(Re-)Construction of Identity and Belonging after Forced Migration: A Sociology of Knowledge Approach

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This study uses a sociology of knowledge perspective to analyse how former Bosnian refugees in Austria have integrated the experiences of ethnicized war and forced migration into their lives over the past three decades. The objective hermeneutical analysis of narrative interviews with Bosnian-Austrians reveals significant differences between former child refugees and those who experienced war and migration as adolescents. From a sociology of knowledge perspective, these differences can be attributed to varying 'stratifications of experience': The central crisis in the adolescents' lives was triggered by experiencing the destruction of their Yugoslavian lifeworld, which significantly eroded their trust in their social reality's stability and in their belonging. The former child refugees, however, particularly struggle with their double marginalization. While the former typically manage this crisis through an exaggerated adherence to the ideal of personal performance, the latter draw on collective imaginations of ethnic/national affiliation and try to comply with them.

Introduction

Nearly three decades have passed since the Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia collapsed and war broke out across the region, reaching a tragic climax in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Between 1992 and 1995 approximately 100,000 people were killed in this ethnicized war between Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks, and over two million were displaced. Nearly 90,000 Bosnians sought shelter in Austria (Valenta and Ramet 2011: 4), where they were first considered as 'de facto' refugees. Three years after the war's end, most of the former Bosnian refugees were granted permanent Austrian residence status (Franz 2003, 2005, 2011; Halilovich 2013; Hageboutros 2016; Halilovich *et al.* 2018). Ultimately, more than 90 per cent of Bosnian refugees stayed in Austria and blended in, at least statistically, with the

large number of guest workers who had been in Austria since the 1960s or 1970s (Fassmann and Reeger 2008).

Of the substantial and highly valuable research on Bosnian refugees in Austria as well as in other countries, most draws on data conducted within the first few years after their forced migration (e.g. Robinson and Coleman 2000; Al-Ali and others 2001; Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Colic-Peisker 2005; Franz 2005). Furthermore, the research typically focuses on the receiving countries by comparing or reflecting upon their reception policies, how they responded to refugees, and/or structural integration issues (e.g. Franz 2011; Valenta and Strabac 2011, 2013). Exceptions are, for instance, Marita Eastmond's analysis of mnemonic processes within a Bosnian refugee family in Sweden, in which she draws on twenty years of multisided fieldwork (Eastmond 2016), the ethnographical study by Halilovich on the lived 'on-site and online realities' of Bosnian refugees in Austria, where he points out the relevance of 'place-based identities and locally-embedded social networks' (Halilovich 2013), or his and Efendić's analysis of former Bosnian refugees running 'trans-local' businesses in Switzerland or Sweden and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Halilovich and Efendić 2021).

Overall, all these studies provide valuable insights about refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina in various host societies, particularly the structural conditions they were confronted with and transnational ties they developed over time. The question of how former Bosnian refugees have integrated their experiences of war and forced migration into their lives over the past three decades, of how these experiences shape their lives today, however, remained largely unexplored.

Building upon Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's sociology of knowledge, as introduced in *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967), and their intellectual predecessors, particularly Alfred Schütz (Schütz 1944; Schütz and Luckmann 1973) and Karl Mannheim (1985, 1993) and drawing on an objective hermeneutical analysis (Oevermann *et al.* 1987) of narrative interviews conducted between 2016 and 2020, this paper analyses how former Bosnian refugees in Austria are constructing their individual identities and collective belonging(s) nearly thirty years after forced migration. By focusing on interviewees who were younger than twenty when they arrived in Austria, the research concentrates on a life phase that usually includes the key stages of educational trajectory, early professional career, and family foundation. However, the findings below show that even within this group of people who are currently in their mid-thirties to mid-forties, significant differences exist between those who experienced war and (forced) migration during late adolescence or early adulthood and those who were children. From a sociology of knowledge perspective, these differences can be, as will be shown, attributed to a different 'stratification of experience' (Mannheim 1993).

Drawing on central insights form the sociology of knowledge, this paper promotes a perspective that takes the individuals' experiences seriously and simultaneously considers them as embedded in social structures. With their assumption of a 'fundamental social dialectic' (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 61), particularly Berger and Luckmann systematically tackle the question of how to understand

the relation between individual and society—a question of great importance when dealing with concepts such as identity and belonging. It is, in fact, this dialectical perspective that makes the approach so valuable not only for sociology in general but also for migration research.

