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A Spectrum of Non-Belonging - Refugees, Human Rights and Political Pragmatism

This article represents the analysis of the life history of one of the refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina who came to Sweden with Croatian passport and, as such, initially received a negative decision to her request for asylum, and then a temporary residence permission for a period of six months. The analysis covers three geographically and temporally separate phases of this refugee odyssey: life during the war and flight, then refugee life in Croatia, and finally refuge in Sweden. The main aims of this article are twofold. Firstly, it aims to show the way refugees themselves look at their refugee life and the role of the various macro-, mezzo- and micro-actors, who in every way influence their life. Secondly, it tries to demonstrate all the possible strategies which the governments of Western Europe try to develop in “solving the refugee problems” in situations where the gulf between their humanitarian rhetoric and real pragmatic politics becomes uncomfortably deep.

Keywords: refugees, ethnic conflicts, immigration, welfare state, citizenship, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Swedish refugee policy

Spekter nepripadnosti - begunci, človekove pravice in politični pragmatizem

Članek prinaša analizo življenjske zgodbe begunke iz Bosne in Hercegovine, ki je na Švedsko prišla s hrvaškim potnim listom in zato sprva dobila negativen odgovor na prošnjo za azil, nato pa dovoljenje za začasno prebivanje za obdobje šestih mesecev. Analiza pokriva tri geografsko in časovno ločene faze te begunske odisejade: življenje med vojno in beg, begunsko življenje na Hrvaškem in azil na Švedskem. Članek ima dva cilja. Prvič, prikazati kako begunci sami doživljajo svoje begunsko življenje, skupaj z vlogami različnih makro-, mezo- in mikro-dejavnikov, ki vplivajo na njihovo življenje. Drugič, članek poskuša zajeti vse možne strategije, ki jih za »reševanje begunskih problemov« razvijajo vlade zahodnoevropskih držav v situacijah, kjer postaja prepad med človekoljubno retoriko in realno pragmatično politiko neprijetno globok.

Ključne besede: begunci, etnični konflikti, imigracije, socialna država, državljanstvo, Bosna in Hercegovina, švedska begunska politika

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We become aware of the existence of a right to have rights /.../ and a right to belong to some kind of organized community, only when millions of people emerged who had lost and could not regain these rights because of the new global political situation /.../ (Arendt 1968, 296–297)

1. Introduction

During the summer of 1993 the Swedish Government made the decision to issue permanent residence permits for about 50,000 Bosnian refugees, who were then in Sweden as asylum seekers. At the same time, the decision was made to impose visa requirements for B & H¹ citizens. However, as the war in B & H was still in full swing, and as from early 1993 it was extended by the conflict between Croats and Bosniaks, the number of people who were fleeing from their homes increased even further. In this situation, given on the one hand that the war was creating new refugees, and on the other that in the countries where the majority of refugees had hitherto usually been sent, an increasing number of legal obstacles was being created, as a consequence refugees were forced to seek new avenues for acquiring refugee status in those countries. Since visas were not required for Croatian visitors to Sweden, some 5,000 B & H citizens who had the right, on various bases, to seek and obtain Croatian citizenship and consequently passports, used this opportunity to come to Sweden with Croatian passports and after entering the country, sought asylum there.²

Although the majority of these people actually came from war-torn B & H, and even though B & H residence addresses were entered in their Croatian passports, the Swedish Government decided that these refugees should be considered Croatian citizens; and since Croatia was obliged to help them they were to be sent back there. Almost a year after this decision had been made, after the renewal of war operations in Croatia and after numerous protests against the initial decision in Sweden itself, the above-mentioned decision was amended from visas to temporary residence permits (*tidsbegränsat uppehållstillstånd* – TUT) for a period of six months, until 31 November 1995. Yet another year was to pass after the expiry of this permit for the Swedish Government to make a final decision on the expulsion to Croatia, but this time for only 2,500 B & H Croats.

In the period August 1995 – February 1997, I conducted fieldwork on four occasions and interviewed 30 refugees. I also talked to some 20 representatives of various organisations and institutions that were in contact with these refugees in one way or another. The refugees were interviewed in two Swedish towns, Karlskrona and Malmö, and with some of them I talked on several occasions during this period.

The life history of Jasna, which is the subject of analysis in this article, is that of one of these refugees. If we apply the methodological distinction between “exemplary” and “symptomatic” life histories (Ålund 1991), then we can say that

Jasna's history is an "exemplary" one for those citizens of B & H who have mixed ethnic identities. However, at the same time, this history is also "symptomatic" with respect to everything that this group of B & H refugees – i.e., those with Croatian passports who obtained temporary protection in Sweden – was forced to go through. In her history the difficulties of a new "normal" life (in B & H, Croatia and Sweden) overlap with feelings of exclusion from the social and cultural life streams in all the environments that she experienced as an undesirable, isolated and frequently exploited "alien". Her visions of a return home are connected to her normal previous life and result in discrepancies between her personal wishes and the rough, short-term pragmatism of the various régimes and authorities involved, who are burdened with an ethnic categorisation of individuals and groups. At the same time her history reveals the gloomy background in which a refugee's experience was created, and it is connected to the establishment of a new profiteering in which the refugees' life has become a new currency of war and post-war economies (Duffield 1999).

