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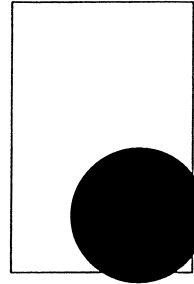
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# Misplaced masculinities

Status loss and the location of gendered subjectivities amongst 'non-transnational' Bosnian refugees

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## Abstract

In order to understand gendered patterns of coping that have been noted amongst a variety of migrants, this article analyses localized trajectories of subjectivity that structure early coping strategies with downward social mobility amongst a section of refugees from the Bosnian 1992–5 war. In particular, it investigates the 'misplacement' – as refugee men and as Bosnian men – experienced by middle-aged, professional, educated fathers who had fled Bosnian towns. These men tended to stubbornly cling to their remembered personhood, located there where they recalled having counted as someone. Yet they were disengaged from 'transnational' social fields, for the place where they recalled having counted as someone was not present-day Bosnia-Herzegovina, but previous forms of organized sociality in that same geographical location. The article draws attention to the specific interplay of general experiences of migration to western states in the 1990s, 'ethnic cleansing' and refugee policies, and specific remembered localized life-trajectories in the Socialist Yugoslav Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina and their sudden end.

## Key Words

Bosnia-Herzegovina • masculinity • place • refugees • transnationalism

## INTRODUCTION

Numerous writings have traced constructions of masculinities and femininities in migration (see Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999; Sørensen and Stepputat, 2001), with many focusing on changing household relations through women's increased participation in wage labour (e.g. Lawson, 1998; Pessar, 1999: 589; Pratt and Yeoh, 2003: 161). For the purpose of this article, a key finding in such work is that, if and when women's paid employment increases their authority within the household to some extent, this sometimes brings about changes in household relations that are sufficiently sizeable for men

to be disturbed by them (Pessar and Mahler, 2003: 827). Men's frustration is then highlighted, as are the anxieties, increased misogyny and abuse that characterize some of their responses (Espiritu, 1999: 640–1; Mills, 2003: 49–53). Amongst refugees, on the involuntary pole of the migration continuum, such patterns are reported to be even more prevalent (López Zarzosa, 1998: 190–1; Schrijvers, 1999: 323–4; Shahidian, 1996: 63; Ui, 1991: 170). In this article I pitch my argument on a rather generalizing level in order to elaborate on the literature's near-unanimous agreement on systematically gendered coping patterns in migration. Rather than illustrating that, to put it bluntly, women cope better, I take this as my starting point, seeking explanations in localized gendered patterns of status recognition.

Migrant men who are seen, and may see themselves, as out of place, have come to play a central role in various contemporary moral panics and policy discourses. They are often accused of eschewing 'integration' into receiving societies in favour of a long-distance relation with their place of origin. Scholars working in the 'transnational' paradigm have refuted such simple categorizations, showing that migrants may actively engage with both contexts (Basch et al., 1994). They have also demonstrated how migrant connections with the context of origin may become key resources in the negotiation of status hierarchies (e.g. Goldring, 2002; Goodson-Lawes, 1993; Salih, 2000). This article focuses on migrant men who *were* largely disengaged from their context of residence and explores the role of place in their coping strategies with multiple losses, including status loss. Bringing together secondary data from Australia, the USA and western Europe (referred to as the 'Western states'), with my own findings in the Netherlands and Australia,<sup>1</sup> I analyse localized gendered trajectories of personhood that structure early coping strategies with downward social mobility amongst a section of refugees from the Bosnian, 1992–5 war. These Bosnian refugee men, I show, tended to evoke and celebrate their place of origin with gusto. Yet I argue this did not amount to 'transnationalism', for what they cherished was not a place that was still there but *their* place in a time-space context that had been wiped out.

The 1990s Bosnian war, predominantly legitimized and represented in nationalist terms (Jansen, 2005), involved gendered forms of forced displacement and emplacement. In directly war-affected areas, able-bodied men often stayed behind on their own, whereas elsewhere their forced or voluntary military involvement led them away while women stayed put. In 'ethnic cleansing', women and children were often deported to 'their' territory, whereas men were more likely to be killed or 'disappeared'. As in other conflicts, women thus constituted to a large majority amongst the millions displaced in the post-Yugoslav wars. Initially many women lived in uncertainty about their male relatives in war-time refugee camps. Later, some men joined them in displacement, but numerical female over-representation persisted. In combination with the political and professional engagements of authors this explains why most writings on post-Yugoslav refugees focus on women's experiences, interpreting men's practices largely by extrapolation. In contrast, this article puts men at the centre of the analysis. Let us look at an example.

### **IZO AND ALMA BEGOVIĆ**

The year is 2000. The place is a small but neat council flat in a Melbourne suburb. Meet the Begovići, both in their early 50s. During the 1990s war in their native Bosnia, they

paid most of their savings to secure Izo's release from forced labour and his safe passage, with Alma and two teenage children, to a German refugee camp. Later, avoiding repatriation, they resettled on humanitarian visas in Australia, where they secured citizenship and disability pensions. The Begovićs' emotional and financial preoccupations focused heavily on their children's future. For Alma, this was reflected in her working a 'black' job as a cleaner and managing most of the couple's contacts with public services, health care and, together with the children themselves, education. Izo, on the other hand, spent much time in the flat and paid regular weekday visits to a nearby bar where he observed others playing the slot-machines. During weekends, he was also active in a social club with fellow-townfolk refugees. In the flat, Izo engaged in some minor domestic tasks, preferring to watch instead, over and over, a video made by his brother, now in Germany, on a recent visit to the Bosnian town they hailed from. It pictured their house, of course, but it also contained images of a trip through the town itself, shot from inside a car, showing the town hall, the couple's workplace and various other public buildings. Unlike for Alma, who knew many non-Bosnians, four years had not been sufficient for Izo to become fluent in English.

