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After Coming Home: Forms and Meanings of Return in Dayton's Bosnia and Herzegovina*

The Dayton Agreement was meant to end the war, restore the Bosnian state to its prewar multiethnic composition, and facilitate rebuilding coexistence among its constituent nations. The peace treaty stipulated that people who were forced to leave their homes had a right to return home freely. To do so, the most important provisions were contained in Annex 7, which focused on arranging the return of refugees and IDPs. Minority returns became a special tool for measuring success in the peacebuilding process. Since repatriation did not happen in the way the international community anticipated, the fulfillment of Annex 7 became a political priority. Since 1999, international agencies (OHR, UNHCR, and others) have set the return of minorities at the top of their agenda. Although the repatriation process has not officially been concluded, the number of returnees were low after 2006. It is no longer much of a priority for anybody except verbally for political purposes. This study addresses the question of under what circumstances we can talk about a minority return being “successful”. Given the complexities of the repatriation process, its dynamics, and the fact that no return could actually end at the moment of formal inhabitation at the prewar address, this article proposes that categories for minority repatriation should not be considered through the binary of “successful” and “unsuccessful” but along a continuum running from “complete” to “incomplete” types of sustainable return and to specific forms of unsustainable (“unsuccessful”) return. Based on results obtained from field research in select Bosnian localities between 2010 and 2018, I argue that the term “return” has several facets which impact its sustainability and character.

Key words: Bosnia and Herzegovina, minority returns, IDP returns, repatriation success, sustainability of return after ethnic cleansing

После доласка кући: облици и значења повратка у дејтонску Босну и Херцеговину

Дејтонски споразум требало је да означи крај рата, враћање босанске државе на њен предратни мултиетнички састав и олакшану обнову суживота међу њеним конститутивним нацијама. Мировним споразумом било је предвиђено да људи који су били принуђени да напусте своје домове имају право на то да се слободно врате кући.

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Да би се то могло учинити, најважније одредбе биле су садржане у Анексу 7, који се фокусирао на организовање повратка избеглица и расељених лица. Повратак мањина је постао специјални инструмент за мерење успеха процеса изградње мира. С обзиром на то да се репатријација није остварила на начин на који је то међународна заједница предвидела, испуњење Анекса 7 је постало политички приоритет. Од 1999. године међународне организације (Канцеларија високог представника у БиХ, Високи комесаријат Уједињених нација за избеглице и друге) поставиле су повратак мањина као свој приоритет. Иако процес репатријације званично није био завршен, број повратника је био мали након 2006. године. И то више није представљало ниједији приоритет, осим вербално, у политичке сврхе. У овом раду поставља се питање: под којим условима се може говорити да је повратак мањина био „успешан“? С обзиром на сложеност процеса репатријације, његову динамику, на чињеницу да нема повратка који се стварно завршава формалним усељавањем на предатну адресу, у овом раду се предлаже да категорије мањинске репатријације не би требало посматрати бинарно као „успешне“ и „неуспешне“, већ у континууму који тече од „потпуног“ до „непотпуног“ типа одрживог повратка и специфичних облика неодрживог („неуспешног“) повратка. На основу резултата теренских истраживања на одабраним босанским локацијама у периоду од 2010. до 2018. године, указујем на то да израз „повратак“ има више аспеката који утичу на његову одрживост и карактер.

Кључне речи: Босна и Херцеговина, повратак мањина, повратак интерно расељених лица, успех репатријације, одрживост повратка после етничког чишћења

Introduction

Almost twenty-five years have passed since the signing of the Dayton Agreement that concluded the 1992–1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter BiH). The Bosnian conflict broke out for complex social, ethno-demographic, and political reasons. These factors escalated ethno-national tensions and the struggle to control ethnically homogenized territories (Bougarel 1996; Burg & Shoup 1999; Hayden 1999). To unmix the ethnically heterogeneous Bosnian population, the ethnic minorities were expelled from territories under each side's control. More than half of all Bosnians had to leave their homes between 1992 and 1995 (Harvey 2006; Mann 2005; Ther 2016). The conflict meant that prewar BiH, which resembled a “leopard skin” (Bougarel 1992, 106) by virtue of its multiethnicity (Čermák 2018; De Andrade & Delaney 2001; D’Onofrio 2004; Edwards 2000), was turned into separate, distinctive, and ethnically homogenous areas under the control of the Bosniak,¹ Serb, and Croat leaders (Burg & Shoup 1999; Pejanović 2017). Ethnic cleansing, a violent/forced homogenization of the population and a literal translation of *etničko čišćenje*, became a new and ominous term in the international lexicon during the Yugoslav wars, even though it was a common practice during the twentieth century (Hayden 1996).

