

CHAPTER 4

VIEWS FROM WITHIN: BOSNIAN REFUGEES' EXPERIENCES RELATED TO THEIR EMPLOYMENT IN SWEDEN

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Introduction: stories of chance

“If it wasn’t for Karl, I would perhaps still be cleaning fish in the factory”! This was a concluding comment by a refugee from Bosnia-Herzegovina who told me about her working experiences in Sweden from her arrival in January 1993, when she was thirty-three years old, to the moment of our conversation in July 2009. She greets Karl when she occasionally sees him in the street of a regional centre close to which she lives and works. He is probably not aware of being one of the crucial “chance-factors” in this woman’s life. Unlike the Public Employment Service (*Arbetsförmedlingen*) official who was her regular contact in the institutionally guided path towards employment, Karl – his temporary replacement (*vikarie*) – “saw her” and helped her find a job she is very much pleased with. “You know what they say – you either *see* the person right away, in the first few minutes, or you don’t.” Karl recognised that she was able to meet working tasks far more accomplished than those of cleaning fish for industrial processing. She now works for a small private firm where she deals with customers and handles administrative tasks. It was Karl who found the job announcement, understood that she might be the right person, got in touch with the firm’s owner, followed her to

the job interview and visited her during the probation period. Even if it took four and a half years to come true, this is an ideal story of an individualised approach to a job-seeking refugee-immigrant, of a devoted Employment Service official successfully fulfilling his task, of an open-minded Swedish firm owner who also “saw” her as a vivid, communicative and diligent person and understood that her computer-illiteracy would soon be overcome. On the other hand, this is also a story of a grateful refugee: this woman despised the idea of being on social care and did not shy away from any job she could get – before cleaning fish she cleaned offices, worked in a kitchen providing food for schools and old age homes, and drove a taxi. She did not believe that her Bosnian degree in the humanities would ever be useful in the Swedish labour market; it did not grant her employment in her native country either. She took any job offered to her via the Employment Service: “I just wanted to work.” Before acquiring her current position, she did not allow herself to think about work in terms of satisfaction, only in terms of her own dignity as a person who could take care of herself and contribute to the well-being of her young family. Any work was fine insofar as it brought the money needed for organising a new home in Sweden. Talking to me one and a half decades after her arrival in Sweden, she dwells upon the notion of chance when describing her work-related experience.

How is the experience of this refugee who came to Sweden as an asylum seeker related to the experiences of resettled refugees from the same country?²⁸ A resettled refugee I met was radical in his statement:

I know a man who did fine because he met the right guy, by chance, who did something for him. The state didn't do anything; people were accepted, but the responsibility was moved down to the municipalities. And then you depended on whether the official was in a good mood, if he was educated, how much he could or could not understand.

²⁸ For a detailed explanation concerning the admission category of resettled refugees see chapters 1 and 2 in this volume.

Talking about the chance of “finding oneself in the right place at the right time” and thus “being seen” connects the narratives of asylum seekers and resettled refugees interviewed for the purpose of this study. Chance, indeed, can be a general notion used to describe the existential situation of any people whose homes and working places get enmeshed in war, whose options regarding basic security get radically limited, who lose the power to plan or even imagine their future lives. Chance brought thousands of refugees from the 1990s war in Bosnia-Herzegovina to Sweden, while others were forced to reorganise their lives in other countries in Europe and around the globe.²⁹ An estimated 2.2 million persons from Bosnia-Herzegovina were forcibly displaced during the war (UNHCR 2006).³⁰ 800,000 citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina had left the region for Western Europe: 42,000 of them applied for asylum in Sweden (Government Bill 1993/94:51).³¹ Recognising the scale of the calamity, the Swedish government decided to devote the entire refugee quota (1,800 people) for the budget year 1992/93 to refugees from former Yugoslavia (Government Bill 1993/94:51). For the budget year 1993/94, that quota was extended to 6,000, and 5,500 out of those were reserved for people from former Yugoslavia. Moreover, an ad hoc solution that took into consideration the massive plight of one particular group of people was made on 21 June 1993, when 42,000 asylum seekers from Bosnia-Herzegovina were granted permanent residency (Government Bill 1993/94:51).³² Among the people concerned, this has been referred to as “Bildt’s quota” (since Carl Bildt was the Swedish Prime Minister in 1991-94). The majority of my interviewees

29 Information on the social and cultural background of people inhabiting Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as on the political context of the 1990s war is available in Gustavsson & Svanberg 1995. The edited collection also contains an extensive bibliography. For descriptions of the pains of flight and predicaments of loss, concerning the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina see Alinder & Ralphsson 2000, Liversage 2005: 202-205; Povranović Frykman 2002a and Slavnić 2000: 45-66. For a powerful and insightful autobiographical narrative establishing a continuum of pre-war, exile, and post-exile experience see Bunar 1998.

30 This figure includes both refugees and displaced persons; over one million former refugees and displaced persons have returned to their pre-war homes and municipalities in Bosnia-Herzegovina after the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995 (UNHCR 2006).

31 In the budget year 1992/93, out of 80,600 people seeking asylum in Sweden, 80% (66,400 persons) were from former Yugoslavia – 42,000 of them from Bosnia-Herzegovina.

32 At the same time, a visa requirement was introduced for citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The estimation of the subsequent immigration in the budget years 1993/94 and 1994/95 based on family reunion (*anböriginvandringen*) concerning Bosnians who received a permanent residence permit was between 20 000 and 30 000 (Government Bill 1993/94:51).

were not familiar with the notion of resettled refugees, called *kvotflyktingar* (quota refugees) in Swedish. Hardly any Bosnians who arrived in Sweden as asylum seekers knew Bosnians who arrived as resettled refugees. 6,367 people from Bosnia-Herzegovina (Bosnians) were officially listed as resettled refugees in Sweden in 2007 (STATIV, Statistics Sweden). Almost 5,500 of these people have been admitted in the years 1994 and 1995.³³

While some research illustrates that policies of granting refugee protection can be related to domestic labour market conditions (Appelqvist 2000:93), in June 1993 humanitarian grounds were clearly prioritised. The early 1990s were years of recession and increased unemployment in Sweden, a situation which has negatively affected the employment possibilities for all categories of refugees. But before being put in the position of testing their own chances for employment, Bosnians were transferred to the responsibility of local authorities and included in the municipal refugee introduction programmes. During the first year of residence, they received daily allowances linked to compulsory participation in local introduction programmes (Appelqvist 2000:101-102). These programmes included courses in the Swedish language but also working practice that was supposed to speed up the process of social inclusion and help them become economically independent.

This chapter is not devoted to the refugees' labour market integration from the perspective of costs and benefits for the state, or for particular regions and municipalities (for general trends in this regard see Ekberg 2004; Lundh *et al.* 2002). While the structure of the Swedish labour market with its regional differences remains the crucial context, this chapter is devoted to employment-related human capital and psycho-social predispositions of individuals as perceived by themselves. The following paragraphs present former research relevant for this study, method and material on which it is based, and a description of the resettled and asylum seeking refugees' initial disorientation and different directions concerning employment. Three divergent resettled refugees' stories are then highlighted, and a number of topics discussed, which

³³ In connection to the war in 1992-1995 Sweden received 60,000 refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina; 80, 000 people of Bosnian origin lived in Sweden in 2009. Some 50,000 obtained Swedish citizenship (*Bosnien-Hercegovina* 2008).

Bosnian refugees themselves found important in relation to their employment in Sweden. They include questions of place, ethnic contacts, matters of recognition, critique of Public Employment Service, socio-economic success, loss of status, discrimination, and hope. In conclusion, the relative importance of admission categories of refugees as a basis of analysis is reflected upon.

Relations to earlier research

The material presented in this chapter is based on a random sample of respondents, too small to provide a basis for generalised statements. Rather, the ambition is to shed light on personal experiences that do not prove but illustrate trends, do not claim a holistic picture but depict individual paths, do not relate to macro-scale explanations but bear witness to a vast diversity of experiences. The very diversity of experiences is perhaps the most important insight brought out by this material. While promoting the importance of considering the views from within, my qualitative study suggests a cluster of reasons for the statistically observed facts and figures in chapter 3 in this volume.

These reasons might be better understood through an overview of Bosnian refugees' predicaments and integration processes in Sweden, such as is provided by interview-based PhD dissertations in sociology by Zoran Slavnić (2000) and Åsa Gustafson (2004). The former analyses the situation upon arrival in Sweden of people who only received temporary residence permits. The latter is devoted to the processes of integration and normalisation among Bosnian refugees in Umeå and Malmö in 1996-97, and contains rich information on job-related experiences. However, it does not give specific information on resettled refugees. Elsie C. Franzén's (1997) study of unemployment, started in 1992, was based on interviews with forty-two refugee-immigrants who came to Sweden from twenty-one countries. It offers inspiration for future comparative analyses in which the material presented in this chapter could be a part.

A study concerning psychological problems carried out at the Center for the Advancement of Health (Thulesius and Håkansson 1999) showed that the posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) rate was twenty-five times higher for Bosnian refugees who arrived in

Sweden in 1993 than for the control group of Swedish visitors to health centres. Stephen Goldin's PhD dissertation on the mental health of Bosnian refugee children in Umeå (Goldin 2008) makes clear the importance of family in overcoming war-related stress and trauma among children. The same is shown for adults in the interview-based study done by the psychologists Birgitta Alinder and Lilian Ralphsson (2000) among the first adult resettled refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina to Sweden.

Although numerous works have been published on Bosnian refugees in Sweden, only a few focus on their experiences related to employment. Jan Ekberg and Mats Hammarstedt (2002) point to the constant worsening of immigrants' employment situation in Sweden since the end of 1970s, a trend that has changed slightly since the mid 1990s. Their critique of "the whole Sweden strategy", of distributing refugees evenly across the country in order to avoid their concentration and thus enhance their learning of the Swedish language, remains relevant. Even when that strategy was abandoned, a tendency remained to resettle refugees according to the availability of apartments rather than jobs (see Hagström in this volume).

