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Ethnopolitics, 2018; 17(2):147-164

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Struggling for and Within the Community: What Leads Bosnian Forced Migrants to Desire Community Return?

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ABSTRACT The authors seek to explain the desire for community return by displaced persons in Bosnia. They find a key difference between the minorities displaced from the urban and rural parts of Bosnia. While the rural displaced tend to value community returns, the urban displaced are unlikely to do so; hence the generally low success rate of urban returns in post-war Bosnia. Family dynamics seems to influence community returns, as the decision to return often seems to be made by families, not isolated individuals. Finally, less nationalistic displaced persons seem more interested in return into a minority situation than more nationalistic ones.

Introduction

The Bosnian civil war of the early to mid-1990s left a great number of individuals and families displaced either as refugees in third countries or internally displaced within their own country. In this article, we seek to understand the desire for a community return process that brings displaced persons back to their original homes alongside former neighbours, using Bosnia as a case study. The analysis is broken into six sections. We start with a detailed overview of the political context of the return process in post-war Bosnia. We then lay out our five major hypotheses and suggest their possible impact on the desire for a communal return; the *home hypothesis*, the *security hypothesis*, the *nationalism hypothesis*, the *social capital hypothesis* and the *socio-economic hypothesis*. Next, we describe the data and methods, specifically our use of a survey conducted in Bosnia during the summer of 2013. We analyse a representative sample of Bosnians and compare returnees to their pre-war place of origin with forced migrants who are still displaced within Bosnia. Our sample does not contain Bosnian forced migrants who resided outside of Bosnia in 2013.

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In our findings section, we breakdown the characteristics of returnees by period of return and create regression models for both returnees and those who are still displaced to predict what factors would lead someone to desire community return. We test each of the hypotheses in turn. In our discussion section, we examine the results more thoroughly and point to common threads of higher preference for community return in rural areas and among the less nationalistic as well as the significance of family dynamics in the return process. We conclude with a brief discussion of the significance and limitations of our findings and their implications going forward for Bosnia-Herzegovina and other areas experiencing large scale displacement.

The Context of Bosnian Returns

Bosnia is a critical case for refugee and forced migration studies, not only for the intensity and variation in conflict experience among displaced persons, but also for the policies employed following the 1995 Dayton Peace Accord to facilitate peaceful voluntary return. The civil war of 1993–1995 left about 2.2 million displaced out of the pre-war population of 4.37 in a war equated in the international media with ethnic cleansing.¹ Even though the Dayton Peace Accord stipulated the federalization of Bosnia across ethnic lines, it also protected the right of return for displaced persons and assigned its implementation to international agencies, hoping to enable minorities to return to their former homes (Bieber, 2006; Black, 2001).² Dayton allowed for the return of the displaced not only within their ethnic units as ‘majority returnees’ (i.e. in areas dominated by their own communities) but also as ‘minority returnees’ who could claim their homes, properties, residency and voting rights in areas designated in Dayton to another ethnic community.³ Breaking way from the irreversibility of ethnic cleansing in its broader region, post-conflict Bosnia saw about 1,015,394 of those exiled returning to the country by 2006 including 457,194 returning under minority⁴ status in areas administered by another ethnic group (Belloni, 2001).⁵

The implementation of the Accord was not straightforward, however. It was slowly applied through a process of trial and error, and early attempts to ensure the safety of minority returnees and the return of their property met with strong resistance from nationalist political authorities and extremist groups (Sert, 2008, p. 106). Even so, by March 2005, 92% of the property restitution claims were resolved (Sert, 2008, p. 97) allowing the restoration of some pre-war communities through organized community return, with only few individual returns in others. As demonstrated elsewhere in the literature on return, Bosnia has been a partial success story: some areas have had experienced few ‘individual returns’, that is, handful of individuals returning and unable to re-establish their pre-war communities and institutions. Other areas experienced ‘group return’, with large groups of organized returnees able to recreate their major educational, political and social institutions (Belloni, 2001; Bieber, 2006; Black, 2001).

In this article, we go a step further. We take a closer look at the key features of the Bosnian return experience, focusing on the differences between the minorities displaced from the urban and rural parts of the country, the significance of family dynamics for successful community returns and the role of nationalist ideology in preventing displaced persons from returning as minority returnees. We find that the Bosnian return process, despite its partial successes and limitations, is one of the first relatively successful attempts to reverse ethnic cleansing in the contemporary history of the Balkans and the Middle East.

Clearly, the Bosnian return experience has had some major difficulties. In the early years, the international community's efforts were scattered and sometimes conflictual (Toal & Dahlman, 2011, p. 146). In this period, majority returns were possible but minority returns were rare and often dangerous. But with a change in the control of returns to a centralized international force, the security and legal situation of minority returnees improved, numbers increased and returns peaked in 2000–2003 (Bieber, 2006, p. 112), with 306,485 of the total 434,206 minority returnees arriving home (Toal & Dahlman, 2011, p. 262). After the peak years, minority returns again slowed, possibly due to Bosnia's weak economy and/or ethnic discrimination in the job market.