In contrast to what may be concluded from this, Izo was a remarkably jovial man and an excellent raconteur. This I had much opportunity to enjoy, because he took the occasion of my presence – a Bosnian speaker who was familiar with their town – to revisit the fond memories he had of his previous life. Alma and he had been employed in middle-ranking positions in a socially-owned firm, with Izo having occupied a slightly higher and better-paid post than his wife. By no means elite persons, the Begovićs nevertheless recalled the sweetness of life before. Izo in particular emphasized that Yugoslav socialism had made possible a good life (as most people in and from the post-Yugoslav states, he referred to this as a 'normal' life, see Jansen, 2006, 2007a). He recalled the material comfort, relaxed work attitudes, freedom of movement and the easy-going nature of nationally 'mixed' town life (the Begovićs had declared their census nationality as Yugoslavs but their names made it easy for those who so wished to categorize them as Bosniaks-Muslims). Liberally sprinkling our conversation with references to people he had known – usually other men, in his workplace, in his sports club, in the town hall, in the neighbourhood – he indicated his connectedness in local webs of sociality. Izo also performed the common routine of evoking the *particularly good* life that had been enjoyed in Bosnia-Herzegovina, due to its inhabitants' celebrated sociality. When I first contacted him to see when we could meet, he exclaimed 'I have no house, no motherland, but I have more time than any other man in the world'. Referring to the various lacks that characterized his life, Izo thus also set himself apart from what Bosnians often described as the hurried, over-organized lifestyle in 'the West', projecting an image of himself as a different man onto his situation. Seen in the context of his current and previous actual daily practices – and the contrast between them – this exposed in one stroke some of the stark contradictions that characterized his predicament.

Izo Begović embodied many of the tensions of what I shall call 'misplacement', found amongst middle-aged, professional male refugees who fled Bosnian towns and resettled in western contexts. I use this term to evoke the particular contradictions of the predicament of such refugees in two ways. First, I deploy it to denote their inability-cum-reluctance, as migrant men *tout court* and as men on the refugee end of the

migration continuum more specifically, to either become 'transmigrants' or to incorporate themselves in their current place. This reflects the findings of a broad body of work on gender, status and social networks in migration. Second, I use 'misplacement' to refer to their experiences of their positionings as *Bosnian* men, associated with forms of masculinity that were considered inappropriate in their current context. This is not to provide a culturalist explanation of their predicament, much less to fall into the trap of methodological nationalism that besets so many studies of migration, but rather to trace the specific ways in which more generic patterns of gendered migration shaped up amongst certain Bosnian refugees. To understand the diverging coping strategies of men and women, I argue, we must take into account the particular gendered relations that position them with regard to the place(s) that they consider 'theirs'. I analyse the crystallization of those relations on the crossroads of general experiences of migration to the Western states in the 1990s, violent expulsion and subjection to refugee policies, and memories of specific localized life-trajectories and their sudden end. The latter dimension I develop less in terms of Bosnian (or Bosniak, Bosnian-Serbian, Bosnian-Croatian and so on) 'cultural traditions' than of a remembered insertion into forms of social organization proper to the socialist Yugoslav Bosnian context.

### INVISIBLE MIGRANTS? 'MIDDLE' BOSNIAN REFUGEES IN THE EARLY YEARS

There is, of course, considerable variety in Bosnian refugee experiences, but here, in order to crystallize some systematic gendered patterns and to generalize conceptually, I minimize diversity in terms of sociological features. My primary and secondary data pertain mainly to early coping strategies of a specific section of Bosnian refugees: formally educated, middle-aged parents who fled urban areas in Bosnia-Herzegovina – self-proclaimed secular Bosnians with various national backgrounds as well as persons in 'mixed' households. In terms of class, notoriously difficult to transpose from real-existing socialist to real-existing capitalist contexts, Yugoslav social scientists named this heterogeneous socio-economic category *srednji slojevi* ['middle layers']. It includes professionals as diverse as skilled technicians, teachers, nurses, sales reps, journalists and engineers (see Popović, 1987). Most had been employed in the Yugoslav socially-owned sector. Their positionings in such institutionalized sociality are crucial to my argument and, for lack of a more elegant term, I shall refer to this category as 'middle' refugees to remind the reader of my specific focus.

Since the beginning of the 1990s various Bosnian authorities have sought to mobilize their diasporic potential, first to wage war and then to fuel post-war reconstruction. Yet, like Izo Begović, the refugees I am speaking of here rejected these policies as both self-interested and nationally exclusive. Moreover, while many had travelled to western Europe before the 1990s as tourists, they had no or few pre-existing connections with their current place of residence, unlike many mainly rural and lower-class Bosnians who had previously worked in western states as *Gastarbeiteri* or who had known relatives in that situation. Most 'middle' refugees in the Netherlands and Australia in 2000–1, I found, were disengaged from the 'transnational' activity that has become such a focus in recent social research on migrants (on Bosnians, e.g. Al-Ali, 2002a, 2002b; Eastmond, 2006). They were decidedly not 'transmigrants' (Basch et al., 1994), much less 'long-distance nationalists' (Anderson, 1993). They did not vote

or engage in any political or commercial links, nor did they attend national-cultural or religious functions. They generally expressed disdain for what they considered the primitivism, bigotry and greed of prominent diasporic organizers. Highlighting a tension within the terminology of 'transnationalism', they saw the latter not as transgressive subjects blurring the nation-state model but as nationalists straddling state-borders, closely connected with the forces now dominant in the place they had once considered 'home'.

