UNDER INTEGRATION – THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN CONDITIONS OF CITIZENSHIP AND GENDER RELATIONS AMONG BOSNIAN REFUGEE FAMILIES

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Introduction

The war1 in former Yugoslavia changed life for millions of people, women and men, young and old. For many people a well-known and safe life turned into experiences of losses of family members, relatives or friends, family disruption and a life in a new country. Today people from former Yugoslavia and principally from Bosnia and Herzegovina, lives all over the world and many of these displaced people live in Sweden2. The Bosnians3 that came to Sweden lived at least the first years under radically different living conditions partly than before the war and the migration and partly in relation to people living in Sweden since many generations or since many years. The living conditions also differed depending on the different conditions that existed in the cities or the towns where the refugees started their new lives in Sweden. Even if the living conditions were radically different during the first years one central aspect that has been noticed is that the ways of dealing with limited living conditions, dealing with everyday practical and emotional things could in many ways be viewed as similar to the majority of the population in Sweden.

The refugees tried to re-establish what they considered as “a normal life”. What “a normal life” signifies differ but it could mean to live under similar living conditions as most native or earlier immigrated inhabitants do. It could also signify participation in the new society, which could imply having friends and a local social network4 or/and participate in the democratic process in some way. It could also mean to re-establish the order of relations within the family. Refugees are on the one side affected by the personal experiences of loss and of an eventual trauma. On the other side the refugees are affected by political decisions at national and local level and by group-relations to the majority population and to other groups of people that have immigrated to Sweden and are living in the same local surroundings as the, at that time, newly arrived Bosnian refugees. One example of this could be the fact that the Yugoslavs immigrated to Sweden in times of prosperity and when there was a need for workers and when the Bosnian refugees arrived in Sweden the politics of asylum still was generous but Sweden as most of Europe was in times of recession. The refugees came to a Sweden in “crisis”

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2 Between 1992-1995 111 160 persons from former Yugoslavia applied for asylum in Sweden and among them the Swedish authorities suppose that around 57 000 came from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Before 1995 there is no statistics over asylum seekers divided on sex. The majority of asylum seekers from Bosnia and Herzegovina came before 1995 and consequently the numbers presented from 1995 and afterwards do not say so much. This hinders a gender perspective when refugees aren’t seen as women and men and only as gender-neutral refugees. Nobody has therefore, as I’ve found, been able to follow when and how many women respectively men that has entered Sweden from other countries.
3 In this text the term Bosnians is used for people coming from Bosnia and Herzegovina.
4 Most of the refugees have well functioning transnational networks (see e.g. Al-Ali, Black, Koser (2001))
which affected the structural living conditions and the general social and cultural integration for all people in Sweden. These structural living conditions also affected the relations within and between the different ethnic groups from former Yugoslavia and the attitudes concerning repatriation.

There are many similarities between people that have lived all or a long time of their life in Sweden and newly arrived refugees but there are some differences and they could often be attributed to various forms of social inclusion and exclusion. The contingencies of both formal and substantial citizenship differentiate the living conditions between different ethnic groups as well as between women and men. Questions of citizenship and integration are important for all women and men but the fact is that at least men from the majority population in each society doesn’t have to pay as much attention to them as women from the majority population or both women and men from minorities. So, even if it is questions that are important for all people the aim of this text is, with the background in a study made in 1996-1997 in Malmö and Umeå among Bosnian refugees, to discuss the complex relation between formal and substantial citizenship, integration and gender relations.

New life situations means that habitual ways of organizing every-day life, who would and should do what are questioned. New questions are raised. New thoughts are aroused. In times of change habitual structures, for instance gender relations and conceptions of femininity and masculinity becomes visible and therefore could be questioned. Bosnian refugees, women and men respectively, have felt tensions due to the new living conditions in the new local contexts in Sweden. Some have felt strong tensions concerning images and conceptions of femininity and masculinity and in many cases a questioning of established and taken for granted gender relations. The consequences have been frictions and reconsiderations. The naturalness of gender and gender relations have been questioned in another way than if you don’t move between communities or migrate to another country. When individuals or groups move from one country and one community to another aspects of citizenship are raised.

I will in this text deal with the concepts of gender, citizenship and integration. Questions of ethnicity are continuously given attention to in relation to the different concepts. This will end up in a section where gendered space of action is discussed. This part follows by empirical examples that my final discussion is based on. This text is based on my draft for a doctoral thesis, which means that I have reflected more on some parts and less on others. The gender dimension of integration and citizenship will only be one of the aspects discussed in my concluding chapter in my thesis.

**Citizenship and integration in relation to gender**

Sociologists often analyse changes in society with the help of social categorizations as gender, class, ethnicity, age, sexuality and so on. Social categorizations are often useful when studying phenomenon in society but it is important to remind us about the fact that they are social constructions that don’t determine individuals’ lives but affect the individuals depending on for example the historical, social and economical context in which they are living.

**Gender**

Our gender affects our whole existence. How we are raised, how we focus in question of education, what professions we choose, how we arrange our family life and working life. It also affects how we act and behave in relation to people around us and inversely how other people react on how we live and what choices we’ve made. The question of gender is closely linked with the way the relation between women and men are organized in society and in most cases with references to biological differences and consequently not described as a social construction but described as obvious or inevitable.