The paper begins by focusing on its (social-)theoretical research foundation: (a) It outlines the fundamental dialectic of social reality, which exemplifies the core of Berger and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge; (b) it anchors the concepts of identity and belonging within the theory from the *Social Construction*; (c) and it reflects on the existential determination of knowledge and the relevance of 'stratification of experience' in processes of identity building. The second section details the research methodology for the empirical analysis, and introduces the objective hermeneutics approach as well as the data corpus used in the study. Finally, the third section discusses the results from the objective hermeneutical analysis in the light of sociology of knowledge and demonstrate how war and migration differently affect people's lives depending on if they migrated as older adolescents or children.

A Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Identity and Belonging in the Context of War and Migration—Theoretical Reflections

The Fundamental Dialectic of Social Reality

In agreement with Berger and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge, this paper posits that social reality is created by humans who, themselves, are simultaneously products of these very realities. By systematically adapting Karl Marx's dialectical way of thinking and by combining the sociologies of Max Weber and Émile Durkheim (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 18), Berger and Luckmann base their work on a *fundamental (dialectical) proposition* wherein '[s]ociety is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product' (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 61).

The authors comprehend society as an objective reality wherein institutions and their legitimations represent its social structures (Berger and Luckmann 1967: chap. 2), and as a subjective reality derived from the personal acquisition of reality (Berger and Luckmann 1967: chap. 3). Objective reality becomes a subjective reality through its internalization within the processes of *primary socialization* (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 129–137) and *secondary socialization* (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 138–147). During the socialization process, individuals, however, do not only internalize the objective reality but also evolve their identities.

Identity and Belonging

Identity, as an equally reflected and reflecting entity (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 132), is a 'key element' of subjective reality (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 173), and hence also developed dialectically:

> Identity is formed by social processes. Once crystallized, it is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations. The social processes involved in both the

> formation and the maintenance of identity are determined by the social structure. Conversely, the identities produced by the interplay of organism, individual consciousness and social structure react upon the given social structure, maintaining it, modifying it, or even reshaping it. (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 173)

Unlike identity, Berger and Luckmann never explicitly dealt with belonging. However, due to its dialectical perspective on social reality, their sociology of knowledge is highly suitable for analysing social phenomena that are related to integration and, accordingly, to questions of belonging. Soeffner and Zifonun express this justification by asserting:

> Integration must be comprehended as an overarching social phenomenon. It in no way represents a passive internalization of given structures (norms, values, etc.); rather it is carried out within the dual process of externalization and internalization of knowledge epi-processually with the construction of reality. (Soeffner and Zifonun 2008: 6)

Integration, in this sense, differs from how it is often understood: Here, it is not about adaption to or assimilation into subordinated, normative units. Such an understanding is normatively charged and is therefore inadequate for social analysis (e.g. Pries 2018; Schinkel 2018; Saharso 2019; Mijić and Parzer 2022). Rather, integration is about 'the core sociological notion of "society"' (Schinkel 2018: 1) or—to paraphrase Berger and Luckmann—the fundamental dialectical process within which social reality is constructed through human agency.

During the past two decades, belonging has gained importance in migration research (for an overview, see Lähdesmäki *et al.* 2016; but also, e.g. Anthias 2009; Antonsich 2010; Yuval-Davis 2011; Anthias, 2018). In some cases, the term is used alongside identity, while it is introduced as its substitute in others (Lähdesmäki *et al.* 2016: 234). Floya Anthias, who has undertaken important research on both terms, argues that identity and belonging 'live together but involve a different emphasis': 'Identity involves individual and collective narratives of self and other. Belonging, on the other hand, is more about experiences of being part of the social fabric' (Anthias 2009: 233). More importantly, however, is the insight that the use of both terms 'must be heuristic. In and of themselves, they do not necessarily carry any given analytical worth, for it is in the ways that we use them that this worth is given' (Anthias 2018: 140). Therefore, systematically linking central insights from research on belonging with Berger and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge enables a heuristic differentiation between the following three dimensions of (social) belonging.

(1) Belonging can be 'understood as an everyday mode of being, that is largely unconscious or not the focus of conscious thought' (May 2011: 270). People 'belong' where their thinking-as-usual is effective and where they are essentially doubtless. This concept of 'thinking-as-usual in everyday life' appears prominently in Alfred Schütz's work, whose social-phenomenological theory has constitutively shaped the sociology of Berger and Luckmann (1967: chapter 1). Schütz presupposes that everyday life routines are supported by the objective idealization

of 'and so on', and its subjective idealization of 'I can do it again' (Schütz 1962: 224). These idealizations predetermine that the basic structure of the world as we know it, and thus the modes of our experiences and how we act within it will remain unchanged.