2. Prologue: Collapse of a Normal Life

When I met her first (in the summer of 1995) she was 35 years old. She was born and grew up in an industrial town in Central Bosnia, where she had lived with her husband and two children until the war broke out. She worked as a bank clerk for 12 years. She had never belonged to those to whom a sense of ethnic belonging meant a lot in life. This may have been even more so because she came from a mixed marriage, her father being a Serb and her mother a Croat. Besides, she, herself, was married to a Bosniak. All these factors together classify Jasna among those who represented a very significant part of the essence of B & H before the war. This was a generation which grew up during the 1960s and 1970s in urban areas of the republic – the generation for whom life under conditions of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity presented a very normal state, which nobody considered as questionable, unnatural or temporary.

To explain this we have to understand the way that inter-ethnic relations were treated in the former Yugoslavia before the war. On the one hand there was a public political discourse that tried to integrate all the citizens of the multiethnic state on the principles of national, religious, cultural and political equality. On the other hand, although a competition among the national political élite for real power was going on behind this ideological façade (Goati 1997), a significant number of people, especially those who grew up in urban areas during this period, accepted the multiculturalism just mentioned as their own symbolic universe (Berger et al. 1973), or as an all-embracing social definition of reality which served as a compass for them in their daily relations with others, as well as in trying to find the meaning of life in general.

8 These kinds of value orientations, however, lost both formal and real political support after nationalistic parties came into power, especially after the outbreak of war. Those with the above-mentioned views, even when they were of the same ethnic background as those in power in certain areas, became outsiders in a same way as members of minority ethnic groups in these areas of Yugoslavia, and especially of B & H. The new all-embracing definition of reality, which now became dominant and which had the full institutional support of the authorities (most frequently even a formal one in a legal sense), was based on the new principles according to which the focus was given to ethnic homogeneity and inter-ethnic exclusivity (Slavnic 2000).

By deciding to leave, Jasna definitely refused to jeopardise her basic life principles for the apparent safety which she would obtain in return from the “new authorities”. She preferred to leave, seeking protection and a new kind of safety in a world which she believed to be organised on the same principles as her own. That was a central motive for Jasna’s departure and surely the most radical decision in her life hitherto.

3. The Beginning of the War: the Forming and Closing of Ethnic Circles

The everyday life of a modern human being is, according to Giddens,³ determined mainly by the existence of a sense of “ontological security”, which can be defined as a sense of continuity and order between things and events in the environment one is living in. This sense is possible only within the predictable “routines” on which everyday life has been organised. The predictability of these routines contributes to maintaining human beings’ ontological security, while it is primarily protected by “trust” and “tact”, states Giddens. Thus, a contemporary human being cannot enjoy peace and safety, i.e., a normal everyday life, unless there is trust in other people (relying on their reliability and honesty or love), a trust in “abstract systems” (relying on experts’ knowledge and technology) and finally, also an orientation towards the future (organised and controlled) as a tool for connecting the past and the present. However, in order for this whole system to function, according to Giddens, a modern human being develops a whole range of skills for communicating with other people (i.e., “tact”). “Tact” (respect for the needs and requirements of the people with whom communication is established) not only contributes to the production and reproduction of everyday human beings’ interactions, but it also corrects and mitigates possible disturbances in these interactions, which, if they develop, can lead to conflict and consequently bring ontological security into question. However, in certain life situations, namely “critical situations” (such as, for instance inter-ethnic clashes), these disturbances are of such an intensity that they cannot be softened by “tact.”

Then we have a situation of a radical disturbance of the normal everyday life which an individual is used to and feels safe in. This is when times of anxiety, fear and helplessness begin.

All this had a very significant effect on Jasna. She strongly believed that society was rationally organised. She was convinced that, as she was responsible for performing her job, others were behaving as she was, especially those responsible for the functioning of important social institutions. She expected to get the salary she deserved regularly each month for her work. With that salary she expected to provide for the normal life of her family, and that she would get assistance in local health institutions if she became sick; and, if her safety or property was in danger, that she would get help from the police. She also expected that, in situations when the only alternative to the political compromise was a civil war, politicians would quite naturally try to avoid the war. Finally, she could not even imagine that professional soldiers could be so “irresponsible” as to start shelling the civilian population in the town in which they themselves lived. However, with the outbreak of the war this whole construction, which had created normal everyday life, broke apart, and the outset of war caught Jasna unprepared and scared:

/ .../ For me everything was scary. First, on 19th May, they shot 19 airplane rockets at the town. That was terrible. Everything had started earlier in Sarajevo, but unless it happens to you, one simply cannot believe that the same thing can happen in your town as well. And that is exactly what happened. When it started in Croatia, you did not believe it would come to Bosnia. When it started in Sarajevo, you did not believe it would come to your town as well. But all of a sudden it started. Then it became frequent, almost every day we were shelled. I was shivering with fear all the time. But I still went to work, although I had to run all the way from one building entrance to another / .../

