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Peaceful returns: reversing ethnic cleansing after the Bosnian war

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Peaceful Returns: Reversing Ethnic Cleansing after the Bosnian War.

Abstract

This article questions the conventional wisdom that claims forced migration is irreversible following massive ethnic cleansing campaigns by investigating durable returns to pre-conflict home communities in Bosnia Herzegovina. We formulate a set of novel hypotheses on the demographic determinants of return as well as on the role of social capital, nationalist ideology, integration, and war victimization. We use a 2013 Bosnian representative sample with 1,007 respondents to test our hypotheses. The findings support the expectation that gender and age have a major impact on return. Net of other factors, women and those experiencing wartime victimization are less likely to return. Older Bosnians with positive memories of pre-conflict interethnic relations are more likely to return than younger persons or those with negative memories. Finally, ethnic Bosniacs are more likely to return than ethnic Croats or Serbs. More nationalistic internally displaced persons (IDPs) are less likely to return.

Key words: ethnic cleansing, refugees, sustainable returns, forced migration, social capital, Bosnia Herzegovina, internally displaced persons (IDPs)

Introduction

Voluntary peaceful return following forced migration is a critically important area in refugee studies, yet little effort has been made to collect systematic data on actual returns (for exceptions, see Black and Koser 1999; Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2005; O'Loughlin et al. 2011; Toal and Dahlman 2011). NGOs and international organizations generally consider sustainable return a preferred and durable solution of the refugee problem (ECOSOC 2005; UNHCR 2013, 2014), but despite the normative consensus, there is little empirical knowledge of how or why forced migrants themselves make the decision to resettle in pre-conflict residences (Belloni 2006; Tuathail 2010; Joireman et al. 2012). Once there is a genuine possibility of going home, what influences individual decisions to return to a pre-conflict residence, often in the face of very difficult conditions?

Answering this question has implications for the broader field of refugee and forced migration studies. Academic work on refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), as well as related policymaking, frequently lacks quantitative data, largely because relevant surveys remain rare (Bloch 2007; Jacobsen and Landau 2003). Survey-focused work on forced migrants is frequently risky in terms of the personal security of interviewees and difficult to complete, especially with a representative sample of migrants. IDPs and refugees represent vulnerable but mobile populations; while their vulnerability makes them of considerable interest for social science inquiries, their mobility makes it challenging to determine representativeness in the sampling procedures. Lacking reliable data, international organizations, governments and NGOs often have to make decisions without sufficiently assessing views of the forced migrants.

To cover this gap, this article analyses survey data collected among forced migrants in Bosnia. Compared to other post-conflict societies and peace settlements elsewhere, key strengths of the Bosnian case study include its significant rates of return and reliable data collection (Black and Koser 1999; Toal and Dahlman 2011). So far, there has been mixed and contradictory evidence in the literature as to whether return is feasible following protracted forced migrations or ethnic cleansing campaigns, especially those associated with the Yugoslav wars (Adelman and Barkan 2011). **In this article, we challenge the assertion, common to academics in the field, that ethnic cleansing and forced migration are irreversible. We do so using evidence and data from a large-n survey in Bosnia.** To shed light on return under prohibitive conditions, the article considers two groups of forced migrants: those remaining in forced migration and those opting to return to their pre-conflict homes and communities. We are comparing minority returnees who came back to the place of

pre-war residence with those who now reside in the area of Bosnia where their ethnic group holds political power. While some of the individuals spent war-time years outside Bosnia, the majority (80.32%) are internal forced migrants.

Minority and Majority Returnees

In this study, we focus only on the potential and actual minority returnees who currently reside in Bosnia.¹ The term ‘minority returnee’ refers to a forced migrant (either an IDP or a refugee) who returns to a pre-war location of residence and who will be a post-war minority in that location. In this context, ‘minority’ refers not to a local demographic situation, but to membership in a group which possesses no or limited 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. This distinction is critical in terms of shaping the dilemma to return or not following a peace settlement: for the most part majority returnees are welcome in their ‘own territory’ within Bosnia while minority returnees generally face more difficulties including hostile local authorities and new occupants.

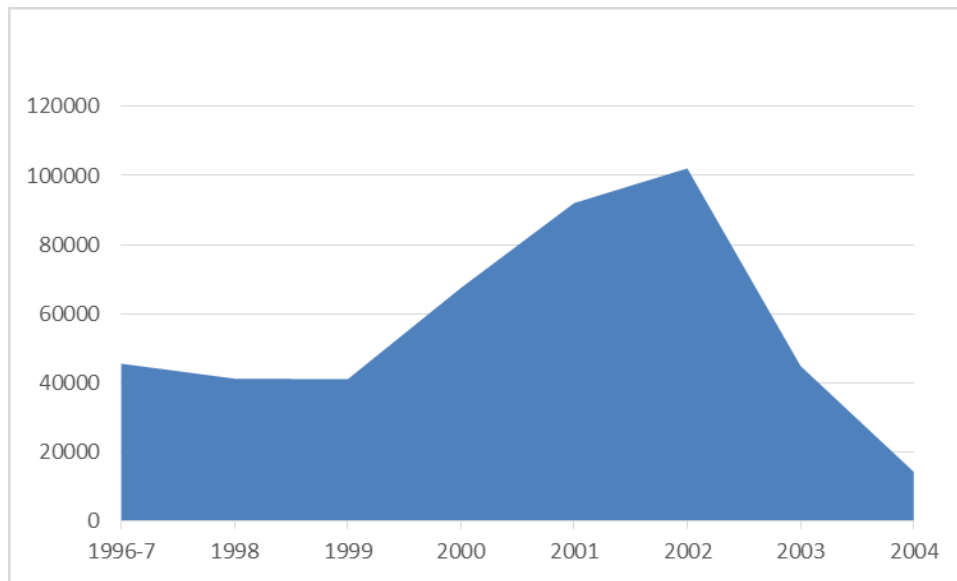
The Context: Forced Migration and Return in Bosnia