(2) 'Thinking-as-usual' is acquired through social interaction with significant others, particularly during primary socialization. Nevertheless, as Berger and Luckmann argue in the third chapter of the *Social Construction*, relations to significant others always remain decisive, since permanent social interaction—particularly with significant others—is the only means through which individuals can secure subjective reality and, accordingly, belonging (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 154). This mirrors a central insight from research on belonging, whereby senses of belonging emerge from collective interpretations of reality that are negotiated through social interactions rather than passively internalized (Anthias 2009; Antonsich 2010; May 2011: 369).

(3) Belonging is, however, not just about knowing the rules, but is also about being involved in their creation. Therefore, 'thinking-as-usual' seems to be a necessary but insufficient condition of belonging. Belonging is also a matter of agency, participation opportunities, and power. It is about being involved in processes of social change or, in reference to Berger and Luckmann, being a part of the fundamental social dialectic. At its core, particularly in this respect, not everyone is allowed to belong. Symbolic and/or social exclusions occur along certain dimensions (e.g. religion, ethnicity) that have been empirically shown to interact or intersect with other dimensions of social inequality (e.g. gender, milieu/class) that further reinforce exclusion or inclusion (Anthias 2009, 2012; Mijić 2020).

When analysing (collective) identities and belonging in the context of (forced) migration, it is crucial not to reduce the concepts of identity and belonging on *national* identities and *national* belonging. Migration literature from the 1990s onward has gradually shifted towards the consensus that people increasingly live in complex, multi-nodal social worlds that span multiple locales and milieus, which 'affect[s] the construction, negotiation and reproduction of social identities' (Vertovec 2001: 578). By challenging 'methodological nationalism', the transnationalism approach provided important insights into how multiple forms of 'crossing nation-state borders' are integral to the migrant's objective and subjective realities and, hence, their identities. However, while the transnationalization of social relations is often framed within a positive, meritocratic context, situatedness in transnational spaces is context-specific. In other words, social location cannot be decoupled from social and societal boundaries or structures and power relations (Kivisto 2001; Dahinden 2005; Salazar and Smart 2011). The findings presented in this paper show, for instance, that transnationalism can also appear as an (additional) everyday challenge regarding the (re-)construction of a positive self-image.

Existential Determination of Knowledge and the Stratification of Experience

From a sociology of knowledge perspective, the subjective reality of individuals and their associated identities and senses of belonging are typically sustainably

affected by major events that *inter alia*, structure time into a 'before' and an 'after' (Cavalli 2004). In particular, wars operate as 'sluices of memory' (Koselleck 2020), which both affect people's perspectives of reality and their self-perceptions. However, not all individuals experience major events like wars or (forced) migration in the same way. From a sociology of knowledge perspective, one can posit that the individual's definition of the situation depends on their social positioning or the 'existential determination of knowledge': Mannheim (1985) states that an individual's social positioning (e.g. class, school of thought, generation) fundamentally affects how experiences are processed. This proved to be particularly significant for the research presented in this paper about the generation-specific existential determination of knowledge, which is attributable to the stratification of experience: To Mannheim, the age at which an individual processes specific social events is decisive to the formation of consciousness:

> [I]n estimating the biographical significance of a particular experience, it is import-ant to know whether it is undergone by an individual as a decisive childhood ex-perience, or later in life, superimposed upon other basic and early impressions. Early impressions tend to coalesce into a natural view of the world. All later experiences then tend to receive their meaning form this original set, whether they appear as that set's verification and fulfilment or as its negation and antithesis. Experiences are not accumulated in the course of a lifetime through a process of summation or agglom-eration, but are 'dialectically' articulated. (Mannheim 1993: 373)

In the light of these considerations, Mannheim develops his generations approach and differentiates between three analytical perspectives on the generation phenomenon: generational location, generation in actuality, and generation unit. People of the same age share one generational location when they live in the same time and place, whereas

> [y]outh experiencing the same concrete historical problems may be said to be part of the same actual generation; while those groups within the same actual generation which work up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways, constitute separate generation units. (Mannheim 1993: 379)

In recent years, Mannheim's theory of generations has gained importance in migration research (Berg 2011; Berg and Eckstein 2015; Winland 2015; Kublitz 2016; Dyson 2019). Contemplating 'generations' in a migration context has often been limited to integration-related differences between those who have migrated themselves and their children ('first' and 'second generation' migrants) and/or their relations to their own country of origin or that of their parents—their transnational ties. In the introduction to the special issue, *Re-imagining Diasporas and Generation* from Diaspora: a Journal of Transnational Studies, Berg and Eckstein point out that migration research '[has] overlooked the importance of pre-migration experiences empirically and especially analytically' (Berg and Eckstein 2015: 8). An empirical and analyt-ical account of these experiences could be achieved by applying Karl

Mannheim's theory of historical generations. Hence, the collection of papers in the special issue primarily addresses the question of:

> how and why people who emigrate from a single country but at different points in time, whether or not they are of the same age, or who migrated from different countries at a similar point of time, including the same age, may adapt differently in a host society owing to pre-migration differences in lived experiences. (Berg and Eckstein 2015: 8)

The research presented in this paper, however, focuses on people who were forced to leave one single country (Bosnia-Herzegovina) at the same point of time (during wartime). Its starting point was to use a sociology of knowledge perspective to analyse how these people—with their specific existential determinations of knowledge—have experienced war and migration and how these experiences affect their construction of identity and belonging. The objective hermeneutical interpretation of the data revealed that a small difference in age was enough to have a significant effect on how the crucial events of war and migration were experienced and identity and belonging were constructed. In other words, the analysis revealed that the existential determination of knowledge which is attributable to the stratification of experience, seems to be particularly important in understanding the different modes of (re-)constructing identity and belonging.

Methods and Data

Objective Hermeneutics

The main objective of the empirical analysis was to work out the interviewees' identity-related patterns of interpretation as well as their (mostly unconsciously adopted) strategies of coping with (potential) ambivalences, discontinuities, and crises. The *objective hermeneutics* method, which Ulrich Oevermann *et al.* first introduced into scientific discussion (Oevermann *et al.* 1987; Endress 2013; Wernet 2013), was evaluated as the best method to achieve this goal. The most important contribution that such an approach makes to this research is through its capacity to open the black box of how identity is created after the experience of war and migration. In other words, it can reconstruct how people deal with the (potential) crises, or disruptions evoked by these experiences. Rather than focusing on the information content of the interview, the objective hermeneutics approach reconstructs a specific *case structure*. Instead of asking *what* people are talking about, it asks *how* they talk about specific contents and *in which ways* they express them. Furthermore, this approach does not ask about the speaker's intention (the subjective sense), but what (s)he has actually expressed (the 'objective' meaning). The key strength of the objective hermeneutics approach is its capacity to uncover this 'how'. Therefore, this implies that the structures or strategies that people tend to unconsciously deploy to deal with specific crises cannot be ascertained through direct questions alone.

The first step of the reconstruction analyses the objective data about the respective interview partner, which have either been ascertained in the course of the interviews, or derived from their content (e.g. age, migration circumstances, time of migration, region of origin, religion). When combined, these objective data constitute the case's background, against which the biographical identity unfolds. In other words, analysing these objective data provides a first picture of milieu-specific living conditions that helps draw first and preliminary conclusion about the case (information removed for peer review). Additionally, their analysis improves consistency and comparability across interviews. As a next step, 'fine sequential analysis' usually starts from the interview's initial paragraph, while subsequent sections are selected according to principles of maximum variation. Objective hermeneutics aims to carve out a case structure, i.e. a specific and recurring means for how the respective interviewee copes with particular tensions or crises. Forming the case structure hypotheses and their condensed comparison is, in fact, a process of generalization and corresponds to developing a (middle-range) theory about the case at hand (here, the construction of identity out of war and migration). This process of generalization is achieved by tying the results from the empirical analysis back to the (social-)theoretical foundation of the research (here, the sociology of knowledge). The following illustrates the outcome of amalgamating the empirical findings and theory by drawing on exemplary paragraphs from the analysed interviews. This section is preceded by an outline of the data corpus.

Data Corpus

Ten interviews were selected from the data corpus of a larger project, which consists of 30 narrative interviews. The selected interviews last between 1.5 and 6 h and correspond to approximately 700 pages of transcripts. To uncover the research question about how experiences in people's formative years affect their identity development, these 10 interviews all represent interviewees who were no older than twenty by the time they arrived in Austria. By choosing this cohort, the research concentrates on a life phase that usually includes educational trajectory, early professional career, and family foundation as defining stages. This key sample consists of five interviews with females and another five with males. Six interviewees had a Bosniak background, while two were Bosnian-Serbian and another two were Bosnian-Croatian. Respondents' age at their time of arrival in Austria ranged from six years old to young adulthood. Additional interviews from the data pool were incorporated with the 10 key interviews for contrast and/or as supplements. Of these additional interviews, special consideration was given to 10 conducted with second-generation immigrants of different ethnic affiliations, who 'experienced' the war in the 1990s as children or adolescents from afar. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. All information was treated confidentially, and names, professions, and locations have been anonymized to protect individuals' identities.