In terms of ethnic differences in returns, Bosniac internally displaced persons (IDPs) were more likely to return than their Serb or Croat counterparts. The ethnic differences in the return rates are usually understood as a reflection of the post-war politics in the three Bosnian constitutive nations. On the one hand, Serb and Croat nationalists had generally focused on 'right-peopling' their ethno-territorial regions, that is, on replacing the ethnically cleansed Others with IDPs from their respective ethnic groups. Accordingly, Serb and Croat IDPs were pressured by 'their' nationalists to stay on 'their' territories, with return represented as 'unpatriotic' and strongly discouraged (Toal & Dahlman, 2011, pp. 169, 185). On the other hand, Bosniac nationalists used return to re-capture territories lost during the war (Toal & Dahlman, 2011, pp. 167–176). One Bosniac mayor explained a successful case of mass Bosniac return as 'we have retaken that territory with our people' (Toal & Dahlman, 2011, p. 176). Physical returns (as opposed to just property return or exchange) had an impact on votes for the local nationalist parties, making them a threat or boon to local political control (Sert, 2011, p. 222). For nationalists on all sides, the freedom of IDPs to decide for themselves where they wanted to live was less important than victories in local elections and control over territory.

While the property restitution policy in Bosnia was a major success, the return of property generally did not lead to the return of people, as many forced migrants exchanged or sold their property. Sert (2011, p. 223) says this may partly explain how nationalist resistance to property return was broken down, as restoring property facilitated leaving the area by providing capital to move elsewhere. Fieldwork by the Union of Associations for Refugees, Displaced Persons, and Returnees in Bosnia [UARDPRB] (2007, p. 1), indicates that only about one third of all minority forced migrants actually returned to their pre-war homes. In several cases, forced migrants used the reconstructed housing property as a summer home, spending most of the year at the place of wartime exile (UARDPRB, 2010, p. 16). Even in the townships where community effort led to successful mass return, the return was often not followed by well-designed and funded local economic development programmes. While many Bosnians suffered from very high unemployment—around 40% in the early 2000s—the minority returnees also faced ethnic discrimination, especially in terms of employment in local public institutions (Jansen, 2006, p. 189; UARDPRB, 2008, pp. 7, 17). Consequently, after the mass return, many returnees left again, this time for economic reasons—to find jobs.

Furthermore, even under the best of conditions, some groups of forced migrants might not be interested in return. There may be gender and age differences, for example, with elderly men more likely to return and young women being less likely to return (Stefanovic & Loizides, 2015). As Jansen (2008, p. 55) observes in his ethnography of returns in Bosnia, elderly refugees are 'dying to return and returning to die'. Refugees too young to remember much of the pre-displacement life are generally less committed to return,

and the generation born after the forced migration may not even associate ‘home’ with the pre-displacement region. The gender difference might be related to greater opportunities for women in urban Bosnia (or Western countries of exile) compared to small town or rural Bosnia. Furthermore, public opinion polls indicate very high desire among the Bosnian youth—not only the internally displaced—to leave Bosnia. Finally, while there were several areas with very high return levels in Bosnia, the available data suggest these areas are generally small, mono-ethnic townships or villages (UNDP and Oxford Research International, 2007, p. 20; UARDPRB, 2010, p. 17). Bosnia’s urban areas were once famous centres of multiethnic life, but post-war urban minority returns have been limited. Bosnia’s cities are now overwhelmingly mono-ethnic.

Several studies indicate that the decision to return often emerges not from an individual’s personal choice, but from negotiations among family members and neighbours (Black et al., 2004, p. v). A survey of Columbian IDPs finds people active in local peasant organizations are more likely to desire to return to their pre-conflict homes (Deininger, Ibanez, & Querubin, 2004, p. 17). Glatzer observes in his study of the late 1980s Afghani returns, ‘Because in Kunar there are too few people it is unsafe, because it is unsafe, more people don’t come. This circle cannot be broken by individual decisions to go back, but only by organized mass return’ (Glazer, 1990, cited in Harpviken, 2014, p. 66). Similarly, the president of the local returnee organization in the Gorazde region of Bosnia remarks, ‘Together the returnees endured most of the hardships and were safer when physical attacks on us still happened and the security situation was poor’ (Porobic & Mameledzija, 2014, p. 24). In Zvornik region, mutual support helped Bosniac returnees deal with discrimination, unemployment and poverty (Porobic & Mameledzija, 2014, p. 12). However, none of these studies try to explain why the desire for the community return varies among returnees and the still displaced.

Hypotheses

The existing studies contain many useful suggestions on how to measure the degree to which a displaced individual desires community return and the degree to which community return matters to an individual who has already returned, our present goals. Accordingly, we draw on these studies. In addition, we examine the difference among the returnees across three main periods of return. Ultimately, we formulate and test five hypotheses.

The *home hypothesis* ties directly into why a person would want to return to the scene of his/her violent expulsion. While the definition and level of importance of ‘home’ is debated (Bolognani, 2007, pp. 60, 65; Ghanem, 2003, pp. 3, 16; Hammond, 2004, p. 37; Jansen, 2006, p. 185, 2008, p. 44; Stefansson, 2004b, p. 54), returning to a place of comfort drives some returnees. Whether to reclaim lost property, regain old relationships or to feel returned to their spiritual ‘roots’ (Stefansson 2004a, pp. 2–3), displaced Bosnians have shown a willingness to take on the hardship of return to their old community. Group return is expected to be preferred by those who wish to feel that sense of community. However, we expect there is a difference between urban and rural returns. While the rural returnees to mono-ethnic villages might be able to recreate a pre-conflict local community (assuming enough people return), a sense of community in (once) multicultural cities cannot be recreated by (mono-ethnic) community returns. Moreover, while community return can bring safety in numbers in rural areas, in the urban areas it might

make the minority community more visible and, thus, more vulnerable to ethnic harassment or worse.

