a greater burden than those at the health center, although women there had also lost loved ones, homes, property and jobs.

Women at the hotel were more conservative or rigid about family and gender roles. They embraced the more traditional patriarchal values than did women from cities and from ethnically-mixed regions in Croatia and in Bosnia (Erlich 1966; Olsen 1988; Rudan and Olsen 1992). Anasa, for example, who was only 26, said that in the case of a mixed marriage, it was "normal to her" that a woman should "follow her man," even if that meant cutting off ties with her own family. She spoke of a woman from her own town, a Hercegovinan (Croat) who married a Bosnian Serb, and now was completely alienated from her parents and other kin. "Once you marry, that's it," she said. A woman may choose her man, she implied, but then her future choices are limited; that she must choose a man was also implied. The Bosnian Croats felt they even had to make efforts to change their dialects, so that local people wouldn't mistake them for Muslims or Serbs. They took every opportunity to emphasize their Croatianness and to distinguish themselves from the Bosnian Muslims.

At the health center refugees and displaced persons of different nationalities mixed readily with each other. The Croats here were not from Bosnia-Herzegovina, but from other parts of Croatia, primarily from Vukovar in Eastern Croatia (before the troubles a fairly affluent, ethnically mixed region). Unlike the Croats from Bosnia who felt that as Bosnians they were less likely to be accepted by members of the local population, the Vukovar Croats were living in their own country (that is, they were displaced persons rather than refugees). They felt they were among friends. Though many were nostalgic for their own region, and talked about differences in the landscape and in the local cuisine, they did not feel that local people looked down on them because they were victims, or blamed them for what had happened. They were also used to living in an ethnically mixed population, and however much they might have blamed the Serbs, in the end, for the tragedies they had suffered, they found it relatively easy to accept the mixture of Muslims and Croats in the center.

The Muslims at the health center were not from small villages and towns, but from Sarajevo, also ethnically mixed and very cosmopolitan. Many of them were well-educated, used to living among Croats and Serbs and interacting with them as neighbors and colleagues. The Sarajevo Muslims, unlike the village Muslims, also had professional or semi-professional training upon which they could depend as they set about reconstructing their lives. Like Zara, the physical therapist willing to work as a cleaning woman, most knew they would be unlikely to find immediate employment in their old jobs. But their experience was not that of someone brought up in a small, uneducated, homogeneous community, and they had greater confidence in their own abilities and were more ready to associate with people from different ethnic and occupational groups. They could imagine futures for themselves. Finally, Muslim women from Sarajevo, unlike Muslim or Croat women from villages at the hotel, were used to making decisions, participating in a family as an equal partner. They were better prepared to make their own ways and to seek out opportunities, whether they had husbands or not.

At the clinic, people wandered in and out of the TV room, and sometimes, rather than watching television, they engaged in conversation. Though there were common rooms in the hotel, people did not congregate there as they did at the clinic. Rather there were smaller homogeneous "communities" of women who shared ethnicity (Bosnian Croat and Bosnian Muslim) and who came from the same place; some even had extended family connections. There was no television room, and that may have contributed to the fragmentation (that is, the

television provided a reason for people to go to a common room at the clinic). In addition, there were many more refugees in the hotel than in the clinic, and size alone may have inhibited a sense of commonality. But in fact people not only remained separate socially at the hotel, but seemed actively to dislike each other. Croat women remarked on the dirty hallways in the hotel, and always blamed the filth on the Muslims. There was a trail of litter in the hallways, there were broken windows and furniture, and there was graffiti on public walls. Who had done these things, however, was something we only heard as hearsay. The Muslim rooms we visited were as clean and orderly as the Croatian ones. The Muslims commented on the "stinginess" of the Croats, and their unwillingness to socialize. Croats said the Muslims complained of discrimination when the Croat children, for example, received chocolate for Easter from a Catholic nun, but the Muslims also had a religiously-based relief service which gave them extra food and clothing, and which gave nothing to the Catholics.

Finally, the women in the hotel occupied themselves much more than at the center with the social rituals that had been part of their lives in communities at home, including among some of the Croats very structured exchanges of visits and afternoon coffee. Though this behavior may be taken as a sign of positive adaptation, there was a sense that some of these women were not simply passing the time, or finding companionship among the others in the center, but holding firmly to the past, to a time before the war. They were the ones who spoke constantly about returning home; the women in the clinic did not, or did not do so as frequently.