'Middle' refugees did not live in two states and their activities did not span Bosnia-Herzegovina and their current place of residence in any significant, concrete sense. Their limited practical engagements with post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina were channelled exclusively through narrow kinship channels and often aimed precisely at circumventing the structures of that new state (e.g. sending money to parents, helping out a niece with visa applications and similar activities). Six years after the war, many of those in the Netherlands and a few in Australia had visited Bosnia-Herzegovina (but not necessarily their pre-war place of residence), usually to sort out property restitution and to visit kin (the Begovićs had not). Such visits were short, and, since they were almost invariably undertaken during summer, the period actually spent in Bosnia-Herzegovina was further shortened to take holidays on the Adriatic coast in Croatia, in resorts traditionally popular with people from Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Several commentators on this text have expressed surprise at this lack of 'transnationalism', which, to me, indicates the relative invisibility of this section of Bosnian refugees and their exclusion from scholarly attention. Of course, coping strategies of 'middle' refugees may well have changed since, 2000–1. Glick-Schiller and Fouron (2001) have pointed out that we should think of a continuum with some migrants becoming more and others less involved in 'transnational' connections as they become incorporated in their new surroundings. Perhaps I was more likely to uncover those without such connections because, in contrast to most researchers on Bosnian refugees, I did not seek access through diasporic or refugee policy institutions or clubs but through personal networks.

It should be noted that such 'non-transnationalism' did not imply assimilation by any means. Izo Begović, and almost every other 'middle' refugee I have ever met, considered their Bosnian-ness a central dimension of their personhood, both in terms of how they explained their predicament and in how they evaluated it. Yet they did not translate their relative disengagement from their context of residence into active linkages with *current* Bosnia-Herzegovina. Focusing on 'middle' refugee men during the early period of coping with the losses brought about by displacement, I argue this can be understood in terms of relational constitutions of gendered subjectivity in localized, institutionalized webs of sociality past and present. This means placing their Bosnian-ness back where it belonged for them: in Yugoslav Bosnian everyday life. Again my own research trajectory probably played a role here: with me having carried out years of ethnographic research in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia, our rapport was usually established on the basis of common familiarity with places, practices and phenomena from across the former state, and not just from Bosnia-Herzegovina. As we shall see, a focus on persons with secular, urban, middle-layer, middle-age positionings warrants attention to the institutionalized sociality of Yugoslavia, which has been problematically absent from most studies of Bosnian refugees.

## BOSNIAN REFUGEES' GENDERED COPING WITH DOWNWARD SOCIAL MOBILITY

Like my own research, all studies of Bosnian refugees in the Western states I surveyed (Al-Ali, 2002a, 2002b; Čolić-Peisker, 2003; Eastmond, 1998, 2006; Franz, 2003a, 2003b; Grünenberg, 2006; Huisman and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2005; Kelly, 2003; Korać 2003a, 2003b; Marković and Manderson, 2000a, 2000b; Owens-Manley and Coughlan, 2000; Povržanović-Frykman, 2002; Waxman, 2001; Wight, 2000) highlight a predominance of nuclear households with a determined focus on livelihood matters and, particularly, on the future of children. At least in the short term, the vast majority of refugees – as well as most Bosnians who stayed put – experienced substantial downward social mobility during the 1990s. All this, of course, has been noted amongst a wide variety of migrants. Yet while the policy-imposed line, between refuge and migrancy is politically and theoretically counterproductive (see Jansen and Löfving, 2008), the sudden, violent nature of Bosnian displacement, and its articulation with the collapse of Yugoslav socialism, strengthened a widespread experience of accumulated loss. Namely, while some migrants on the voluntary pole of the continuum may strategically build in expectations of an immediate status drop with a long-term, often cross-generational eye on a higher position on the social ladder, the life trajectories of those suddenly expelled renders this pattern unlikely (see Al-Rasheed, 1992). In addition to possible war traumas and the pain of separation from loved ones, many Bosnian refugees had great difficulty in coping with this drop in wealth, status and recognition. I found this experience to be particularly prominent amongst urban, middle-aged, professional, formally educated refugees. A further pattern emerged: most studies show – explicitly or implicitly – that coping problems were especially sharp amongst men.

In my research in the Netherlands and Australia, I too was struck by the gendered discrepancies amongst 'middle' Bosnian refugees, women were more matter-of-fact in their attitudes towards their predicament and more resourceful in dealing with it. This contrasts strongly with the stereotypical image of displaced women as homemakers mourning the loss of the home that they had been intimately tied to. In fact, despite being the most prominent guardians of links with the place of origin (Goodson-Lawes, 1993: 282), migrant women are generally more reluctant to return than men (Brettell, 2000: 110; Mills, 2003: 49; Pessar, 1999: 587; Pessar and Mahler, 2003: 827; for class differentiation, see Espiritu, 1999; Sørensen, 1994: 113). Far from being incapacitated by sorrow, Bosnian refugee women in the Western states, like Alma Begović, quickly focused on securing socio-economic stability for their households, as well as on education, health, and legal issues. More so than men, they were willing and able to take on such challenges, considering their lives 'transplanted' and determined to start over again from the bottom of the economic ladder (Franz, 2003a: 101, 2003b: 147).