One of the major problems of return is expressed by the *security hypothesis*. This hypothesis considers both perceived risk factors and risk tolerance of security issues in determining how likely possible returnees are to prefer group return. As it examines perceived risk, not actual risk, those surveyed may underestimate or overestimate their potential risk based on communications with other returnees, media stories, personal risk assessment, the ability to ward off threats and/or an overwhelming (or underwhelming) desire to return. We expect group return will be preferred by those who feel more vulnerable and seek safety in numbers. A study of Iraqi forced migrants indicates women are less likely to want to return to areas with high rates of sexual violence and violations of women's rights in general (Sassoon, 2011, p. 158). If this hypothesis is correct, people with a higher sense of physical vulnerability, such as women and the elderly, will be more likely to desire community return than young men.

The *nationalism hypothesis* predicts hard core nationalists will strongly desire to return to their native area (Dahlman & Tuathail, 2005, pp. 648, 656; Jansen, 2008, p. 45). Nationalists are expected to prefer group return as way to reclaim the territory their ethnic group lost due to ethnic cleansing.

The fourth hypothesis argues *social capital* encourages the return process, including the dissemination of information and the provision of the resources needed to travel back or to facilitate group return (Brown, 2002, pp. 8–10; Lin, 2000, p. 792; Walsh, Black, & Koser, 1999, pp. 114–115). Those who have more trust in their family members and neighbours may be more willing to work with them to return together. Conversely, those having poor relations with their families and neighbours may not see them as potential resources in a return process.

Finally, the *socio-economic hypothesis* expects those who have money will not need to rely on others to facilitate their return. If this hypothesis is correct, we should find a lower preference for group return among those with higher income and better education (measured as highest self-reported education level attained).

Data and Methods

The data were collected in a survey conducted in Bosnia in June and July 2013.⁶ The survey agency used a four-stage stratified sample: in the first stage, it selected municipalities using simple random sampling;⁷ in the second stage, it selected a polling station proportional to its size within selected municipalities; in the third stage, it selected households using random route technique selection from a given address; finally in the fourth stage, it selected individuals within the household to be interviewed using a Kish Table. If respondents consented to be interviewed, the field interviewers conducted face-to-face interviews in the homes of the participants. The senior staff of the survey agency conducted the day-to-day monitoring of the data collection process and provided daily updates to the Principal Investigator. The response rate was 63.53%, with a total of 1,007 interviews completed. After data collection, the results were entered into an SPSS file, and original copies of the questionnaires were destroyed. An IPSOS survey statistician calculated weights based on inclusion probabilities and the demographic data available. As Bochsler and Schläpfer (2016, p. 467) note, surveys on ethnicity in post-war Bosnia or other post-conflict societies can be used as a political tool to consolidate ethnic identity, rather than merely represent it. In our study, the focus on the three main ethnic groups of Bosniac,

Croatian and Serbian seems valid given the low representation in our dataset for people who do not self-identity in one of the major groups. For the operationalization of the variables used, see [Table A1](#) in the [Appendix](#).

Out of the 1,007 respondents in the sample, 205 are minority still displaced; 300 are minority returnees; 246 are majority (returnees and still displaced); and 256 are never displaced. Our data analysis focuses on minority returnees ([Figure 1](#), [Tables 1](#) and [2](#)) and minority still displaced ([Table 3](#)). In the multivariate analysis ([Tables 2](#) and [3](#)) the number of missing cases for the predictor variables leads to a reduction in the number of cases under analysis, from 293 to 212 and from 189 to 138, for minority returnees and minority still displaced, respectively.

Multivariate analysis of the predictors of the preference for community returns proceeds in two steps. We first look at the predictors of the preference among the returnees ([Table 2](#)) and then among the still displaced ([Table 3](#)). In both cases, we produce three nested models: first model includes just the structural variables; the second model adds the experience variables; and the third model adds the attitudinal variables. The predictor variables are the same for both returnees and still displaced, with the exception of fear of loneliness, which was only available for the still displaced. Building nested models in this manner, combined with additional data analysis, allows us to identify and analyse some forms of causal complexity, such as the possibility that an attitudinal predictor might be influenced by structural predictors.⁸

Findings

We started by comparing characteristics of minority returnees over time. As seen in [Figure 1](#), the sample data collected among current returnees support the general perception that minority returns peaked in the 2000–2002 period. More specifically, of minority returnees in our sample, about one third (31.94%) returned before 2000; about half (48.61%) returned from 2000 to 2002; and about one fifth (19.44%) returned from 2003 to 2012.

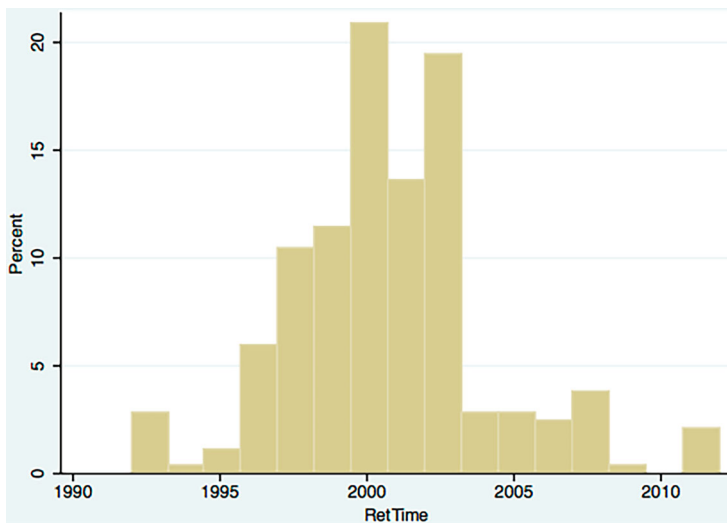


Figure 1. Returns over time. *Source:* 2013 Bosnian returns survey.