¹ *Bosniaks* (*Bošnjaci*) constitute one of the three Bosnian “constituent nations,” along with Serbs and Croats. Bosniaks were officially called Muslims until 1993. *Bosnians* (*Bosanci*), on the other hand, are all inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Although Socialist BiH was one of the most rural Yugoslav republics, the rapid modernization of urban areas in the period after the Second World War increased rural to urban migration as well as migration of Bosnians to more developed neighboring Yugoslav republics, Serbia and Croatia (Bringa 1995; Petrović 1987). Despite massive modernization progress, 60% of Bosnians still lived outside of urban municipalities centers in 1991 (Markotić 1996). An intense trend of urbanization continued during the war since the massive destruction of residences in the countryside was part of the ethnic cleansing campaigns (Toal & Dahlman 2011). People who lived in rural areas were hastily leaving and heading to urban zones under the control of ethno-nationally defined elites. This forced form of urbanization (Tuathail & Dahlman 2004) sharply accelerated the prewar natural urban drift. The process of Bosnian “unmixing” was carried out not only by the means of ethnic cleansing and the destruction of livelihoods and infrastructures but also by the more general and long-term migration trends that occurred during the Socialist era. A gradual decline of the Yugoslav economy, economic hardship, and growing debt in the 1980s further intensified these movements (Woodward 1995).

In an effort to reverse the results of ethnic cleansing, the Dayton Agreement stipulated that all expelled people had a right to return home freely (OHR 1995). To restore the multiethnic composition of pre-war BiH, the most important type of repatriation would be “minority return”, which meant that a former resident would return to their pre-war residence but in a place where he or she would be a member of an ethnic minority (Brubaker 2013). In contrast, a majority return would be to a place in which the returnee’s ethnic group was in power.

Inter-governmental structures (such as the OHR, OSCE, UNHCR, IOM, World Bank) and the armed forces (IFOR), which had administrated BiH since 1995 under the term of “international community”, organized the return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) (United Nations Human Rights 1998). These “Foreign Intervention Agencies” in Jansen’s definition refer to a conglomerate of intervening actors under the dominant US/Western-European umbrella (Jansen 2006). Although the international community is not a single entity with a singular aim, the UNHCR, the IOM, and the World Bank, under the coordination of the Office of the High Representative (OHR), particularly focused on the return process. These agencies invested an unprecedented amount of financial and political capital (Black 2002) to successfully implement the Dayton Agreement’s commitments.

The IOM and the UNHCR mostly understood the return of expellees to their places of origin as either “successful” (sustainable) – if the expellee returned home, recreated a sustainable livelihood, and reintegrated into the local community without an immediate inducement to leave again (“The Sustainability of ‘Voluntary Assisted Return’: The Experience of the Balkans” 2004) – or “unsuccessful” (unsustainable) – if the expellee stayed elsewhere and never returned at to live there (Žila 2014), if the returnee subsequently re-emigrated (was displaced a second time), or if he/she remained at home only because they had to do so against their will (Black & Gent 2004). In this paper, I argue that the distinction between a “successful” (sustainable) and an “unsuccessful” (unsustainable) return was not so

straight forward. Given the complexities of the repatriation process, its dynamics, and the fact that no return could actually end at the moment of formal inhabitation at the prewar address, this article analyzes the question of what the UNHCR's formal return statistics (i.e., the numbers of successful returns) tell us about the character of any individual minority return and its sustainability.

The diverse strategies returnees have used to adapt to and negotiate post-war and postsocialist reality in Dayton BiH (Eastmond 2006; Jansen 2011; Metivier et al. 2018; Porobić 2016; 2017; Rondić 2007) show that the minority return of any individual involves a long-term process which takes many different forms and reaches various ends. Based on my fieldwork, this study makes clear that understanding repatriation only in strict terms of “successful” or “unsuccessful” is therefore insufficient. Such an appraisal often does not reflect the final character of the individual's return, even if it is recorded in repatriation statistics as “successful”. It has been empirically proven that the official numbers of returnees in many areas did not correspond to the actual numbers who live there (Čermák 2018; Rondić 2007; Žila 2015). Actually, an effort to postpone a first postwar census in BiH had arguably been stalled precisely because it was believed by some international representatives that it would confirm the much lower than expected number of achieved returns than was previously reported in returnee statistics by the UNHCR (UNHCR 2011).² It would reveal the extent to which the return policy had failed and/or had been unsustainable (Black & Gent 2004; Perry 2015; Žila 2016). Although the official results of the 2013 census have been recently disputed as distorted (Hoh 2018; Josipović 2016; Nikolić 2016; Savić & Ignjić 2017), its findings, in general, affirm the different ethno-demographic composition of BiH caused by ethnic cleansing campaigns and the lower number of real minority returnees in the peacetime period (BHAS 2016).