The war of 1993-1995 left deep wounds in Bosnian society. Out of the pre-war population of 4.37 million, about 110,000 were killed and 2.2 million driven from their homes in a devastating conflict associated in the international media with

genocide and ethnic cleansing (Carmichael 2002; Bieber 2006).² While census results are questioned by some, the Bosnian Statistics Agency estimates the 2003 population was 3.83 million (Toal and Dahlman 2005). Of the estimated 2.2 million driven out, 1,015,394 returned to the country by 2006, with a documented 457,194 repatriated under minority status in areas administered by another ethnic group (Tuathail et al. 2006).³ These numbers are frequently disputed, particularly as to the sustainability of return (i.e. some returnees have returned to reclaim and then sell their properties).

Nonetheless, the Bosnian case study is of considerable interest for forced migration studies, not only for the sheer numbers of returnees and the variations in responses across regions and municipalities, but also for the policies used by the international community to facilitate repatriation. The Dayton Accord grants forced migrants the right to return to their former homes in the war-torn republic (Black 2001; Bieber 2006; Hall 2014) but its implementation has not been straightforward; rather, it has been slowly applied through a process of trial and error (Belloni 2008). In the early post-war period (1995-1999), violence by nationalist authorities and mobs against any attempted minority returnees was widespread; consequently, there were very few cases of significant returns in this period (Belloni 2008: 170-6). However, from 2000 to 2005, the trickle became a flood, thanks to the security support given returnees by NATO forces, along with well-organized international pressure for property return (Belloni 2008; Toal and Dahlman 2011). After 2005, the scale of the minority returns dropped again. Despite the up and down pattern and regardless of its inherent limitations, the Bosnian return process represents one of the first relatively successful attempts to reverse forced migration in a region previously associated with ethnic cleansing generally considered irreversible.

Figure 1: Minority Property Returns in Bosnia (1996-2004) ⁴



Source: Bieber 2006: 112

Main Hypotheses: Returning Home

So far, few studies have specifically asked why forced migrants will either return home or try to integrate into a new environment.⁵ To address this gap in the academic and policy literature, we designed a survey of 1,007 Bosnians. Implemented by IPSOS in 2013, the survey focused on economic, psychological and socio-political factors of forced migration during the 1993-1995 Bosnian war and on the post-war returns following the peace settlement in the country. We based it on the main hypotheses in the literature and included novel hypotheses on the role of social capital (see Diagram 1).

War trauma hypothesis: The decision to stay away might stem from a fear of renewed ethnic violence (Lake and Rothchild 1996; Walter 1999; Annan et al. 2011), possibly associated with traumatic war-time experiences, such as victimization or loss of a significant other. If this hypothesis holds, people who experienced conflict-related war-time loss will be less likely to return.

Political pressure hypothesis: In terms of ethnic differences in returns, conventional expectation is that Bosniac forced migrants are 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 have focused on ‘right-peopling’ their ethno-territorial regions, that is, on the replacement of the ethnically cleansed Others with forced migrants from their respective ethnic groups. Thus, Serb and Croat IDPs have been pressured by ‘their’ nationalists to stay on ‘their’ territories, with return represented as ‘unpatriotic’ and strongly discouraged (Toal and Dahlman 2011: 169, 185; see also Harvey 2006: 96-97). Sivac-Bryant’s ethnography of Bosniac returns to Kozarac shows that local Serb authorities were moving ethnic Serb refugees into the homes of Bosniacs who were forced out; they asked refugee Serbs not to return to their pre-war homes but to stay in the RS (2016: 18, 78). On the other hand, Bosniac nationalists have used return as a way to recapture territories lost during the war (Toal and Dahlman 2011: 167- 176). One Bosniac mayor explained a successful case of mass Bosniac return as ‘we have retaken that territory with our people’ (Toal and Dahlman 2011: 176). Consequently, Bosniac forced migrants have been pressured to fulfil their patriotic duty by returning to the place from which they were expelled. As Stefansson explains in his qualitative study of returnees and the refugee situation in Banja Luka, Bosniac returnees generally articulate the ideology of return, while forced migrant Serbs from Croatia support the ideology of remaining (2006: 128).

Clearly, for nationalists on all sides, the freedom of forced migrants to decide for themselves where they want to live takes a back seat to national interests and patriotic duties. But in light of the differences in the forms of nationalistic pressure,

we would expect Bosniac forced migrants to be much more likely to return than Croat or Serb ones.

Integration hypothesis: The integration hypothesis argues forced migrants are less likely to return home after the passage of time and after successfully settling in a new environment (see Zolberg 1989:406; Zetter 1999; ICG 2002; Ibáñez and Moya 2010). Several related factors could influence decisions to relocate or return, including permanent jobs, property, and language proficiency (Wahlbeck 1999; Annan et al. 2011; Toal and Grono 2011). Better-educated forced migrants should be able to use their human capital to integrate into an urban economy. In addition, the ethno-political make-up of the neighbourhoods of pre-conflict residence, particularly majority/minority patterns, could influence the extent to which they opt to return or integrate into a new post-war environment (Toal and Dahlman 2005; Celik 2005; Belloni 2006; Sert 2008). Conversely, forced migrants who had to leave behind major property (such as land, flats, or houses) might be less willing to integrate into a new place of residence and more likely to return and reclaim their property. If this hypothesis is correct, forced migrants in Bosnia with professional occupations, permanent jobs, and high education levels will be less likely to return, and those who left significant property behind will be more likely to return.