The Swedish historian Yvonne Hirdman acknowledges two logics that she means has been the basis for the gender organization in the western society from the end of the 19th century. The first logic is
the ways in which women and men, and what is interpreted as feminine and masculine are kept apart. This could be both spatial and via dichotomies which means that places, objects, tasks, behaviours, qualities and attributes are made in to either female or male. The second logic is the male standard primacy. Hirdman says that these logics leaven women’s and men’s everyday life so we act in relation to contracts that maintain these logics. Contracts are her supposed to be “understood as an invisible relation taken over and passed on by a culturally heredity ‘agreement’ as a type of (compulsory) bond between two units” (1990, s 78). These contracts, which Hirdman designates gender contracts, are maintained firstly in a philosophical and a consciousness level. Secondly they are maintained at an institutional level and thirdly at an individual level, among couples. The third level is under influence of the other two levels but is always worked out within every couple and in relation to class belonging, family situation and age. I would also say ethnicity, which Hirdman doesn’t mention.

Gender and ethnicity interact even if there is no simple relation between them. Some aspects of gender relations differ in relation to ethic belonging. One example is that there are definitions on what is regarded as ‘ethically specific’ forms of femininity and masculinity. Examples of this could be parenthood, housework, sexual demands and impediments and possibilities to negotiate about your own wishes (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1996, Cockburn, 1998). But even if these forms sometimes are regarded as stable there are other aspects as for example class, age, education, religion, if you belong to the majority or to a minority group that also have an influence on the way women and men form their lives. Due to power relations in society the dominant conceptions of gender and the more dominating forms of gender relations affects the minority groups conceptions of gender and their internal gender relations more than the other way around (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1996, p113). This means that what is conceived as feminine or masculine changes for example over time, geographically and among classes. Britt-Marie Thurén (1996) uses the term ‘genusifiering’ when studying and comparing for example different communities/societies and wants to grasp what, when and in what way and which consequences different forms of gender labelling have. She looks at the relation, the situation, the symbol or the thing and their ‘genusifierade’ strength, reach and their hierarchical order. This means how strong is the cultural frame of femininity and masculinity and what sanctions do people get if they don’t fit in. How many areas in society are gender neutral and how many areas are connected with either women or men. Finally Thurén means that even if women and men often do different things at different places it should be possible to find their hierarchical order.

There are many aspects that contribute to a power structure or to people’s superior or subordinate positions. Access to time, spare time, money and social contacts are central aspects when it comes to individuals’ possibilities to negotiate and to individuals’ positions in society but also in a relation. Gender is something that we negotiate about and continuously revalue even if the gender structure in a society or in a community often could be considered as a stable order or structure. Hirdman writes (1990, p 78) that the gender contracts are organised in great varieties. Different studies shows this varieties that could be within the same class (Magnusson, 1998) or between classes (Lindgren, 1992, Morokvasic, 1991) or within the same ethnic group (Ålund, 1991, Schierup and Ålund, 1987) But studies also show similarities between classes (Ahrne and Roman, 1997), between different ethnic groups (Cockburn, 1998) and so on. In other words the implication of gender is not given and it is influenced by the surroundings possibilities and limitations. One dimension of the surroundings possibilities and limitations are the actual citizenship rights and duties.

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5 She doesn’t mention hetero- or homosexuality as a significant aspect either but I won’t deal with that aspect in this paper so that is of less importance here.
Citizenship

The question of citizenship has become more and more actual partly due to the augmenting migration and partly because women and women and men from minority groups within different nation-states strives for equal rights as men of the majority population have.

Citizenship is primarily a question of who is a member and who is not a member of a certain political, juridical and social community. As a member or a "non-member" you have certain rights and duties and your possibilities to participate in political and social life are therefore affected by the fact that you are a formal member or not.

T H Marshall wrote in his classical text *Citizenship and Social Class* that citizenship is

"a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed. There is no universal principle that determines what those rights and duties shall be, but societies in which citizenship is a developing institution create an image of an ideal citizenship against which achievement can be measured and towards which aspiration can be directed.”

(Marshall, 1996, s 18).

The first part of this quotation points towards the formal status of citizenship. Marshall wrote his text from a British perspective and the rights that he pointed out as the most central ones was the civil, the political and the social rights that had emerged during the 18th, 19th and the 20ies century respectively. The aim of citizenship rights is equality among the citizens. The second part points towards the fact that the content of this status is primarily due to the citizens’ possibilities to participate and have an influence on the political outcome. In his text Marshall focuses on class differences in relation to both formal and substantial citizenship rights and in relation to that he indicates the importance of social rights. Without social rights persons of lower class belonging would have very small possibilities to participate in the society’s political arrangements, to vote and to know what to vote for, for instance. And in the long run to influence the way the citizenship is institutionalised and socially organized. What Marshall didn’t bring up was the fact that women in general and women and men of minority groups weren’t included in his analyses of the historical development. Marshall’s analytically important concepts of civil, political and social rights and duties have therefore to be expanded to concern not only class differences as Marshall wrote about, but also gender differences and majority versus minority differences (Lister, 1997a, Yuval-Davis, 1997).

Citizenship could basically be understood as an equality-question. Equality is a troublesome concept and a central question is therefore how the concept is interpreted and what equality-ambitions that involves. Questions of equality are without exception connected to power and participation in both the public and the private area. Citizenship, no matter if it is viewed as a status or as a membership has both formal aspects but also substantial aspects (Bottomore, 1992, Lister, 1997a, Yuval-Davis, 1997).