I portray the return as a dynamic and long-term project (Jansen 2007a) in which returnees struggled with many obstacles that affected the final sustainability and character of the repatriation process. My findings raise three interconnected questions: first, on the basis of the IOM and the UNHCR's understanding of the return, can we consider the return of people who settled in their places of origin and reconstructed their homes but did not restore their prewar social relations as “successful”? Second, how can we evaluate the repatriation of people who physically returned to their places of origin but who have maintained a permanent address in the areas of their previous displacement? Third, how has the presence of minority returnees contributed to the forms of post-war coexistence in their places of origin? These questions must be discussed with an eye to the partially overlapping concepts of social capital (Putnam 1993) and of social exclusion/inclusion (Daly & Silver 2008). This article proposes that categories for minority repatriation should not be considered through the binary of “successful” and “unsuccessful”, but along a con-

² UNHCR had been publishing annual statistical reports about recorded returns disaggregated on the municipal level and including information about the ethnicity of returnees from 1996/1997 to 2007. Since 2008, only figures aggregated on the level of entities were published until 2011 (Čermák 2018, 14).

tinuum running from “complete” to “incomplete” types of sustainable return as well as to specific forms of unsustainable (“unsuccessful”) return. This continuum depicts the Bosnian repatriation process more comprehensively than the binary categories used to date permits.

My research involved fieldwork in rural Bosnian municipalities and in urban centers in them between 2010 and 2018. In this period, I spent at least three months every year in different municipalities across BiH. I carried out participant observation and interviews in B-H-S languages among minority returnees with different national backgrounds. I talked to local authorities responsible for this agenda as well as to representatives of local governments. In an effort to study returnees of all national backgrounds, I conducted research among Bosniak returnees in Čajniče, Foča, Han Pijesak, Kalinovik, Kotor Varoš, Mrkonjić Grad, Osmaci, Prijedor, Rogatica, Vlasenica, and Zvornik, among Serb returnees in Bosanski Petrovac, Bosansko Grahovo, Breza, Drvar, Donji Vakuf, Glamoč, Kalesija, Sanski Most, and Ustikolina, and among Croats in Breza, Fojnica, Vareš, and Dobretići. I did not study minority returns in larger cities such as Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Tuzla, Zenica, or Mostar. The primary focus of my research was an evaluation of the extent to which the UNHCR and other agencies’ recorded number of returnees corresponded with the situation on the ground. I was also interested in questions of the sustainability of return and the ways in which the returnees have coped with socio-economic predicaments after their return to their pre-war places of residence.

Repatriation process in Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina

The 1995 Dayton Agreement is an ambiguous treaty. Western negotiators did not consider any solution to the Bosnian question other than keeping the ex-Yugoslav republic as a single state, formally indivisible but in practice divided into two entities: the Republika Srpska (RS), with a unitary government, and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), composed of ten cantons, each nearly completely autonomous from the FBH government (Holbrooke 1999).³ The highly decentralized structure of the state enabled Croat and Serb political representatives to accept an undivided Bosnian state since the government in Sarajevo had virtually no governmental authority in the RS or in Croat-majority cantons in the FBiH (Hayden 1999). However, Annex 7 required the restoration of the republic’s pre-war multiethnic character (Toal & Dahlman 2011). The voluntary return of Bosnian refugees to their pre-war place of origin (not to their country of origin) was the innovative and preferred solution among those considered at the time, such as integration in the area of refuge or resettlement elsewhere (Black 2006; Heimerl 2005; Phuong 2005).

The goal of remixing BiH, however, was at odds with the Dayton Agreement’s decision that, in seeking a compromise among warring sides, cemented the

³ The geopolitically important region in the northeastern Bosnia and a river port at Sava, Brčko, became in 1998 the condominium formally detached by both entities by the decision of the IC.

ethnic division of the country. No matter how the OHR, the UNHCR or other agencies defined what “should” happen regarding Annex 7 and the return of refugees, the implementation of its plan was extremely difficult since the same political leaders who had caused the outbreak of war remained in power and were re-elected in 1996. Since the end of the war, minority returnees had been rejected by all three of the main ethno-national parties representing Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats. National leaders opposed repatriates trying to settle in territories under their control (Toal & Dahlman 2011, 200; Kostic 2003; Black 2001, 190).

Earlier predictions that all Bosnian expellees would want to return to their pre-war place of residence and would remain there (Cohen 1998) did not take into sufficient consideration how massively BiH had changed. The state was wrecked by three and a half years of fighting. Many buildings were in ruins, utilities were unavailable, fields were mined, and infrastructure and businesses were in disastrous shape (Donais 2005b). Except for (geo)political and security problems, all returnees had struggled with various obstacles including property restitution and its complications (Philpott 2005; Williams 2006), not to mention their socio-economic struggle. Without repossessed property and the financial support to reconstruct or replace it, there could be no return (Philpott & Williams 2008, 155). Although there was huge international financial support (Jansen 2011), the reconstruction policy of the international and inter-governmental donors was unbalanced. The extremely high number of NGOs involved in the repatriation process, uncoordinated from above, caused chaos at the local level (Kleck 2006; Ćukur et al. 2005; De Andrade & Delaney 2001).