Generation Specific Crises—Generation-Specific Coping Strategies: Ways of Dealing with Shattered Realities and Incomplete Belongingness

The objective hermeneutical analysis of the data and the contrastive comparison of the reconstructed case structure hypotheses (see above) indicate significant differences between people who experienced war and (forced) migration during late adolescence or as young adults and people who had those experiences as children. Specifically, the approach reveals how individuals of different age experienced war and migration (What kind of 'crises' have been triggered by those experiences?) and how they processed these particular experiences—how they integrated them into their lives over the past 30 years. In this section, the results are summarized 'ideal-typically' by drawing on the (social-theoretical) research foundation while quoted interview passages help elucidate the findings.

Shattered Reality: Experiencing War and Migration in Post- or Late Adolescence

The fine sequential analysis as well as the 'objective data' from the interviews strongly suggest that interviewees who came to Austria as older adolescents or young adults have internalized the objective reality of the socialist system in former Yugoslavia: Not only did they complete their entire schooling in this system, they have also been (made) part of the symbolic 'Yugoslavism' universe since childhood, which refers to defining characteristics of the structure imposed by the communist government in Yugoslavia that dictated how peoples' lives unfolded. Notably, this was mediated through youth organizations like the Yugoslav Pioneer Organisation and the Association of the Youth of Yugoslavia (Marjanovic-Shane 2018: 67). In describing their Yugoslavian past, all interviewees from this cohort stressed that everyone had equal opportunities regardless of their social background and that ethnic categories were of no importance. Emphasizing these two features (equality of opportunity and irrelevance of ethnic identifications or categorizations) probably owes much to the fact that in the further course of their lives, these aspects were no longer a given.

The findings reveal that the central crisis in interviewees' lives was triggered by their actual witnessing of the breakup of former Yugoslavia. This entailed more than just the downfall of a political system—it involved the collapse of their complete life world, of the objective reality in which they were socialized, and of its 'symbolic universe' (Berger and Luckmann 1967).

The experience of having their everyday lives smashed to pieces, which had been symbolically held together by 'Bratstvo i Jedinstvo' (Brotherhood and Unity), resulted in massive feelings of insecurity. In *Structures of the Life-World*, Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann note that:

> The place in which I find myself, my actual 'here,' is the starting point for my orientation in space. It is the zero-point of the system of coordinates within which the dimensions of orientation, the distances and perspectives of objects, become determined in the field that surrounds me. (Schütz and Luckmann 1973: 36–37)

Dropping out of one's own system of coordinates, losing connection to the world or the orientation thereof, and being deprived of being able to reliably interpret it are recurring motifs within the interviews. When elaborating upon the situation at the war's onset, one interviewee explains:

> You lose every orientation. You simply do not know where the danger is coming from. (female, 1973)

Slight variations of this utterance reappear in very different contexts within the analysed data:

> I didn't see it coming, I didn't know what was happening. I was completely disoriented. (male, 1974)

Disorientation was not a temporary occurrence: Experiencing the collapse of the former Yugoslavia seems to have rather permanently destroyed people's faith in the stability of their social reality. This becomes, for instance, evident in the following sequence:

> I know that nothing is for sure. Even today it might occur to someone that we have no right to be in Austria. Or that we don't have the same rights like real Austrians. I know this sounds somehow crazy but who knows. (male, 1974)

Even after almost 30 years in Austria, this interviewee does not trust that he can stay. While reflecting upon the right-wing Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), one interviewee states:

> People don't know, how dangerous this is. They don't have a clue that everything can change from one second to another, they don't know that nothing is for sure, not even their precious democracy. (female, 1973)

Although one's life practice could be considered 'as a continuous process of balancing between the taken-for-grantedness of everyday life and the latent uncertainty and doubtfulness of the social world' (Endress 2014: 60), it is plausible to assume that disruptive experiences enduringly deplete their general 'resources for trust'. In this case, the experience of war and (forced) migration not only led to a loss of 'social capital due to the loss of social belonging and opportunities for participation, but also to a loss of basic trust, social trust, and self-trust' (Endress 2014: 60). This lack of self-trust immediately became evident through statements like

> I always thought that it won't be enough, that I will fail. (male, 1974)

This was perhaps most apparent in the interview with a Bosniak woman who came to Austria when she was nineteen. She describes herself throughout the material by using the voices of (more or less) significant others. A few such examples include:

> He always told me: 'Elmedina you are so fierce'.
> My colleague used to say: 'Elmedina, you are not assertive'.

He told me: 'Elmedina you are frustrated'.
They used to say; 'Elmedina, you are such an amazing person'. (female, 1973)

It was as if she had lost her own voice and self-perception. The balance between her self-identification and external categorization (Jenkins 2000) leans more towards the latter. This is most likely an outcome of both experiencing her lifeworld's collapse and being reduced to her ethnic background and, later, to being a refugee.