Table 1. Characteristics of minority returnees by period of return

	Before 2000	2000–2002	2003–2012
Median age	59 years	61 years	60.5 years
Gender composition	Male: 54% Female: 46%	Male: 50% Female: 50%	Male: 44% Female: 56%
Ethnic composition	Bosniacs: 58% Croats: 5% Serbs: 36% Other: 0%	Bosniacs: 65% Croats: 9% Serbs: 24% Other: 1%	Bosniacs: 70% Croats: 3% Serbs: 23% Other: 3%
Pre-war origin	Non-Urban: 97% Urban: 3%	Non-urban: 97% Urban: 3%	Non-urban: 95% Urban: 5%
Education	University Degree: 10%[†] No Formal Education: 9%	University Degree: 9% No Formal Education: 7%	University Degree: 3%[†] No Formal Education: 17%
Wartime loss of a close person	36%*	47%*	61%*
Wartime abuse	18%	14%	13%
At least one interethnic friend	43%	40%	37%
Membership in the DPA	5%	9%	8%
Mean family income	504 KM**	377 KM**	383 KM
Wartime Exile in Bosnia	72%	79%	81%
Strong memories of pre-war life	69%[†]	80%[†]	77%
Open to intermarriage ^a	-.929	-.924	-.719
Post-war family trust compared to pre-war	More: 36% Same: 55% Less: 9%	More: 38% Same: 55% Less: 7%	More: 34% Same: 63% Less: 3%
Post-war trust for co-ethnics compared to pre-war	More: 16% Same: 57% Less: 26%	More: 19% Same: 55% Less: 26%	More: 19% Same: 52% Less: 27%
Average importance of community returns ^b	7.516	7.101[†]	6.453[†]
N	92	140	68

Notes:

^aPlease see [Appendix](#) for details on survey questions and variable coding.

^bKM = Convertible Mark (*konvertibilna marka*), approximately 53 cents (0.53) USD in January 2017.

Significance: [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Source: 2013 Bosnian Returns Survey.

Table 1 compares the characteristics of minority returnees across the three return periods. We see that across all three periods, minority returnees tend to be elderly people from rural areas. As expected, Bosniacs are the majority in all periods. Later returnees in the sample are likely to be women, to be less educated, to have experienced close loss during the war, and to report lower family incomes. However, gender differences between the periods are not statistically significant. Statistically significant differences over periods are in average family income (between the first and second periods only), educational levels (between the first and third periods only) and experience of close loss. In addition, minority returnees in the second period are more likely to have strong memories of the pre-war life than minority returnees in the first period; the average

Table 2. Regression of preference for community return among returnees on predictors

Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Structural variables</i>			
Age	-.019 (.012)	-.013 (.015)	-.012 (.016)
Urban Pre-war	-1.872[†] (0.546)	-3.397[†] (1.956)	-2.368 (1.913)
Female	.180 (.369)	.290 (.440)	.590 (.448)
Education	.022 (.023)	-.015 (.033)	.009 (.032)
Ethnicity (ref: Bosniac)			
Croat	1.900* (0.795)	2.109 (1.702)	2.275 (1.659)
Serb	.138 (.411)	-.243 (.538)	.557 (.545)
Other	-1.197 (1.592)	-3.412[†] (1.855)	-2.980 (1.811)
<i>Experiences</i>			
Wartime close loss		.048 (.444)	-.102 (.435)
Wartime abuse		-.056 (.610)	.203 (.607)
Interethnic friendships		.377[†] (.205)	.460* (.205)
Membership in DPA		.576 (.908)	.097 (.914)
Family income (in 1,000s of KM)		1.842** (.694)	1.781* (.687)
Wartime exile within Bosnia		.017 (.614)	.484 (.606)
<i>Attitudes</i>			
Memories of pre-war life			-.289 (.392)
Open to intermarriage			.374* (.176)
Post-war family trust			.802[†] (.439)
Post-war trust of people of the same ethnicity			.859* (.385)
Constant	7.933*** (1.041)	6.407*** (1.280)	3.328* (1.733)
Adjusted R²	1.8%	4.1%	12%
Number of Respondents	293	215	212

Notes:

Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.

Reference category for Settlement is Rural.

For the exact wording of questions and coding of variables, see [Table A1](#) in the [Appendix](#).

Adjusted R^2 indicates the model fit, or the percentage of the variability of the dependent variables correctly predicted by the model. It varies from 0% (no fit at all) to 100% (perfect fit).

Fear of loneliness was not measured for the returnees.

Significance: [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Source: Bosnia Survey June–July 2013.

Table 3. Regression of preference for community return among still displaced on predictors

Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Structural variables</i>			
Age	-.016 (.014)	-.014 (.019)	-.021 (.020)
Urban pre-war	-2.099*** (.546)	-2.083*** (.706)	-1.600** (.583)
Female	.369 (.455)	.038 (.554)	.836 [†] (.470)
Education	-.180 (.111)	-.181 (.153)	-.105 (.133)
Ethnicity (ref: Bosniac)			
Croat	-.945 (.728)	-.821 (.933)	-1.392 [†] (.791)
Serb	-.735 (.522)	-1.441* (.698)	-1.749* (.596)
Other	-.639 (1.056)	.314 (1.290)	-1.075 (1.097)
<i>Experiences</i>			
Wartime close loss		.362 (.605)	-.336 (.513)
Wartime abuse		.083 (.634)	.443 (.546)
Interethnic friendships		-.120 (.204)	-.144 (.171)
Membership in DPA		3.615* (1.448)	3.671** (1.243)
Family income (in 1,000s of KM)		.137 (.610)	.033 (.508)
Wartime exile within Bosnia		.917 (.769)	.582 (.637)
<i>Attitudes</i>			
Memories of pre-war life			-.272 (.377)
Open to intermarriage			.544** (.199)
Post-war Family Trust			-.877* (.438)
Post-war Trust of people of the same ethnicity			-.272 (.338)
Fear of loneliness			.620*** (.082)
Constant	9.726*** (1.116)	8.871*** (1.796)	8.028*** (1.884)
Adjusted R²	12.4%	14%	43%
Number of respondents	189	141	138

Notes:

Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.