Marshall wrote about citizenship as a membership in a community. Often it is related to signify membership in a nation-state. Ruth Lister argues that this membership is not only “a set of legal rules governing the relationship between the individuals and the state but also a set of social relationships between individuals and the state and between individual citizens” Lister, 1997a, s 29). With that aspect in mind it means that there are both a vertical and a horizontal dimension of citizenship. The central aspects of the vertical dimension are the formal rights and duties that exist. Over time women have been granted relatively fewer formal rights than men. Both the vertical and the horizontal dimension include substantial aspects of citizenship. So even if the formal rights are more extended today there are other aspects that contribute to women and men’s different living situations. Attitudes and expectations that circumscribe the substantial citizenship of women more than of men are for example the division of labour, the division of working time and spare time, the different views of
women and men as actors in a broad sense and more specifically political actors. Another change over time is that both the formal and the substantial citizenship have changed for indigenous minorities as well as for immigrated minorities. This has to do with ideas about multiculturalism.

Another important aspect that Lister has pointed out is that even if we often talk about citizenship at a national level it is at the local level, in the municipality, where the majority of the negotiations that are connected to citizenship rights and duties are taking place (Lister, 1997, s 33) Not only for newly arrived refugees it becomes central which rights and duties the new local surrounding involve, with other words which form of substantial citizenship are actual and which form of civil rights exists.

**Citizenship rights, duties and possibilities to act**

As said earlier it is important to problematize and discuss citizenship in relation to different municipalities. To do that it is necessary to look at differences due to gender or/and ethnicity, something that has been neglected in many studies and in political negotiations around citizenship rights and duties. Something that in the end should facilitate individuals’ ability to act for example in the political field. I will here discuss it with reference to the Bosnian refugees since immigrants have special citizenship conditions that need to be given attention.

The question of political rights in Sweden differs between native and immigrated inhabitants. To have the right to vote in the municipality where you live you have to have had a permanent permission to stay for three years. To be able to vote at the national level you must have a Swedish citizenship and to get that one of the main requirement is that you have had a permanent permission to stay for five years. So far the formal rights. Without them you still have the possibilities to act within the civil society through trade-unions or through different organisations that could be a basis for informal political activity. Community actions could be an important way of strengthening individuals and groups so that they see themselves as political actors and effective citizens. These informal political actions could be a way for individuals or groups that often wouldn’t think of acting in the formal political field. Lister points out that it has been obvious that women that haven’t been part of the formal political system instead have been able to achieve changes at the local arena trough community actions. She writes that “This (that community actions could strengthen individuals or groups) is especially true for women for whom involvement in community actions can be more personally fruitful than engagement in formal politics which are often experienced as more alienating than empowering” (1997a, p 33). At the same time she emphasizes that “placing value on informal politics as an expression of citizenship does not, however, mean ignoring the continuing need both to open up formal political arenas to women and also to make formal politics more accountable to informal” (1997a, p 34). An addition should be made here. Minorities or other subordinated groups should be included in the same way.

Lister points out two central arguments for social rights. Firstly, it is a question of promoting, in terms of power and resources disadvantaged groups so that they can make use their political and civil rights. Secondly, the social rights are fundamental when it comes to supporting personal autonomy (1997a, p 29). At the same time autonomy has a collective social dimension. One example is that women and men, at least from the majority population, have different positions in working life with the consequences that women compared to men have more limited economical resources. Often this makes women from the majority population economically dependent on a man or the welfare state. Both women and men from at newly immigrated groups also have more limited economical resources than the native Swedish population (Vogel et al, 2002). This makes women and men from newly immigrated groups more dependent on of social welfare and the policies connected to that area. Which means policies that are decided and formulated in the field of formal politics. What often is neglected is that men in general are dependent on women’s time. An imbalance when it comes to house work and caring makes it easier for men to advance in working life, get higher salaries and higher pensions (Lister, 1997b, p 107-108). But it could also mean that men could use more time to leisure activities or to political engagement. What could be said is that neither women nor men are constantly autonomous. Autonomy is a problematic concept since it is normal in certain periods of life to be
dependent of others. There are periods of life that everyone goes through when you are more dependent on others but there are also special situations, as for example for newly arrived refugees. As a beginning it is common to be more dependent on the welfare state. The question among politicians in Sweden and other European countries is for how long refugees should be more dependent on the welfare state than the population in general. All the same, one central point is that the unequal power relation between women and men makes the interdependence between women and men imbalanced in favour of men.

Marshall among others focused more on rights than on duties. Rightwing parties all over Europe are now arguing for more duties, for example the duty to take a paid work. This is a change, from rights to duties that already has started in Sweden. In a formal way everybody in Sweden are affected by this change but since the newly arrived refugees don’t have paid work in the same extension as native Swedes or people that immigrated long ago the former group is more affected by this change than the latter one.