The Muslim women at the hotel believed they were the most marginalized (and they probably were). Some of them insisted that Muslims were "civilized" or "respectable" people, as if they had to justify themselves to us, the interviewers. One woman said that Croatia had provided them with the immediate necessities of life, but in Croatia they did not feel they were among friends. At that particular time hostilities between Croats and Muslims had escalated in Hercegovina (a region of Bosnia-Hercegovina) and many of these women were from that region. No doubt this heightened the sense that they were living in "enemy territory" in spite of the fact that they had been given refuge there.

Conclusion

All the people we interviewed, both those in the hotel and those at the clinic, both the Croat and Muslim refugees from Bosnia and the displaced persons from other parts of Croatia, had suffered in more or less the same fashion. They had lost property; they had lost homes, both the buildings themselves, and the communities that they called "home"; and they had lost people they loved. The women - married women - for the most part had to cope with life without men, conventionally the decision-makers, but also companions, partners, and as husbands, important to a married woman's sense of who she is (a wife, not a widow or an unmarried woman). No human being can go through such an experience of deprivation without being affected by a sense of uncertainty about the future, about one's own ability to make one's way in the unknown world that was to come. Many of the displaced persons and refugees emphasized that this hatred expressed in nationalist and religious metaphors, came as a surprise from people they had known, trusted and lived peacefully with for years. This further shattered their sense of trust in the world around them, their abilities to believe that somehow things would turn out right in the end.

The uncertainty manifested itself in everyday behavior and in what people said about their present difficulties, and about what they could hope for in the future. Those who had the least hope and the highest level of uncertainty behaved as if they could recreate in the context of their new and temporary lodging, the symbols of identities that they once had in their home communities. Women created again the small rituals that give meaning to the life of a homemaker, and give her a reputation. They were not so much looking to the future as providing themselves with a refuge, constructed from the past that would shelter them from the uncertainties of their present life.

Those who found their solace in domestic ritual behavior were also -- and quite logically -- reluctant to admit that they were now living in a community of sorts. Where they had family and kin and fellow villagers they reconstructed community life within this narrow circle. Furthermore they exhibited a peasant-like mistrust for strangers that developed, when the strangers were from another republic and, still more, when they were of another religion, into active dislike. This was especially so in the case of those who had spent their lives in ethnically

homogeneous places. But it was also true, albeit to a less extent, even of those who had lived in mixed communities.

Those who looked inwards, always narrowing the circle of social activity, and who were susceptible to feelings of ethnic hostility, had certain other features besides a life spent in a small village or town. They had a low level of education and most of them had worked on the land or at related jobs which did not give them the skills and attitudes of confidence that allowed others, such as those from Sarajevo, and especially those who were young, to look with less despair into the years ahead. Those who were relatively educated, who had professional skills, who had lived in urban settings, and had freely associated with colleagues of different religions and nationalities, were the mirror-image of the inward-looking would-be re-creators of a lost way of life. They did not obsess over household trivia; they socialized with others whom they did not know beforehand, and, most of all, they were quite resistant to discourse and sentiments that were founded on ethnic hatreds. This was true even when the course of the war would have made such sentiments understandable.

There is nothing very surprising about this. Relatively unsophisticated people who live in homogeneous communities find it harder to cope with people not like themselves and with the loss of a way of life and a culture that inhibits their capacity to adapt to new situations. We must remember, of course, that not only are people adapting to change, they must adapt to severe trauma and loss. Educated people have skills that let them cope better with diversity, and with change, though not always with psychological traumas associated with war. Our point is to insist that ethnic sentiments and prejudices are not primordial in the sense that they invariably take control over other values and sentiments. On the contrary, even if they are, in a sense, part of human nature, of the human psyche, the extent to which they are manifested and allowed to guide conduct and attitudes is a function of particular contexts, one of which has been discussed in this essay.

Notes

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2. Displaced persons" came from other parts of Croatia; "refugees" came from elsewhere, mostly Bosnia. For the sake of brevity, from this point on, we use the term "refugees" to refer to all those living in the camps on Hvar, except where we wish to clearly distinguish members of one category or the other, for analytical purposes.

3. Our sample included a total of forty individuals -- 14 men and 26 women; of the women 5 Bosnian Muslims, 12 Bosnian Croats, 7 Croats from Eastern Croatia and 2 non-Yugoslavs married to a Croat and a Serb respectively.

4. Eva-Marija Barbaric-Kersic, one of our field assistants, pointed out this pattern after two days of interviews.

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