Focusing on the employment status in 1997 of refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina who immigrated in 1993-94, Jan Ekberg and Mikael Ohlson (2000a) point to the fact that in some municipalities more than 80 percent were employed, while the figure was less than 10 percent in others.³⁴ All the five municipalities with the highest employment rate are in Småland (Gnosjö-Gislaved) where the economic sector was characterised by small private enterprises. The authors suggest that decision-making processes seem to be much shorter in small private enterprise contexts and the importance of informal networks more prominent. Job vacancies are quickly filled. One should, however, take into consideration that the absolute number of Bosnians involved here is only about 1,500. Detailed figures are also offered by the same authors in another text (Ekberg and Ohlson 2000b) regarding the fact, referred to later on in this chapter, that almost 1,800 Bosnians who immigrated to Sweden in 1994 settled in Malmö, while there were only 100 Bosnians

³⁴ In 1997, less than 15% of Bosnian men who immigrated in 1993 were employed in Malmö, while more than 61% percent were employed in Gnosjö-Gislaved. The employment frequency for women was 9.5% versus 40% (Ekberg and Ohlson 2002b: 248).

registered in that town one year earlier. Ekberg and Ohlson also show that the differences in the educational level (with the average of 11.7 years for Bosnian men at the age 16-64, and 11.0 years for women) between the ones who are employed and the entire group is most prominent in Malmö and least prominent in Gnosjö-Gislaved. It is, however, not possible to derive any definite conclusions as to why Bosnians might be more easily employed in smaller municipalities than in big towns, or why they do or do not move for jobs. A summary of the research mentioned above is offered by Benny Carlson (2007) who uses more recent statistical data from 2003, and presents some individual employment paths of Bosnian refugees in eleven municipalities in the “success region” of Småland. In 2003, the Bosnians there were employed with a frequency between 83.6 and 91.9%. The individual experiences discussed by Carlson complement the stories presented in this chapter.

Bosnians’ employment figures follow the trends observed for immigrant educational and vocational status (see Bevelander and Lundh 2004; Dahlstedt and Bevelander 2010; Rooth 1999; Rooth and Åslund 2006). They are in line with Dan-Olof Rooth’s (1999) finding that for refugees the initial contact with the labour market in Sweden has a strong impact on their further success. They are also in line with a trend generally valid for foreign-born people in Sweden, showing that there is a higher probability of employment with a vocation than with a general education (see Dahlstedt and Bevelander 2010).

Relevant data concerning the labour market integration of Bosnian resettled refugees in comparison to those who came as asylum seekers (“refugees”) and relatives (thanks to family reunion policy) is presented by Pieter Bevelander in this volume. The statistics for 2007 show that there are no differences by admission category in relation to the overrepresentation of people from Bosnia-Herzegovina in Malmö and Gothenburg and their underrepresentation in Stockholm. With regard to employment, people in the admission category of relatives have a better start compared to refugees and resettled refugees, but the resettled refugees show a substantial increase in employment after their first five years in Sweden. Nevertheless, resettled refugees from Bosnia-

Herzegovina who have been in the country more than ten years still have lower employment rates relative to refugees and relatives.

Relevant to the final discussion in this chapter, the data on the “slow start” and “catch up” periods of ten to fifteen years for resettled refugees show that in summer 2009, when research for this study was done, the admission categories could not be seen as the reason for the varied success of individual Bosnian refugees in the Swedish labour market.

A qualitative study: method and material

This text is based on thirty-five interviews focusing on the interviewees’ employment in Sweden, conducted from June to October 2009. Nine were made with resettled refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina, who arrived in 1992 and 1994, and the rest with people who came as asylum seekers and were encompassed by “the Bildt quota” (all at working age).³⁵ Eight men and seven women had university degrees (from universities in former Yugoslavia), three men and one woman had two-year post-gymnasium degrees, five men and nine women completed gymnasium or vocational secondary school, and two women had completed elementary school only.³⁶

These were semi-structured interviews, with elements of life-history interviews: the respondents were welcome to take up those issues they found most important and talk about them at length in their native language. I did not encourage general statements, or ask people to compare their own situation to the situation of people who came to Sweden under different circumstances.³⁷ They were

35 Seven of those interviews were conducted by my former students of Bosnian origin Mia Hadžić and Ivan Gušić. Several interviews also contain information about the employment-related circumstances of the spouses or other family members of the persons interviewed. My former insights into the situation of Croatian refugees from Bosnia and Croatia (see Povrzanović Frykman 2001; 2002a; 2005) provided ample background knowledge as well as access opportunities. It was necessary to rely on personal contacts as the first link to people I had never met. Attempted access via channels such as Bosnian associations, religious connections and a local Bosnian radio programme did not prove to be efficient.

36 *Statens Invandrarverk* (SIV; The Swedish Immigration Board) mapped the educational background of adult Bosnian refugees in 1994 (see Douglas 1995: 118). 58% had more than 9 years of education and 23% had more than 13 years of education. Those with higher education were first and foremost engineers, followed by economists, teachers and health personnel. 92% of all Bosnian refugees were less than 50 years old, and 32% of them were children under 15. Families with children encompassed 80% of this group. See also data on education in Pieter Bevelander’s chapter in this volume.

37 A methodological warning: people tend to generalise their own situation when making general statements. Or perhaps they simply tend to know people in the socio-economic position similar to theirs, thus confirming that being of a particular ethnic affiliation may be less important than, e.g., being a professional in a certain field. Successful people tend to know other successful people; they

asked about their views from within their own situation of trying to establish themselves in the Swedish labour market. The material used here thus consists of narratives that cannot be seen as empirical data documenting external realities but as data documenting people's perceptions thereof and the related subjective assessments of their own situation (see Liversage 2005:36-37).

All the resettled refugees I interviewed were Bosniaks. It is, however, clear that the fact that they suffered in the 1990s war made them eligible for their status in Sweden, not their ethnicity. In the asylum seeker category, Bosnians of the other two major ethnicities (Serbian and Croatian) in Bosnia-Herzegovina were also interviewed but most of my respondents were Bosniaks, as this was the ethnic group most victimised in the 1990s war in their country.³⁸

The persons who participated in this study live in the big town regions (*storstadsregioner*) of Malmö, Gothenburg and Stockholm, in the university town of Lund, in the regional centres such as Västerås, Borås, Kristianstad and Kalmar, and in the region of Karlskrona/Ronneby (see *Regionfamiljer och ingående arbetsmarknadregioner* in Bevelander and Lundh 2004:153). The majority remained in the original places of their resettlement. Several people, however, commute at rather long distances to their present workplaces.

Admission categories were not strongly differentiated according to choice of residential location in Sweden. Neither was the length of the period between leaving Bosnia and getting the first address in Sweden necessarily much shorter for resettled refugees. By chance, some asylum seekers I talked to entered Sweden only a few days before "Bildt's quota" was granted in June 1993, which made the period of their uncertainty shorter than that of any of the resettled refugees (who stayed in camps in Croatia and Montenegro up to four months before arriving to Sweden). However, while resettled refugees got a Swedish address after a very short period of waiting in temporary premises (for a few weeks at most), asylum seekers stayed

depict a truly optimistic picture of 'Bosnians in Sweden'. After being told that "all Bosnians did fine in their region" by a couple of well-paid professionals with one child, I noticed a shocking difference in material standard in the nearby home of a single woman with two children, who had been on and off jobs since she came to Sweden. Yet, what connects these two families is not only the same place of everyday life, but also the successful educational path of the children who all aim at university degrees.

38 See *Human losses in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1991-95* (2008), with figures collected by the Research and Documentation Center in Sarajevo.

in reception centres for a varied number of months before they actually got “the papers”, that is, their permanent residence permit.

Demarcation by suffering?

The following statement refers to those resettled refugees who came directly from the infamous concentration camps in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Like the man quoted below, many were imprisoned because they were intellectuals in leading positions in their local surroundings.

Human suffering cannot be measured. Everyone believes that his pains are stronger, more pronounced than those of the others. But I know, from the frequent contacts with my co sufferers, that we all had the same or similar symptoms. A sort of feeling like clones... insomnia and despair. Then fear and nightmares. I took *Propavan* for six years in order to be able to sleep for a couple of hours. We didn't look forward to anything and we didn't ask for anything, only for some peace and quiet. How could we think about employment, apartments, rights and duties in such a state of mind? We neither knew anything, nor did anyone inform us about what we could or could not do. I only know that, when meeting one another, we mentioned the same symptoms and talked about the heaps of tablets we were all taking.

Those others, who were waiting for residence permits in reception centres, were of better psycho-physical health and much better informed about everything. They knew all their rights. They prepared for getting an apartment and many did much better than we did. I, for example, spent all the credit for the apartment in IKEA in one day, since we only then had a van at our disposal. I bought things in the shop they chose.

Those others had it much better, from the placement in the municipalities to the buying of furniture and employment. They were more rational. They took care of daily matters while we were in our own world, known only to us. They sometimes stressed their suffering by saying “UNPROFOR” took me over the Sava river”, “I travelled to Sweden for five days”, “we had to

overnight in a garage” and similar things. We were quiet. What to say about their “suffering”? But I repeat, everyone thinks that his suffering is the greatest. Anyhow, they had it easier because they were in better psycho-physical shape.

The psychological difficulties caused by war or by the demands of adjustment to and struggle towards employment in Sweden criss-cross admission categories.³⁹ Four women I talked to, some of them asylum seekers and some resettled refugees, suffered burnout after having worked for a number of years. One was on sick leave in summer 2009, the other was back to work but only for twenty percent of working hours, and the third changed her job. A stroke, a heart attack, premature retirement, and work-related injuries occurred among my male and female respondents. Several women told me about periods of extensive crying during the introductory period. One had repeated bouts of vomiting while studying at the Swedish university in order to get employment credentials perceived as adequate.