This change indicates the political aspects of citizenship and that the content of citizenship is contested. How are rights and duties balanced? Do citizenship reflect a status or a practice? Should a citizenship imply an active or a passive role in society? The advocates for more duties argument that only rights produce passive and dependent citizens. On the other side there are people focusing on social rights with the motivation that more social rights will make individuals use their civil and political rights. (See Turner, 1990, Lister, 1997a, Yuval-Davis, 1997) Even if Nira Yuval-Davis reminds us of the problem subordinate groups have entering the political field she argues that “the most important duty of citizens is, therefore, to exercise their political rights and to participate in the determination of their collectivities’, states’ and societies’ trajectories” (Yuval-Davis, 1997, pp 21-22). Furthermore she argues that it is important to participate in the construction of ethnic and local communities. It is an important area for women to obstruct oppression and discrimination with reference to culture or tradition within their own ethnic and local communities. In addition, it could be said that it is important irrespective of defining yourself as part of the majority society or as part of a minority group.

So, the question here becomes in what way are gender relations dependent on citizenship conditions in the local community where the refugees live and therefore interacting with the integration process?

Integration

Integration is the concept that has been used during the last years to grasp the process that is supposed to take place when individuals come to live in Sweden. The most common is that we talk about integration when focusing on immigrants but I will emphasise the importance of integration among all inhabitants. The classic sociologist Émile Durkheim discussed the negative consequences of a lack of integration within a modern society. A modern society signified by among other things division of labour and a stronger individualisation. He argued that within the modern society the individuals would be dependent on each other because of the individual’s specialities and not their common values. A central aspect here is that integration in Durkheim’s sense is a quality of the social system, not only of its individuals or groups. The society or the community could be less or more integrated itself (Boglind et al, 1995, ch 4).

Integration in its ideal form would be that all parts in society are fairly integrated in to a common network. In Sweden we could instead describe the situation as we have different groups that within each group are more or less integrated. These different groups are then connected to each other in different ways. Similä (2002) gives examples of how the groups within the subsystem, as he calls it, could vary in connection with each other. The stronger ties between the groups the easier could for example information pass. The weaker ties between the groups the more plural the society could be described as. The stronger ties within the groups the stronger could the social support within the group be. Similä doesn’t mention that, but the stronger the ties within the groups are the stronger could the social control also be (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Another central remark about group connections is
when Hechter’s (1982, ref to in Similä, 2002, p 111) points out that it is a difference between the horizontal and vertical separation of groups. Wimmer is also taking power relations into account when he claims that in every nation-state “there is a group of people who considers itself to represent the ‘core’ of the state; in other words the state is primarily constructed by its members and for its members” (1997 ref to in Similä, 2002, pp 109-110). This means that among other things majority and minority membership, class belonging, gender and age matters both between and within the different groups.

To follow up Similä’s theses he writes that:

“According to this line of reasoning, poorly integrated members can be found in all subsystems. In other words, majority members, too, can be poorly integrated. If we accept this, perhaps we should not over-emphasise cultural factors when analysing integration. Lack of integration can be found within all subsystems of a society. It again follows that members of the majority population are more or less integrated; that is, lack of integration is by no means restricted to immigrants and ethnic minorities. It also shows that a minority member can be well integrated without intense interaction with members of the majority population” (Similä, 2002, p 112)

So, if integration is a question for the whole society what is the point looking at a specific ethnic group then? And is it the same thing to participate in well-integrated groups or institutions dominated by members of the majority population?

What we could say is firstly that different groups within the subsystem have stronger or weaker ties in relation to other groups and secondly that the groups have more or less strong connections within their own group and these aspects matter for the individuals living conditions.

Similä questions the arguments that for example Diaz (1993, ref to in Similä 2002, p 112) has that integration among native Swedes and within Swedish institutions has a greater significance than integration within minority groups. Similä means that all integration is important. This is true but with reference to the actual situation at the labour market, within the formal political institutions and so on there are several aspects that are more easily handled when integrated among native Swedes and within Swedish institutions. (See Ålund, 1985, Schierup and Ålund, 1987, Yuval-Davis, 1997)

Hassan Hosseini-Kaladjahi has been problematizing the question why certain national groups have, with Similä’s view of integration, weaker ties with the dominant majority group, the native Swedes, than other groups. His analyses show that a possible reason could be the different levels of industrialisation and not a cultural distance between Sweden and the countries the immigrant groups originate from. Hosseini-Kaladjahi also says

“That we should remember that the level of industrialisation is not only a matter of linear technological development. It is also a matter of qualitative changes in social and cultural institutions: family, division of labour, religion, the system of values and so on.” (2002, p 132)

This quotation shows that it could be very difficult to separate social, economic and cultural aspects from each other if you have a perception that culture implies the ways you organize and deal with everyday matters. Hosseini-Kaladjahi also says that individuals from groups from different nation-states with different levels of industrialisation have something in common. In Sweden these groups from different nation-states are seen or treated in the lights of ethnicity and ethnic group belonging.

This ethnic classification is based upon the existence of different ethnic groups and that they interact. This becomes evident when there are both a majority population and different minority groups as in Sweden. These groups are invented and reinvented when they interact and when they create a differentiating ‘us’ and ‘them’ (cf Barth, 1969) and could therefore function as a mark of belonging.
Often it is as a minority group the question of ethnic group belonging and ethnic identity becomes important. Often history, culture and traditions are stressed as unifying but it is always possible to discover political, social or economical motives for emphasizing ethnicity (see Cockburn, 1998, Hylland-Eriksen, 1993, Yuval-Davis, 1996).

This means that economical, social and political hierarchies interact when groups are constructed and reconstructed. A consequence would be that even if economic, political and social aspects (which is what I interpret Hosseini-Kaladjahi means when talking about a country’s level of industrialisation) interact with cultural aspects the former are due to power relations more important than the latter one.