Age effect hypothesis: Several studies indicate the desire to return to pre-conflict homes is strongest for those forced migrants who spent their formative years there. Critical factors include their memories, direct or indirect (for children of the forced migrants), of the original home, as well as local relations with non-members of their own ethnic community before the conflict. As Jansen observes in his study of returnees in Bosnia, elderly forced migrants are ‘dying to return and returning to die’ (2009: 55). Those who are too young to remember much of the pre-forced migration

life are generally less committed to return, and the generation born after the forced migration may not even associate 'home' with the pre-forced migration region (Hammond 1999: 236-240; Romano 2005). Following this logic, the age effect hypothesis argues older forced migrants with positive memories of the pre-expulsion life are more likely to return than the young or those with negative memories. Moreover, when choosing where to live, the elderly might be less concerned with opportunities for education or employment and more interested in living in a place where they feel they belong. If this argument holds, advanced age and positive memories of pre-forced migration homes will improve the odds of return.

Opportunities for Women Hypothesis: For a number of younger women, time spent in the West or in urban Bosnian areas may offer opportunities for education, paid employment and new life opportunities generally not available in rural Bosnia. As suggested by major anthropological study of pre-war Bosnia (Binga 1995: 47, 119), there had been already a tendency for younger women to opt for life in urban areas which offered them greater independence from their parents' wishes and the patriarchal environment of their ancestral communities. While we acknowledge that gender and age might be related to return through multiple causal pathways, we hypothesize that overall younger women would be much less likely to return than older men.

Social capital hypothesis: This hypothesis draws on social capital literature (Putnam 1993: 167; Varshney 2001; Castles 2003; Çelik 2005; Steele 2011) to emphasize the efficacy of trust, norms, and networks to facilitate and coordinate return actions. It also emphasizes the role of both formal associations and informal neighbourhood and kinship networks in decisions to return or stay away. Mutual trust and communal ties enable, on the one hand, the creation of organizations of forced migrants and help, on

the other, to foster coordination and overcome security challenges to successful and durable return (Stefanovic and Loizides 2011). If this hypothesis is correct, those from the high return regions will be more likely to return themselves.

In terms of the urban-rural differences in returns, previous studies have generally reported higher returns in rural than urban areas. While this finding is not disputed, why it happens is not so clear. Forced migrants from rural areas may be more likely to return because coordination and social organization are easier to achieve in rural settings, as people may know and trust a greater number of their neighbours. Returnees to unoccupied monoethnic villages might experience a greater sense of ‘safety in numbers’ than returnees to multi-ethnic and individualistic urban environments, as the former will immediately find themselves in a local minority situation. If the above arguments hold, forced migrants from rural areas will be more likely to report higher levels of local social capital and correspondingly higher return levels than those from urban areas.

Nationalism hypothesis: The resentment and national ideology thesis (Allport 1954; Petersen 2002) posits the forced migrants who regularly vote for hard-line ethno-nationalist parties are less likely to return under the political administration of a rival community. While classic theories of nationalism (Gellner 1964; Hall 1998) have convincingly demonstrated nationalists generally resent a life under ‘foreign rule and rulers,’ little research has examined how the dilemma appears among minority returnees who might opt to compromise a new life among co-ethnics in favour of return to a territory essential to their ethnic or national identity but where they would be in a minority situation. After everything that has happened, some may feel they cannot live together with other ethnic groups; if so, return will be less likely.