In the refugee camps in the region (Gilliland et al., 1995; Huseby-Darvas, 1995) and later as resettled refugees in the Western states, women were more likely to be employed than men, partly because jobs available to newly arriving foreigners were often in feminized sectors, but also because they were less reluctant to compromise and take on low-skill, low-pay jobs (Al-Ali, 2002a: 254; Franz, 2003a, 2003b; Korać, 2003a, 2003b; Owens-Manley and Coughlan, 2000). An exception arose in places where work placement schemes tended to favour men for construction and industry jobs (e.g. the USA, see Franz, 2003a: 94). Often qualified professionals, 'middle' refugee women tended to

quickly adapt to discriminatory, segregated labour markets and, mainly through domestic work such as cleaning, became the main providers for their households, at least in the initial stages. In fact, they then often found themselves trapped in this section of the labour market with little opportunity for socio-economic advancement (Korać, 2003a: 61; Owens-Manley and Coughlan, 2000: 13). Reflecting patterns amongst other migrants (e.g. Napolitano Quayson, 2005; Pessar, 2001; Ui, 1991), a further specific trajectory was provided by employment in largely female-run refugee services and social policy programmes. Effectively and legally establishing themselves as household heads, women thus often secured social benefits and health insurance for their households (Franz, 2003a: 92–3). Moreover, they built wider, stronger, social networks than men, both with other Bosnians and beyond (Korać, 2003b: 412). It was mainly women who managed encounters with state, legal, health and educational institutions, developing language skills superior to those of their husbands (Franz, 2003a: 97).<sup>2</sup>

Reflecting findings of other migration studies, amongst Bosnian refugees too tensions over the household division of labour have been associated with high rates of divorce, male alcoholism and abuse (Al-Ali, 2002a: 255; Franz, 2003a: 97). While never based on concrete figures, I found these were commonly stated worries amongst Bosnian refugees themselves. Many commented on the gendered discrepancies in their coping strategies, pointing to the difficulties of men to live up to what they considered standards of proper masculinity. Differentially positioned men, of course, engage with hegemonizing models of masculinities in different ways (Connell, 1995; Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994; Gutmann, 1997), and sometimes, household gender roles were successfully renegotiated. More frequently, however, ‘middle’ men resented the destabilization of their self-image as household heads due to their dependence on benefits, their wives’ employment or their own low-paid, low-skill jobs (Al-Ali, 2002a: 255; Franz, 2003a: 98). In response, many spent their days engaged in conversation with like-minded male fellow-refugees, recalling, like Izo Begović, the superiority of their previous lives in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

## LIFE TRAJECTORIES AND REMEMBERED GENDERED SUBJECTIVITIES

How can we understand the gendered discrepancies between Alma and Izo Begović’s experiences and the evidence that theirs is a common story? I now attempt to develop a critical perspective on the different trajectories of personhood that were available as collectively sanctioned routes to men and to women, relating them to localized patriarchal patterns<sup>3</sup> both in their previous and in their current lives. In a study of Bosnians in Vienna and New York, Barbara Franz argues that her female informants, forced into low-paid employment and network creation by economic necessity, remained firmly focused on their role as mothers (2003a: 86). Franz’s material supports earlier findings in feminist migration research that patriarchal households sometimes come to be experienced as sites of resistance against other forms of discrimination, such as racism and socio-economic deprivation (Espiritu, 1999: 642; Pessar, 1999: 590). But she goes further than that, attributing to her informants a ‘rejection of Western feminist values’ (Franz, 2003a: 100) and an active choice to ‘continue their traditional forms of living and the customs of their home societies rather than to adapt to Western models’ (2003a: 87). Indebted to earlier work positing a continuity of gendered patterns from Yugoslav



times (Blagojević, 1994; Papić, 1999; Simić, 1969, 1983), she locates the reasons for their anti-feminist choice in the patriarchal traditions of their places of origin, in the 'culture . . . they come from' (2003a), and argues that war then sharpened these patterns, as deprivation forced everyday household tasks to prominence and insecurity led people to cling to the domestic sphere with unprecedented vigour.

This reminds us of the difficulties of establishing a 'base line' of gender patterns in the context of origin against which to assess post-migration gender relations (Mahler, 1999: 698), with the previous situation sometimes simplified as a patriarchal 'tradition' of either complementary harmony or oppression. Both perspectives may downplay the transformations that would have taken place even if people had stayed put. Moreover, with their focus on 'tradition' both may overlook the importance of the socio-political context in which these patterns existed. In the Bosnian case – particularly amongst urban, formally educated, middle-layer professionals – pre-war gender relations were part of life in a modernizing socialist Yugoslav state with a commitment to gender equality, rhetorically and, to some extent, policy-wise. Most scholars agree that some gains were made in terms of women's liberation, for instance, in terms of education, legal equality, reproductive rights (Ramet, 1999). Ethnographic research by Bringa (1995) in a Bosnian village and Denich (1977) in a Serbian town highlight the persistence of patrilineal and patrilocal kinship patterns as well as the impact of modernizing policies. They show that the effect of the post-Second World War rise in women's participation in education and paid employment was limited by the hierarchical segregation of the public and private spheres: women generally remained in charge of domestic duties and men still dominated the workplace, politics and the *kafana*. In fact, economic participation seems to have increased women's power at home, but *not* in the public sphere (see also Burić, 1972; Meznarić, 1985). In the 1990s, competing postsocialist nationalisms further sharpened these gendered tensions (Bracewell, 2000; Helms, 2006, 2007; Jansen and Helms forthcoming; and cf. Gal and Kligman, 2000).