Obviously, Jasna was still trying to perform the daily routines with which she was building her own personal security and that of her family under normal pre-war conditions. She was going to work regularly, although for more than a year, she worked for only some DM 3 (€ 1.50) of monthly salary. For this money she could buy three eggs per month. By doing this, she probably sub-consciously tried to postpone a complete disintegration of the world that she lived in before the war. However, the situation became more and more difficult. It was particularly difficult for her to see her children deprived of regular schooling – the only reliable investment on which people such as Jasna can build their future. Besides, the family descended into a state of literal starvation.

It is really hard to believe, but there were situations, not that we were completely without anything to eat, but we had only flour, and I prepared some kind of curd-cake or something else made of dough, for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

A general feeling of insecurity in town was also growing, especially for ethnically mixed families in the situation of strained ethnic polarisation.

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Nobody hurt me personally, probably because I was not a nationalist. I did not provoke anybody, so I remained in a normal relationship with those friends whom I had known previously, and I did not come into contact with other people during those times. The only problem was when one was in such a situation for too long. Then one had to meet with other people: when we were in the basements that we used as shelters we heard them saying that all Serbs should be killed, or if the conflict was between Croats and Muslims, that all Croats should be killed, and so on. I personally could not take part in those exchanges, but with time, it got to you and you could not endure it any more.

Moreover, as time went by, life became more and more difficult, and the end was nowhere in sight. The time came when it had been almost a year since the war started. Eventually, one of the family friends from Croatia contacted them and offered to be hosts for them, if they decided to leave B & H. But Jasna was still indecisive.

/.../ the situation was getting worse and conflicts between Croats and Muslims could be seen on the horizon. I felt terribly at that time. My town was somehow in the middle. Serbs were on one side and Croats on the other. I was constantly afraid that somebody might come into my home who would not care who or what you were. And this is why the children were crying non-stop. So finally we decided to go in whatever way we could.

4. The Various Dimensions of Chaos

Immediately upon reading Jasna's first descriptions of her departure from her home town one can notice a kind of discontinuity. That is, the picture the reader forms about Jasna's situation as a whole, her motives, her strategies and her plans for future, is all of a sudden disturbed by her statement that she prepared everything for the trip in one day and that her intention was to remain in Croatia only for a month, and only to get some rest. This is obviously in opposition to the depth of suffering she went through together with her family, during more than a year of living under wartime conditions, as well as in opposition to the care with which she planned every detail of the trip. However, this "spare line" for expressing Jasna's own motives for departure is actually a second part of her "basic line" (which is planned in detail), that is, the viewpoint behind which stand her real motives and goals, as well as real strategies for solving her own particular problem. Actually, this is some kind of a mental preparation for departure, a rationalisation, prepared in advance, of the situation for her own and sake of others in case of failure. But this is not all. This is only a beginning of creation

of the strategy, which we, together with Giddens (1984), can classify among the “strategies for facing a critical situation”. Jasna joins the mass in a flight and faces an experience where the life of a refugee hangs by a thread of coincidences, under conditions of hopelessness and unpredictability. At the same time it is a framework for establishing a new “normal” life.

And then one day I heard on the radio that a special convoy was to be organised. That was a twenty-kilometre long convoy. Vehicles were from everywhere. The wounded, the dead were also a part of the convoy. / ... / I got prepared in one day only. The plan was to leave for a month and take a rest from everything, and then to return. It never occurred to me that I was leaving for good, that is, for a long period of actually staying away from home. As soon as the convoy started, a “madness” began. The UNPROFOR [United Nations Protection Forces], which were supposed to safeguard us, were nowhere in sight. Eventually two vehicles showed up, only to disappear again. The general atmosphere was such that as soon as we started I wanted to go back. It took us six days to get to Croatia. We were even shot at on the way. During the night you would just see some people appearing in front of the bus (nobody knew who they were or which army they belonged to, but all had those bands round their heads like “Rambo’s”), and the convoy had split up long before and only single vehicles were moving down the road, several kilometres apart.

In this story Jasna went through some dimensions of the hell in which one finds oneself during a war. These are dimensions of fear, humiliation, helplessness, but also include the emotion of a “real” ethnic belonging.

Anyway, after six days we came to the border. However, once there, we saw several buses returning from the border itself. Men on board were stripped naked and women and kids from three buses were squeezed into one bus. Standing side by side packed into one bus they showed the rest of us that “you will not enter Croatia.” But we went on further, towards the border. At the actual border crossing we stopped. People on the bus started singing and crying out of happiness since we finally made it, after such a difficult trip. Someone came onto the bus to check our documents. I had a guarantee letter for entering Croatia / ... / since I did not want to travel in uncertainty. I was afraid anyway. Then three soldiers came in with their guns pointed and said: “Those who are now going to be told to leave the bus, should leave without a word. If anyone says one word, the whole bus will be sent back.” I was a bit scared at that very moment, but then again I thought: “I have documents, so there’s no problem.” However, I have a Muslim surname, which cannot be missed.