Reference category for Settlement is Rural.

For the exact wording of questions and coding of variables, see [Table A1](#) in the [Appendix](#).

Adjusted R^2 indicates the model fit, which is the percentage of the variability of the dependent variables correctly predicted by the model. It varies from 0% (no fit at all) to 100% (perfect fit).

Significance: [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Source: Bosnia Survey June–July 2013.

importance of community returns is smaller for the returnees in the third period than in the second; and these differences are statistically significant.

The change over time shown in Table 1 suggests a possible decline in the dangers the more vulnerable groups (the victimized and the poor) felt they would face in a return to Bosnia, implying some success in the improvement of security. In addition, the average significance of community return for an individual's decision to return seems to decline over time, again suggesting later returnees felt less vulnerable and thus had less need for the greater safety of community return.

Table 2 shows the factors that influence the desire for the community return—that is, the importance of community return to an individual's decision to return—among the actual returnees. Model 1 indicates that age, gender and education are not significant predictors. However, urban returnees are less likely to value community return than rural returnees, net of other factors and this finding is statistically significant. Some ethnic differences are statistically significant as well, with ethnic Croats more likely to value community return than Bosniacs. Overall, the model fit is extremely poor. Model 1 offers some support for the home hypothesis but no other.

Model 2 shows the impact of experience variables. Wartime close loss, wartime abuse and membership in a DPA are not statistically significant predictors. Contrary to the nationalism hypothesis, interethnic friendships are *positively* associated with the desire for community return. Contrary to the socio-economic resources hypothesis, family income is positively associated with the desire for community return. In terms of ethnicity, Bosniacs are more likely to value community return than ethnic Others.⁹ As in Model 1, urban pre-war origin is a statistically significant negative predictor of the desire for community return. These findings give some modest support for the home hypothesis only, with a model fit of 4.1%.

Finally, Model 3 introduces attitudinal variables. Contrary to the nationalism hypothesis, interethnic friendships and openness to intermarriage increase the desire for community return. However, in line with the nationalism hypothesis, those with a high level of trust in members of their own ethnic groups are more likely to value community return. As in Model 2, contrary to the socio-economic resources hypothesis, as family income goes up, so too does the appreciation for community return. However, as post-war family trust goes up, so does the appreciation for community return; this is exactly the opposite of what we see in Table 3. This finding lends some support to the social capital hypothesis. Finally, the percent of variability explained is now 12%, indicating an improvement in the model fit.

Overall, findings in Table 2 give some support for the home hypothesis and social capital hypothesis. We find very little support for the nationalism hypothesis and no support at all for the security hypothesis or the socio-economic resources hypothesis. In opposition to the nationalism hypothesis, more nationalistic respondents seem *less* likely to desire community return. We also find the more nationalistic forced migrants are less likely to return than the more tolerant ones. In other words, nationalism matters, but its effects seem to be exactly the opposite of those assumed by the nationalism hypothesis.

We next look at predictors of the preference for community return among minority forced migrants who are still displaced (i.e. have not returned to the pre-war residence). We design three models: the first contains structural variables only; the second adds experience variables; and the third adds attitudinal variables. As Table 3 shows, in Model 1, age, gender, education and ethnicity are not statistically significant predictors of the preference for community return among the still internally displaced Bosnians, net of other indicators in the model. In line with the home hypothesis, the displaced from urban areas are less likely

to want a community return than the displaced from the rural areas, and these differences are statistically significant. Adjusted R^2 value of 12.4% indicates a weak model fit. Overall, Model 1 modestly supports the home hypothesis.

Model 2 shows the effect of the introduction of variables associated with wartime or post-war experiences. Surprisingly, wartime close loss and wartime abuse are not statistically significant predictors of the preference for community return, net of other variables in the model. Moreover, location of the wartime exile (i.e. within Bosnia or abroad) is not a statistically significant predictor of the desire for community return, nor are interethnic friendships or family income. The only experience variable that seems to matter is membership in a displaced persons' association (DPA); such persons are statistically significantly more likely to desire community return, net of other variables in the model. Urban pre-war origin remains a statistically significant predictor.

Interestingly, once we control for DPA membership, the contrast between ethnic Serbs and ethnic Bosniacs becomes statistically significant. Additional analysis shows there are Serbs who are DPA members, who would like to return as a community and who did not manage to return. There are no such Croats or Bosniacs. In our sample, all Croats and Bosniacs who report DPA membership have actually returned. Overall, this model gives some limited support for the home hypothesis and the social capital hypothesis, but no other.