> It was a strange feeling to stand in line for food with an empty plate for the first time. And then this medical examination before we came to the refugee camp, of course they examined our lungs and everything, but also if we (...) have lice (...) on our heads, that was also a bit humiliating. Of course, one understands that it has to be like that because it is just mass keeping of people (laughing lightly) but it is such a change in living conditions that one is suddenly treated like that, or has to be treated as a refugee. You're nothing but a refugee. You have nothing more to say about yourself. (female, 1973)

She apparently no longer trusts her own self-image since it has no longer been confirmed externally.

The strategies to handle their loss of orientation and its accompanying insecurity could be ideal-typically differentiated into collectivistic and individualistic strategies (even within the same interview). An example of a collectivistic strategy—which emphasizes the 'We'—is the development of a nationalistic (or ethnocentric) orientation. However, this strategy was only occasionally apparent in the data corpus, and this was usually triggered by being categorized by others, which is further addressed below.

The most predominant coping strategy for loss of orientation and/or trust is an individualistic one, which characterizes an exaggerated adherence to the ideal of personal performance to the point of self-exploitation. The actors try to acquire and retain their place in society—to belong—by building on a work ethos exemplified by high individual performance. While losing their belief in the objective idealization of 'and so on', they placed all their energy in the subjective idealization of 'I can do it again' (Schütz 1962: 224), and adaptation takes place only through achievement (professional and/or educational). Thus, high individual performance strengthens their self-images and simultaneously meets the 'host' society's integration requirements. Moreover, it also shows their efforts to achieve security in a social reality they perceive as immensely insecure.

> I needed to have the feeling that, should necessity require it, I could make it on my own [...] what I have indeed realised is that I, possibly in contrast to others, and that has probably something to do with the war and the migration history, that always when it came to important life decisions, I deliberate what if the worst thing happens. How I am going to deal with it. (female, 1977)

Conversely, identifying with an ethnic or national category had limited significance. At the extreme, there is no place of origin or place where the interviewees'

'thinking-as-usual' still works—Yugoslavia is gone. They consider themselves as belonging to a country that no longer exists. While interviewees who came to Austria as guest workers in the 1960s and 1970s frequently speak about returning home or going on vacations in their homeland, for example, this is rarely discussed by those who came as refugees. Instead, they do not usually mention 'origin', which suggests that invoking 'origin' is considered as completely inappropriate and incongruous, because to them it connotes disruption, disintegration, and losing the ground under one's feet.

This does not actually mean that there is no 'We'. The analysis shows that the 'collective identity' of these interviewees is, however, neither constitutively defined by ethnic or religious boundaries—even if nationalistic patterns of interpretation can indeed be identified. Instead, the 'We' is typically constituted by an unspecific group of people with shared experiences, who process them in a similar way:

> I only want to surround myself with people who have similar political views regarding the Balkans [. . .] I want to surround myself with people who are Yugo-nostalgic and who are sad that this is over. (female, 1975)

Likewise, one interviewee expands upon her new circle of friends in Vienna:

> There we were Yugoslavia in miniature again [. . .] most of the people who were over eighteen had experienced something nice in Yugoslavia, this cohesion, they didn't change [. . .] and that's why I was able to keep this spirit, this education that I had there, all the time. (female 1973)

Regarding comprehensibility, on the other hand:

> No one who has not experienced what we have experienced can understand anything about it. (male, 1974)

These utterances demonstrate the search for cultural resemblance. However, interviewees' understanding of cultural resemblance is not based—at least not primarily—on an abstract idea of ethnic identity or as Weber (1978) describes, as the 'subjective belief in a common descent' (p. 389). Instead, cultural resemblance is based on the assumption that similar values and knowledge arise from a shared stratification of experience (it is 'we' vs. those 'who has not experienced what we have experienced' or 'people [who] don't know' . In such cases, ethnic boundaries typically emerge covertly and become relevant after individuals experience(d) particular situations where they were categorized as Bosniak, Croat, or Serb. A Bosniak categorization implies the individual's experiences of being expelled from their country of origin and facing anti-Muslim discrimination in their current everyday reality. This becomes particularly evident in the following interview segment, where the interviewee (female, 1973) reflects on her ambivalent attitude towards a Bosniak-Muslim Diaspora organization in Vienna.