Not only a post-war reconstruction but also post-socialist processes strongly affected the sustainability of return (Henig 2016; Gilbert 2006). Besides postwar reconstruction, the inter-governmental structures such as the World Bank or the IMF had been implementing a neo-liberal type of post-socialist transformation (Jansen 2006; Kostic 2003) that caused state-owned businesses to be privatized and, more often than not, shuttered. Transformations consisting of a neo-liberal mix of macroeconomic stabilization, liberalization, deregulation, and privatization had been orchestrated by the foreign intervention agencies and presented as the only acceptable means of transition (Jansen 2006). Peacebuilding in BiH, ruled over by these international and inter-governmental institutions, represented a “massive experiment in social engineering” (Donais 2005a, 20). For any potential returnee, the final decision to return was also influenced by other factors such as fear, worry, uncertainty, and mistrust. Such “soft” factors, which varied from individual to individual, were very difficult to measure.

For all these reasons, the repatriation process has not developed since 1995 in the way the international agencies envisioned (Heimerl 2005). Refugees and IDPs have not returned in great numbers, and minority return has been particularly unsuccessful. According to UNHCR statistics, of the over 1.3 million Bosnian refugees, some 208,000 had returned to BiH (though often not to their pre-war places of residence) by the end of 1997. Of the over one million IDPs, only 45,500 had returned to areas in which they formed a minority (ICG 1998). This type of return, therefore, was highly prioritized and increasingly “politicized” in 1998 (Ito 2001).

Ethnic minority return has become the central parameter of post-war reconstruction and reconciliation in BiH (Stefansson 2010). Repatriation data from the UNHCR for the period of 2000–2002 showed substantial progress in minority returns. According to UNHCR statistics, 67,000 minority returnees came back in 2000, 92,000 in 2001, and 102,111 in 2002 (UNHCR 2011). In 2004, the UNHCR celebrated a significant milestone of one million former refugees and IDPs having returned home (UNHCR 2004). According to the UNHCR, about 430,000 (30% of the total number of minority returnees) completed the formal return process by the end of 2004 (UNHCR 2011). This number was evaluated as a success by the international representatives in BiH, including the High Representatives Wolfgang Petritsch and Paddy Ashdown (Čermák 2018).

An optimistic interpretation of the return statistics in the period of 2000–2002 caused the Foreign intervention agencies to shift its attention and decrease its financial support for repatriation (Tuathail & Dahlman 2006; Williams 2006). In the following years, the number of returnees strikingly dropped to a few thousand per year. The process can be considered effectively over after 2007 as only hundreds of returns were recorded annually (Čermák 2018). In 2011, the UNHCR officially registered 470,228 minority returnees (UNHCR 2011). Since then, the webpage of the UNHCR branch located in BiH has not been working anymore, no UNHCR statistics on the return of refugees in BiH have been published, and the UNCHR in BiH works in the framework of the South-Eastern Europe UNHCR branch.

The repatriation of Bosnians to their places of origin has ceased to be one of the key topics in post-war BiH. Although Western nations still support some projects to help returnees and the topic of repatriation is occasionally mentioned in the media, it is evident that people who wanted to return have already done so, so the repatriation process in BiH is for all practical purposes over (Čermák 2018; Žila 2014). However, Annex 7 of the Dayton Agreement has not yet been deemed met by international representatives. Because the requirement of restoring people to places where they lived nearly thirty years ago formally remains part of Bosnian political reality, political leaders use the topic of repatriation for their political goals (Žila 2014). To complicate matters even more, the FBiH and the RS constitutions both state that any power-sharing arrangement shall be based on the 1991 census until Annex 7 is “fully implemented”. A new census was conducted in 2013, though its results have been contested by the RS. In any event, there is no agreement on which census (1991 or 2013) should be used for determining the representation of the three constituent nations in BiH’s administration. The two competing censuses are a central point in current disputes about the reform of the election law in the FBiH. The Central Election Commission decided at the end of 2018 that the number of seats given to Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats in the House of Peoples now being formed in the FBiH would be in accord with the 2013 census. Bosniak politicians strongly disputed this decision (Latal & Lakić 2018).

The successful minority return and limitations of its measurement

The common understanding of a “successful” voluntary return is defined in terms of recreating sustainable livelihoods, restoring previous activities, providing for basic human rights, reaching dignified standards of living, and reintegrating into the local community to such a degree that returnees would not be willing to leave their homes afterward (Porobić 2016). Anyone who decided to return has struggled with various problems at the beginning of the repatriation process, during its realization, and especially after its ostensible completion. These returnees have acted, reacted, and adjusted to the situation at their place of origin despite unforeseen factors.