Finally, Model 3 shows the effects of the attitudinal variables. Neither memories of pre-war life nor post-war trust of those in the ethnic group is a statistically significant predictor. As might be expected, fear of loneliness is strongly associated with the desire for community return. In contrast to the nationalism hypothesis, people open to intermarriage are also more likely to want community returns. Surprisingly, post-war family trust is *negatively* associated with the desire for community return. Urban pre-war origin and membership in a DPA remain statistically significant, even after we control for the attitudinal variables. As in Model 2, ethnic Serbs are less likely to desire community return than Bosniacs, and this finding remains statistically significant. In addition, after we control for the fear of loneliness, ethnic Croats are now less likely than the Bosniacs to desire community return. Additional analysis indicates that ethnic Croats have a slightly higher average score for fear of loneliness, but the difference is small and statistically insignificant. The final model has a solid fit of 43%. Overall, these findings support the home hypothesis and the social capital hypothesis, with a puzzling finding for the effects of post-war family trust. We find no support at all for the nationalism or security hypotheses.

Discussion

For those who are still displaced, it appears that the home hypothesis may be a significant factor in wanting to return in a group. A possible explanation is the community appeal of 'home', and such a community can be formed during a return together. This community formation can logically extend to the desire to avoid loneliness during the return process. For those returning to urban areas, the risk of returning together increases both visibility and vulnerability. A significant minority return to a city in one communal trip may spark fears of ethnic conflict and doom returnees to living in an ethnic ghetto, not their original homes. In contrast, rural areas may face the problem of 'ghost villages' where *home* is nearly impossible to recreate without fellow returnees, encouraging a group return as the more viable method to recreate both community and economy.

Membership in a DPA turns out to be significant for the still displaced, with members more likely to desire a group return. They have greater access to shared resources, both in networking and in actual amount of support provided. Thus, the social capital hypothesis has some support.

It is interesting that while *all* ethnic Croats and Bosniacs who report DPA membership returned, some ethnic Serbs who are members of a DPA and who strongly desire community returns have failed to return. One has to wonder why a DPA membership seems to be such a powerful facilitator of return for Bosniacs and Croats, but not for Serbs. One possible factor, already noted in the Context section, is that Bosniac nationalist authorities were likely to offer support and resources for an organized return, while Serb nationalist authorities were more likely to actively discourage ‘their’ people from returning. That is, Bosniac nationalists have used return as a way to re-capture territories lost during the war (Toal & Dahlman, 2011, pp. 167–176). In the same time, Serb nationalists have focused on ‘right-peopling’ their ethno-territorial regions, that is, on the replacement of the ethnically cleansed Others with forced migrants from their own ethnic group. Thus, Serb IDPs have been pressured by ‘their’ nationalists to stay on ‘their’ territories, with return represented as ‘unpatriotic’ and strongly discouraged (Toal & Dahlman, 2011, pp. 169, 185; see also Harvey, 2006, pp. 96–97). Therefore, while returning Bosniac could count on strong and consistent political support of Bosniac nationalist politicians, Serbs faced hostility and opposition from ‘their’ nationalist politicians.

The security, socio-economic and nationalism hypotheses are generally not supported among the still displaced, with one exception: in the last model, those who are less nationalistic (in terms of openness to intermarriage) prefer group return. The reasoning may be that those who are more multicultural (less nationalistic) are more open to returning in a form that tries to reclaim mixed-ethnic or even multicultural communities.

Turning to returned Bosnians, we find some support for the home hypothesis. Again, we expect those from urban areas will not need a group return process to find a community within their old city. Having more interethnic friendships is correlated with a higher desire for group return. While this finding goes against the nationalism hypothesis, it might be read as support for the social capital hypothesis, but in a modified form. Conceptualizing community based on local/regional identity rather than ethnicity would facilitate shared resources and mutual help in mixed-ethnic group returns. In the case of mono-ethnic returns, interethnic friendships may assuage fears of returning to an area where another ethnic group is dominant, as returnees can expect some help from their friends on the ‘other side’.

The security hypothesis is not supported among the returnees, with none of the related factors being statistically relevant. This suggests that either safety is not a significant issue for respondents or the group return process is not important in assuaging or heightening those fears. The socio-economic hypothesis is not supported. In fact, we find the reverse is true for returned respondents: those with a higher family income are more likely to prefer group return.

The nationalism hypothesis is not supported in this group either, as only one of the relevant variables—intra-ethnic trust—is found to be salient. Furthermore, those who are less nationalistic (open to intermarriage and to interethnic friendships) are *more* likely to desire group return. One possible explanation is that those who are very nationalistic will never return to a situation where they are in the minority in number and power, so the question of the form of the return does not make sense to begin with. Alternatively, those who are less nationalistic may be more open to re-establishing or creating either a new multicultural

community, or, at the very least, a non-antagonistic mixed-ethnic community. Thus, nationalism matters and operates at both the contextual level (in terms of political pressure) and the individual level (in terms of who will decide to return).

The most surprising finding is that the post-war family trust variable has an opposite effect for the two different respondent groups. Among those who are still displaced, those who trust their family more are *less* likely to desire a group return. Arguably, those who trust their family more will have resolved their family conflicts about return and will need less non-family help if and when they return. What is unexpected is that this factor is also significant for returnees, albeit for the opposite reason; those who report higher levels of family trust are more likely to have valued and benefited from a group return. One possible explanation is that the families who experience intense internal conflict over returning are more likely to still be displaced (as of 2013); in contrast, those who have already returned may have had a more amenable family dynamic. Several studies of returnees suggest discussions of return can produce major internal family conflicts, mostly along the lines of age and gender.¹⁰

Conclusion

While our approach is relatively useful for examining the experiences of Bosnians who are still internally displaced, it has lower explanatory power for those who have already returned. Nonetheless, we can safely state that the urban–rural divide and internal family dynamics play key roles in the Bosnian return process. Those from rural areas prefer group return, while those from urban centres appear to be uninterested in or even opposed to it. We expect this is due to the security and well-being concerns of returning alone to an empty village versus the dynamics of visibly returning en masse to urban centres. While the coordinated community returns have produced high returns in several rural areas or small towns in Bosnia—such as Kozarac or Drvar—our findings suggest this model cannot easily be extended to the larger cities.