Diagram 1. Hypotheses on Return in Post-Dayton Bosnia, Causal Factors

Structural Factors

Gender

Age

Ethnicity

Rural pre-war
residence

Life Experiences

Permanent
Employment

Loss of close

Property loss

Social Capital Hypothesis

Extent of
community

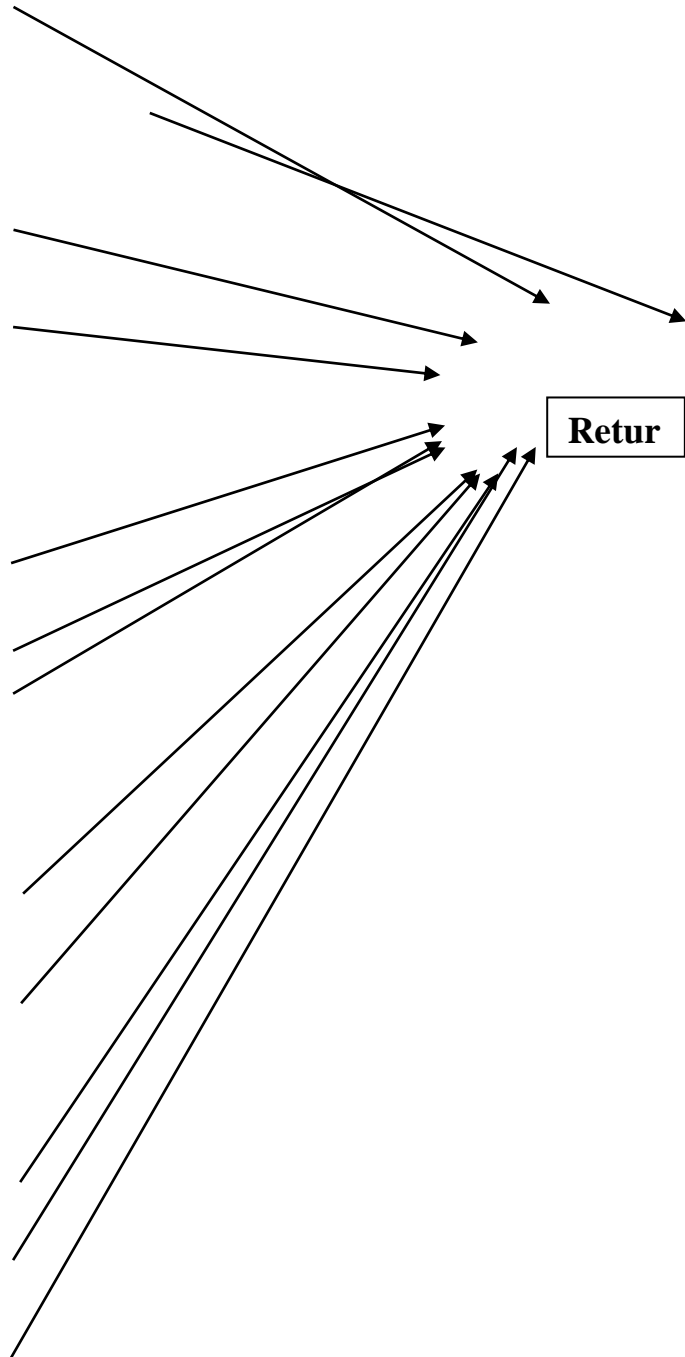
Pre-conflict
interethnic

Nationalist Ideology

Tolerance of
living with

Vote for
co-ethnics only

Openness to
intermarriage



Similarly, the forced migrants who only vote for co-ethnics and who resolutely reject ethnic intermarriage will be less likely to return, as this puts them in a minority position.

Survey, Data, and Methods

The data were collected in a survey we conducted in Bosnia in June and July 2013.⁶ IPSOS implemented the survey using a four-stage stratified sample. In the first stage, it selected municipalities using simple random sampling;⁷ in the second, it selected a polling station proportional to its size within selected municipalities; in the third, 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 PI. 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. The IPSOS survey statistician calculated weights on the basis of inclusion probabilities and demographic data available.⁸

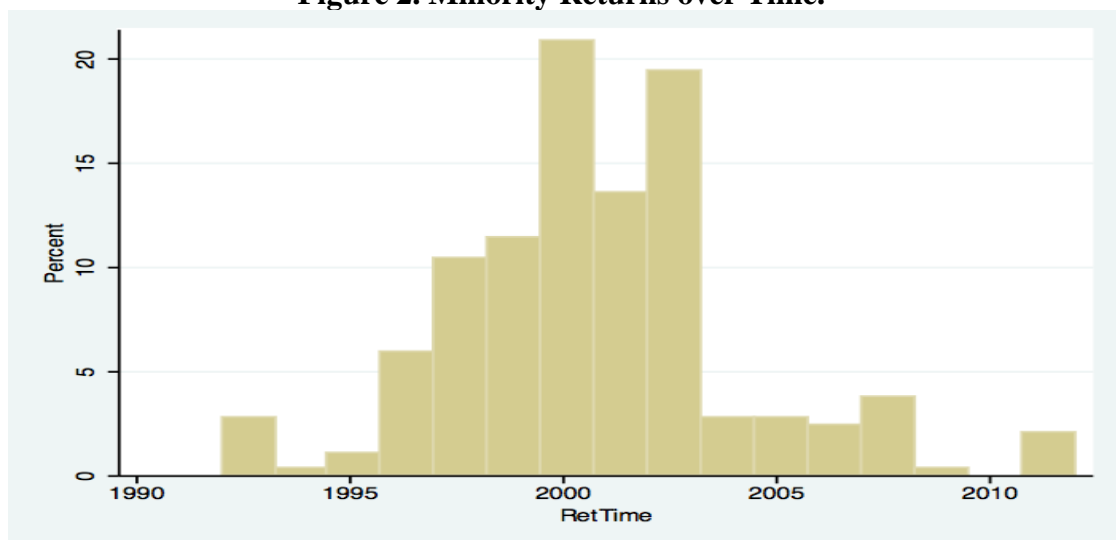
Since the outcome variable is binary (returnee / non-returnee), we used binary logistic regression.⁹ The data analysis was conducted in Stata 11. Table 2 reports odds ratios, standard errors (in brackets), statistical significance of each coefficient, and overall model fit. An odds ratio less than one means the given independent variable reduces the odds of the outcome. For example, in Model 1, we see Serb respondents are about half (.557) as likely to return as Bosniac ones (the reference

group), net of other variables in the model. An odds ratios greater than one means the given independent variable increases the odds of the outcome. For example, in Model 2, we see that the respondents with rural pre-war residence are about six times (6.155) more likely to return than the respondents with non-rural (i.e. urban and semi-urban) pre-war residence. Model 3 shows ethnic Croats are 9.6 times more likely than Bosniacs to return, net of other factors. However, we should note that the standard error is extremely high, implying that the actual odds, while statistically significantly greater, might be much lower.

Findings

As Figure 2 shows, the sample data support the general perception that minority returns peaked in the 2000-2003 period. More specifically, of minority returnees in our sample, about 1/3 (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 2. Minority Returns over Time.