In considering any repatriation “successful” and sustainable in the long term, the most important questions are whether and to what extent returnees have succeeded in handling the wide spectrum of difficulties mentioned above. Although time spent at one’s prewar residence can indicate whether the return should be considered successful, it is not the only feature of a sustainable return. Specialists focused on repatriation emphasize that the sustainability of return should be conceptualized more broadly to encompass other important socioeconomic factors, such as income, employment, and access to healthcare or education (Black & Gent 2006). These authors also state that it remains open for debate whether the notion of the “sustainability” of return represents the best way of conceptualizing the success of a return process (Black & Gent 2006). In any event, official numbers cannot adequately depict any individual’s difficulties with the repatriation process (Porobić 2017).

There are three interrelated questions regarding the success of minority return in BiH. First, did minority return necessarily lead to the reintegration and reconciliation of the Bosnian society? Could it be, therefore, considered as sustainable and successful in terms of international agencies’ understanding? Second, what does the UNHCR data tell us about the character and success of the repatriation process? Closer observation reveals a more complex reality. Official data on repatriation does not provide a complete answer to the question of the extent to which minority returns have actually reversed the outcome of ethnic cleansing. Third, how reliable is the UNHCR data on return?

The UNHCR considered the return of any individual “finished” and “successful” at the moment when the person physically returned to their place of origin, regained their property, and literally “spent one night” there (Belloni 2007, 149; Donais 2005b, 178; Waters 2004, 445). Regarding this understanding, there are many obscurities of how this rule was created and how it was implemented. The way the UNHCR’s definition was interpreted by scholars was disputed as “baseless” by former UNHCR officers (Artini & Lovat 2009). However, the unambiguous statement when the return process is formally concluded and under which circumstances we can talk about the successful return is missing. In other words, it is unclear what methodology had been used to determine and measure the successful return. As some researchers pointed out, the return home has not meant the “conclusion” of the repatriation process but rather its “beginning” (Rondić 2007). The

UNHCR was, however, especially concerned with the “end” of the repatriation process as being measured by the expellee’s physical return (Belloni 2007).

International organizations had no capacities to observe returnees’ quality of life after being repatriated and did not verify whether repatriates have remained in their places of return nor under which conditions they live there (Black & Gent 2006). The criterion of voluntary and safe return (OHR 1995) had not been evaluated. Only since 2004, when the numbers of officially registered returnees sharply decreased, did the international and inter-governmental donors begin to focus more on sustaining returns, putting an emphasis on safe and dignified conditions as well as social reintegration (Haider 2009; Ministarstvo za ljudska prava i izbjeglice 2008). However, in all minority return areas where I conducted fieldwork, returnees complained that after their physical repatriation, nobody was further interested in their struggles. I did not find any proof of ongoing monitoring that had been carried out by the international and national bodies. A similar mix of complaints, disillusionment, and frustration among Bosnian repatriates has been discussed by other scholars (Porobić 2017; 2016; Jansen 2007a; 2006; Hovey 2001).

The number of officially registered returnees by the UNHCR greatly differed from reality, and, due to that, they were disputed. Researchers who focused on minority return in BiH concluded that the number of real returnees is much lower than the UNHCR data suggests (Čermák 2018; Stefanovic & Loizides 2017; Žila 2014; Jansen 2011; Haider 2009). The UNHCR statistics registered the current situation on the ground. These figures do not take into account the fact that many returnees left their renovated homes again after a couple of years of struggling.

It is obvious that minority return progress represented a “juggling with numbers” game in which success was measured by quantitative indicators on the number of returnees, regardless of the “quality” of return, i.e., its sustainability (Black & Gent 2006; Ito 2001), which otherwise would consider the striking political and socio-economic changes in BiH after 1992. The growing number of minority returnees was used by the international institutions and organizations operating in BiH as proof that the peacebuilding process had been successfully implemented, notwithstanding whether these returnees had continued to live at their places of origin.

From the perspective of my interlocutors, the successful return especially meant the chance to live a decent and dignified life after their arrival in their pre-war place of residence. The majority of respondents agreed that the most important aspects regarding successful return were a renewed house, a chance to get a job, and access to public services without being threatened (including sending their children to schools). If these three requirements were met and the returnee could socialize with the local community without feeling intimidated, it was the most desired form of a successful return.

Sustainable vs. unsustainable forms of return

On the basis of an analysis of the repatriation success in BiH, I have found even more nuances in minority return. Taking into consideration the common understanding of sustainable return (Black & Gent 2006; Porobić 2016), I reveal other layers in the framework of the traditional distinction between a sustainable (“successful”) and an unsustainable (“unsuccessful”) minority return. By examining personal cases, I offer alternative categories of minority return. These developed categories – complete and incomplete forms of sustainable return and specific forms of unsustainable (“unsuccessful”) return – need to be elaborated in correlation to an understanding of the sustainable (“successful”) return by the foreign intervening agencies. The minority return was not a one-way process. The character of the local (majority) community, the way they treat returnees, and the level of their willingness to welcome or support former neighbors are as crucial for the process of repatriation as the readiness of repatriates to return.