In this war ethnic belonging was the first criterion that designated the gulf between safety and protection on one side and torture and expulsion on the other. A second criterion was ethnic purity. Every ethnic mixture brought nothing but problems. Although not a Bosniak herself, Jasna was been treated as one since her husband was a Bosniak.

When they approached me, a soldier read no more than my surname and said: "Missus, take your bags and get out." He did not even look at the documents. Till that moment kids were not quite crying, but now both started screaming. And I was actually the only person with kids on the bus, as nobody else had dared to take kids on such a risky trip. I wanted to say that simply I had all the necessary documents: "I have" He interrupted me and yelled: "Missus, I said if one word was uttered everybody would be out. Take you bags and get out." The bus driver took my bags out and put them outside. This did not happen only to me. Almost half the bus was thrown out – all those who were not pure Croats. Then the buses took off and we who remained behind, from all three buses, gathered at one place not knowing what to do next.

If we now try to summarise this situation, we can see that on one hand we have "ethnic belonging" and "ethnic purity" that completely define reality. Exclusion of all outsiders and "mixed" people was brutal, deep and complete, but because of the chaotic war situation, it was neither general nor systematic. On the other hand this fact, actually, enables people to cope with particular situations.

Then I enquired what I could do. I had made some enquiries beforehand, in case they were to throw us out at the border, and I had been told that there were always taxi drivers ready to transport you for DM 300. So, I had prepared this money for such an option. I went to the place where the taxis gathered and asked if anyone was willing to take us to Croatia (but one had to whisper all the time). They said they would, but for DM 300. This was the amount of money I had to pay to be driven just 2 kilometres to the border and to be left on the other side. As I did not have any other option, I accepted it. Then I and another woman with two kids squeezed into the taxi. After a while we came to the border. The taxi driver went out and whispered something to the border guards for some time. Then they approached us and searched through our bags, they even checked my make-up, deodorants and the like. Eventually they let us through by giving us only a five-day permit of stay in Croatia.

Jasna arrived in Zagreb the next day without a dime in her pocket. This was when the second phase of uncertainty began: the phase of struggle for survival under conditions of poverty and refugee stigma. She spent ten months in Zagreb under very difficult financial and social conditions. At that time the general situation in Croatia was very difficult, especially for refugees. The state, which was at war itself, had at the same time to care for almost 300,000 refugees from B & H alone (Valenta et al. 2011). Besides, the general political climate in Croatia was not very much different from the one in B & H.

All this resulted in a very ambivalent behaviour of the state towards refugees. On one hand refugees were registered by the appropriate state bodies and institutions, thus the state was fulfilling its obligations in accordance with domestic and international laws and humanitarian conventions; this then became the basis for the international promotion of the Croatian refugee policy and politics in general, as well as the basis for securing international financial assistance (usually

in hard, stable currency, which was so needed at the time), in order to be able to care for these refugees.

However, on the other hand, the refugees themselves frequently had little benefit from this assistance and the refugee cards gave them more headaches than concrete benefits. Additional problems for Jasna began when the conflict between Bosniaks and Croats started in B & H. This merely shows that refugees, obviously, cannot avoid the political dimensions of a conflict in the country of their origin even when they are outside of its borders, where once again they become the victims of ethnic categorisation.

/ ... / It was horrible to listen to what was going on and wherever we stayed we had a lot of problems. For instance, at one place I stayed, everything was all right with those people and we visited each other. They considered me as one of them, a Croat, until one day my husband called over the phone and introduced himself. Then they made a whole circus out of it (this was actually the time of conflicts between Bosniaks and Croats). They were saying: "We are feeding their wives here and they are killing our people there". They refused to talk to me from that moment.

Subsequently, Jasna again found herself in a situation where on one hand she did not experience even a part of what made her become a refugee at a first place, and on the other hand she had exhausted all the possibilities of her current situation, so that she was compelled to make yet another radical decision. There were only two alternatives. Either she went back home, to a war where she would face the very same material problems and moral dilemmas because of which she left her home town, or she would proceed with searching for her lost security and dignity.

When she became really desperate, not knowing how to solve her problems, somebody advised her: "Well, why don't you go to some other country?". She was told that many were leaving for Sweden; and that she probably would not be sent back from there since she had small children and she had been in a war-stricken country for such a long period. "Sweden is good for children and, generally speaking, it's a most humane country." But she was still suspicious and cautious. Finally, she made the decision to go. This decision was made in the very same way as the one to leave B & H, that is, when all the other possibilities to stay had been exhausted. There is another similarity to the situation before her first departure: once again Jasna made detailed and long preparation for leaving.