Hosseini-Kaladjahi continues by saying that

“If the variable explaining the differential integration of ethnic groups is, in the first place, the position of their countries of origin in the international division of labour, rather than their cultural distance from the native population, then we are not dealing with the denomination of culture. Rather, we are dealing with a social variable beyond the boundaries of nation-states – that is, international ranking of countries in terms of their level of industrialisation – which becomes a matter of ethnicity when judged within the boundaries of a nation-state.” (2002, p 130)

This is why ethnic belonging could create a feeling of similarity (from within) and of difference (from outside) and this feeling is based on cultural and/or in a broad perspective social and political interpretations and ideas. It is trough internal group processes individuals’ ethnic awareness is formulated (Johansson, 1999) and one reason why this is more palpable among minorities is that minorities often are more economically and socially excluded from central institutions and positions in society. Group processes of this kind and their consequences in form of intensified and changed ethnic groupings has in a far-reaching way affected the Bosnian refugees’ lives and forms of integration.

Integration could be used in at least two ways. Firstly by talking about a whole society’s level of integration and secondly when talking about different groups or individuals participation in different spheres of society. It is the second version that I will use in this text.

Since ethnicity and integration in a society are interlinked I’ve not only commented integration but also ethnicity. Ethnic belonging is here described as a social construction but that does not imply that ethnic groupings and alliances aren’t real and apparent for the individuals concerned. Ethnic identity is regarded as given when internalised, but ethnic identity tend to change both concerning content and strength in relation to changes in the surrounding society and in relation to social hierarchies. This means that in a changing process due to a refugee situation ethnic identity could become stronger or could become weaker or the identity could be regarded as very problematic.

This together indicates that when it comes to a specific country (Sweden) it is a point looking at the possibilities (the citizenship rights) and the impediments for one group to be part of the overall integration. This time it is the Bosnian refugees that are studied but to study other groups, for example the native Swedish upper class could also say something about the power structure in Sweden and that groups possibilities (the citizenship rights) and their impediments.

Gender, citizenship and integration connected to ethnicity have been discussed. Now I want to end up this theoretical part by focusing on gender in relation to conditions of citizenship and the contingencies of integration by focusing on gendered space of action.

**Gendered space of action**

As discussed in the beginning what is perceived as feminine and masculine and what is perceived as gender neutral is partly influenced by political, economical and social structures and of social and cultural symbols and traditions and partly by the negotiations that women and men have about what they perceive as feminine, masculine or gender neutral. That means when do women and men act...
within symbolic frames and when do they exceed the symbolic boundaries. Women and men live their lives within these frames as they perceive them and therefore will they become everybody’s “reality”. To be a women or a man is a practical everyday experience.

It is a common prejudice that women that migrate to so called ‘more developed’ countries always ‘win’ something without ‘loosing’ anything concerning gender relations (Lutz, 1991, pp 17-20) It is therefore important to point out that a life as a refugee in Sweden consists of different possibilities and limitations than a life as a refugee in another country with other patriarchal, social and economical structures. At different times and at different places could more specific gendered spaces of action dominate. This is a question about dominating ideas about what is conceived as feminine and masculine in a conventional way or what, in relation to that, is conceived as exceeding the symbolic boundaries. What I call gendered space of action in this text is both created by official, which means the political and juridical framework and culturally normative values. The official framework of a country or a community doesn’t always (or normally not) accord with the culturally normative values. What is counted as an individual’s space of action is connected with for instance gender, ethnic belonging, class, age, urban/rural (cf Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1996, Cockburn, 1998, Lindgren 1992, Magnusson, 1998, Thurén, 1996).

There is a constant dialectic between an individual’s self, the individual identity and the collectively expected identity that are part of the surrounding society. Every individual always has to adapt to the collectively expected identity. The individual identity is therefore formed through a process in relation to the change that the surrounding society is part of (Bradley, 1996, Hall, 1997, Cockburn, 1998). This is the case even if it is a question of national, ethnic or gender identity. The elements that are facilitating or limiting an individual’s ability to act are therefore both the individual’s surrounding society and the individual’s individual circumstances.

In relation to a conceived space of action each individual has different expectations and demands on for example what they can and should do, work with, do at their spare time, be responsible for at home and so on. The expectations and the demands are based on arbitrariness and changing, as focused in this text, symbolic gender boundaries and gender relations.

In a comparison between different theory traditions represented by Simone de Beauvoir, Catherine MacKinnon and Judith Butler Maud Eduards found that the common aspect in the different theory traditions is women and men’s different spaces of action. In brief, it could be said that masculinity is characterized by action and femininity by passivity. One of Eduards conclusions is that women’s living conditions are characterized by limitations and restricted spaces of action and that “women are deprived of their ability to act” (Eduards, 1997, p 30). Hirdman as well, from her understanding of the gender order, draws the conclusion that “women’s position in society in relation to men is characterized by their limited space, restricted liberty of action, controlled actions. The oppression of women is characterized just by control of women’s liberty of actions: in the physical and the psychological space” (Hirdman, 1990, p 79). The space of action is with other words central for the understanding women and men’s daily living conditions. Stereotypical conceptions and expectations on women and men limits primarily women’s space of action and therefore their living conditions but also the living conditions of men. These conceptions, expectations and sometimes sanctions vary as Thurén writes (1996) in question of strength, reach and their hierarchical order. This means that how the situation as a refugee will be is influenced by the space of action that existed in the country of origin and that exist in the new country. This space of action is closely related to the conditions of citizenship and the contingencies of integration.