The “complete return” category represents a form of sustainable return emphasized by the implementors of the Dayton Agreement. This “ideal model” demonstrates that the repatriate has truly returned to their place of origin, recreated their home, and re-registered their permanent address there. As to the returnee’s integration into the local majority society, I distinguish two levels: socially inclusive (“exemplary”) return and socially exclusive return.

The return of Biljana⁴ (age 51), who arrived in Kalesija in 2001, represents social inclusion. She successfully regained her property, restored her permanent address there, and, by getting back her pre-war job in the local administration, succeeded in re-establishing her life. She votes, pays taxes, and receives health insurance in this town located in the FBiH. Most importantly, Biljana renewed pre-war links with her neighbors. This “ideal” type of minority return was supposed to reverse the war’s outcome, make the ethnically homogenized territories heterogenous again, and gradually try to restore the interethnic trust necessary for reconciliation (Halpern & Weinstein 2004). On the basis of my findings, however, this symbiosis of two key minority return features, namely socio-economic sustainability and reintegration of returnees, was registered in large numbers only in the case of Serb repatriates who returned home in the FBiH: Drvar, Bosansko Grahovo, and Glamoč (Žila 2014; Stefanovic & Loizides 2011; Donais 2005a). It is, however, important to note that the prewar inhabitants of Drvar and Bosansko Grahovo were almost all Serbs.

The successful regaining of pre-war property and the registration of the permanent address has not generally meant complete social inclusion in the local majority community. Most frequently, minority returnees came back to rural areas

⁴ Names of all informants have been changed in order to protect their anonymity. I use these case studies to illustrate my point that can be related to other returnees of all nationalities as well. I use ‘national’ equivalents for the originals in the same way as Jansen did in his research (Jansen 2007b).

where they have lived in small returnee communities isolated from the majority. This is the case for Alma (age 38), Hurem (age 44), and their two children, who live in a village close to Zvornik in the RS. Hurem's family returned mostly because of their longing for their pre-war place of residence. They have been nostalgic for what they lost and wanted to restore it. Although Alma and Hurem registered there permanently (they vote and receive health care in the Zvornik municipality), by working as small-scale farmers in their village they socialize exclusively with other minority returnees. Alma's and Hurem's children commute to school in the FBiH across the inter-entity line. Despite their "success" as minority returnees, they have remained excluded from the ethnic majority of the municipality. For them, ethnic borders remain. Distance and isolation do not contribute to a restoration of ethnic mixture as found before the war. Even in other municipalities, I have observed that a returnee's children can commute to school across the inter-entity line. Returnees in municipalities located in the RS commute to schools located in the FBiH and *vice versa* (Čajniče and Goražde, Foča and Ustikolina, Osmaci and Kalesija, Prijedor and Sanski Most, Trnovo in the FBiH and Trnovo in the RS, etc.).

The part of my fieldwork which focused on repatriation in Bosnian municipalities discovered a form of sustainable return with social exclusion so exceptional that I call it the "incomplete return". After many years in Sarajevo, Mirza (age 49) decided to return to the municipality of Foča where he regained and reconstructed his house in 2004. In general, the return of expellees to the Foča municipality, where huge atrocities against local Muslims/Bosniaks were committed by the Serb paramilitary units at the beginning of the war, went wrong (Donais 2005a). Although Mirza is living permanently in his place of origin, he has rejected the idea of making it his permanent address. For reasons varying from security to livelihood, he has remained registered and connected to the place where he endured the war, Sarajevo. After returning to his pre-war place of residence, Mirza has regularly crossed the inter-entity line to collect welfare payments (he was an unemployed demobilized soldier), do paperwork, or to vote in the FBiH. Beyond enjoying a slightly higher social benefit there, Mirza emphasizes that a combination of fear and distrust keeps him from being treated in the Foča health center where the staff is Serbian. Both of Mirza's children have remained in Sarajevo since the end of the war. All other children of returnees from the same village commute to schools located in the FBiH. The incomplete return in Mirza's case hardly accomplishes his wants and needs. Instead, it should be understood as a creative form of struggling in the post-war matrix of the Dayton BiH. Having a chance to get a slightly better social benefit in the FBiH and his unwillingness to visit the local health center caused Mirza to remain, at least administratively, connected to the place of displacement, even though he physically returns. Mirza's "dual life", i.e., his physical return without socio-economic integration into the local majority, has not led to the "reintegration" and "reconciliation" anticipated by the foreign intervention agencies. Bearing in mind such an understanding of a "successful" voluntary return, Mirza's case presented a "success" limited to him but not to his family.