A female resettled refugee talked at length of her husband’s difficult state of mind caused by his doubts and ambivalences over leaving the country instead of fighting – he suffered guilt-feelings. While some resettled refugees were offered psychological counselling upon arrival in Sweden, this couple was not. The accessibility of psychological care seems to have varied very much between the municipalities. However, this woman pointed out that many Bosnians were hesitant about being labelled as “psychological cases”:

We were trying to manage our private crises. Our mental system had to be adapted to this. Men who were in the prisoner-of-war camps, women who were raped. They could get concrete help if they wanted. But many felt uneasy about meeting a psychiatrist, you know...

³⁹ In a study of Bosnian refugees living in Croatia, Mollica *et al.* (1999) show that 40% of respondents reported symptoms of depression and 26% reported symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The most common trauma events were warfare and refugee experiences, including shelling and grenade explosions, exposure to sniper fire, and hiding. Torture was experienced by 18% of the respondents. Dolores Vojvoda and her co-authors (2008) describe the evolution of trauma-related symptoms over three and a half years among Bosnian refugees resettled to the United States. They found no correlation between PTSD symptom severity and either age or level of trauma exposure, but they found that women were more affected than men.

Another woman related at length how she strived to be the “best in class” when learning Swedish, and how she broke down a couple of times during the introduction period. She was prone to uncontrollable crying at home (“for a month I was continually crying so that I lost a lot of weight and couldn’t memorise things”). She was diagnosed as depressed but stayed on sick-leave for only two weeks; she didn’t want to lag behind.

I was thirty-six when I came here; I had to prove my capacities from scratch, as a child. I was a *vikarie* (replacement) in kindergartens for four and a half years. (...) I was struggling all the time; I was an example to my children – how I was putting myself under pressure and how I was fighting.

After a number of disappointments over not being able to get permanent employment, she underwent the appropriate education to become a kindergarten teacher. She then got a position she was pleased with. However, she suffered a heart attack in 2007, at work. Burnout and posttraumatic stress disorder were diagnosed. “The doctor was surprised that they did not see it already in the reception centre”; he connected this woman’s heart disease to accumulated stress. She was dependent on sleeping pills for a long while and is now sensitive to even minor stress. However, she told me a lot about her baby-grandson whom she meets very often. He is a source of great happiness. A refugee resettled from a camp in Montenegro in 1992 described the days after she landed safely in Sweden:

I lay without moving for seven days. I couldn’t move for pains in my entire body. A cramp and being sorry for many things... Only when you relax for the first time, when you stop worrying that someone will come and kill you or your child, when you can sleep, you don’t have any wishes, you can’t be cheered up by anything.

When interviewed in summer 2009, she was on long-term sick leave after having worked hard and established herself as an assistant nurse.

Disorientation and different directions

We didn't know anything.

We did as we were told; only later did we understand how things worked.

Poor initial orientation within the system – the issue taken up by Elsie C. Franzén (1997) in her study of refugee-immigrants' unemployment – was repeatedly pointed out as a problem by my interviewees. Without a thorough understanding of “how things work”, one cannot possibly pose relevant questions, avoid misunderstandings, or perhaps try to “fight” for individualised solutions.⁴⁰ Regardless of admission categories, most bosnians I talked to were in a state of shock when they came to an unknown country and were ascribed the identity of a refugee who cannot make demands, but should be grateful and obey the rules. Most of them were entirely dependent on interpreters (only three of my respondents spoke what they perceived as good English). Immediately upon arrival, no one was able to think about the future or job options – everyone was worried about the war in the homeland and about the close relatives left behind (as shown, e.g., in Alinder and Ralphsson 2000; Gustafson 2004; Goldin 2008). Later on, when everyone was obliged to attend Swedish for immigrants (SFI), an opinion was formed, in line with the valid official rules, that a “good” level of language competence is a necessary precondition for any kind of inclusion in the Swedish labour market (an issue criticised in Franzén 1997). However, for some people, lucky enough to be “seen” already while doing the obligatory work-practice, language competency proved to be less important than vocational experiences (as shown in Dahlstedt and Bevelander 2010).

Also, the conviction was spreading among the refugees, that “here we are all the same, no education from the homeland matters”. It took a lot of time for some of my respondents to understand the rumour-like nature of that particular “fact”. Several others, however,

⁴⁰ Many respondents mentioned that they were not informed about alternate ways of spending the loan for household furniture (20,000 crowns). They spent the entire amount on new equipment as they did not know about the possibilities of buying second-hand. The money they eventually had to return could have been used more wisely.

who believed in an unproblematic transfer of their high-school or university credits, were bitterly disappointed. The demands made on people with regard to “completing” their ground- and high-school education seem also to have varied very much between the municipalities. Several people told me that they agreed to a certain kind of Swedish vocational education inasmuch as it was paid by the Public Employment Service and did not require a study-loan (CSN) that had to be paid off as soon as a person is employed.⁴¹

Against the background of laws and policies concerning refugees in general (see Franzén 1997), chance looms large: one’s entire employment path in Sweden could depend on the particular official responsible for one’s “case”, or on the immediate boss at the place where people were sent to do the practical part of their obligatory introductory program. A striking example was offered by a married couple who had the same educational degree and the same former working experience, yet ended up with very different starting options provided for them through official channels.

From the institutional point of view, both my husband and I had the same possibilities. But we got very different places to do practice at. Neither of us spoke a good Swedish by then – it was, like, you say ‘yes, yes’ and smile when people around you laugh – but my husband felt very good at his practice. He started to work extra when they needed him, made friends with the colleagues. I, instead, every day after coming home from work – I was crying.

This woman was crying because of ill treatment by her immediate boss. After the boss ignored the many phone-calls from the kindergarten about her one-year old daughter being ill, this woman refused to continue doing practice there. (“The Employment Service official was not surprised – she knew about that person!”) Her situation changed when her husband managed to get her practice in the same hotel in which he worked. The hotel director is praised by both as a very nice man, kind to all employees, understanding

⁴¹ A few people talked about the weak economic power delimiting their choices at the present. A woman who came to Sweden with a university degree was frustrated by having to take a CSN loan even for completing high-school education at *Komvux*, unlike the people in some other municipalities: “I had a debt of 60,000 crowns in the start (when she started to work; MPF); I was paying it off for fifteen years. And my entire loan for education was counted as income”.

and encouraging with regard to their struggle with the Swedish language. Indeed, he appears to be a person most important for their subsequent well-being, recognition and the opportunities they both successfully used. It is obvious from the interview that this director “saw” the couple and treated them accordingly. He was also able to avoid a possible “error in the system”; he did not give up on the idea of giving a permanent job to my female interviewee after a number of unsuccessful attempts to contact the responsible person at the local Employment Service.

After completing *beredskapsarbete* (relief work; temporary employment; MPF) I was offered a permanent job as a *frukostvärdinna* (serving breakfast).⁴² I think that he (the director; MPF) called for ten days, every day he left messages that she (the official; MPF) should contact him, with no avail. He didn’t know what he was allowed to do – I was sent there by the Employment Service, and he believed that he had to contact them first before giving me a job, that it had to go through them.

The employment official in question was absent on other business; eventually contact was established with another official who – contrary to the experiences of any other people I interviewed – tried to convince this woman *not* to take the job she was offered.

He said that I shouldn’t take a job as a *frukostvärdinna* since I had a higher education: I should strive for something better. I told him to find me something better, then. It is difficult right now for economists, he said. But I told him – if I have to choose between sitting at home, 30 years old, as a foreigner, waiting for something to turn up, and the job of *frukostvärdinna*, I take this job! Well, he told me that in that case he had to erase me from his list, that he wouldn’t be able to help me any more. But I was determined and took the job. Some months later I got a letter warning me that I must report within 24 hours... It might not sound very harsh as I am telling it now, but it was painful

⁴² Swedish words used by Bosnians while speaking their native language were kept in Swedish in translation.

to see what different treatment my husband got (via the same Employment Service office, but via different officials; MPF). They had meetings with him every two months, asking what he needs; they paid courses for him, in agreement with his director, a computer course and an English course – anything the director suggested, they paid for. His *handläggare* (Employment Service official) was fantastic in comparison to what I got. In this first period, it is of crucial importance who you get.

Another refugee told me about having done the obligatory six-month work practice and then being offered a permanent job in the same restaurant; the boss was very pleased with him since he had a lot of experience in that type of work in Bosnia. However, his story has a distressing turn: according to the rules, as the job offer was a consequence of work-practice that was a part of the official introduction, it was not addressed to the Bosnian man directly but via his contact at the Employment Service office. The official forgot about it and never informed the person in question! Since there was no answer, the employer took someone else; many months later, when meeting him by chance, he reproached the Bosnian man for never responding... it was truly shocking. *Post festum*, nothing could be done with regard to that particular job opportunity. “If it wasn’t for that man...” Chance here has a clearly opposite meaning to the one mentioned in the introduction. The issue of unequal power, i.e. of the limited power to affect one’s own situation, had been made acutely present for the Bosnian man concerned. While he still wonders how his life would have unfolded if it was not for that particular mishap at the beginning of his life in Sweden, the employment official himself suffers no consequences.

Three resettled refugees – three divergent stories

The quotes that follow are excerpts from much longer narratives by two men (born 1960 and 1952) and a woman (born 1961), who arrived in Sweden as resettled refugees in 1992 and 1994 respectively. They are all Bosniaks with university degrees, who lived in different regional centres in Bosnia. Yet, the differences among them concerning employment paths in Sweden are striking.

Structure supporting agency: success and satisfaction

The first story concerns the very first eleven Bosnian families that were resettled in Sweden in mid November 1992, presented in the book based on an investigation started by the psychologists in 1993 and devoted to family as a salutogene factor (Alinder and Ralphsson 2000). I got in touch with several people from that group. Since the moment they were met at Arlanda airport – by TV cameras, social workers, and a psychologist from Linköping – their introduction to Sweden was unsurpassed for its ideal-typical perfection. This is how the resettled refugee reception system works at its best, with no interference in the form of big numbers of refugees, tired teachers who do not care enough, or insufficient practice places. The officials working with these first resettled refugees were devoted and did much more than was demanded by rule. My interviewees from that group all agree that probably no other Bosnian refugees had a reception and introduction similar to theirs.⁴³

The place they live in has 5,500 inhabitants, so they were able to meet on a daily basis. As it is very close to Västerås, all the refugees from that group found jobs. The man quoted here, born in 1960, used to be an economist working as the chief of the sales department in a factory.