Both former Yugoslavia and Sweden was/is countries where the official equality has had a prominent position, but where the real differences in life conditions between women and men all the same has been and still is obvious (Djuric, 1995, SOU, 1998:6). The formal rights and obligations have almost

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6 See e.g. Haane Haavinds discussion about “the modern gender contract” in Scandinavia (1982).
7 Military service is one area where formal differences has existed and exists.
been/are equal, but the real living conditions shows differences concerning the daily organisation of work and family life. For example who is working for a salary and how much, and who does have the main responsibility for the home and the eventual children or elderly persons and who does have time or practical possibilities to take part in spare time activities or political work. This means that when it comes to concrete women or men the differences becomes obvious concerning the possibilities to participate in society and to be an “active and participant citizen”. For the Bosnian refugees it is on the one side a question of the partly different framework and therefore the possibilities and limitations that is actualized in the Swedish society but on the other side also a question of how they act and chose to arrange their lives in relation to this partly different space of action. In a gendered perspective this has created tensions within different relations and is a prominent aspect of the change that you go through as a refugee either you want it or not.

Harsh realities and hampered equities

This study originates from a Nordic project where the overall aim was to study integration and repatriation and gender aspects wasn’t focused. Nevertheless there were some aspects that concern gender relations that became obvious when doing and analysing the interviews. In the following part some major aspects will be discussed. There are of course several more aspects that affects the gender relations in relation to the conditions of citizenship and the contingencies of integration but due to the length of the text I will limit the aspects discussed.

(Un)employment, housework and caring

The Bosnians were quite many when they came and they were quite young or families in the middle of life. As learned from interviews with refugees or with other persons with knowledge about the group of refugees many of the refugees meet a partner (and it wasn’t unusual to meet another refugee from Bosnia and Herzegovina) in the beginning in Sweden and to get children during the first years in Sweden. This meant that when the women used her parental leave the man could go on with language courses, other courses, paid work or unemployment.

Women and men with a university education that I've been in contact with had paid work before the war and in cases where they had children they had organised the care for children in different ways. It wasn’t unusual that grandparents had been taken care of the children while the parents had been working. When talking about the time before the war they often expressed the gender equality between the parents. Often aspects of a modern city life came up. But as the discussions went on it could be said that the same structure as many families in Sweden show (see for example Ahrne and Roman, 1997) became common. The structure is that women have more responsibilities concerning children, home and relatives and they do more routine work that need to be done every day or every week than men. Then they migrated to Sweden and if they hadn’t already started the Swedish language course or some complementary course they did so when they got their permanent permission to stay. Both women and men seemed very ambitious to recommence work if they hadn’t some severe trauma that stopped them. The reality in both Umeå and Malmö were that many of them had to go to several courses, that diplomas missed and that they didn’t get employment in relation to their education. Many of them were unemployed for shorter or longer periods.

Only in a few interviewed families the women had worked at home before the war. It should be said that in none of these families the women had a university education. The man had had a paid work and had been able to economically provide for the whole family and the women had with her time provided for the house work and in cases needed the caring of children or/and elderly. After the migration and the reception of the permanent permission to stay both women and man had to go to

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8 As I’ve understood the Bosnian fathers weren’t more interested in taking out parental leave than other groups of fathers, which meant that they used much less of the parental leave than the mothers.
language courses and due to the economic situation and the Swedish welfare system both women and man had to orient towards paid work. Neither in these families had all of them got employment.

A common analyse of these families were that when the women had work and the man didn’t they had to find an attitude that made the situation ok for both women and man. What kind of attitudes they choose varied among different women and men. One man ‘changed his interest’ towards cooking and sewing but at the same time talked about the situation as temporary. He was only ‘in between’ his earlier career and his coming career. Several fathers said that they appreciated the contact with the children. They said that before the migration to Sweden they hadn’t taken so much practical response for the children and that they hadn’t spent so much time with them as now. Un American study shows that men that focused on their children during unemployment coped with the situation better than men that couldn’t change focus from paid work to for example family responsibilities (Johnson and Abramovitch, 1988). Some other men in my study focused on ethnically oriented club activities, other men focused on repatriation and some looked for work within the ‘black market’. The difference between the official rights and the socially and culturally normative values that exist in Sweden and within different local communities are contributing to the complexity of existing spaces of action but also to the possibilities to develop individual claims when choosing how, when and where to act.

Almost all women said or hinted that it was a difficult or a tricky situation when they had courses or paid work and their husbands didn’t. They were on one side happy that they themselves had got an opportunity to get a paid work, learn Swedish better and to get contacts outside the family and the friendship network which in the beginning in Sweden often was dominated by other persons from Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the other side they were worried about their husbands’ mental condition. Both in the cases of interviewed Bosnian women that had a paid work and that didn’t, they clearly expressed their concern about the whole families well-being with reference to the extreme period that they had been going trough, the loss of relatives or friends, the loss of a house, a city, an imaginary future and so on. They often meant that it was very important primarily for the children if they had any but also for themselves that the family life would go on and be a stable factor in life. Most of them included an own paid work but all of them mentioned the importance that their husbands got a paid work as an important aspect of stabilizing the family, both economically but also in a more psychosocial way. This was the same picture I’ve got from the men that discussed the family situation. Either they focused on the importance that both of them got a paid work or they said that they needed a paid work to be able to take care of their family. They meant that if they could economically provide for their family they would get rid of their dependent position, which would place the whole family in a different light in relation to the children’s day-care centre, school, spare-time activities and in relation to the Swedish society in general.