Source: 2013 Bosnian Returns Survey

Table 1. Comparing Returnees to Non-Returnees

	Non-Returnees	Returnees
Ethnic Composition	Bosniacs: 42% Croats: 40% Serbs: 61%	Bosniacs: 58% Croats: 60% Serbs: 39%
Median Age	48 years	60 years
Gender Composition	Male: 40% Female: 59%	Male: 60% Female: 41%
Pre-War Origin	Rural: 45% Semi-urban: 51% Urban: 77%	Rural: 55% Semi-urban: 49% Urban: 23%
Permanent Job	Has Permanent Job: 36% No Permanent Job: 64%	Has Permanent Job: 64% No Permanent Job: 36%
Pre-War Interethnic Relations in Area of Origin	Excellent: 47% Poor: 81%	Excellent: 53% Poor: 29%
Loss of a Close Person	62%	38%
Home Ownership	Owner: 42% Non-owner: 58%	Owner: 63% Non-owner: 37%
Community Return	Nobody returned: 100% Very few: 74% Less than half: 22% About half: 26% More than half: 4% Almost everyone: 5%	Nobody returned: 0% Very few: 26% Less than half: 78% About half: 74^ More than half: 96% Almost everyone: 95%
Ethnic Co-Existence	Strongly opposed: 78% Strongly supportive: 36%	Strongly opposed: 22% Strongly supportive: 64%
Vote for Co-Ethnics Only	Strongly opposed: 43% Strongly supportive: 58%	Strongly opposed: 57% Strongly supportive: 42%
Ethnic Inter-marriage	Strongly opposed: 59% Strongly supportive: 50%	Strongly opposed: 41% Strongly supportive: 50%

Note: Descriptive statistics reported using weighted sample.

Table 2. Odds Ratios for Logistic Regression of Return, Bosnian Returns, 2012

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Structural Factors</i>			
Ethnicity (Bosniacs are the reference group)			
Croat	2.376 NS (1.127)	8.618** (6.180)	9.607** (7.959)
Serb	.557* (.158)	1.657 NS (.625)	1.324 NS (.658)
Age	1.050*** (.009)	1.060*** (.016)	1.074*** (.018)
Gender (Male 0 Female 1)	.386*** (.105)	.130*** (.053)	.164*** (.065)
Rural Pre-War Residence	1.808* (.544)	4.118** (2.006)	4.047* (2.424)
<i>Experiences</i>			
Permanent Job		.363* (.168)	.544 NS (.246)
Good Pre-War Interethnic Relations		1.633** (.286)	1.344NS (.243)
Close Person Lost		.300** (.123)	.226** (.106)
Home Owner		1.661 NS (.737)	1.291NS (.585)
Community Return		5.265*** (1.496)	5.323*** (1.457)
<i>Nationalist Ideology</i>			
Acceptance of Coexistence			1.508** (.228)
Vote Co-Ethnics Only			.668* (.112)
Open to Ethnic Inter-marriage			1.749* (.383)
Cox & Snell R²	14.94%	55.03%	60.61%
Number of Respondents	487	420	420

Significance: NS= not significant, †p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, *** p<.001.

As demonstrated in Table 2, the Croat variable is not significant in the first model, but the effect of the Serb variable is negative. Net of other factors, Serbs are only half as likely to return as Bosniacs (the reference ethnic group). This finding is

supportive of the political pressure hypothesis. The age variable effect is positive and statistically significant, in line with our expectation that the older a person is, the more likely s/he is to return. The gender variable effect is negative and statistically significant, which means men are more likely to return than women, with young women very unlikely to return, a result suggested by our opportunities for women hypothesis.

Finally, rural pre-war residence is statistically significant and positively associated with return. That is, forced migrants from rural areas are more likely to return than those from urban areas. Further data analysis suggests forced migrants from rural areas are more likely to desire community return, and their communities are also more likely to have achieved high return levels. This finding seems to support our social capital hypothesis.¹⁰ Additional analysis finds rural forced migrants report slightly higher levels of trust in the family and slightly lower levels of generalized trust than non-rural forced migrants. Urban forced migrants are more likely to say they would not like to return because they have now started a new life at the new place of residence. While 66% of rural non-returnees say the lack of family and friends in the place of origin is a very important factor inhibiting return, only 48% of urban non-returnees agree. Urban returnees are also considerably more likely than rural ones to say the establishment of multi-ethnic police force was a major factor in their return, with 78% of urban returnees but only 47% of rural returnees saying improved security situation drove their return.

In Model 2, the Croat variable effect is positive and statistically significant, with Croats about eight times more likely to return than Bosniacs, net of other variables. The Serb variable effect is now positive but not statistically significant, and the model predicts Serbs are more likely to return than Bosniacs. More detailed

exploration of this finding indicates the Croat and Serb variable becomes positively associated with the likelihood of return after we control for the community return variable. It appears Bosniac forced migrants are much more likely than Serb or Croat ones to return as a community. This finding seems to support the political pressure hypothesis. The age variable effect is still positive and significant, and the gender variable effect is the same as before. The close person lost variable effect, added in this model, is negative and statistically significant. Respondents who did not lose a close person are about three times more likely to return than those who did, a finding supportive of our war trauma hypothesis.

The effect of the permanent employment variable is negative and significant. The respondents with permanent jobs are about three times less likely to return than those without permanent jobs, in line with the integration hypothesis. We have also tested for the effect of having a professional occupation and a good education. As one might expect, the chances of having a professional job and permanent employment increase with education. Thus, it seems education reduces chances of return, as those with education are more likely to get professional and permanent jobs in the host country and less likely to return to the ancestral one.

While our findings support the integration hypothesis, previous research in Cyprus (Loizides & Stefanovic, 2013; Loizides, 2016: 114) and the Kurdish regions of Turkey on education (Stefanovic et al. 2015; 276) has different results, suggesting this finding might be specific to the conditions of the former Yugoslavia and not necessarily replicable elsewhere. For instance, the Cyprus2015 project data on displacement show that, in the long-term, integration into a new environment does not conflict with return; in fact, the capacity to integrate might offer minority returnees

more resources, experience, and confidence when dealing with hardships during the return process (Loizides & Stefanovic, 2013: 2).