This was the most important – that reception. There was a woman, *flyktinghandläggare* (Refugee Case Officer), who influenced us very much. The first time is the most important for integration – are you received as a person or as a number? An older lady from Istria worked there and helped us with everything. She was half Italian, half Croatian.

We got heaps of money, two social allowances in advance, money for clothing, everything for the baby. 70 000 crowns in the hand,

43 They were not obliged to attend the standard 700 hours of Swedish for immigrants (SFI); some could pass the exam after three months. They were overwhelmed by the warm reception, appreciated all the help they got, and tried to do their best in whatever was expected of them. They praised the Finnish reception official (mentioned by name and surname) who helped them with their purchases in IKEA, took them to boat tours, and their children to amusement parks. She “worked much more than necessary”, “she behaved like family: if someone fell ill, she would appear with a thermometer and *Alvedon* pills”. As shown in detail in the aforementioned book, the fact that they had small children and that the closest family members were not parted by war was of crucial importance. To me they stressed that they managed to cope with their traumas because several of these families were settled together.

so you ask yourself: how did I deserve this? We could choose an apartment; we got a three-room apartment. Our *flyktinghandläggare* made a van available for us, and set an agreement with IKEA that they open two hours before standard opening hours so that we could choose our furniture in peace and quiet.

SFI was organised in the local school. We had a lot of small children, so it was done in the way that allowed the parents to take shifts. Six months later, the children were all in kindergarten, and the adults could attend SFI in Västerås. There was a big difference between the Bosnians and the refugees from Iraq and Iran. They didn't care, while we were almost competing with one another – who is going to be better?⁴⁴

The greatest problem was that we had family in Bosnia. We immediately organised a Bosnian association and got a satellite antenna. For two years, we only watched Croatian TV (to see what is happening in Bosnia; MPF).

After SFI I could not accept a job in industry. If you want to be an economist, you have to do SAS, high-school Swedish A and B, English (I had French at school!). So, I got an official copy of my diploma from Mostar, and *Högskoleverket* (Swedish National Agency for Higher Education) recognised 150 university credits that I could complete with some courses at an economics program in Västerås. I searched for a job and worked as an interpreter in the refugee reception centre. In 2000 I applied for a position in a European project on the development of the economics in the municipality. Many people applied, but I got the job. First for three years, but thanks to good work, it was prolonged for one year. The local firms asked for project prolongation until 2007. I was assessing and planning infrastructure in the municipality, helping new firms by providing them with information, e.g., about the available premises. It was financed by the EU but then the municipality started a job centre. That is where I work now, giving people advice on how to find jobs.

⁴⁴ This refers to competition among Bosnians in the same class. It is crucial to understand that these people know one another very well ("since we were born").

Many (Bosnian refugees; MPF) ran away from here to Malmö, but the one who wants to work and to fight, can succeed in any place. It could be a problem if you are tied to a certain type of industry, e.g. the car industry.⁴⁵

This man is an example of “super-integration” typical for successful immigrants. He is not only a member of several Bosnian associations and the local Rotary club, but also an active politician. His story confirms the claim made by another resettled refugee, that “individual resourcefulness and capacity of every individual were decisive factors in finding their place in Swedish society”.

Social care trap: struggle and persistence

The woman born in 1961, quoted below, was resettled together with her family after some four months spent in a refugee camp in Croatia in 1994. They were offered a move to Malmö because they had a relative there who came as an asylum seeker a year earlier.

We were isolated from normal life for three years – the war in L. started already in late 1991. Even a functioning traffic light (in Malmö; MPF) looked strange to us who used to live in civilisation once upon a time... People (officials in Sweden; MPF) expected us to know everything, or maybe the personnel had too much to do. (...) You got a “premium” if you could meet your social worker; I was on social allowance for five years, and I met my social worker only once.⁴⁶

My husband’s brother and his wife came in June 1993 and got the residence permit a year later. (...) When we arrived in Sweden on 22 July 1994, we met them – they did pretty well. They were young and could speak English; that helped them to understand. Also, they learned some Swedish while in the reception centre. There were services there to help them. (...) As people in the reception centres weren’t sure whether they would be allowed to

45 There is no car industry in Västerås, but there is ABB – high technology robotics. The 2009 crisis did not affect the municipality as harshly as many other places.

46 She talked to the social worker on the phone, after she could speak some Swedish – a stressful experience, since she prepared herself meticulously for posing questions, but often did not understand the answers.

stay, they didn't know what to do. But the very fact that they were in Sweden and could walk around gave them the opportunity to get to know the way of life in Sweden. Many told how they spent their days walking around in the town, so they knew where the shopping centres, museums, banks, and beaches were. However, they didn't have any contact with Swedes except for the personnel in the refugee centres.

I studied electro technology in Bosnia, but I got a job there in a sewing firm. When I told them this at the Employment Service office, they placed me in a certain way, and I had the feeling that they said: don't you even dream of working in first-class positions here!

During the introduction they took us around the town, we had lectures about the bank, the school, the right to social care, about the police... I could comprehend near to nothing. That was in September 1994. We were overwhelmed by all the information we got at once. And the explanations were scarce. There was so much information, and the notions used were meaningless for me.

I waited for six months to start SFI in Rosengård; *Yrkesorientering* (vocational orientation) was also done there. Luckily, the teachers there were better than the ones at SFI. There was a forty-year old teacher from Croatia there (at SFI; MPF), and as the group consisted of Bosnians and Kosovo Albanians, we spoke our language more than Swedish.

They told me: if you get a job in five years, you have succeeded! I registered at the Public Employment Service. I had to register in Rosengård. It was all unclear to me – what it means, how it functions. I went to *Komvux* (Adult Education) for four semesters (ground- and high-school level). I didn't have to pay anything. Before that we attended a course... I don't know what was its purpose. But that was in the town centre, those teachers were kind. I then continued at *Komvux* full time, in order to have the complete social allowance. I *wanted* to go there in

order to master the language. There was no job anyway, only cleaning in private houses; that I did “black”. People with trades could find jobs, but only if they had some connection. When I completed the education at Komvux I was tired. There was no job via Employment Service. I did not meet any kind officials, either at the social care or there (at the Employment Service office; MPF).

From a respected citizen in L., I became a second-rate citizen (while still in her native town; MPF). But here I felt the same. I was at the main square with my twelve-year old son, when a man turned to him and said: *Jävla invandrare, va gör du här, gå hem!* (You bloody immigrant, what are you doing here, go home!) I started to cry, I was shocked, I hugged both my sons... in the middle of the square. No one can take responsibility for that among those officially responsible (for the refugees; MPF). But the locals were not informed, they should have been told who we are, where we come from, how we lived... People around us reacted, but the next time my son was called *svartskalle* (‘black head’) at school, he picked a fight. The word was used as a mocking word; before, he did not mind.

My husband was sorted to *yrkesutbildning* (vocational training) on the basis of a statement that he made. Although he studied electro technology too, he told them that he knew everything about electric installations. Electro technology was developing so quickly that we knew we had no chance to work with our degrees; we were out of touch. Anyway, he went to a nine-month course. He learned the vocational terms. For three years he was neither here nor there – he thought of returning (to Bosnia; MPF). He worked as much as he had to. He had a bad conscience for ‘letting down his people’. You listen to the news day to day... we had family down there.

He got a job in early 1999, I got one in August 1999. After five years! (...) I got a practice in a school (after three years of courses) as a teacher – I also started to clean ‘black’, for two,

three months. I came to a woman in Limhamn; her children went to the international school, and she said she could recommend me there. I met the vice-director and she told me I could come the next day, to teach mathematics. That was on 2 November 1999 – practice as *mellan-* and *högstadielärare* (teacher for children between 11 and 15 years of age; MPF). I stayed there for ten months, till the end of the school year. In the meantime, they needed someone for *fritids* (afterschool activities; MPF); I was there for some two years. I made an effort to get into the educational field, and people wanted to help. It was an international school; the accent was not a problem! It was also a smaller school; people cared for one another. (...) I worked with children six to twelve years old. The children are spontaneous, honest, and amiable. They helped me to cope with my crises with their simplicity and energy, rewarding me with hugs. That brought my energy and self-confidence back. I eventually got a job, first for ten months, then for one year, then for one more year, and only after that a permanent position. It was a great thing they gave me a chance.

After all those courses, when I came to practice there, and found myself surrounded by the living language, I realised that I didn't know Swedish. I didn't have any contact with Swedes for five years. Now, with the crisis, Swedes are returning to Rosengård. But I thought that all Swedish women are fat, wearing *mjukisbyxor* (gymnastic trousers) and screaming at their children. Social cases... In that school for rich people I was between two worlds. That workplace helped me to understand the codes, the codex of behaviour, of everyday communication.

In the Bosnian association I found what I missed. I was very tense at work – I could relax in the association. I could understand a joke... It provided a balance of the contents I needed.

I am now studying to become a *lågstadielärare* (primary school teacher). I'd like to also get educated to become a *specialpedagog* (teacher for children with special needs) in mathematics.

My husband got a job in a firm producing big dispatching systems, through a friend. He started work as a montager two and a half years ago there; six months ago he advanced to the position of constructor. Finally his professional knowledge is needed! He is satisfied, although he has to work a lot of overtime. But it is much easier to sit by the computer than to stand the entire day.

Torture, unemployment, depression

The third refugee quoted here, born in 1952, came to Sweden in late 1992, and was reunited with his family a month later. He was a prominent journalist in his Bosnian home-town, tortured in a concentration camp. He spoke German and had relatives in Switzerland, but was not able to get resettlement there. He complained about the address he and his family were assigned in a small place in Sweden: they were placed among social cases with many difficulties, including alcoholism (“vomit in the staircase, noise... to have it a bit ‘nicer’ than in war?!”). The responsible official explained: “so you will have to pay less for a flat once you start working”. This man insisted on changing not only the local address but on being moved to another, bigger place where he hoped that both he and his wife would get a job.