In the precariousness of wartime refugee camps, many women maintained a semblance of normalcy in their daily activities, often through exaggerated simulations (Gilliland et al., 1995; Huseby-Darvas, 1995). Later, when resettling in the Western states, they reaffirmed yet again their responsibilities as homemakers (Al-Ali, 2002a: 255), taking on the role of breadwinners as an extension. Feminist studies (e.g. Oakley, 1974) have shown how patriarchally defined women's work tends to focus on reproduction, repair and repetition within a circumscribed domestic sphere. This socialization in dependent, restricted roles is sometimes invoked to explain why women cope better with displacement (Schrijvers, 1999: 323). We could speculate that amongst post-Yugoslavs, adaptation to new surroundings was compatible with patrilocal patterns in women's trajectories of personhood too. Women had historically been expected to move into the extended household of their husbands, thereby adjusting to an unfamiliar context from the lowly position of daughter-in-law, overseen by senior women (Bringa, 1995; Denich, 1974). While this explanation carries less weight for the 'middle' Bosnians discussed here, due to pressures on city accommodation many of those couples had actually spent the first years of their married lives in the husband's parents' house. The prevalence of multigenerational households persists today in post-Yugoslav cities as well as villages, and patrilocal residence is more common than living with the wife's parents. A related factor is that Bosnian refugee women often remember their reputation as a product of

willingness for hard work and self-sacrifice for the family, mainly subject to affirmation by other women (Franz, 2003a: 92; and cf. Bringa, 1995). Most of the women we focus on here recalled personhood that had included employment and other non-domestic roles, but it had *also* encompassed the bulk of domestic responsibilities. Hence, the infamous socialist double burden or shift (Massey et al., 1995) had spread their trajectories of personhood across the domestic and the non-domestic sphere and thus, inadvertently, allowed relatively greater compatibility with the challenges of displacement.

Dominant understandings of male subjectivity did not include this two-pronged pattern to the same degree, and many Bosnian refugee men concentrated on specific interaction with a few fellow-nationals (Al-Ali, 2002a: 255; Franz, 2003b: 147–8).<sup>4</sup> In Franz's words:

[Men] appeared to hold on to their previous ethnic and social identity by continuous nostalgic revelations of their lost privileged status and economic position. [Their] identities seemed to be linked to their places of origin, their homes, and their economic and social status in their communities of origin. (Franz, 2003a: 97)

Should we interpret such self-positionings as straightforward expressions of nationalism, materialism or attachment to place? Izo Begović and most other 'middle' refugees I worked with fiercely rejected nationalist discourse – but could we argue that they displayed materialist attitudes and strong attachments to their place of origin? I believe the key to their positioning lies in what Franz, in the foregoing quotation, refers to as 'status'. This status needs to be put in place, but not necessarily in the terms that Franz proposes. Izo's involvement in the social meetings of his townfolk and his re-runs of the video tape, I argue, denoted not simply attachment to that place but to *his* remembered place in that town.<sup>5</sup> This retrospective discourse revolved around recognition, but not in the institutionalized terms of multiculturalism, to which Izo and many other Bosnians related mainly in ironic and pragmatic ways (see Kelly, 2003). The recognition of a reified 'cultural identity' did not resolve Izo's predicament – what he craved was recognition in a web of sociality. In Melbourne, only celebrations of his *previous* local attachment seemed to hold some such promise. But his stubborn attachment to his previous place was necessarily limited and skewed, and his awareness of this seemed to lead him to cling to it with even more gusto. The sudden and violent nature of his displacement and the dismantling of the socialist institutions that unfolded alongside and within the Bosnian war, meant that his place of origin could serve to validate status claims only in a disembedded, retrospective manner.

It has been shown that it is possible, expedient and attractive for many migrants to bridge thousands of kilometres in order to establish status relations, as connections with contexts of origin often play a central role in negotiating hierarchies (e.g. Goldring, 2002; Goodson-Lawes, 1993; Salih, 2000). Yet the distance between men like Izo Begović and their place prior to escape should not be measured in kilometres but in years: much more so than most migrants, they acted on the knowledge that the context they had once experienced as 'home' was simply not there anymore. Such a gap, of 10 years, cannot be overcome through spatial connections. To understand the specifically gendered implications of this difference, I suggest, we must look at masculine trajectories of personhood and situate them in the life course. While younger men I worked

with, less socially invested in Bosnia, seemed more capable to 'transplant' their lives, many of the 'middle' ones found themselves unable to do so. In Čolić-Peisker's study of Bosnian refugees in Australia, a woman states:

I have a feeling that my father has a hard time dealing with the loss of . . . what? I am not sure how to put it. Social life? Status? The feeling of self-worth? We used to live in a small town where he was well-known and respected. [Upon arrival in Australia] he never complained openly but it was more than obvious from his comments. Until recently, he used to talk about his past life non-stop, about having been this and that, about his business trips, privileges, how much money he used to earn, on what committees he sat. (Čolić-Peisker, 2003: 19)

Likewise, Franz talks of a man who recalls having been a well-known, trusted and respected inn-keeper in his pre-war place of residence, a man who 'had lent people money', but 'in Vienna nobody knew him' (Franz, 2003a: 98). Rather than detailing a range of ethnographic examples of my own, let me draw attention to a recurrent single phrase that perhaps best captured this phenomenon in my research and that was particularly common amongst men like Izo Begović – middle-aged, formally educated, professional fathers of urban backgrounds: '*tamo sam važio za nekoga!*' ['there I counted as someone!']