One woman that I interviewed commented that earlier it wasn’t any problem either for her husband or for herself that he had the central position in the family. They both knew their duties, their responsibilities and their powers. Now she instead expressed how the new non self-chosen order had created negative consequences, which she saw as more trying than the order where the man had had the central position in the family. Her new position in society and the tasks attached to it could give her self-esteem and a feeling of importance for the family’s situation in Sweden. This feeling did not turn up instead she felt responsible for symbolically restoring her husbands earlier position so she acted to hide his degradation of status. In a sense the man’s degradation of status becomes the woman’s responsibility due to the gender structure in society. A similar experience is found in Norway where Lauritsen has interviewed families with origin in Iran. The women there felt it was difficult to take advantage of their situation when their husbands felt powerlessness (Lauritsen, 1996)

The tradition of the male breadwinner as we have had in many parts of the world isn’t easy to change. Mikael Nordenmark (1999) is in his thesis discussing the connections between unemployment and family-life and well-being within the family with empirical data from Sweden. One of his results is that men aren’t changing their part of housework as much as women are when they are unemployed and that well-being is closely related to the share of house-work. As discussed earlier, women do more housework in all cases, regardless of class, age and ethnic background but in times of own
unemployment women do even more housework but men don’t augment their part of the housework in the same way when they are unemployed. One understanding of this could be that women in general find it more natural to take care of the whole family’s well-being in terms of practical housework and caring and men in terms of economical providing.

The limited economical situation and the unbalanced gender relation when the man and not the woman were unemployed could of course not always but in a way easier be solved in Malmö than in Umeå. In Malmö there were more opportunities to work within the ‘black market’. This often meant to work with or for persons from former Yugoslavia.

Participation in organizations and club activities

The ethnically organized club activities differed a lot between Malmö and Umeå. Malmö is a multiethnic and multicultural town. In Sweden the largest group of persons that in some way have their background in former Yugoslavia lives in Malmö. A great part of the civil society in Malmö is built up around ethnic group belonging and that meant that there existed clubs with their origin in former Yugoslavia and quickly after the refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina came several clubs were built up. Umeå could also be described as a multiethnic and a multicultural town but in a lesser extent than Malmö. There were, as I know, only a few persons with background (own or parents) in former Yugoslavia in Umeå at the time when the refugees arrived. The refugee group started up one club that was supposed to embrace all refugees’ wishes. Of course, that wasn’t possible so the situation became in one way similar to that in Malmö. The refugees chose to take part of the ethnically oriented club activities or they chose not to take part of it. In both towns there were international women’s organisations without comparison only for men. In Malmö there were other international organisations. In the time for my interviews I got the impression that the refugees in Umeå were more ‘reduced’ to use the non-ethnically oriented organizations for spare time activities than in Malmö.

What could be interesting in this case is the ways of using the clubs or organisations. More men then women used the ethnically oriented clubs daily or several times a week. The women used the same clubs more often only during weekends when there were activities for themselves or for the children. Both men and women that had chosen not to visit the clubs (anymore) said that they found the clubs to be focused on ethnic group belonging and often on questions of “the time before the war” or on repatriation. Instead the men that visited the clubs said that it was a place where they could be themselves. There were many others in the same situation as themselves (for example unemployed, with thoughts on repatriation, with bad experiences (traumas) from the war) but also, as is important, the clubs were places were they got information about the Swedish society, the welfare system, contacts for paid work both within the ordinary labour market but also within the black market. They also got information or help selling, buying, repairing things and sending money to relatives and so on.

The women that I spoke with focused on the social aspect of the clubs and the importance of the activities in the children’s mother tongue. The difference that I noticed concerned the women that took part in these international women’s organisations. They described their participation as important for themselves in several ways. Firstly that was a social platform, but a platform where they got to know people of different background and both women that had lived all or a great part of their life in Sweden and others that were newly arrived inhabitants. And in these organizations the women often had different tasks so they were in some way responsible for activities. The Bosnian women got to know women that had lived all or a great part of their lives in Sweden and they became important contacts when the Bosnian women needed information about something in the Swedish society. Some of the women that I interviewed commented that this had given themselves better contacts within and a better knowledge about the Swedish society than their husbands, which sometimes created a tension when for example different decisions were to take.
Circumscribed spaces of action – a gendered question

The structural conditions the local society inhabits, for example unemployment, limited economical resources and the social relations offered contribute to changing gender relations. Men spending more time at home due to unemployment and due to more limited economical resources could contribute towards a greater flexibility concerning gender related actions, which opens up for fewer limitations. But what could be seen as ‘positive’ changes concerning for example new substantive rights, new or continuing professional careers for women or fathers getting closer contacts with eventual children could result in ‘hidden’ consequences. A forced change from focus on paid work towards housework and caring could stress men since that change are opposing the culturally normative what is seen as ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ (in both Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Sweden). The impression was that when the changes felt too big and extensive the women made what she could to confirm a gender relation where the man was superior and the women subordinated with the motive that the consequences of the mans augmenting self-esteem was positive for the whole family.