Immediately upon arrival in Sweden, he was met by a psychologist, accompanied by an interpreter. This occurred only once and he later wondered if it was for the purpose of some research. He claims that he asked his social care contact to send him for treatment in 1995, but “they didn’t want to pay”. It remained unclear to me how he eventually got in touch with the psychologist who diagnosed both posttraumatic stress disorder and depression.

I came to T. (in Bosnia; MPF) after the second prisoner-of-war exchange. I was without documents, without money. I was lost, in no shape, psychologically destroyed. I was registered in the camp as being under UNHCR’s protection, but once I was out, they didn’t have to take care of me. I came to K. (in Croatia; MPF) on my own. I registered with UNHCR there and was asked where I would prefer to go. I asked for Switzerland, as I knew German and had an uncle living there, but they told me the Swiss

quota of 150 prisoners-of-war and their families were filled. There were people there who arrived in K. five days before me, and they filled that quota. I asked for Germany, but they told me that there was neo-nazism there, and it wouldn't be good for me to be exposed to it in the state I found myself then. America was a possibility, but I was afraid of America, I was afraid of that distance; if something bad happened, one could return (if resettled closer; MPF). So Sweden was the only country left.

The language was a puzzle, the uncertainty total. When I think about it today, everything is in a mist. I was neither ready nor able to think. It was like some invisible force was guiding me. We came to a small place (...). We got an old flat in a house with social cases, while some other people got nice flats. Was it by chance or not – I can't discuss that. We completed SFI in B. (a bigger town to which the family moved; MPF). I hoped to get a job there. I didn't go for my profession, just for a job. I didn't hesitate to do anything but cleaning. Through my wife's repeated pleas, in 1998 I got a month of employment in the factory in which she worked since 1995. (I studied at Komvux in the meantime). I came there, had a look, tried it and saw that I could do it. For the next fourteen months I was ironing jackets produced in Riga. But when after fourteen months the workers in Riga were dismissed, there was no job for me either. I wasn't sorry in the least. Learning Swedish at the working place? With such a job, when you work "on accord", with a norm, there is no talking. And when we did sit together during pauses, I could not understand the language they spoke. After completing Swedish high school education at Komvux, I was accepted into the program in journalism at G. university. But at the same time I got that job, so I was in a dilemma. If I worked, I got 8,000 crowns a month. If I studied, I got 3,200 crowns of education support.

When I asked for an AMU (*arbetsmarknadsutbildning*, Employment Training) course, I was told that this was reserved for the natives. I then went to Komvux again, just to do something somewhere. Again to the Employment Service office, month

after month, year after year. Then, thanks to an official there who knew me from a course in which he was teaching, I got six months of paid work checking some documents in a firm's archives. I received 18,000 a month there. The boss was nice, she was of Finnish origin and has had a project in Bosnia during the war, she felt sympathy towards the Bosnians. But after that I was back to my starting position at the Employment Service. Practice here, practice there – just that they push you out of home, or out of the street. Just to “massage” one with some stupidities... It all affects one's health, when you see what is happening. They “sold” several projects and stupidities, so that someone (among the officials; MPF) could get some hours of employment. Contents that are beyond reason, for example “how to engage in *friskvård* (keep-fit measures)”, “how to write a CV and a job application”, “how EU is organised”... But when you search for job, there is nothing.

They asked me if I would change my profession. I chose a montage course at Lernia. I chose it because it lasted for only twelve weeks, it was the shortest of all; I thought I would get job quicker that way. But after five weeks the Employment Service “contact officer” came and told me that I have to stop because they said they would not employ me. I came home. I felt like nothing, my psyche was down/falling. In the meantime, I was diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder.

When I stopped working in December 1999 I tried to get a job with my original profession. (...) I applied for vacancies there (in a setting in which he could work in his own language; MPF) and they called me whenever there was a need. I hoped to get a job there after someone's retirement, but then they cut down the program, so there was no need for new people. After that – again some practices... I couldn't manage any more. I was afraid of getting a heart attack. I felt anxiety. I am on sick-leave now. I don't expect anything. I don't hope for anything. It is life from day to day. I just try to stay on my feet and stay more or less normal.

Two other resettled refugees pointed out the importance of being settled in the same places in Sweden as fellow refugees who went through the same war experiences in the same places in Bosnia-Herzegovina:

I was helped by a psychiatrist, but we were often the targets of the journalists who wanted to interview us. A special problem was that we were resettled in numerous municipalities at the time when group therapy was most needed.

What helped us most was that we were together and could talk. That was the best method. We had a psychological treatment with a Serbian interpreter! You lose any will to talk! Today it is easier. There are many more of our people (among the medical staff in Sweden; MPF). Those meetings (with the psychologist; MPF) were more of a burden. One had to be careful about what one said, although we all indeed needed help.⁴⁷

Questions of place

The fact that the three persons quoted above were resettled in places in different parts of Sweden with different labour market situations is of some importance. Place may be singled out as the decisive factor influencing these individuals' potential employment, but their actual employment was clearly dependent on a number of factors clustered in unique ways. The question of place, however, was reflected on by a number of my interviewees as important in different ways.

We ended up in Rosengård, since no one was asking about any guarantees for payment there. You had to have a guarantee otherwise, in order to pay for the flat. My husband thought that he had to be modest and contented with what he was offered; he took the first flat he saw.

⁴⁷ See the remarks in Douglas 1995 on the irritation of the officials, caused by the Bosniaks' demands regarding the ethnic affiliation of interpreters they had to 'talk through'. The ignorance of the war-context crucial for such demands – indeed, of the core of those people's victimisation – was paramount. The same goes for questioning the truthfulness of the refugees' depictions of peaceful ethnic coexistence in Bosnia before the war in the 1990s.

The resettled refugees I talked to, who came to Malmö, found apartments through their own contacts among relatives who already lived there (some might have paid a middle-man); they were not forced to accept settlement elsewhere. The importance of close relations in a new country was prioritised over the importance of future job opportunities. According to my respondents, people who had no clue about the current job market situation in Sweden were not advised against moving to Malmö in 1994. On the other hand, several of the asylum seekers I met had neither special preferences regarding settlement nor any knowledge of regional job-situations, so they agreed to go to municipalities offered to them just as resettled refugees would be expected to do. Only a few made active choices of university towns, having their own or their children's future education in mind.

Not moving for work

“For me, K. is Paris!” K. is a place with less than 6,000 inhabitants, but the woman who uttered this wanted to stress that K. is a good place to live in, and that she is happy to be there regardless of the fact that she never got a permanent job. Coming from a so-called ethnically mixed marriage that did not survive the strains of exile, and having bitter memories from the war, she has not been back to Bosnia for nine years. For her, K. is a place of peace, a place far away from ethnic labelling, a place from which her children started on the path towards a good life via education.

As indicated also by other researchers (e.g. Gustafson 2004), the physical proximity of close family members, especially children, is seen as very important, and often was the reason for settling in a particular town. (“We could not imagine staying in northern Sweden – we didn't know anyone there!”) While some Bosnians made a conscious decision to move far up north (such as the medical professionals mentioned in Gustafson 2004), none of my interviewees did so. On the contrary, when being offered a job in Stockholm, one of them, living in southern Sweden, declined the offer, saying that “it was 600 km in the wrong direction”. This, of course, was a reference to the position of his present address with regard to Bosnia and Croatia, where he has relatives and where he

spends summer holidays. The job in Stockholm would have been better paid but both he and his wife already had jobs they were very pleased with.

The particular distance to the working place was also mentioned:

It is wonderful to work close to where you live. Only after you get a job far away can you appreciate such proximity.

The man in his thirties quoted above spends a lot of time travelling to work, but is very pleased with living in the small town where he is within walking distance of his parents (visiting them for lunch every Sunday – “It is obligatory!”), where people recognise him in the street, and where he plays basketball every Saturday “in a Greek club, with Swedes, Greeks, Croats, Bosniaks, Serbs”. He gave the impression of great satisfaction with his apartment and the life in that particular place that was not at all related to his employment. He did not consider moving to Stockholm when a permanent position (the only so far) was offered to him, since it was below his educational level.

In former Yugoslavia it was very common to live in the same place one was born in. Moving for work is not an automatic “that goes without saying” answer, embedded in my respondents’ former social experience. That explains why, when asking about moving for jobs, I sometimes got an answer about moving within a distance of 20 km! It is reasonable to presume that the unwillingness to move may be affected by the basic social security offered by the welfare state on the one hand, and the fact that people appreciate having a stable home after the turmoil of exile on the other. One refugee was hesitant to “let her son go” to search for work in Norway: “He was with me through a lot; there is a special link between us”. The son is twenty years old and unemployed.

Smaller is better?

Several people I talked to expressed satisfaction with the place of their present life. “We left our roots here”, some said. Feeling good about (“liking”) one’s neighbourhood was pronounced. Most of my respondents were also very pleased by their dwelling. Several

of them bought houses as soon as they got permanent employment. The size of a place was seldom pointed out as significant, although I heard statements such as:

Smaller places were better because there were fewer foreigners there; the refugees got a local family to help them. But here (in Malmö in 1994; MPF) it was chaotic.

Smaller places are better. When I go to Gothenburg... there is not the least chance of meeting someone, getting to know someone. In the tram, people don't look at you; they look through you. Here (in the place with 20,000 inhabitants where she lives; MPF), everyone knows who you are.

Such statements were uttered by people who had also lived in small places in Bosnia. Those coming from bigger towns seem to appreciate urbanity as such. People rather stressed the practicality of everyday life organised at small distances. For example, a resettled refugee was lyrical about the place in which she spent her entire life in Sweden:

There are more contacts in small places. Here everything is 'under our nose' – you have 30 metres to the school, to the kindergarten...