An unsustainable return consists of all repatriations that did not result in the sustainable form of repatriation for the long-term and thus to "successful reintegration"

tion that is critical to any national reconciliation and reconstruction process” (Black & Gent 2006, 24). In my fieldwork, I identified four types of an unsustainable return: no return, re-emigration (being displaced a second time after temporary return), seasonal return, and involuntary return.

Asim (age 41) was expelled along with his family from the municipality of Han Pijesak. He settled in Switzerland, where he obtained citizenship and launched a business. His traumatic war experiences, the remoteness of his rural place of origin, and his completely destroyed home caused him to discount the option of returning and reconstructing his property. Asim has maintained contacts there and, especially during summer, regularly visits his old relatives. A return of a couple of seniors is similar to Mirza’s case; they have physically come back and settled in their damaged house. Administratively, they have remained registered in Sarajevo because of a higher pension in the FBiH. Regarding Asim’s case, there is the question of who could ever expect or even anticipate that a person who got Swiss citizenship and a decent job there would ever return to BiH. Asim’s story is thus an example of a clear, unsustainable form of return.

After ten years in Banja Luka, Dobroslav (age 49) decided to return to the municipality of Sanski Most, whence he and his family were ousted at the end of the war. To obtain international financial support for reconstructing his house, Dobroslav signed up for the repatriation process, finished it in 2005, and repossessed his house. He applied for the repatriation process in part because of rumors that he could lose his property if he did not formally request it. This concern was also cited by other researchers (Kleck 2006, 109). Finally, Dobroslav was lucky and received support to rebuild his property. After finishing the reconstruction work, however, he did not settle there with his family but rather stayed in Banja Luka. Dobroslav said he had planned to return, but he was discouraged by the combination of extremely difficult living conditions and the lack of economic opportunities at the place of origin. Dobroslav, however, retains his house and uses it as a summer house (*vikendica*).

This type of “temporary return” developed due to the international donor’s pledge to financially assure the return of all expelled people. Hundreds of expellees have engaged in the repatriation process to get reconstruction aid without considering the option of truly returning. It is impossible to distinguish between an intentional “abuse” of reconstruction aid and a well-meaning failure to resettle at the place of origin. By registering with these support programs, of course, potential returnees have validly exercised their legal rights. These temporary returnees have rightfully used funds earmarked for going back to their places of origin, but, having decided that a permanent return was impossible, they had only the sale of their property to finance their life at their place of refuge. Although it is impossible to calculate the total number of these temporary returnees, hundreds of renovated family houses or apartments have been sold, exchanged, leased, or used as recreation buildings. The Helsinki Committee estimated in 2006 that half the registered minority returnees have sold or exchanged their properties and another third of them was planning to do that in the near future (Helsinki Committee 2005). This highly ra-

tional activity gives people who were expelled de facto compensation that could not be given in any other way.

Seasonal repatriation represents another type of provisionally unsustainable return. Samir (age 55), who has been living in Sweden since 1994, has retained dual citizenship and regained his family home in the municipality of Prijedor. Every year, he travels to BiH and spends the summer there. Samir has completely renovated his property and financially supported the development of local infrastructure. During the summer, his village pulsates with life although it is deserted for the rest of the year. Vacation time creates an impression of restored prewar multiethnicity (Stefansson 2006) thanks in part to Samir and other members of the Bosnian diaspora.

This type of unsustainable return (or temporary return) can develop to the sustainable form of return in the near future. It is possible that the “seasonal returnee” will someday decide to settle there permanently, especially if they are approaching retirement and receive a pension from a western country. The fact that Samir has maintained a Bosnian passport and his property points to his interest in staying in touch with his country of origin. Being located in one place in Sweden but retaining a connection to the place of origin, even if he only goes there occasionally, is not a failure. In the future, if Samir decides to return from Sweden, it could transform into a more sustainable form of return than in the case of Mirza. His life demonstrates that this specific transnational form of “return” can give Samir and others expellees a chance to understand repatriation as a still open-ended process depending on a connection between the country of acceptance and the country of origin (Eastmond 2006; Halilovich & Efendić 2019; Huttunen 2010).

The same concept of open-ended repatriation is more difficult to apply to the case of IDPs who do not have citizenship and thus the financial support of a foreign country. Although my findings from rural municipalities indicate that some of the IDPs could be willing to return as retirees to their places of origin, the concept of open-ended repatriation is out of the question for the majority of them. Even though Samir’s experience seems to be congruent to Mirza’s life trajectory – both men maintain some form of social relations and, in Mirza’s case (and in the future, maybe Samir’s as well), presents a “success” limited to them but not to their families – there is a distinction between these two cases. Except for having a chance to get benefits from the host state, the difference rests in a time framework. Mirza has permanently returned to the Foča municipality. He lives there the whole year even though he has remained registered in Sarajevo. Samir arrives in the Prijedor municipality for a short time and only during his summer vacation.