Accompanying this exclamation, some men would hold forth on their previous material wealth, but in conversation with other men, including me, the focus was much more frequently on their previous non-domestic connectedness. They recalled having counted as someone formally – as an employee in a workplace, an activist in a socio-cultural organization, perhaps a player in local politics – and informally – as one of the *frajери* ['the guys'], or even as a *faca* ['a character'] (Jansen, n.d., 2007b). The link between these formal and informal dimensions had been established through the life-blood of Yugoslav society: the all-important *veze* ['connections']. Importantly, the place where these 'middle' refugee men recalled having counted as someone was not remembered in national terms that would be congruent with the social organization of current Bosnia-Herzegovina. As we saw in Izo Begović's story, above all, the key point of reference for 'middle' refugee men was a previous social context in which they had known people and in which people had known them. A very common phrasing in their recollections was 'Of course I had someone there'. While they sometimes referred to *biti svoj čovjek* ['to be one's own man'], in ways similar to what Vale de Almeida (1995), in his study of masculinity in a Portuguese town, calls *senhores de si* ['men of substance', literally 'lords of themselves'], such connotations of mastery must thus be understood as embedded in localized social relations (see Ganguly, 1992; Osella and Osella, 2000). Let us therefore relate such narratives of remembered significance back to place.

## LOCATING GENDERED SUBJECTIVITIES: TRANSPLANTATION AND MISPLACEMENT

In her study of the post-1991 Greek-Albanian borderlands, Sarah Green demonstrates that, on the Greek side, men's masculinity was 'relocated' due to the area's incorporation in discourses of national tradition, overtaking previous localized spatial interactions (1998: 100). On the Albanian side, Green shows, men 'perhaps lost their prior

masculinity but that has not “feminized” them as much as it has left them with little in the way of an unambiguous gender identity at all’ (1998: 99). In short, they have ‘lost their location’ (1998). Likewise, I argue, ‘middle’ Bosnian refugee men had lost a particular localized form of masculinity.<sup>6</sup> When they recalled that ‘they had counted as someone there’, and when they reasserted this in the company of other men, they remembered this in a place and time that had been lost forever. But rather than refer to *tada* [‘then’], the dominant idiom I encountered was spatial, *tamo* [‘there’]. This *tamo*, I believe, should be understood as a localized context of concrete social relations.

Loizos and Papataxiarchis show how, in households subject to normative heterosexuality and kinship rules, ‘women need men and men need women in order to become persons’ (1991: 233). However, outside of the household (their example: coffee shops) men may obtain meaningful personhood through homosociality. Amongst ‘middle’ Bosnian refugee men, remembered subjectivities *as men* were predominantly constructed with regard to such extra-household contexts. They may have been retrospectively located in formal surroundings such as an office, a factory, a municipal building or a sports centre (where these men may have been, say, machine engineers, representatives or football coaches). Their informal dimensions may have been emplaced in the *kafana* and on the *korzo* (the evening stroll where they had been amongst *frajeri* such as themselves, or perhaps even been known as a bit of a *faca*). Likewise, the link between the formal and the informal spheres, that is, *veze*, were remembered as embedded in local, real-existing social relations. This is not to imprison these men in some isolated locality, nor to suggest that they had not developed their personhood in the domestic context too (as fathers, husbands, sons, brothers, as handymen and so on). Rather, like Izo Begović, they now, with me and in the company of other men, overwhelmingly *recalled* their masculine personhood as being constituted outside of the domestic.

After displacement, these men could not ‘relocate’ (in Green’s terminology) or, given their refugee status, ‘transplant’ (Franz) this previous personhood. Rather, it was ‘dislocated’. Crucially, the remembering happened in a situation of refuge where these men were not fulfilling basic patriarchal expectations of masculinity in the non-domestic sphere: not only did they fail to be breadwinners but they were subjected (in the Foucaultian sense: made into subjects) to the bureaucratic, seemingly arbitrary, refugee policies of their host state. Women, of course, were subjected to the same policies, but by the same patriarchal logic hegemonizing notions of their personhood revolved predominantly around the household sphere. Despite everything, this *could* be transplanted. Their subjectivities as devoted and respectable mothers and wives had been partly dependent on affirmation by extra-household women, but could be ‘relocated’ into a shrunken nuclear household. Clearly, this continuity of derivative subjectivity also contains contradictions: previously subjectified in the domestic and in the non-domestic sphere, women now took charge of their household’s embedding in both, but they increasingly represented their personhood through the homemaker idiom. In fact, having accepted low-paid jobs, their long-term strategies often still focused on men’s careers, reflecting both patriarchal labour markets (men earn more) and patriarchal household expectations (men should be breadwinners). In this context, some women privately expressed the hope that a decent job would put an end to their husbands’ depressed states or, at least, would get them out of *their* hair. As indicated in many studies

of gender and migration, care was thus mixed with annoyance and Tammy Wynette-style gendered pity, for 'after all; he's just a man'.

Perhaps, then, we need a more nuanced understanding of the anti-feminist dynamics Franz uncovered. Yes, these women tended to phrase their predicament in patriarchal terms – through references to their self-evident roles as mothers – but should we really understand this first and foremost as a culturally inflected choice? It is no coincidence that interest in returning to their original homeland was the lowest of all amongst younger women refugees, who, like many other migrants, often came to see their place of origin as the location of undesirable patriarchal control (cf. Green, 1998: 100–1; Mahler, 1999: 707; Mills, 2003: 49). Research shows furthermore that younger women who have gained a degree of economic independence and moral freedom through migration frequently justify their reluctance to return 'with a concern for "the good" of the family unit' (Goodson-Lawes, 1993: 293). Particular gendered subjectivities come to be located in the cultural intimacy of particular places, and actual return does often lead to a reimposition of reformulated patriarchal expectations (Pessar and Mahler, 2003: 828). For Bosnian women refugees, boasting about one's emancipation was hardly the simplest way forward when dealing with a man who felt he failed to live up to patriarchal expectations and with a household to be fed and cared for. The fact that they rarely phrased their self-understandings in terms of western feminism does not preclude an awareness of difference between the various locations they had made theirs nor a sense of achievement and a determination to safeguard their 'modest gains' (Pessar, 1999: 589).<sup>7</sup>