I was often told about moving within the same place. So, for example, a family of asylum seekers wanted to live in Gothenburg after getting a residence permit, to be close to the relatives who had already settled there. They first lived among the (Swedish) social cases because it was only there they could afford the rent. When they obtained employment, they bought an apartment in a part of the town they like and where their teenage children would refuse to leave.⁴⁸

None of the people I talked to mentioned employment possibilities in relation to the size of the places they knew, only social well-being. According to the people I spoke to, "knowing someone" (among Swedes or co-ethnics) indeed helped people to get jobs, but it was

⁴⁸ The central importance of having a stable address and especially of owning a home (preferably a house) would deserve a special study, with the focus on the transnational span of everyday lives, as homes are kept, invested in or obtained in Sweden but also in Bosnia, and at the Croatian seaside.

not necessarily related to the size of the places. Many were surprised by the importance of “connections” in Sweden.

Here it is called contact.

If you have a “net”, it is very easy. Connections – social network.

I got a job through a connection. It was something that surprised me in the beginning: to get a job through a connection. Here it is maybe one of the most common ways, totally normal.

The surprise came from the fact that the cultural topos of *veza* – private connection, familiar to everyone related to the regions of former Yugoslavia – refers to a “normality” of nepotism that people believed did not belong in a “proper”, law-abiding country like Sweden.⁴⁹

When asked to comment on the supposition that Bosnians have more contacts with Swedes in smaller places than in bigger towns, and that those contacts have a positive effect on their possibilities of employment, a male resettled refugee who moved from a small place to Stockholm said:

Bigger or smaller places are important only with regard to education or job offers. The contact with Swedes is not so important. The Swedes are not eager to “sacrifice” themselves (in order to help immigrants to get jobs; MPF). I helped a (Swedish; MPF) colleague by giving her some data and providing her with contacts with Bosnians, but when I asked her to help me when I was about to change apartments, I got the answer: “In Sweden, one has to do everything on one’s own”. She didn’t even want to give me a guarantee for my daughter’s job. I asked her, but she simply remained silent. She just discarded the question.

49 Thanks to Zoran Slavnić for observing that this points to a clash of discourses. The one accepted in Sweden, on “connections” as a part of social capital and thus as an unproblematic aspect of Swedish modernity, is counter posed to the discourse originating in Yugoslavia, adopted by the Bosnians now living in Sweden. That is a discourse of striving-for-modernity in a Weberian sense that refers to “connections” as a sign of nepotism and personal links as characteristic of traditional society. They should be replaced by formal merits as the only criteria for social and professional promotion. Similar issues are taken up in Bauder 2005 (thanks Zoran Slavnić for the reference).

Ethnic contacts

The common understanding of the notion of ethnic contacts gets complicated in the discussion of such contacts among Bosnian refugees. Depending on context, the expression “our people” can refer to Bosniaks, Croats or Serbs in exclusive terms, but also to all people from former Yugoslavia who speak “our language” – meaning Bosnian, Croatian or Serbian. The flexibility of these notions reflects and explains the range of ethnic contacts that helped some people get a job in Sweden. Several Bosnians mentioned that their Swedish employers were pleased with their work and asked them to bring in more workers through their ethnic contacts. Persons who acted as door-openers (see Carlson 2007) for several of “our guys” were distinctly proud of their role.

A Bosnian engineer has had a number of under qualified jobs in Sweden:

I lost any illusion. I weakened my criteria. I was never ever asked for an interview. I know people who drive taxies in Malmö and they are building engineers.

He was forty-two years old when he decided to change his original profession and become a teacher. However, in the course of studying, he found a job that enabled him, after a halt of eleven years, to proceed with the professional work he was educated for in Bosnia. He enjoys working there also because it is an “ethnic” firm:

The owners are from Vojvodina (the northern region of Serbia; MPF); they also came here in the 1990s. The main owner married a Swedish woman. He now employs thirty people, mainly from former Yugoslavia. The majority came because of the war. Mostly from Bosnia, three from Croatia, even one from Kosovo, then a Dane, a Romanian, some Swedes. The official language is Swedish, but we speak our languages. It is not necessary that everyone speak Swedish. We work in groups; there is always someone who speaks Swedish. Two Swedes work for us – they own a sister-firm; when we have a meeting, we translate for them. (...) We joke at work. It feels nice, familiar. (...) When it comes to

politics, there were never any major problems. Everyone found an interest of one's own. The atmosphere is quite tolerant. Yet, there were some situations when it wasn't OK... There are many thirty-year old guys who came from Srebrenica...⁵⁰

Self-employment

Asked if he ever considered self-employment, the man quoted above explained his reasons against it:

A private firm? You know about our path in Yugoslavia: you got a degree, you were a part of a system (bound to get a job; MPF). I am formed in that way, I am afraid of uncertainty, and I don't know enough about private business. That is a question of generation; younger people are much more ready to take risks.

Another person observed:

It seems that Bosnians are not good merchants. They are few in comparison to the Arabs or Iranians, Turks, Greeks. A very small number, but they exist.

When a resettled refugee told me about a family member who is a successful owner of a firm, his success was explained by the person in question, as due to the owner being not only able but part of a family tradition in the building business in Bosnia. My respondent was proud of his relative's success, but observed, in a mocking-critical way, that "he is a moderate" (i.e. conservative, not sharing his own working-class identity).

Another refugee I met worked for seven years in a restaurant owned by his wife's relatives who came to Sweden as labour migrants in 1970s. He was then offered the opportunity of buying the business together with a companion. Both he and his wife work there, together with their seven employees. They radiated pride in their success. They did not complain, but explained to me that "only people who never

⁵⁰ The assault on Srebrenica stands as one of the most atrocious events in the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina 1992-95. Almost 7,000 Bosniak men, most of them civilians, were slaughtered in the week in which Srebrenica was taken by Serb forces; see *Human losses in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1991-95* (2008).

owned private business could believe that it is easy money”. They work a lot (some ten hours a day, also on weekends) but they can afford a month of holidays by the Croatian coast every summer.

Ethnic niches Bosnian way

Generally speaking, earlier migrants from former Yugoslavia living in Sweden at the time of the arrival of refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina did provide some practical help to refugees of their own ethnic affiliation, but the relations were not necessarily good. On the contrary, many of my interviewees mentioned conflicts between “old” (labour migrant) and “new” (refugee) immigrants within the same ethnic group experienced in some ethnic associations, or even between family members.⁵¹ A refugee of Croatian affiliation related:

They don't like us. It is *avundsjuka* (jealousy), although I don't know what for!? I was in the club in 1996 for the last time. (...) I did not order the war (he did not want to come to Sweden; MPF); they came here because they wanted to – they came for work.

A resettled refugee of Bosniak affiliation explained:

They tried to organise us in associations, to help us politically: there was no mention of employment, since they were not well-established people in Sweden, but simple workers who couldn't even speak correct Swedish. They could not tell us (it appears as humour nowadays!) what the abbreviation ABB stands for, or Vasa, so of course they couldn't help us to integrate into Swedish society. A few years later, we were helping them in explaining many unclarities they were struggling with before.

Several refugees “accepted”, as one of them said, positions as mother-tongue teachers of the language called B/K/S (*Bosniska/Kroatiska/Serbiska*; Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian) in Swedish schools

⁵¹ Guilt was often imposed on men by their labour migrant co-ethnics for not staying behind to fight. This was a prominent topic in my former research (see Povrzanović Frykman 2001) as well as in the interviews done for the purpose of this study.

(see Povrzanović Frykman 2002b). Some got jobs in public home care assistance for older people (“there were our women who needed someone who spoke Croatian”). A married couple of refugees were employed only in various projects concerning Bosnian refugees or in Bosniak ethnic associations. Those, I was told, are meagrely paid jobs assisted with public money, and are very few in number.

A man who was also engaged in a number of projects concerning refugees and immigrants but who never managed to get a permanent job in his former profession connected to the media, uses his professional capacities for volunteering in an ethnic association. Investing his free time and money, he keeps his professional identity stable. His unstable paid work often does not fully engage his capacities and certainly does not allow him to have his status confirmed by a business card similar to the one he has for his volunteer work.

Contacts with Bosnia

A man in his forties who operates a small family restaurant, together with a relative, complained about the lack of free time (“I had no proper holidays for the last seven years!”). He told me about his many trials, including one starting a private enterprise that would connect Sweden and Croatia. His unsuccessful attempt was the only example of a transnational firm that I heard of in the course of this research. As explained by a resettled refugee:

The contacts with Bosnia-Herzegovina were mostly used in projects that were “fashionable” before, but don’t exist any more. I met at least twenty Bosnians who worked in different projects. But most often like this: a Swede is the project leader, and the Bosnian is employed half-time.

It can be posited that labour market integration in Sweden is a precondition for transnational integrations of new and old homeland in the post-exile experience of regular personal contacts. When asked about the dates for her summer holidays in 2009, a refugee woman told me that, since she lost her job when her firm went bankrupt, the entire family stayed in Sweden.

The realms and scopes of integration could be assessed also by looking at the geography of remittances. While it is common to presume that immigrants, including refugees, send remittances “back home” (as some of my respondents do, albeit not regularly), a well-to-do family of Bosnian refugees I talked to sends regular amounts to Ethiopia, not to Bosnia!

Matters of recognition

Denise Thomsson (2008:26) points out that resettled refugees may be viewed as “empty sheets”, with whom the introduction teams have to start “from scratch”; that was the unpleasant experience of many of my respondents. To be “seen” in a way that was proper from people’s own point of view, was a rare experience. I was told about a reception centre official apologizing to a refugee woman for “teaching her” how to dispose of the garbage after she showed him a family album with photos taken in her Bosnian home. The understanding was acute of the gap between their self-perception and the fact that they were in a situation of economic dependence (“on social care – it is terrible!”) and also facing the stereotype of refugees as backward *others*. However, in relation to employment in Sweden, some had realistic ideas about their own shortcomings:

The ‘minus’ of my generation is that I never learned English. Another mishap is my age: forty-five years is the limit for taking CSN (the study loan; MPF).