Gender relations that became more balanced in terms of power was seen as something positive but when the changes became bigger than the family could catch up with it could turn out that the original power relation stayed unchanged or even got reinforced. The woman’s caring responsibilities together with her responsibility not to take up too much room and not to get a too important position in society seem to stay intact. It seems, as there is a symbolic boundary that indicates how much the individuals are allowed to deviate from what is regarded as ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ which could be said are the consequences of the existing substantial citizenship. A way of interpreting this could be that family life ‘need’ to a certain extent gender relations that are unbalanced in terms of power in favour of men even if the formal citizenship rights in Sweden indicates something else. I would say that these tendencies could be found in different studies made among different families or couples with different backgrounds in Sweden (Bekkengen, 2002, Bäck-Wiklund and Bergsten, 1997, Holmberg, 1993, Ahrne and Roman, 1997, Nermo, 1994, Jonasdottir, 1992) but are stressed in times of migration (Eyrumlu, 1998).

The family could be seen as more important for a newly arrived refugee family than for a family with a relatively stable living situation. The family could be one dimension of life that is continuing while other dimensions are changing due to the refugee situation. At the same time is isn’t unusual that individual’s careers in combination with family life could contribute to difficult and conflicting priorities no matter it concerns a refugee family or a family that have lived all or a great part of their life in Sweden. Careers, participation in spare-time activities and a functioning family-life require time and commitment. In a society where the responsibilities and the practical house work and caring aren’t equally shared between men and women real choices or priorities don’t always really exist for women. Women’s concern about the family often implies that they subordinate their wishes to them of men. Individual choices that becomes a general structure. A structure that has been obvious both in former Yugoslavia and in Sweden in the mid 90ies. At the same time it should be said that informants from primarily Malmö had noticed a great number of divorces among the Bosnian couples during their firs year in Sweden. What that depended on could only be speculated about. Did they want to divorce before the migration but the consequences due to local norms and values should have been too negative? Did the tensions in relation to the migration and the lack of possibilities in Sweden become too trying? How much have experiences and traumas during the war influenced the everyday life in Sweden and therefore made it more difficult to live together?

The more extensive your space of action is the more possibilities you will get. The different organisations and clubs both opened up women and men’s possibilities but also in some cases limited them. The women that had responsibilities within international women’s organisations showed how local activities could strengthen the women’s self-esteem and therefore strengthen their possibilities to make use of the existing local space of action. This could also be the case for some men that have
responsibilities within ethnically oriented clubs. In all cases the organisations and the clubs are important arenas for getting useful contacts.

I’ve written that all integration is integration. That is important. But integration only in to an ethnic community could in Sweden in the mid 90ies became limiting. So many functions and institutions in society are dominated by the native Swedes or at least by immigrants in a broad sense that an exclusion from all these spheres will limit your possibilities. Therefore it is of great importance that both women and men’s space of action make it possible for them to participate both within an ethnic community and within groups or institutions dominated by the majority population.

Reflections on citizenship, integration and gender relations

The central analyses that I have been able to do from my interviews could be seen in the lights of internal and external integration. When saying internal integration I mean integration within one’s own ethnic group. When saying external integration I mean integration within the whole society and in this case it means integration within groups or institutions dominated by individuals from the majority population. (See Schierup and Ålund, 1987)

Citizenship rights that facilitate integration are of great importance for native families but even more important for newly immigrated families since there are so many changes that requires considerations and causes tensions that the more tensions that are possible to avoid should, with the help of citizenship rights, be avoided.

One aspect of the gender structure is that women in general take more responsible for men then vice versa. This becomes more crucial when the family has been going through radical changes that have been limiting the family’s living-situation, economically and socially. Most immigrants find integration in to the new society very important because the less integrated in the new society the less economic and social possibilities you will get. This means that newly arrived immigrants often try to integrate in some way in the new society. It could be in the multiethnic majority society or it could be in to a more ethnically homogenous economic and social group. The more you integrate in to differentiated areas the more possibilities you will get. As a member of a minority group you will loose more than a member of the majority group will if you don’t try to integrate into more areas than the areas that your own ethnic group reside. So participation in society is of high importance for your life-chances. And when it comes to refugee families where the women get more possibilities than the man to work, to participate in public life, in civil society and so on the gender relations will probably be even more tensed than in families that have lived a longer time in the same society. Women tend to re-establish a gender relation where they give priority to men and their wants. A conclusion would therefore be that women could have difficulties to make use of their own possibilities in society if the men they live with don’t get the same possibilities. Social exclusion is always limiting but social exclusion of men limits women’s space of action more than the other way around.

This means that the ability to regard the new situation as self-chosen together with the ability to keep up a professional identity by studying, temporary work and so on could make the acceptance of a greater flexibility concerning gender related actions credible. This could open up for a greater space of action for both women and men and in the long run open up for changes towards more equal gender relations. Individuals that have it relatively more easy to see and use possibilities within the new society are individuals within families that are well integrated within both the majority society and within an ethnic internal community and where both the woman and the man experience participation and a similar forthcoming career. To be able to participate and to feel integrated in both the majority society and within an ethnic internal community require both formal and substantial citizenship rights that take in to account the special situation newly arrived refugees have and that take in to account the gendered structure of society.
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