> A member of the organisation, who survived several concentration camps in Bosnia asked me to join this exclusively Bosniak association. I didn't feel able to say yes,

since I don't consider myself Muslim. At the same time, however, I have a guilty conscience and I wonder if I am not somehow obliged to be part of it. We have all been through these awful things during the war and today we are exposed to anti-Muslim discrimination, regardless of whether we define ourselves as Muslim or not. I have great difficulties with the term Bosniak, because I was not brought up that way. But I can't get rid of it either. (female, 1973)

Incomplete Belongingness: Experiencing War and Migration as a Child

Unlike those who came to Austria during late adolescence or young adulthood, people who migrated at a young age (as children or in early stages of adolescence) have a clear, intrinsic motivation to deal with their origin. They have internalized the objective reality their parents imparted on them as well as the 'cultural patterns' of the 'new' society by being incorporated into its formal (e.g. kindergarten, secondary school) and informal (e.g. peers, host families) structures. In light of Berger and Luckmann's approach, they have presumably experienced a doubled primary socialization. This means they have internalized the cultural patterns from both sides; however, these cultural patterns should absolutely not be conceptualized as self-contained and antagonistic, because of their multiple sites of interaction.

In contrast to the former adolescent refugees, those who came to Austria at a younger age have incorporated the host society's patterns alongside those from the 'old' society as 'a matter of course, a (widely) unquestioned way of life, a shelter, and a protection' (Schütz 1944: 507). It seems reasonable that this doubled socialization has made the issue of origin and belonging highly important for them, since neither are unequivocal. In the *Social Construction*, Berger and Luckmann assert that the 'question "Who am I?" becomes possible simply because [at least] two conflicting answers are socially available' (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 167). In terms of belonging, it also only makes sense to ask, 'where do I belong?' when there are different answers to choose from. The issue rarely arises when 'the socially predefined answer is massively real subjectively and consistently confirmed in all significant social interactions' (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 164). This was apparent in all the interviews with those who had childhood experiences of war and migration. Thus, these interviewees portrayed completely blending in and be considering as belonging to the society where they lived throughout childhood—to the Austrian society—as essential. Unlike the other respondents, their primary and still-ongoing socialization into the objective Austrian reality allows their 'thinking-as-usual' to work broadly in everyday life. For instance, they typically display no traces of a foreign accent in their language, while some can even code-switch effortlessly between Austrian High German and its different dialects. Yet, they see themselves as being confronted by the categorization of 'incomplete belongingness', as one interviewee states:

I am super integrated and I feel Austrian but somehow I am not considered as being one. Even before people ask for my name or my religion, they presume that I am not Austrian, I don't know, I hope my son will be seen differently, however I will never see myself as one hundred per cent Austrian, I am anyway rather Viennese. (male, 1982)

Here, self-identification as Viennese as well as 'not being one hundred per cent Austrian' is an unmistakable reaction to being excluded from full-fledged membership to the 'Austrian' community (whatever this insinuates). This is echoed in a sequence from another interview:

> I have always referred to myself as Bosnian, and always when somebody asked me 'where are you from?' I have always said I am from H. [the Bosnian town where she was born]. (female, 1986)

The question 'Where are you from?' indicates she is assumed to not be 'from here'. This forces her to position herself, preferably, unambiguously. To meet these expectations, she has 'always' declared herself as being Bosnian and from H. That is, these cohort members negotiate their incomplete belongingness by alluding to how they are not only Austrian, but also something else. As a previously quoted interviewee explains:

> The possibility to drive down [to Bosnia] is a kind of safety buffer, it means that YOUR own people are not that far away. (male, 1982)

Over time, they usually develop entire narratives about their roots—mostly about where their parents grew up—as well as an emotional attachment to these places and an 'imagined community' (Anderson 2006) of Bosniaks/Bosnians, of Serbians, of Croatians. Ethnic affiliation seems to be an integral and mostly unquestioned part of how former child refugees describe themselves (Jenkins 1994: 204). While those interviewees with a Bosniak/Muslim background typically refer to themselves as Bosnians, individuals with a Bosnian-Croatian or Bosnian-Serbian background avoid this by describing themselves as *being from Bosnia* while *being Croatian or Serbian*. In other words, they show a particular desire to be considered as a 'true' Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian—and not less of one because they grew up or also 'belong' somewhere else. However, their narratives about origin often prove to be very fragile because they rarely withstand the direct confrontation with the 'objective reality' of their imagined community's society. Any proximity, thus, exposes them as outsiders who do not really belong, and unveils what they envisioned as 'home' while growing up in Austria as an illusion, since it was not based on an actual experience. Becoming aware of this fragility, hence, constitutes the central crisis in the lives of those who experienced war and migration during childhood.