Social background and actual needs

Upon arrival in Sweden (“we went like the blind, no matter what; everything was in a mist”), neither the asylum seeking nor the resettled refugees had the power to decide what to do; most details of their reception centre- and introductory period were decided for them. Denise Thomsson (in this volume) mentions the managing of expectations needed in order to ensure that the refugees have realistic ideas about the country of resettlement. My interviews with the resettled refugees from Bosnia point to the fact that most of them came to Sweden out of chance and had hardly any precise ideas about the country. What some of them addressed was the general

image of Western Europe as rich, prevalent in former Yugoslavia as a country of labour emigration. “The image of a very good life in the West was disappearing. It started to shake”, said a refugee who so far had not succeeded in getting a permanent job in Sweden.

When talking about people in structural positions of power, my interviewees uttered a lot of critical comments. Managing of expectations for some of them meant coming to terms with the manifold loss of power and status.

They thought they had to teach us how to dispose of the garbage, how to use a VCR!

I needed a human gesture, and he told me how to use the washing machine!

As I was resettled in a very small place in the Örebro municipality, we met our social assistant only twice a month. He made an effort to “teach us” how to run the water in the toilet, how the municipality is organised, what the shops are for, and that there is a “big house in Örebro that is called a theatre”. (...) I posed an ironic question, asking if one had to pay for the desired merchandise; he gave me a serious answer that “in Sweden everything has to be paid for”.

These are remarks made by resettled refugees but they are a standard element of most Bosnian refugees’ narration about their official introduction to Sweden. Some took the opportunity of talking at length about their social background in the situation of the interview:

I came from a provincial town, but we had a first-league football team. My father sang in a choir for thirty years, I started to swim at the age of three and to ski at the age of four; I attended the music school...

A male resettled refugee pointed to the fact that his refugee experience was not recognised when it could have made a difference with regard to his employment:

I searched for jobs in the parts of the municipality where there are mostly immigrants. Some projects – to be there for any of their needs. I couldn't get in although I had the qualifications. The natives got in, even if they had no clue about what it means to be a refugee.

Working capacities

One person I talked to became the chief economist in the place in which he started obligatory practice only a year earlier. His diploma and the complete study plan and program were translated into Swedish at the initiative of a Public Employment Service official in Lund who paid 40,000 crowns for the translation. Instead of demanding that he get the twenty university credits needed for full recognition of his Croatian university degree, his director, in collaboration with the Employment Service, arranged that this man could work half-time, and attend courses in the other half, to raise his competence to the degree necessary. "I got all the help I needed." This man's capacities and potentials were fully recognised, and the appropriate individual solutions were organised for him, due to the individual engagement of the director who "saw" him and wanted to employ him.

Some other people had their diplomas translated at their own initiative but no one ever wanted to see them. A woman now working as an assistant nurse observed that, if she made a phone call, the employers always claimed there was no job available. So, she *went* to an old-age home and said "give me a chance, I want a chance"! She started the probation period four days later and six months later got a permanent position.

One forty-year old man received a year and a half of vocational education paid by the Employment Service which led to a few weeks of employment, after which he developed an asthmatic condition which prevented him from working in the field he was educated for. The owner ("a blood-sucker!") did not provide the necessary protection and air-moisteners for people working with formaldehyde, lacks and sawdust. This man was clearly frustrated by his crushed hopes for "making money the easier way, with a pencil", and insisted on telling me about health risks connected to some of the many jobs he had later on, e.g., drug-addicts' needles in the garbage compartments of the houses he was servicing.

Help and gratitude

“The Swedes are wonderful!” exclaimed a resettled refugee who also stated, without being asked, that she and her family have it far better in Sweden than they would ever have had it in Bosnia. She did not refer specifically to employment, but to the overall sense of well-being. Many people who were very critical of “the Swedes” working at Employment Service offices, expressed their warm gratitude to other Swedes who helped them in different ways.

We are very grateful to the S. hotel (that gave the couple their first employment; MPF). We had luck with the directors. Magnus and Tina – we always thanked them.

I would now sit at home if I didn't have Ingemar.

My boss takes us on trips for one weekend a year, together with our spouses. It is so nice! We've seen different parts of Sweden that way.

The teachers at Komvux took a liking to our people (Bosnians; MPF).

A refugee who is currently unemployed finds her family's existence safely predictable within the Swedish welfare system:

Before this crisis (in 2009) I didn't know anyone who was unemployed. It is striking the whole world – here it is still good. (...) Sweden... One could say ‘there is no soul’, but still, it is much better in comparison to many other places.⁵²

The higher dwelling standards (bigger apartments!) they could afford in Sweden were mentioned as very important:

⁵² The statement “Sweden is lacking soul” – referred to, but not adopted, by my interviewee – belongs to immigrant folklore concerning a hierarchy of places in which the cultural superiority of *us* “with soul” versus *them* “without soul” is established. However, the comparison of Sweden to “elsewhere” is not necessarily just a rhetorical figure; Bosnian refugees have close relatives, and thus first hand information about their conditions, literally all over the world. So is the case with the woman quoted here, who has close relatives in Bosnia, Germany and Canada.

You know how it was in Yugoslavia – you had to work for fifty years to buy a flat! Here, we got fantastic flats!⁵³

On the one hand, you are really grateful; many people (from Bosnia; MPF) lived (even when on social care; MPF) better here than in Yugoslavia. But it was hard not to live from your work.

Critique of Public Employment Service

The critique of the Public Employment Service (*Arbetsförmedlingen*) and its policies was pronounced in my interviews.

They “follow you” but only in pretence; the conversations last for fifteen minutes. You agree to that, since it is demanded of you. You do as you are told.

They send you to some courses with no avail – they only produce jobs for themselves.

Too much money is given for various courses. You spend three months for a course, and don’t get anything from it.

I found a practice in a second hand shop on my own; those practices were just exploitation.

The project employment does not lead to real employment.

Every employer exploits people – that is capitalism, and we were a labour force they got for free. They all need people but are afraid of paying a lot for employees.

I had practice for six months at a time; they avoided employing me by claiming my Swedish was not good enough.

⁵³ None of my respondents mentioned the fact that in Yugoslavia considerable numbers of people in urban areas did not have to buy their apartments but got them from the firms and institutions they were employed in. Those apartments could not be sold, but they could be swapped. Also, the children inherited the right to live in the apartments originally given to their parents. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, those apartments were offered for sale to the people living in them, at prices that were far below market prices.

A month after I got the job through my relative, the Employment Service sent me an official letter about me getting employed! They pretended, for their files, to have found me the job.

I saw, by chance, a newspaper advertisement of the Government's program for re-qualifying refugees to allow them to work in educational institutions. I took it to the Employment Service; then they registered me.

Every job I found – I knocked on the door myself.

Socio-economic success

A resettled refugee was proud to mention that a great number of highly educated Bosnians in Sweden found their “proper” place regardless of the fact that they came to the country as refugees.

I know a great number of medical doctors who work in their profession. Some even advanced in their positions. There are many in Stockholm, also a great number of dentists. (...) I chose a Bosnian doctor as a family doctor. I know specialists, pharmacists, professors of medicine, doctors of chemistry. Then, there are people who had another profession in Bosnia, but adapted to the labour market demands, and work successfully in another position. (...) I know film workers, directors, professors at a film academy.

Recognition and optimal use of their human capital resulted in the gaining of social and economic power for a couple from a small place in Southern Sweden, in which they had agreed to settle although it was not their preferred option. They only had complimentary words about their reception and introduction period, and about the Swedish “godfather family” – the local people who volunteered to help them get to know the place. I met them in the company of their two grandchildren whom they take care of every Saturday while their son and his Swedish wife are on duty in their private business. The husband told me how he felt exposed to the public gaze whenever he walked in the street or went shopping: he was embarrassed for

being on social care. However, he got a permanent job after only four months, before completing the obligatory six-month practice-work within the introduction period. The owner of the car-varnishing workshop quickly recognised his twenty-five year-long experience and his “workaholic” disposition. “I work here as I worked in Bosnia – at work and then privately, at home, some fourteen hours a day”, he told me with satisfaction. He still works in the same workshop (“even if I never really completed SFI!”). He was the first Bosnian refugee to get employed in H.: the municipality sent him a letter of congratulation. He and his wife became “role models” for those Bosnians who hesitated to work when the employment did not bring much more money than social care allowance. In the beginning, this couple, too, had only 100 crowns more than when they were on social care. Yet, even then, work made a major difference in their feeling of self-respect. Other refugees soon realised that they were subsequently gaining economic power, allowing them to buy a car and a house, to support their children’s education, to travel to Bosnia and finally to build a house there (“without any loan!”).

The wife became a cleaner, getting fully employed step by step, making a lot of friends at work and becoming known in the place. After hurting her back, she took premature pension several years ago, but she is overtly proud of “having earned a pension”. In Bosnia she was a housewife.

The gender dimension was also addressed by women whose employment paths were halted due to pregnancy. For example, a woman whose studying of physics in Bosnia was interrupted by the war, attended a Swedish ten-month technical education that was supposed to guarantee her a job, when “a problem” occurred:

I got a vocation, but I stayed at home with the baby. Later on I tried to get the job (with that education; MPF), but was rejected for the lack of experience.

She subsequently worked for six years in the car industry (montage, lacking, loading trucks), until she lost her job together with two thousand other people. She then underwent yet another reorientation in the job market, and now works as a car-park attendant employed

by the town. With considerable pride, she told me that out of one hundred people interested in the six-week education for that position, she was one of the eighteen chosen, and one of the twelve who eventually got the job.

Loss of status

My material suggests that human capital is important but that it offers no guarantee for a development of a career-path satisfactory from the individual point of view (neither for the resettled refugees nor for the asylum seekers).

In further research on Bosnian refugees' employment in Sweden, I would construct a "group" out of people who experienced downward mobility. Among the people interviewed for this study, there was a female lawyer who, in order to get a paid job, agreed to be re-educated as a cook, and ended up working (as an administrator, but also as a cook) in a kitchen providing food for schools and old-age homes. Another woman understood that she could not live in Sweden as a professional artist so she was re-educated as a teacher for children with special needs, currently working with a boy suffering Asperger syndrome ("he understands better when I draw for him, than when I talk to him"). A Bosnian engineer tried to start a private firm, but lost it due to the IT-crisis several years ago and has been driving a taxi ever since. Another refugee I know, who used to work as an economist in a big Bosnian firm, became a bus driver in Sweden.