The most complicated type of return is an “involuntary” one. Emina (age 54) had to return to a remote village in the peripheral municipality of Čajniče in the RS. Although she did not want to return, her cheerless living conditions (she lost her husband, had to leave the apartment illegally occupied in neighboring Goražde, had no other close relatives, and was unemployed) forced her to do just that. After being evicted, the return to her pre-war and damaged home in the municipality of Čajniče was the only solution for a troubled situation. The fact that she repatriated

in 2009 and had no assistance meant she did not receive relevant financial or reconstruction support from international donors. She only received some remaining building material from the municipality. After her return, Emina struggled in a remote, barely accessible, and partially ruined village without any guarantee of the minimal conditions for return, namely dignity. Her poor living standards and being socially excluded deepened her despair, helplessness, and apathy. These negative feelings influenced her state of health. When I got into contact with her for the first time, she was recovering after suffering from a stroke. This type of return represents the worst scenario for minority returnees, not because they lack drive but because of unfavorable circumstances.

Conclusion

This study analyzes the common perception of a ‘successful’ voluntary return. In this understanding of the repatriation of any individual as dynamic and ongoing even after her physical return, this article demonstrates different returnee’s ways of realizing his/her minority repatriation. Different strategies for dealing with the wide spectrum of difficulties encountered during the return of any individual and, additionally, the distinct levels of his/her social inclusion/exclusion, integration into the local community, and involvement in local socioeconomic activities demonstrate that there is no clear-cut model for minority return but rather different forms of minority return that can be considered a “success”. To analyze the “success” of any individual repatriation, we must take into account some important considerations: whether a returnee could stay at their place of origin in the long-term perspective, whether he/she decided to create a permanent residence there, and to what extent a returnee successfully integrated into the local community and socialized with the majority. As I demonstrate by examining personal cases, instead of evaluating a minority return as just sustainable (“successful”) or unsustainable (“unsuccessful”), I offer alternative categories of minority return – complete and incomplete types of sustainable return, and specific forms of unsustainable (“unsuccessful”) return. I elaborated on these forms in correlation to the understanding of the sustainable (“successful”) return by the foreign intervene agencies. These cases show how nuanced an individual’s strategies and experiences could be while he/she adapted to the Bosnian post-war reality.

Can we consider the return of people who resettled in their places of origin, and reconstructed their homes, but did not restore their pre-war social relations or reintegrate there economically “successful”? Although some of these returnees could find this a sufficient way of coping with their post-war difficulties, this form of return does not meet the criteria of the foreign intervene agencies. Many people who live as minorities in the FBiH or the RS have their residency registered in the adjacent municipality of the other entity, which is under their ethno-demographic control. Keeping up an address in the area of their previous displacement means that these returnees have continued to engage in all socioeconomic activities (including voting, the health care, and/or schooling) there. Being “present” at the place of origin but also “absent” – that is, living in a “parallel universe” separated from

the local majority and cultivating social capital elsewhere – these returnees force us to look for more precise categories. While these repatriates did not return in accordance with the foreign intervene agencies' original expectations, we cannot simply call this repatriation "failed". Nor can we say that a returnee who spent one night in their place of origin was a "success". Based on my findings, most Bosnian returnees did not meet the ideal for a "successful return" according to the UNHCR's understanding. The 2013 census results also proved that many Bosnian residents do not live in the places where they are registered (Čermák 2018).

Although the aim of the foreign intervene agencies was to reconstruct, reintegrate, and reconcile pre-war local societies by supporting minority repatriation, the majority of returnees have not socialized with the local majority community. Registering residence in one place while living in another, plus the low degree of socio-economic interaction with the local majority, indicates that the interpretation of repatriation success (i.e. sustainability) is more complex than formal statistics demonstrate.

Returnees who settled in their pre-war places of residence are predominantly elderly people who have maintained ties to villages they left nearly thirty years ago. Even though they decided to return and spend the rest of their lives in places they are nostalgic to, their grown children have no interest in ever living in those places. If a restoration of the pre-war Bosnian composition was the main defined goal in Dayton, then recreating the Bosnian leopard skin would somehow mean forcing Bosnians to not engage in the socio-economic migrations from villages into cities that all European states (including Eastern and Southeastern Europe) have done. In that regard, ethnic cleansing fast-forwarded a process that was accelerated during Socialist Yugoslavia and was ongoing even in places that did not affect the war. Despite the arguments about the moral failure of the West during the Bosnian war, the horrifying results of campaigns of ethnic cleansing were, unfortunately, never likely to be reversed by the return of refugees and IDPs to their pre-war places of residence organized by agencies under the dominant US/Western-European umbrella.

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