The effect of the pre-war local interethnic relations variable is positive and significant; forced migrants reporting good pre-war interethnic relations in their region are more likely to return. The community return variable effect is positive; in line with the social capital hypothesis, if a large proportion of the community returns, individual respondents are 5.2 times more likely to return as well. While those who owned homes in their pre-war places of residence are more likely to return than non-owners, the variable is not statistically significant. Further analysis indicates that controlling for age makes the effect of home ownership not statistically significant; in other words, home ownership is strongly influenced by age. While the average age for owners (self or spouse) is 63.4 years, the average age for non-owners is 40.8 years. Thus, another way age influences minority return is through home ownership.

Model 3 tests the effects of nationalism ideology via three variables. All three are statistically significant and have the expected effect. First, forced migrants who accept multi-ethnic living are 1.5 times more likely to return than those who do not, net of other variables in the model. Second, forced migrants who vote exclusively for candidates from their own ethnic group are less likely to return, and this relationship is statistically significant. Finally, those open to intermarriage with members of the currently dominant ethnic group in their area of origin are almost twice as likely to return as those who oppose it. This finding is also statistically significant. These findings give very solid support of the nationalism hypothesis.

In terms of socio-demographic and experience variables in the third model, relatively little changes. The Croat ethnicity variable is still positive and statistically significant. The Serb variable remains positive, but it is no longer statistically

significant. The effects of age, gender, pre-war rural residence, community return, home ownership, and close person lost variables are about the same as in the previous model. The effects of permanent job and good pre-war ethnic relations are as before, but they are not statistically significant. Additional data analysis indicates that people who report good pre-war ethnic relations are unlikely to score high on nationalism variables.

Overall, Model 3 correctly predicts who will return in 89.29% of the cases, indicating a very good model fit. Because of its accuracy, we can use the model to illustrate the effect of gender. According to the model, the probability of return for a 30-year-old woman with a permanent job is 11.54%. In contrast, the predicted return probability for a 63-year-old man without a permanent job is 93.92%. The findings give clear support of our expectation that gender and age have a key impact on return.

Discussion: Reversing Forced Migration in Bosnia and Beyond

We find considerable support for the *age effect hypothesis*. In line with the results of several other researchers (Hammond 1999; Jansen 2009; Loizos 2009), our findings suggest older respondents and those with positive memories of pre-conflict interethnic relations are significantly more likely to return. Home ownership increases the likelihood of return but is largely driven by age. By and large, our findings also support the *integration hypothesis*, as we find forced migrants who now have permanent jobs are less likely to return. We find clear and strong support for the *nationalism hypothesis*, in that those who are less nationalistic are more likely to return. And the evidence supports the *war trauma hypothesis*; losing a close person has a clearly negative effect on the odds of return. Personal war-time victimization does not have a statistically significant effect, however; to verify this finding, instead

of ‘objective’ victimization, future surveys might focus on the severity of the victims’ psychological scarring (such as PTSD).

While women are statistically less likely to return than men, it does not make sense to explain these gender differences as a reflection of differences in security concerns. Additional tests indicate women look for better security than men, but the gender difference is not statistically significant. Thus, security concerns cannot be seen as the main driver for the gender differences in return. Instead, the findings on the effects of gender, age and permanent job -- specifically, that young women with permanent employment are very unlikely to return -- can be seen as supporting a novel hypothesis link to new *opportunities for women*. For a number of younger women, time spent in the West or in urban Bosnian areas may offer opportunities for education and paid employment generally not available in rural Bosnia. A major anthropological study of pre-war Bosnia (Binga 1995: 47, 119) also points to this direction and argues that traditional patrilineal household structure placed many young wives in the position of strangers; they had to adapt to a new family and cope with a sometimes difficult relationship with their mothers-in-law in a two-generational household:

Although socialism, industrialization, and modernization had provided these girls with new role models as members of wider society, as soon as they married and went to share a house with their husband’s family, more traditional household family structures took precedence in defining their new roles as responsible household members who would soon have the responsibility of bringing up new members. (Binga 1995: 102)

Binga says women in rural Bosnia ‘would describe their own married lives as dreary, with boring work and limited opportunities to experience anything outside village’

(Binga 1995: 106). Consequently, marriageable girls preferred to marry men who lived in urban areas, as these were more secularized and offered greater independence for young couples from parents' wishes (Binga 1995: 116-7, 150).

Likewise, research on post-war Bosnia indicates a greater range of opportunities for women in urban areas. As childcare facilities and elderly care facilities are concentrated in urban areas, women in rural Bosnia are often expected to provide unpaid childcare and elderly care work, lowering their opportunities for participation in the paid labour force (Somun-Krupalija 2011: 18, 22). Other relevant research also finds higher rates of paid labour for women in urban compared to rural areas (Smajic and Ermacora 2007: 78). Yet to adequately test whether the gender effect is caused just by the differences in economic opportunities or whether patriarchal rural norms also play a role, as Smajic and Ermacora (2007:76) have argued, future studies could collect data on internal family conflicts over return and on beliefs about gender equality.

Do our findings imply that high integration levels (in terms of opportunities for education and quality employment) reduce the return rate? If so, should a host society intentionally reduce the educational and employment opportunities for forced migrants and thereby boost their future return rates? Such conclusion seems to follow from our findings, but we see several major problems with this approach to forced migrants.