It also appears that the return process can divide families, with younger generations seeing no future in Bosnia, particularly the underdeveloped rural areas, and the older generations wanting to retire in their homeland. For women and youth, community return could potentially reproduce patriarchal rural communities, with little opportunity for them. While it is important to strive to enable those who want to return to exercise that right, some displaced people might have very good reasons not to desire community return or return of any kind. The right to return should not be turned into forced return for those who found a new home elsewhere.

While return in Bosnia has largely ceased, the implications of this study could be relevant beyond the former Yugoslavia and the Balkans particularly given the recent humanitarian tragedies in Iraq, Ukraine and Syria. By providing new insights into displacement and return, our article aims to assist the reconceptualization of voluntary return for victims of ethnic cleansing in post-conflict environments. In a nutshell, the implications are threefold. First, for humanitarian organizations aiming to assist voluntary return the article creates a demographic profile of likely returnees, particularly pointing to the more significant obstacles facing urban returns (a significant finding for Syria's urban displaced). Second, it demonstrates the importance of family dynamics and networks in enabling or restricting return.

Third, key actors in peace processes should note the need to mitigate nationalist feelings could be to support durable returns. By highlighting the negative impact of nationalist

attachment on return, our article demonstrates the self-destructive role of nationalist elites; by maintaining negative outgroup feelings, they prevent ingroup members from returning to their pre-conflict homes even when this is one of their stated objectives as demonstrated, for instance, in the return ideologies of Bosniacs, Greek Cypriots or Palestinians.

Reconciliation movements linked to the right of return could, in principle, provide alternative non-violent mechanisms to address radicalization, a significant challenge of broader relevance not only for the Balkans but also across divided societies. Particularly, in the Middle East the right of return, as stipulated in the relevant UN Pinheiro principles on property restitution, could reframe local and international understandings of existing solutions and help reconcile rival visions of peace and stability. While UN principles provide the legal and normative boundaries of durable returns, our article opens up a debate as to what is seen as possible by the displaced persons themselves. The article's findings, theoretical insights and survey design could therefore enable future studies to investigate voluntary return intentions, and to identify institutional designs more likely to facilitate sustainable return by identifying the key priorities, tradeoffs and concerns of victims themselves.

Funding

This work was supported by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada; Central European University—Institute for Advanced Studies; EURIAS Fellowship of the European Commission Seventh Framework Programme Marie Curie Actions Co-funding of Regional, National and International Programmes; the Leverhulme Trust; the British Academy; and the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at Saint Mary's University.

Notes

1. The most reliable fatality figures on the Bosnian war have been compiled by the Research and Documentation Center (RDC) in Sarajevo. By June 2007, the RDC recorded 97,207 war fatalities and estimated that the count could rise by a maximum of another 10,000 with ongoing research. The head of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia estimates the number of dead at 110,000. See *Bosnia War Dead Figure Announced*, BBC News, 21 June 2007, available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6228152.stm>. The current RDC data indicate that 40.82% of the casualties were civilians; 83.33% of the civilian casualties were ethnic Bosniacs (Bosnian Muslims). See RDC, *Research Results and Data Base Evaluation (2007)*, available at <http://www.idc.org.ba/presentation/index.htm>. 'Bosniac' is the self-selected ethnic identifier for the Bosnian Muslim community. UNHCR, *Update on Condition for Return to Bosnia and Herzegovina 2 (January 2005)*, available at <http://www.unhcr.ba/publications/B&HRET0105.pdf>.
2. The internally assisted post-conflict return in Bosnia can be divided into three general phases: the creation of safe conditions for return; return of property; and property re-construction and returnees' reintegration (Porobic & Mameledzija, 2014, p. 4). From 1996 to 2000, international assistance equalled at least 15 billion US\$ (Fagen, 2011, p. 4).
3. Minority return refers to displaced persons returning to an area now in the ethno-territorial autonomy controlled by another ethnic group. Majority return refers to displaced persons returning to an area now in the ethno-territorial autonomy controlled by their own ethnic group. In this context, 'minority' refers not to a local demographic situation, but to membership in the group which does not possess ethno-political power in the given post-war political entity. Thus, members of an ethnic Serbian family returning to Drvar after the war are 'minority returnees.' Although Serbs were the demographic majority in Drvar before and are again after the war, Drvar now belongs to a Croat-dominated Canton. Members of a Bosniac family returning from Germany to Sarajevo after the war are 'majority returnees' because Sarajevo is now in a Bosniac-dominated Canton.
4. These numbers are disputed, particularly as to the sustainability of return (i.e. some returnees have returned to reclaim and then sell their properties). See UNHCR, update on condition for return to