> When we visited my hometown the first time after the war ended, I thought we were in the wrong place. I did not recognise anything or anyone. I felt completely foreign in a place with which I am somehow still deeply connected emotionally. (female, 1985)

The findings demonstrate that people navigate this crisis of 'incomplete belongingness' to their imagined origin by artificially creating a Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian 'We' identity. Drawing on collective imaginations of ethnic or national affiliation, many interviewees define culture *ex ante* and try to comply with it:

They want to speak 'beautiful Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian', to listen to the right music, to watch the right films, to celebrate the right holidays in the right way, and to engage in the right cultural associations or religious activities. What is actually considered 'right', however, depends strongly on the cultural capital or the 'cultural tool kit' (Swidler 1986) that they possess. The spectrum ranges from a pronounced ethno-nationalism with rigid ethnic ingroup–outgroup differentiations to an emphasis on the south Slavic high cultural heritage.

Besides their performance of rituals, it seemed particularly important for people to form significant relationships with those perceived as 'truly Bosnian' (or Croatian, or Serbian) as part of creating belonging or protecting their own Bosnian (or Croatian, or Serbian) we-identity. At first glance, cultural resemblance is a reasonable explanation for why people develop these relationships, especially since the interviewees usually refer to its relevance when discussing their relationships. Nevertheless, these relationships may often serve as a kind of an anchor—a connection to the community that these significant others (in contrast to oneself) unambiguously belong to.[1]

Belonging to these communities of origin, however, in this case seems to be characterized by a specific feature: In particular, being a 'true' Bosniak is contingent on having experienced the war. Notably, those with a Bosniak background displayed traces of guilt for not having been affected by the war in the same way as those who actually lived through it (Mijić 2021). Due to their late birth and early flight the former child refugees (but also members of the so called 'second generation') often feel excluded from this 'community of fate'; they do not feel entitled to being traumatized by the war. Yet, they feel obliged to be concerned (with it):

> And I started to deal with it, what exactly happened and how did it happen, and I did not allow myself, for instance, not to look at it, I am really dealing with it, ah, since if I haven't experienced it then I must at least have the strength to know about it. (female, 1986)

In general, it becomes apparent that former child refugees have developed a distinct form of acculturation stress towards their Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian origin, wherein anxieties of rejection accompany all of their endeavours to (re-)connect.

Conclusion

The objective hermeneutical analysis of narrative interviews with former Bosnian refugees revealed that people who experienced war and migration during childhood face and must cope with significantly different challenges or 'crises' than those who experienced war and migration as adolescents. However, belonging is ultimately precarious for both: On the one hand, those who experienced the collapse of their life-world at a (somewhat) older age lost

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1   The special significance of marriage or partnership with regard to the construction of social reality has been emphatically analysed by Berger and Kellner (1964).

their trust in the stability of their social reality and an accompanying sense of belonging. In extreme cases, they see themselves as belonging to a community which no longer exists. On the other hand, younger cohort members display a unique precarity, since their belonging is not given—neither here nor there; neither by their social environment, nor by themselves. While those who experienced war and (forced) migration as young adults tend to primarily manage by adopting the (individualistic) strategy of high individual performance, former child refugees cope with their incomplete belongingness by drawing on collective imaginations of ethnic or national affiliation and by trying to comply with it. In doing so, they often expose themselves to acculturation stress towards their 'society of origin'.

Despite being focused on former Bosnian refugees, the significance of the research presented in this paper goes far beyond this particular case. The results—mutatis mutandis—are relevant for a better understanding of long-term trajectories among people who experienced forced migration. Although extensive research is available about migration from war conditions, the (long-term) effects of direct or transmitted experiences of war and migration on identity constructions and constructions of belonging has largely remained unexplored. Furthermore, the research makes a significant contribution to bridge the gap between the research on forced migration and particularly Berger and Luckmann's as well as Karl Mannheim's sociologies of knowledge and thereby also helps to link migration research 'more closely to wider social theories' (Castles 2010: 1576).

By anchoring the empirical analysis in the sociology of knowledge, that is, by focusing on the experience of individuals while taking into account the respective social-historical background, the research presented in this paper illuminates the essence of what complicates identity and belonging in the context of war and migration and how, in turn, people negotiate these specific challenges. The findings suggest that the effects of war and migration on former refugees' lives as well as the characteristics of their coping strategies are significantly influenced by their social backgrounds. This paper focused on the generation-specific existential determination of knowledge, which is attributable to the stratification of experience. However, in light of Mannheim's ideas, the analysis further indicates that the way people process their experiences is not only affected by age at which they lived through major historical events, but also by their social positionings (Mannheim 1985). Future research should devote particular attention to the interplay of these intersecting dimensions. Furthermore, it is to be expected that societal structures, as well as common (national) narratives concerning immigration and the perception of immigrants within a nation-state, likely have significant effects on immigrant identity construction. Therefore, further research should also aim to clarify in greater detail if there are significant differences in how biographical identities evolve within historically distinct immigration settings. Doing so will further illuminate the relationship between society and individual, or structure and agency, respectively.

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