First, low educational levels and exclusion from employment opportunities could lead to social exclusion, economic dependency on aid, and a deep sense of desperation among forced migrant communities. Such communities could become deeply alienated from the host society, creating a fertile ground for political radicalization. Alternatively, for the migrants, successful would lead to educational

and employment opportunities, economic independence and the ability to contribute to the host society, and a sense of incorporation; for the host society, it would ensure a greater political stability. Second, integration might result in acquisition of skills and resources valuable for community repatriation. In his analysis of Liberian camps in Ghana, Omata argues that ‘in refugee populations, it is common for those who are wealthier or *more resourceful* [emphasis added] to be the first to repatriate or leave’ (2016). Moreover, as older and less educated family members decide to return when the opportunity arises, their educated and permanently employed sons and daughters would be able financially support them as they rebuild their lives and homes in the ancestral lands. Finally, while we see enhanced opportunities for returns as crucial, the primary goal should be a genuine freedom of choice. That is, if forced migrants are returning in great numbers due a sense of desperation and hopelessness felt in exile, such returns are clearly not genuinely voluntary but are forced by socio-economic exclusion. The goal should be to create opportunities for a choice between successful and integrated lives in the new society or successful sustainable return in dignity to pre-conflict homes.

We find support for the *social capital hypothesis* as well. Related qualitative studies in Turkey (Çelik 2005), Ukraine (Nikolko and Carment 2010) and Bosnia (Belloni 2008; Porobic 2016) point to the role of community effort, yet ours is one of the first quantitative studies to demonstrate the complex relationship between the community variable and voluntary return. As expected, forced migrants from rural areas are more likely to desire community return and to return as a community. Overall, while there are several success stories of mass returns in rural areas or small townships (such as Drvar or Kozarac), the outcome of these returns has generally been the re-creation of mono-ethnic communities. Meanwhile, minority return levels

to Bosnia's once multicultural cities -- such as Sarajevo or Banja Luka -- remain very low.

Our results and those of several other studies indicate urban minority returns could be improved by developing a local multi-ethnic police force and taking more decisive measures against ethnic discrimination in employment. Urban returnees are more likely than rural ones to say the establishment of a multi-ethnic police force was a major factor in their return, with 14.93% of urban and only 4.82% of rural returnees saying the representation of forced migrants in the local police force was a 'very important' factor in their decision to return. Furthermore, 78% of urban returnees compared to 47% of rural returnees say an improved security situation drove their return – a very large difference. An ICG study (2002) implies ethnic discrimination against minority groups is widespread in the Bosnian labour market (cited in Stefansson 2006:132). Pickering's (2006) study of minority returns to urban Bosnia indicates that the creation of non-discriminatory workplace would be very helpful for ethnic minorities. Similarly, Mesic and Bagic (2011: 85) argue that one of the main reasons for very low return rates of Serb minorities to urban areas in Croatia is the returnees' dependence on labour market access; in rural areas, people can produce their own food and depend less on others (i.e., the majority) wanting to hire them.

Are minority rural returns of forced migrants only successful if they are going to pre-war mono-ethnic communities? A recent comprehensive study by Sivic-Bryant (2016) analyses Bosniac returns to Kozarac, a case of return to a pre-war mono-ethnic community. Successful Serb returns to Drvar (Stefanovic and Loizides 2011) also represent minority returns to a pre-war mono-ethnic community. While the cases are similar, to definitively answer the question, we would have to look at all cases of

mass rural returns of forced migrants and analyse their pre-war characteristics.

Unfortunately, the existing sample data set does not permit this level of analysis.

The most surprising finding is that controlling for the level of community return changes the results of the ethnicity variables: once community return is taken into account, Serb and Croat forced migrants are actually more likely to return than Bosniac ones. This finding is unexpected. While we find Bosniacs are more likely to return, our multivariate analysis discovers a mechanism leading to the difference in outcomes: in brief, Bosniac returnees are more likely to return as a community. Of course, this makes perfect sense, as Bosniac nationalist authorities are likely to offer support and resources for an organized return, while Serb and Croat nationalist authorities are more likely to actively discourage ‘their’ people from returning. In other words, a key reason for the lower rates of Serb and Croat return is a lack of political support from ‘their’ political authorities. These findings support our *political pressure hypothesis*.

Conclusions

The theoretical framework introduced in this article draws from the existing literature in its formulation of hypotheses but includes some novel hypotheses on the role of social capital. Our findings support our initial hypotheses, with some qualifications. Net of other factors, women and those experiencing wartime victimization are less likely to return, as predicted. In addition, older Bosnian forced migrants with positive memories of pre-conflict interethnic relations are more likely to be returnees than younger persons or those with negative memories.

By shedding light on the local experiences and perceptions of forced migrants in one post-conflict society, our findings can inform responses to the phenomenon of

forced migration more generally. First, the most likely early successes in mass minority returns of forced migrants -- where scarce resources and international protection could be concentrated -- appear to be previously mono-ethnic villages and townships, with good local pre-war ethnic relations and well-organized neighbour associations available to returnees. Securing active support from the political leadership of the returnees' own ethnic group seems to be important for the maintenance of community organization and can elevate the return rates. Second, by highlighting the demographic profile of Bosnian returnees (i.e. age and gender), their needs, and institutional support mechanisms, we can suggest ways to improve the success rate of voluntary return of forced migrants. As the majority of the early returnees are likely to be older persons, the provision of good health care services might be a crucial factor. Third, achieving significant minority returns of forced migrants in urban areas requires developing a genuinely multi-ethnic local police force and taking decisive measures against ethnic discrimination in employment, especially the creation of equal employment opportunities for educated minority women. Finally, we challenge the common wisdom, particularly among academics in the field, that forced migration is irreversible. Our investigation of a case of peaceful return and its underlying mechanisms clearly says otherwise.