/ ... / For six weeks in a row I went to the bus station to make enquiries with bus drivers who were driving to Sweden. These drivers always told me not to worry since nobody had been sent back. When I finally made the decision to go, I borrowed money for the trip. Actually, I heard that I needed to have some money with me since otherwise I could have been sent back while crossing Austria or Germany, whose authorities were allegedly afraid that some of the refugees might stay in their countries. In any case, I had DM 400 as a reserve, just in case something happened to the kids on the journey. Well, that's how we set out on the trip / ... /

5. Encounter with the North-Western European Normality of Refugee Life

There were no problems whatsoever during the journey. After their arrival they were taken to the big reception centre in Malmö which was intended for the temporary accommodation of refugees until they should obtain more permanent accommodation. The next day they were given an apartment to share in one of housing areas of Malmö. Jasna was happy as she finally found a world that functioned properly: A world where there was order and rules were respected. This was a world in which the environment was such that she was sure she would find again her inner peace and safety. After all:

/.../ soon we started receiving financial assistance which was enough for us. I was saving some money from that assistance, so in two months I managed to return all the money I had borrowed. Finally, I did not owe anything to anybody. That is how I am; I'll rather eat less, but I'll repay my debts on time. After all, those people were so good to us and they helped us by lending us money.

Generally speaking, that whole period was fine for Jasna as well as for the kids. Her children finally started attending school; they also went to a swimming pool, so they were overjoyed. In addition they were satisfied with their accommodation, an apartment they shared with another woman. This situation lasted for some two months. In a meantime, Jasna was interviewed by the police. They asked her about everything and she gave them detailed descriptions. After two months they were moved to a refugee camp near the south Swedish town of Hässleholm. The accommodation was worse there, as they did not have their own apartment. However, this did not bother them too much, since they expected their case to be definitely solved soon.

5.1 Dimensions of Helplessness: Refugees in a Legal Labyrinth

All of a sudden, two families from the camp received invitations to see a lawyer. Others had no clue as to what was going on, so they made some enquiries with responsible refugee camp officers. The answer they had was: “/.../ you know, a lawyer will help you get your residence permits earlier.” This calmed them down; a majority was however closely watching what would happen to those who received invitations to see a lawyer. They analysed and discussed these cases among themselves, looking for the reasons why a lawyer was assigned to those people. After a while, another woman went to see a lawyer. Afterwards she explained that she was told that some people might possibly be sent home, but there was a chance for her to avoid that outcome if she managed to acquire some additional documents from Croatia. As this woman had a Croatian address and

not a Bosnian one in her passport, nobody from the camp was very much excited about that either.

Yet not long afterwards six more invitations to see a lawyer came to the camp and one of them was for Jasna. At first, Jasna saw this as a consequence of her insisting to solve her case earlier, in order to be able to be reunited with her husband as soon as possible. So she took it calmly again. She was the first one for an interview.

/ ... / The interview started with his checking the data of my case, and then he said: "You know what, the situation is as follows. 99 per-cent of you will be returned and you must be ready for that. You will be all expelled from this country." As he said it, I froze. Then I thought that the man might be crazy. What's wrong with him? To be returned! I had never even thought about that. The whole the time I had been thinking only how I could get a permit as soon as possible. And the only question was time: whether I was going to get it immediately or maybe after two months. "Where are they going to send us?", I asked because it was not clear to me. "To Croatia", he said. "Why?", I enquired. "Because you are Croatian citizen." Then I tried to explain to him that I was from a mixed marriage, that I was alone with two kids / ... / He told me that he could understand my situation and that he maybe might help me, but a majority of Croatian passport-holders would be sent back, for sure.

When she left a lawyer's office, Jasna was shaking all over from the shock. She only managed to say to the others: "He said they would send us all back". They did not believe her, although her appearance made them feel fearful and insecure. However, the lawyer gave more hope about the future to all the others who were interviewed after Jasna that day. He told everyone that they might possibly be sent back, but hopefully everything was going to be all right. In any case, he was not as direct and negative as he had been towards Jasna.

Jasna was in shock for quite a long after the first meeting with the lawyer:

/ ... / as soon as we got back to the camp, I started crying and did not stop for fifteen days. I did not even eat anything. Other people thought that I was really going to die. I also took on an unnatural black colour. They tried to comfort me. They were telling me how I had misunderstood everything because the lawyer had given them different information. I just kept on saying how he told me that 99 per-cent of us were going to be sent back. / ... / altogether, that was killing me. My son was also crying non-stop, as he saw me crying. And I could not change my behaviour and regain my self-control. And he was crying and crying. Then many other women from the camp started crying, as well, when they saw him crying. Really, it was very difficult for the kids / ... /

5.2 In the Shadow of Uncertainty: The Struggle to Stay, Mobilisation, Refugee Culture and New Co-Operation Networks

It was an additional burden when the psychosis which was created in the camp because of the danger of possible expulsion had become a reality. Nothing else was a subject of discussion in the camp. They only talked about who was the next to have an appointment with the lawyer, and then what they were told. Several weeks afterwards, when Jasna had recovered a little, she asked for a meeting with some refugee camp officer, who also tried to comfort her. Events had however already succeeded each other rather fast. People started getting negative decisions only ten days after meeting the lawyer. Before long, Jasna received one, as well. Only a few days before that, she visited the lawyer again, but this time he talked longer with her and promised to do everything to help her. After receiving her negative decision, she met her lawyer for the third time. She asked him to write a one more request. He did indeed write the request and sent it by fax. He also put the note "URGENT" on it. Only half an hour later, however, the answer came that there was no reason whatsoever to postpone her return, as she was a Croatian citizen and Croatia was obliged to take care of her.