- Bosnia and Herzegovina, *supra* note 4, at 2; UNHCR, Statistical Summary as at 31 October 2006 (total number of refugees and displaced persons who returned to/within Bosnia and Herzegovina) (October 2006), available at http://www.unhcr.ba/return/Summary_31102006.pdf (Belloni, 2001; Black, 2001). Updated numbers can be found at the UNHCR Bosnia website at <http://www.unhcr.ba/>.
5. By 2014, there were still about 100,400 registered IDPs in Bosnia—people who expressed a wish to return to the pre-war residence to the authorities and who took steps towards property re-construction (IDMC 2014, pp. 1, 5).
 6. Data was collected by Sarajevo-based Ipsos BH, as a part of the project on The Way Home: Peaceful Voluntary Return Project (SMU REB: # 12–224).
 7. The sampling frame was stratified based on two variables. The first stratification variable was based on Bosnia's two entities: Federation and Republika Srpska. The second was based on the coefficient of return (CR) for each municipality. The CR combined the 1991 pre-war Census data with the 2005 estimates of return (provided by the Bosnian Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees; see Nenadic et al., 2005) to express the estimated percent of the pre-war minority population which returned to the given municipality in the post-war period. The median value of the CR for the Federation was 12.49% and the median value for the RS was 14.74%. In the Federation, we randomly selected 12 municipalities where the CR was less than the median and 11 municipalities where it was greater than the median. Similarly, in Republika Srpska, we randomly selected seven municipalities where the CR was less than the median and five where it was greater than the median.)
 8. We did collinearity diagnostics for the models shown in Tables 2 and 3. The highest variance inflation factor value is 3.57, well below the critical value of 10. Thus, we do not seem to have a multicollinearity problem.
 9. Additional statistical analysis indicates that controlling for family income weakens the impact of ethnicity. Sample evidence suggests major differences in median income by ethnic group of the returnees: 400 KM for Bosniacs/Muslims, 400 KM for Croats, 150 KM for Serbs, and 275 KM for Others.
 10. For a number of women, time spent in the West or in urban Bosnian areas can be experienced as gender liberation from conservative and patriarchal norms and expectations (Parutis, 2014, pp. 167–171). Research on Bosnian post-war returns to Sarajevo indicates that a major point of contention in the Bosniac community is a clash between the returnees and never displaced over the women's rights values embraced by some returnees during their time abroad (Stefansson 2004b, p. 64). A study of Moroccan returnees from the Netherlands indicates that young women are generally opposed to return (De Bree, Davids, & De Haas, 2010, p. 504). A study of 2003–2005 returnees to Afghanistan indicates that women and youth find it extremely difficult to adapt to the standard of living and social expectations in rural Afghanistan (Harpviken, 2014, p. 64). Finally, a study of Iranian immigrants to Sweden shows returning to stricter gender roles is a major deterrent to return for women and families with daughters (Graham & Khosravi, 1997, p. 122).

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Appendix

Table A1. Variable descriptions and expected effects

Variable	Description	Expected association with the dependent variable
<i>Dependent variable—preference for community return</i>		
For still displaced	‘Maybe I would return if other displaced persons from my village/ neighbourhood also returned’ (Scale 0–10, where 0 is insignificant and 10 is very important; 98—not relevant, 99—DK/NR)	
For returnees	‘Which of the following factors influenced your decision to return to your pre-war home? (Scale 0–10, where 0 is insignificant and 10 is very important; 98—not relevant, 99—DK/NR).’ Other displaced persons from my village/neighbourhood returned	
<i>Structural variables</i>		
Age	Self-reported	Older people more likely to value community return.
Pre-war urban residence	Self-reported	Urban residents less likely to value community return.
Gender	Interviewer-reported	Women more likely to value community return.
Education	Self-reported (options are: No formal education, Incomplete primary school, Complete primary school, Incomplete secondary school: technical/vocational type, Complete secondary school: technical/vocational type, Incomplete secondary: university-preparatory type, Complete secondary: university-preparatory type, Some university-level education, without degree, University-level education, with degree)	Better educated less likely to value community return.
Ethnicity	Self-reported	No expectations.
<i>Experiences</i>		
Wartime close loss	Did anyone close to you lose his/her life during the conflict? (Yes/No)	Those who experienced close loss more likely to value community return.
Wartime abuse	Did you personally experience physical injury, imprisonment, or torture during the conflict? (Yes/No)	Those who experienced wartime abuse more likely to value community return.
Close interethnic friendships	‘Out of your closest three friends before the conflict, how many were not from your ethnic community?’	More nationalistic more likely to value community return.

(Continued)

Table A1. Continued

Variable	Description	Expected association with the dependent variable
Membership in DPA	‘Have you been a member of displaced persons association?’ (Yes/No)	DPA members more likely to value community return.
Family income	Self-reported	Those with higher income less likely to value community return.
Wartime exile	What was/has been your longest residential arrangement while in displacement?	Those who spent the exile in Bosnia (rather than abroad) more likely to value community return.
<i>Attitudes</i>		
Memories of pre-war life	‘To the extent that you do have memories or representations from life at your original home, would you say these memories are positive or negative?’ (Scale -5 to 5, where -5 is very negative and 5 is very positive, and 0 is neutral, DK = 8, NR = 9)	Those who have more positive memories are more likely to value community return.
Open to intermarriage	Bogardus scale based, average score for the other ethnic groups	More nationalistic more likely to value community return.
<i>Attitudes</i>		
Post-war family trust	How has your return experience changed your view of others compared to the times in displacement? I trust my family as before (1-less, 2-same, 3-more)	Those with higher family trust more likely to value community returns
Post-war trust of people of same ethnicity	How did the war change your community’s (family, friends, neighbours, acquaintances) view of others? People trust members of their ethnic group (1—less, 2—same, 3—more)	More nationalistic more likely to value community return.
Fear of loneliness (only for still displaced)	Which of the following additional factors, if any, would most concern you about the prospect of returning to your pre-war home? (Scale 0–10, where 0 is insignificant and 10 is very important; 98—not relevant, 99—DK/NR) I would feel isolated and lonely	Those more concerned with loneliness more likely to value community return.

Source: 2013 Bosnia returns data set.