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Appendix 1: Variables Used

Variable	Description	Expected Association with Return
<i>Dependent Variable</i>		
Return	Whether the respondent has returned to the pre-forced migration location.	
<i>Structural Factors</i>		
Rural pre-war residence	Self-reported.	IDPs from rural areas more likely to return
Gender (Male 0 Female 1)	Self-reported.	Men more likely to return.
Age	Self-reported	Older respondents more likely to return.
Ethnicity	Self-reported	Bosniacs more likely to return.
<i>Life experiences</i>		
Permanent Employment	‘Is your main source of income permanent employment?’	Less likely to return if they have a permanent job.
Close loss	‘Did anyone close to you lose his/her life during the conflict?’	Less likely to return if suffered close loss.
Pre-war local interethnic relations	‘Overall, how would you describe local relations with non-members of your ethnic community before the conflict?’	More likely to return if there were good relations.
Community return	‘After displacement did members of your community return back to their homes?’	More community members returned, more likely to return as well.
Home Owner	‘Did you or your spouse own the house or apartment in which you lived in 1991?’	Home owners more likely to return.
<i>Attitudes</i>		
Acceptance of multi-ethnic living	‘Would you agree with the following statement: “After everything that happened, I think we cannot live together with other ethnic groups any more.”’	If they agree with the statement less likely to return.
Vote co-ethnics Only	‘In light of everything that happened, we should only vote for co-ethnics.’	If they agree with the statement less likely to return.
Open to ethnic intermarriage	‘How do you feel about [dominant ethnic group]? ¹ Would you accept them as a spouse?’	Those open to intermarriage more likely to return.

Note: 1. The ‘dominant ethnic group’ in the area from which the respondent was expelled. For example, a Bosniac expelled from Republika Srpska would be asked about the intermarriage with ethnic Serbs.

¹ For a related study on the transnational aspects of return to Bosnia see Eastmond (2006) as well as discussion in the introduction to the special issue also defining transnational return ‘as a dynamic and open-ended process...involving mobility between places and active links to people and resources in the country of asylum’ Eastmond (2006: 141).

² The most reliable fatality figures on the Bosnian war have been compiled by the Research and Documentation Center (RDC) in Sarajevo. In June 2007, 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 ICTY estimated the number of dead at 110,000 (BBC, 2007). The current RDC data indicate 40.82 percent of the casualties were civilians; 83.33 percent of the civilian casualties were ethnic Bosniacs (RDC, 2007).

³ UNHCR, *Update on Condition for Return to Bosnia and Herzegovina*, *supra* note 2, at 2; UNHCR, *Statistical Summary as at 31 October 2006 (Total Number of Refugees and Displaced Persons who Returned to/Within Bosnia and Herzegovina)* (Oct. 2006), available at

http://www.unhcr.ba/return/Summary_31102006.pdf; For comparable figures see Black (2001); Belloni, (2008). Updated numbers can be found at the UNHCR Bosnia website at <http://www.unhcr.ba/>

⁴ The data shown are based on the UNHCR reports on the return of property over time. The data on the return of people over time are much less reliable. The key problem is that a number of forced migrants who regained their property then sold it or exchanged it, so they could relocate to areas where their ethnic group was a majority. (For further analysis of this issue, see Bieber 2006: 108-114).

⁵ For exceptions, see studies on forced migrants in Bosnia (Dahlman & Ó Tuathail 2005; Sert, 2008), the South Caucasus (Toal & Grono, 2011), Kazakhstan (Kuşçu, 2014), Colombia (Ibáñez & Moya, 2010), Turkey (Celik, 2005) and Northern Uganda (Joireman et al. 2012)

⁶ The data collection was done by Sarajevo-based IPSOS BH, with funding provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, as a part of the project ‘The Way Home: Peaceful Voluntary Return’ (SMU Research Ethics Board Certification: # 12 – 224).

⁷ The sampling frame was stratified on the basis of two stratification variables. The first 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 estimate the percentage of the pre-war minority population returning to a given municipality in the post-war period. The median value of the CR for the Federation was 12.49 percent and the median value for the RS was 14.74 percent. In the Federation we randomly selected 12 municipalities where the CR was less than the median and 11 municipalities where it was greater. Similarly, in Republika Srpska we randomly selected 7 municipalities where the CR was less than the median and 5 municipalities where it was greater.

⁸ An important feature of our survey sample is the large number of respondents declaring themselves internally displaced. This is consistent with international reports which identify Bosnia as one of the countries with the largest percentage of internally displaced among its overall population (Belloni, 2007; Sert, 2010). This unfortunate record makes Bosnia an appropriate case study for sampling purposes. In the majority of cases around the world, sampling among forced migrant populations is extremely difficult, as victims of ethnic cleansing inevitably intermingle with much larger populations (Dahlman & Ó Tuathail 2005; Ibáñez & Moya, 2010; Toal & Grono, 2011). Unlike Bosnia, survey costs in many post-conflict societies are prohibitive, if IDPs or refugees form a very small percentage of a population or are spread across several countries.

⁹ While binary logistic regression seems a logical choice in this situation, it has certain limitations. To start with, the binary logistic regression does not have a generally agreed upon measure of model fit (Menard 2010; Osborne 2015). We use Cox & Snell R-squared, which has a number of limitations. Furthermore, we are ‘telescoping’ the return process by treating it as a binary outcome. In reality, some returnees came very soon after the war and many came much later, especially during the major return wave in 2000-2003. It is very likely that different causal mechanisms led to early vs. late returns. While there are longitudinal statistical techniques that could help us analyze the timing of the return, we did not collect time-specific data (such as, for example, the timing of the education completion or the timing of the return of the community), so we do not have the right data for that kind of analysis.

¹⁰ Interestingly, the data set implies significant ethnic differences in pre-war origin. These probably reflect wartime frontlines and respective areas of control.

	Bosniacs	Croats	Serbs
Rural Origin	66%	8%	61%
Small Town Origin	31%	78%	23%
Urban Origin	3%	14%	16%