There was a panic in the camp. Some of its residents had already returned to Croatia. Others were trying their best to avoid the same destiny. Among other things a hunger strike was organised. Jasna took part in it, as well. Journalists were also invited. In the meantime, Jasna contacted the Red Cross. She also called some of her acquaintances from the former Yugoslavia who had lived in Sweden for quite a long time. She hoped that they could have some influential friends who could help. All of them promised to do something, but to no avail:

/ ... / Only then I realised that nothing could be done to help. We also ceased with our hunger strike in the meantime, as it did not have any effect at all. They proceeded with sending people back. A decision on my expulsion was already in the hands of the police. At that time, I had already decided to hide, as I did not have any other option. Several days before I was scheduled for return, I left the camp.

This was a beginning of a new experience; hiding from the Swedish government officials and the beginning of co-operation with civil societies (NGOs) and Swedish families. All this also contributed to establishing a new identity, while she was stretched between a feeling of helplessness and a struggle for the right to stay.

The period in hiding lasted for more than ten months. First they hid with some friends who offered them an apartment, which actually belonged to their son who travelled a great deal so the apartment was empty most of the time. They spent three months there. Jasna had earlier managed to save some two thousand Swedish kronas and that was all they had for that three months. They were forced

to a maximum saving routine. The above-mentioned friends helped them from time to time with food, but they did not give them any money. At the same time Jasna was trying to get permanent and more reliable assistance from a church. In November, they moved in with a new host, still in Malmö, where they stayed until after Christmas. One problem was that those people frequently had guests and it was dangerous to keep refugees in the house. This is why each time that guests were coming, they had to move temporarily to another apartment. Eventually, those who were helping them came to the conclusion that it would be the best if they stayed in the apartment until further notice. And so it was: that is where they stayed until the Government announced the decision for a temporary residence permit, in May 1995. Here is how Jasna describes this period:

/ ... / The people who were helping us were really kind to us. We had place to stay and food to eat. Still, the worst was the pressure and constant fear. Can you believe that for ten months, almost eleven, we never left the house because I was so afraid? I spent the whole time by the window. Each time the main entrance opened, I panicked with fear. At the time, I still did not speak Swedish, so it made me even more insecure. Whoever parked in front of the house (firemen, postman, garbage collectors), I was afraid. I even did not allow my kids to watch TV; we were whispering all the time.

Shortly after that, the church decided to help them and they managed to stay there until May 1995, when they got temporary residence permits for six months.

5.3 The Temporary Permit

After the announcement about a temporary permit, Jasna reported to the Swedish Immigration Board (SIV) again. The problem of accommodation was solved as follows: Jasna found an apartment and the SIV subsidised the rental value with one thousand Swedish kronas. Although the apartment was small and modestly furnished, and they had to pay part of the rent themselves from the assistance they were getting for food, Jasna and kids were satisfied with this kind of solution. Besides, the children again started attending school and Jasna started a language course. Nevertheless, when talking about their situation, she mentioned problems connected to “temporariness”. They were still special citizens, singled out from normal life and the necessary assistance that was guaranteed to “old” refugees and “normal” citizens.

/ ... / The kids were good at school. They already knew some Swedish, so it made their lives easier. I, for one, asked for a psychologist immediately in order to get some advice after everything I had been through. My son, for instance, was very sensitive, he was afraid of everything and cried easily. He was annoyed with everything. For example, it took me ten minutes every morning to put his socks on, because it irritated him. The same was with my daughter. They also had difficulties in socialising with other kids.

They almost did not talk to anybody. It concerned me a lot. But I was told I could not get a psychologist. I also asked that I and the kids might go for a teeth check-up. The answer was the same. Thus, the temporary residence differed from our earlier situation only in the fact that we did not have to hide any more. Otherwise, we could not plan anything.

Regarding their future, definite solution of their case, Jasna is pessimistic. She points at new manipulations of refugees whereby they become a currency, used by various countries and various political interests in achieving their goals, without the slightest possibility for them to take any part in creating their own future. This is actually the essence of the practice of temporary protection policy.

6. (Non-)Belonging; Causes and Consequences

Jasna's refugee odyssey illustrates several complex social processes connecting micro/macro, global/national, local/individual levels. Firstly, her experience of war and of her escape from her home town is an example of what the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina looked like and its potential impact. The refugees were displaced by means of a systematic and planned deprivation of the feeling of ontological security, i.e., the confidence in the people among whom and the system in which they lived. What remained were only the fear and uncertainty. In Jasna's case, these feelings were further strengthened during her stay in Croatia – which finally made her decide to leave for Sweden.