In such a situation, when men redefined their everyday practice, for example learning new household tasks, this was invariably commented upon by men and women, mockingly and/or approvingly. It was also firmly 'located', it was seen as proof of them finding their place in 'western' surroundings (cf. Al-Ali, 2002a: 255; Ytrehus, 2005).<sup>8</sup> While close and warm kinship relations, including loving fatherhood, were often considered to be better developed amongst Bosnians than in the West (see Jansen, n.d.), it was still seen as typical (and often as appropriate) for Bosnian men to keep a distance from 'women's' household tasks (see Jansen and Helms, forthcoming). Of course this is not a Bosnian specificity at all, but it remains a fact that many Bosnians themselves tend to discuss the gendered household division of labour in terms of such location, with certain ways of doing things considered typical and appropriate for Bosnia-Herzegovina (and many other non-western contexts) and others for 'the West'. The latter is then often associated with 'modern ways'. In over a decade of ethnographic engagements with people in and from the post-Yugoslav states, I have been reminded of this location of gendered practices on numerous occasions when I was made to carry dishes to the kitchen sink, wash up, hang up laundry or fold clothes.

Men who *did* actively engage in the 'transplantation' of their households shared a strong concern with the next generation (see Povrzanović-Frykman, 2002: 128–31), developing reputations as hardworking, conscientious, sacrificing men, dedicated to their households' upward social mobility. Sometimes such a man would be referred to as an *ozbiljan čovjek* 'a serious man', parallel to what Gordon, in a study of US Dominicans (1978), has called *el hombre serio*. 'Modern', again, was a key adjective too. Interestingly, those Bosnian refugees often relied on localized qualities from pre-war Bosnia: in the context of refuge, they succeeded in converting those talents and experiences (e.g. in crafts, music, journalism, sports, arts) for which they had *tamo* counted as

someone. In that way, they then often evoked the same personhood of themselves as men-with-connections, usually in order to help other Bosnians, particularly kin. However, certainly initially, many did not find such ways to engage in the non-domestic sphere of resettlement – primarily but not exclusively due to lack of employment – and experienced not only displacement, but also, in their own eyes and those of others, what I call ‘misplacement’. At least two dimensions can be distinguished here.

Firstly, like Latin Americans in the USA, Bosnians in the Western states tended to be perceived, and often perceived themselves, as representatives of a peculiar form of masculinity, of a ‘really’ patriarchal culture (cf. Helms, 2006). Self-proclaimed ‘Balkan’ forms of masculinity were not necessarily disowned (as by the ‘serious’ or ‘modern man’) but they *were* experienced as misplaced in the West and became a topic of conversation amongst Bosnian refugees themselves. Some men fulminated against western gender and family welfare policies, which they blamed for the breakdown of men’s traditional authority (cf. Nyberg-Sørensen, 1994: 114). But we must avoid the trap of culturalist generalizations here. In fact, these people had moved from one patriarchal context to another: in Western states, women, with or without paid jobs, also tend to be responsible for most housework, and men’s self-esteem also tends to be established more outside of the domestic sphere than women’s. Perhaps, then, the alternative trajectory of masculine personhood represented by the ‘serious, modern man’ can be best understood as a specific form of patriarchal subjectivity, compatible with the context in which these refugees arrived. It provides a route for a de-Balkanized man who inscribes himself in the globalized American dream: he places himself at the head of his household again, overcomes his dis/misplacement, and tries to ‘make it’ – if not for himself, then at least for his children.

But this is where the second dimension of misplacement becomes entangled in their predicament. Bosnian refugees fled to Western states in the 1990s, when the decline of ‘men’s jobs’ affected working-class constructions of masculinity (e.g. Bourgois, 1995; McDowell, 2000) as well as middle-class ones (Newman, 1998), as the contradictions between patriarchal household models and labour market conditions grew. The professional Bosnian protagonists of this text arrived in downsizing economies where middle-ranking jobs were hard to come by for those in middle-age or older who were not already advanced on the career ladder. If this was true for ‘autochthons’, it was even more difficult for middle-aged Bosnians to find employment that reflected pre-war status or ambitions. Although they were spared some of the racist discrimination that other migrants face,<sup>9</sup> with names ending in –ić, non-homologized diplomas, accented language and yawning holes in their CVs, they would find low-skill, low-pay employment at best. Faced with contradictory experiences and expectations of masculinity, many of the men discussed here seemed to be aware that their remembered formal and informal reputations and their *veze*, which had made them count as someone *tamo*, were irrelevant in their new place. Their qualifications unrecognized, their skills outdated, their possible political engagement only useful in irony and their recognized subjectivities as men largely non-transplantable from its localized context, they felt misplaced and, like Izo Begović, seemed to have decided that that cloak fitted them better than the alternatives. However, the *tamo* where they had counted as someone had been wiped out, both through ‘ethnic cleansing’ and through the dismantling of the institutionalized sociality of Yugoslav socialist Bosnia.