It is very important not to single out such stories, but to look at people in the context of their families. Not only are their children most probably bound to get university education, but the occupations of their spouses might offer a balance in self-perception of one's status. The cook's husband is a well-paid engineer, and the teacher's husband is an esteemed medical specialist. The taxi driver's wife is a medical doctor and the bus driver's wife is a nurse. The teacher claimed that she is pleased with her job (now only fifty percent time), since she needs strict order after having been on sick-leave for depression. The taxi driver mentioned above is pleased, too, since he can now organise his time around his hobby – mountain climbing. The bus driver enjoys the fact that he has a lot of time for reading books during his working days.

A Bosnian engineer who worked as a factory director for twenty years, got a job in a slaughterhouse, together with his wife who used to be a secretary. However, his interest and recognition connected to his hobby of raising pedigreed sport pigeons, remained intact. He travelled to China twice in the past few years, he acts as a referee in international competitions in Europe, he is regularly published in pigeon-raisers' journals in Croatia, Hungary, and Bosnia and he has also authored two books.

Discrimination?

A man who came to Sweden at the age of twenty was an exceptionally successful student in numerous courses providing him with the title of IT consultant and with a number of certificates for the implementation of different computer programs (some of them limited to only 600 people in Sweden). However, he never got permanent employment and nowadays works for a private employment and staffing company, with contracts that are signed for six months at a time (see Andersson and Wadensjö 2004).

Tell me what to learn – I'll learn it! I know my trade, I know the (Swedish; MPF) language, I use English, but I don't have any contacts.

He says he would probably be better off if he had a university degree in the field. Yet, there was no one to give him advice of that sort, not even his teacher in post secondary vocational education, who told him: "You have superb results, but don't be surprised if you don't succeed as a foreigner". He now travels up to 100 km to the places he has to work. The time for travel is not counted as paid working hours and he is not able to plan his free time. Neither is he able to make any significant social contacts at work; he worked in some forty firms over the last nine years. He also complained about the lack of intellectual stimuli:

I eventually ended up among the industrial workers who are not interested in any discussions, not interested in politics; I sink to their level. And they actually have it better since they live close to

work! (...) However, the retirement and holiday money are there; it is paid badly, but I have a job.

He considered starting university studies, but is reluctant to have to lead a student life and live on CSN money after having his own two-room flat, a car and money to spend on holidays. His employment history so far does not generate particular optimism regarding his future employment options.

I am not comparing myself to the ones who are more successful, but with that which I left behind. Also, some people here have more schooling than me, yet they do the same kind of work. There was a war – we stayed alive. Everything is fine, actually.

To my surprise, when answering my direct question on discrimination, he avoided using that concept to frame his own experience. He instead employed a comparative perspective:

If they (the Swedes; MPF) came to us (in Bosnia; MPF), they would be treated the same way. (...) I have less difficulty getting a job here than I would have in my hometown in Bosnia (due to the war-changed ethnic relations; MPF).

Several Bosnian refugees said it was “normal” that the Swedes prefer “their own”, and that “it would be the same where we come from”. They are emphatic about never having experienced discrimination in Sweden. A resettled refugee claimed:

There is no discrimination against Bosnians in Sweden, not at all. On the contrary, they are eagerly accepted, everywhere and in all fields. (...) I have been to almost all the towns in Sweden; I never, not anywhere, met any cases of discrimination. It does happen that injustice is done in some places, that laws are trespassed, but not because people are Bosnians. It is because some Swede might be prioritised.

This surprising differentiation between injustice and discrimination appears as a steady feature of my interviews, worth further investigation. Not aware of the “catch 22” in their statements, several people claimed that “*once you are accepted*, the name doesn’t matter” (or “the accent doesn’t matter”, or “what you believe and celebrate does not matter”). Many claimed that the integration in the labour market depends first and foremost “on how you are as a person”.

Hope

Intertwined with the perceived power over planning, improving or keeping the good aspects of one’s own situation is the issue of hope. I see it as a crucial element of the complex process called “integration of refugees”, in the sense of “enduring disposition rather than a fleeting feeling (...) raw disposition to embrace life as it unfolds (...) the ability to cope with what is beyond one’s control and a belief in the possibility of a minimum sense of agency despite all” (Hage 2003: 24-25).

Some people mentioned above lost the hope of ever gaining a status close to the one they had in their homeland and acted accordingly, minimizing their ambitions as well as their active attempts to improve their job-related situation in Sweden. But most other people I talked to for the purpose of this study – resettled and asylum refugees alike, with different levels of education and sorts of work – radiated satisfaction with their current way of life and belief in their children’s prosperity in Sweden. A sixteen-year old daughter, who started high school just a few weeks before we met, was introduced to me by her mother as “a future veterinarian”. Plans regarding the children’s education, investment in bigger apartments, affording travel (not only to Bosnia!), and pride for work accomplishments were intertwined in ways that complemented the picture of Bosnians’ integration provided in Carlson 2007.⁵⁴

On the other hand, my material urges the conclusion that hope is significantly conditioned by people’s health. While physical hurts

⁵⁴ The case of a fifty-year-old refugee, originally an engineer, is unusual. When his children became adults, he stopped working and lived poorly, on savings, in order to have time to complete a PhD dissertation in the field that was his passion throughout his life. He hopes to get research projects funded in the future and finally be able to work as scholar.

and chronic illnesses did not seem to affect people's optimism, psychological difficulties proved to jeopardize the potential for any kind of hope.

If hope "is the perceived capacity to exercise some mastery over life, and it stands in opposition to helplessness" (Hage 2003:25), the following is a narrative of a loss of hope:

If someone asked me today if I would have come to Sweden, the answer would be negative. The fact that I was a resettled refugee had no bearing. I was pushed into a matrix, a quick river; swim if you can keep yourself up. If not, you are going to sink. (...) To be left to someone else making decisions for you – it is like a refined torture. After all that (suffering as the prisoner-of-war; MPF), here you meet ignorance or unwillingness, so another suffering is coming. (...) You have no one to tell, no one to complain to. When you cannot bear it any more – fall. When I look back – I am here for seventeen years – what did I get, what did I achieve? What could I offer from my working engagement? The period in which I could offer something, do something, is over. I have only my sixteen years of working life in Bosnia.

Conclusion: group-making for the purpose of analysis

With regard to categories of immigrants, asylum seekers and resettled refugees do not show distinctly separate patterns of experience in Sweden. The certainty of being granted permanent residence that differentiates resettled refugees from asylum seekers did not necessarily affect the resettled refugees' labour market integration. In line with that, in an e-mail exchange, a resettled refugee claimed:

Except for the "advantage" over other refugees (although expellees would be the right term), of getting a residence permit even before coming to Sweden, and the four figures (following the date of birth in the Swedish personal registration number; MPF), we did not have any other benefits.

Many of the experiences taken up in this chapter were not specific to resettled refugees versus asylum seekers. Chance can be seen

as their common denominator. Another common denominator relevant for employment is that they all had the same official treatment at the outset of the process of introduction. However, in the view of several resettled refugees, the period of waiting for the residence permit was beneficial for the asylum seekers. It implied uncertainty, but it helped them get oriented in the new surroundings on their own terms.

Resettled refugees did not “lose time” in reception centres. Their introduction should therefore have started almost immediately upon arrival to Sweden. While this has been the case for resettled refugees in some municipalities, it was not true for the resettled refugees who arrived in Malmö in 1994, as too many people arrived at the same time (see Ekberg and Ohlson 2000b:243). The queues were long for all the kinds of services they were entitled to.

The narrative material I collected indicates *no significant differences between Bosnian refugees that would be dependent on their admission status* as refugees or resettled refugees. “Groups” that would represent a meaningful organization of their experiences related to employment cannot be discerned so far as the views from within are concerned.

The insights enabled by the qualitative material suggest that *the type of education, age and gender, the time of arrival, placement in Sweden and the respective job-market situation, together with the psychological condition, personal traits and chance* should all be seen as more relevant for Bosnians’ employment in Sweden than the admission category to which they belonged.

As noted by Eva Wikström in this volume, people’s subjective perception of their situation is a very important aspect of their integration in the new surroundings. Many issues subsumed in the notion of integration cannot be turned into quantitative data. Even if employment is in focus, individual satisfaction defies any list of objective elements that could be systematised and compared. The meaning of satisfaction is highly contextual, and the present employment achievements in Sweden are not necessarily its most relevant context.

The possibilities of well-being coming out of the feeling of meaningfulness and purposefulness pointed out by Denise

Thomsson in this volume do not depend only on labour market integration. In line with the research done by psychologists (Alinder and Ralphsson 2000; Goldin 2008), my material indicates that family-life is a prioritized context in which stability and happiness is found and social life at its most intense. It is thus important that family and co-ethnics live in the same place (just as most of them did in Bosnia). Close friends are found primarily among co-ethnics, yet not any co-ethnics, but rather people with whom my respondents shared experiences of everyday life before exile or with whom they went through the critical resettlement or asylum seeking period. The notion of war friends could be paralleled with the notion of exile friends. Sharing the experience of having lived in a certain reception centre with its local ways and problems, and the later experience of living in Sweden, suggest an important place-related dimension of the issues they cannot share with friends and relatives who stayed behind in Bosnia.

A further refinement of the qualitative approach to the matters taken up in this study would involve a comparison with those Bosnians who underwent a lengthy and uncertain asylum-seeking period before acquiring a residence permit (described in Slavnić 2000). Employment-related interviews with those people would help assess the psychological and social benefits of certainty, i.e. of durable solutions in the field of refugee reception policies. For a systematic comparison of the views on employment from within different admission categories, the situation of relatives who arrived on the basis of family reunion would also be relevant, as well as the employment conditions of those persons who received a permanent residence permit but chose to return to Bosnia.

Depicting a vast variety of experiences of people who found themselves in the same admission categories, my material reminds us that “integration into Swedish society” is a chance-ridden individual process, always experienced locally. I hope that it also proves the value of an ethnographic approach that promotes the views from within.