Secondly, her experience of being refugee in Sweden well illustrates the Swedish new refugee policy established in the mid-1990s, which was based on temporary refugee protection and repatriation.⁴ The rhetoric in this new refugee policy tried to focus on the argument that its main aim was helping refugees in a better and more effective way. This argument is based on the assumption that by being removed from their national communities, refugees become automatically deprived of their identity, traditions, and culture (Malkki 1995). Hence, the best possible solution of the refugee tragedy was – according to this discourse – repatriation, when the situation in their homeland normalized. In its concrete everyday practice, the new refugee policy appeared to focus in the first place on the protection of the Swedish borders, while real help to refugees to deal with their tragedy was of secondary importance (Aleinikkoff 1995).

In fact Jasna was exposed to a sort of twofold expulsion. She was deprived of her right to belong to her homeland, while at the same time she was refused protection in Sweden. In order to explain the reasons for this sort of expulsion, we need to recall Hannah Arendt's (1968) discussion of ambivalent relations between contemporary ("liberal democratic") nation-states and human rights. It is the problem of the conflict between the sovereignty of the individual and the sovereignty of the people, a problem that neither liberal political theory nor "liberal" political praxis have yet resolved. The Declaration of the Rights of Man

and of the Citizen, the fundamental legacy of the French revolution, was according to Arendt (*ibid.*, 290) a turning point in history regarding individual human rights. It represented a definite emancipation from the God or any authority other than Man himself/herself as a source of, as well as the ultimate goal of, law. Since “Men are born free and remain free and equal in rights”, and “The aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and immutable rights of man”, no special law was needed to protect the Rights of Man, because all laws are supposed to rest on these rights, explains Arendt (*ibid.*, 291). The sovereignty of the people was at the same time proclaimed as a rule in the name of Man, and it was reducible to the sovereignty of the (individual) Man. In practice however – since individual rights could only be effectively guaranteed and protected by the nation state – the Right of Man has become a part of the right of people to sovereign self-government (*ibid.*, 291). Thus, as Bridget Cotter (2005) summarized it, the conflict between the nation and the individual results in the nation winning, as the state has become an instrument of “the nation”, rather than a protector of the individual. An individual’s right to have rights may be guaranteed only for those who belong to nation-states.

There are number of consequences that the above-described, and unresolved, contradiction produces in the contemporary world. Jasna’s story sheds light on several of them. First, it gives us an alternative perspective on the relationship between the war in the Balkans and its international context. The predominant dichotomous image of the civilized and democratic West versus the savage and undemocratic Balkans appeared to be very questionable. Instead of this image, one may argue that the war in the Balkans constituted a legitimate quest of the Balkan peoples to achieve what all other civilized peoples already possess, namely sovereign, self-determining nation states. Or, conversely, the “border closure policy” by the West can also be understood as a sign that Western European nations are not so far from “Balkan savageness”. In this context it could be said, with a paraphrasing of Schierup (1995), that a necessary condition for “de-Balkanization” of the Balkans is “de-Balkanization” of Europe. Indeed, judging from the way in which Jasna was received in the West, it became clear that universal principles of humanism, solidarity and democracy only existed as a cover for the realization of these countries’ own particularistic national interests.

Secondly, her story questions the dominant concept of the relationship between nationalism and modernity. According to the prevailing notion of modernity today, with roots in Parsons’s evolutionary macro-theory from the 1950s, ethno-national movements and social exclusion are considered to be a pre-modern phenomenon on the one hand (Imhof 1997), while the “Western society” on the other hand is regarded as a sociologically ideal type for the “modern age” (*ibid.*, 58). At the same time, modernity is, according to Joas (1999), constructed as a peaceful project in itself. This picture continues to be reproduced in the dominant public, political and scientific discourses, not least

despite the fact that a number of eminent scientists (Bauman 1989; Wieworka 1997; Joas 1999; Joas 2003; Imhof 1997; Barkawi & Laffey 2001) have already pointed out that nationalism, racism, war and violence are permanent parts of modernity and not just by-products of its historical development patterns (Joas 1999, 457). In this context, refugees are not kind of anomaly in the international states system: they are creation of and an integral part of this system (Haddad 2003).