At least in the initial years, many middle-aged, professional, formally educated refugees from Bosnian cities, thus not only disengaged from finding a place in their new context but also refrained from the much-noted migrant phenomenon of renegotiating status relations through 'transnational' connections. Instead of making links with the geographical *tamo* where they had once lived, many tended to recall a sense of personhood embedded in a spatial *and* temporal *tamo* that had irrevocably gone. While some (particularly younger men) succeeded in redirecting their subjectivity into becoming a 'serious, modern man' around a concern with the future of their household, such renegotiations called for great effort; the kind of effort that women made, and that was relatively more compatible with pre-existing gender expectations for them. Many were unable and/or unprepared to develop a sense of being a man that would 'fit' their new surroundings. However, while undermined in practice, the patriarchal model of the male breadwinner still prevailed as the dominant ideology both amongst Bosnians themselves and in the wider western societies where they resettled (see Safa 1995). Their predicament contained contradictions between expectations and opportunities of masculine dignity that further sharpened former Yugoslav tensions. They shared those with many other men in their new place of residence, but felt the impact differently due to their experience as refugees who had lost not only houses, loved ones, and material wealth, but also, with the end of socialism, localized status relations in Yugoslav Bosnia. Displacement thus came to be understood as dis/misplacement.

Bringing together those two dimensions, when these men recalled their lives in their hometowns, they remembered themselves as 'emplaced', engaging in mundane processes of formal and informal mutual recognition with others. When they became refugees, they experienced a sense of misplacement that hinged upon the loss and remembering of such emplaced masculinity. This included breadwinner-hood, job positions and salary levels in their work places, but also the ability to sort things out through some *veza* and the exchange of serial handshakes and shoulder hugs when strolling down the main street of their hometown. This is how they recalled being a man *tamo*.<sup>10</sup>

## CONCLUSION

On the basis of ethnographic material on coping strategies amongst a specific set of Bosnian refugees, my analysis demonstrates the value of focusing on people's engagements with place in order to understand gendered patterns that have been noted amongst a variety of migrants. Studies in the 'transnational' paradigm have shown how migrant men often rely on cross-border networks in order to create and maintain hierarchies of status and recognition. The men I focus on in this text were disengaged from such 'transnational' social fields, for the context that would allow them to establish their status was removed in space-time rather than simply in space. The *tamo* where they recalled having counted as someone was not present-day Bosnia-Herzegovina, but previous forms of organized sociality in that same geographical location. My gendered analysis of place as a context of social relations has drawn attention to the specific interplay of general experiences of migration to certain 'Western states' in the 1990s, 'ethnic cleansing' and refugee policies, and specific remembered localized life-trajectories in Yugoslav Bosnia-Herzegovina and their sudden end. I have traced the localization of gendered subjectivities to investigate how, with extra-household recognition crucial to their construction of self, those middle-aged, professional, educated men who had fled

Bosnian towns tended to stubbornly cling to their remembered personhood, located there where they recalled having counted as someone, and misplaced in resettlement.

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### Notes

- 1 Part of a 15-month ethnographic research project, developed with Andy Dawson, on experiences of 'home' amongst displaced Bosnians in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, the Netherlands and Australia (2000–1, financially supported by the Toyota Foundation, the Leverhulme Trust and the University of Hull). I also rely on earlier and later long-term ethnographic work in Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. I use the term 'Bosnian' as short for the nationally-unspecified label 'Bosnian-Herzegovinian'. Names are pseudonyms and translations are mine.
- 2 Al-Ali's assertion that Bosnian refugee women in the Netherlands and the UK felt *more* isolated than men (2002b: 106–7; 2002a: 253–4) stands out as an exception here.
- 3 Following feminist practice, I use the term 'patriarchal' to refer to the structural predominance of the masculine gender within normative heterosexual kinship relations. The term is also used colloquially amongst Bosnians in Bosnia-Herzegovina and abroad when they compare 'their' gender relations with those (western ones) they consider to be *less* patriarchal. I take patriarchy to be one of the most widespread and successfully hegemonizing forms of social organization globally. To me, both the Bosnia-Herzegovina left behind by these refugees *and* the capitalist Western states in which they arrived are characterized by (differentially constituted) patriarchal relations.
- 4 Men were also more likely than women to have been exposed to prolonged military violence, imprisonment and torture, but psychiatric studies suggest that it was making a new start in life itself that was the biggest problem for Bosnian refugees (Plante et al., 2002). Due to their sociological profile, many of the men focused on here had avoided or minimized military action.
- 5 This pattern was not undermined by Izo's involvement in the 'club' mentioned earlier. Far from fulfilling the sort of role of a vector of 'transnationalism' often attributed to hometown-associations (e.g. Goldring, 2002), it was a decidedly friends-only affair. For example, when on one occasion Izo and his fellow former townsmen organized a barbecue, which many Bosnians consider as much typically theirs as many Australians do, it was decided to put in a 'folklore' component in the programme in order to apply for some Australian multicultural funding.
- 6 Napolitano Quayson's study of social service dependent Latino migrants (2005) notes their resentment at being 'feminized', but her argument underscores Green's point of lost location.



- 7 Franz does acknowledge this amongst some of her informants (2003a: 102).
- 8 Such locating practices of gender have also been found with regard to urban–rural differences (e.g. Bringa, 1995; Helms, 2006, 2007, 2008; Vale de Almeida, 1995).
- 9 In fact, they sometimes inscribed themselves into racist discourses from a superior European white positioning (for an analysis, see Grünenberg, 2006).
- 10 Such ritualized performance of mutual recognition of masculinity is an important way in which some recreate forms of temporarily embedded subjectivity on their summer visits to the new Bosnia-Herzegovina. But that is another story. At the time of my research only some ‘middle’ refugee men had been on short return visits.

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