Jasna's life story calls into question even the currently dominant perception of the relationship between nationalism and democracy.⁵ Nationalism is for most of us completely incompatible with democracy. Political activities in a democratic society must be based on a political ethics that focuses on responsibility (the ethics of responsibility⁶), which among other things means that democratic countries are inherently peaceful. By the way, it is well known that democracies do not wage war against each other, as is often argued by protagonists of this view. In contrast, nationalist politicians in undemocratic countries base their political activities on so-called conviction ethics, or ethics of absolute ends. In reality, however, this is not about the dilemma between the ethics of responsibility and the ethics of ultimate ends, but about the question of what is the highest principle of political responsibility. In our time, which both Jasna's history and also the results of relevant research (see e.g. Joppke 1999, 262) clearly indicate, the highest principle is arguably the nation and national interests. Nationalism is thus not merely the historical basis that all currently known democracies are built on, but also, in terms of everyday politics, it is always superior to democracy. Here I mean that we are always willing rather to sacrifice some of our democratic principles rather than some of our national interests. The current trend in the reduction of our Western democratic procedures and liberal citizenships and human rights in connection with the so-called "war against terrorism" is perhaps the best example of what I state here.

7. Instead of a Conclusion

Jasna's story however is not just a story of the 1990s, at least not to the extent that it relates to the radical changes in the Swedish immigrant policy in this period. These changes were, in fact, just the beginning of what is today one of the main features of our everyday life, not only in Sweden but also in most other Western countries.

Changes in immigration policy since then are necessarily linked to the wider political and economic processes of the withdrawal of the welfare state, accompanied by erosion of social rights and labor re-commodification (Slavnic 2010; Munck et al. 2011). Tighter immigration control did not prevent or even reduce immigration, but it criminalized it instead, with all its consequences (intended or unintended) (Jordan & Düvell 2002; Anderson 2010). The

increased insecurity and legal uncertainty to which immigrants have increasingly been exposed, make them vulnerable, and places them in a position that Bernhard et al. (2007) call a “precarious legal status”. Later on this legal status even frames their position in the labor market (Anderson 2010), providing unlimited opportunities to their employers to continue exploiting them (Jordan & Düvell 2002; Jones et al. 2006; Wright & McKay 2007).

Furthermore, relevant research (see, e.g., Goldring & Landolt 2011) shows that their subordinate status in the labor market continues even after they have resolved their legal status and become “full citizens”. So their precarious citizenship status continues to be the engine of their further precarisation and exploitation on the labor market (Munck et al. 2011). To paraphrase Foti (2005), they become “hireable on demand, available on call, exploitable at will, and fireable on a whim.” In this sense, precarisation is not related to only one sphere of the life, such as work, but encompasses all aspects of life of this new class (which is called the “precariat”) as well as their past, present and future (Barbier et al. 2002; Tsianos & Papadopoulos 2006).

This is what is happening at the level of the individual fate of these people. On a broader level, the current structural processes of growing precarization are part “of the latest phase of migration /which/ dovetails with the rise of neoliberal capitalism, for which migration serves as an important vehicle for the flexibilization of labour markets and a depreciation of the cost of labour” (Munck et al. 2011, 254–255; see also Castles 2011; Schierup & Ålund 2014; Likic-Brboric et al. 2013). Mass migration still seems to be a necessary precondition for capital accumulation (Hardt & Negri 2000; Bauder 2006). Another aspect that needs to be emphasized here is that it is not immigration and immigrants as such that contribute capital accumulation, but the immigrants’ deprived position in the labour market. Their exclusion is what makes them attractive for a capitalist economy. By being systematically pushed into the secondary sectors of the labour market, migrants help stabilize it for non-migrants (Bauder 2006). At the same time and in long run they also help the neoliberal reconstruction of labour market as such, which means worsened working conditions and work protection for all.

All these processes are helped by actual citizenship policies. Citizenship and the regulation of labour markets are inseparable from each other, where citizenship appears to be a legal mechanism that sorts workers into different, hierarchically organized categories (Bauder 2006, 26). Non-citizens (but also precarious citizens) are systematically pushed towards the lower end of this hierarchy. Non-citizens, as people per definition lacking citizenship rights, are rightless, powerless and vulnerable and this is exactly what makes them easy to slot into the toughest sectors of the labour market. This is also what makes them attractive for advanced capitalist economies today. “[T]hey are valuable just because they are vulnerable” (Bauder 2006).

Jasna's story seems to be illustrative of these current political, economic and social processes. The precarious legal status that she experienced in the mid-1990s was to become the key characteristic of current immigration and labour market policies – not only in Sweden, but in most of the so-called “advanced economies”. Capital accumulation has always been based on exploiting human labour – what is new in current trends is that it increasingly relies on exploiting human dignity, also.

Notes

- ¹ Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- ² For a short description of the situation of this group refugees, as well as related statistics, refer to Slavnic (2000).
- ³ For the notions “ontological security”, “routine”, “trust”, “abstract systems”, “tact”, “critical situation”, which will be used in this text, see Giddens (1984; 1990; 1991).
- ⁴ For a more detailed account on the trends in Swedish immigration and refugee policy at that time, see Slavnic (2000; 2008).
- ⁵ Nationalism is not only segregated from democracy, but also, as Wimmer & Glick Schiller (2002) point out, geographically far removed from our democratic societies and link it primarily with the savage Balkans, as in our example.
- ⁶ On relationship between Max Weber's “ethics of responsibility” and “ethics of ultimate ends” see Slavnic (2004).

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