Chapter 13
Conflicts and inter-ethnic solidarity:
Bosnian refugees in Malmö

Zoran Slavnić

This chapter deals with the relationship among three different groups of immigrants from the former Yugoslavia in the southern Swedish city of Malmö. The first group is comprised of so-called ‘old’ immigrants (mostly Serbs), i.e., those who came to Sweden during the 1960s and 1970s as labour immigrants. The second group is comprised of Bosnian refugees (mostly Bosniaks) who came to Sweden before June 1993, and who have received a permanent residence permit (PRP). The third group is comprised of those Bosnian refugees who arrived in Sweden after 1993 with Croatian passports (mostly Croats) and who have received temporary residence permits (TRP).

It will be argued that the relationships among these groups are determined by differences in their formal residence status in Sweden, as well as by internal tensions arising from the consequences of the war in their native country. The tensions, however, do not result in extensive and open conflicts among the groups living in Sweden, although this of course does not mean that they have all of a sudden started ‘loving’ one another. The relationships are instead dominated by a suppressed hostility which is often expressed through ‘vicious’ comments about each other, ‘behind the back sneering,’ persiflage. While at the same time, the relationships are likewise marked by co-operation or even by a type of loyalty towards each other.

This chapter aims to answer the question of what it is that holds these groups together despite their mutual animosity. What is it that keeps the existing negative feelings among the groups under control? What roles are played by the institutional structure and, more generally, the surrounding society that frames and determines the everyday life of these immigrant groups?

The answers that are offered in this article are partly based on empirical material collected in Malmö. Since the late 1990s I have visited the Bosnian communities in Malmö several times. During this period of time, I have interviewed around 40 persons, with a number of whom I have remained in contact also since 2000. The data from Malmö are supplemented with more recent participant observations in different other settings and places in Sweden (such as Stockholm, Norrköping, Linköping, etc.) where,
over a period of ten years, I had the opportunity to interact with Bosnians during various formal and informal gatherings organised by Bosnian families and Bosnian associations.

The complex meeting

Before the refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina began settling in Malmö, there were about 11,000 people who were originally from socialist Yugoslavia living in that city. Most of these immigrated during the 1960s and 1970s when the development of local industry was to a large part dependent on the import of foreign labour. During this period, Yugoslavia was counted as one of the largest ‘exporters’ of labour in Europe. Although the country was in a period of intense industrialisation and urbanisation, chronic problems of surplus labour (particularly unskilled labour) and shortages of housing in the growing urban neighbourhoods were brewing. This was the result of an internal migration wave from the countryside to the cities (Schierup 1990). The opportunity to emigrate to Western Europe, which was wrestling with the problem of acute labour shortage, was seen then as a solution to the problem (Magnusson, 1989; Slavnic 2006). The guest labourers in Sweden were consequently the losers in the domestic processes of economic and social changes (Slavnić, 2006). Additionally, in their homeland they were stereotyped as ‘country bumpkins’ with little education, although their actual situation was much more complex. The second group of immigrants with which this chapter is concerned involves the war refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina who came to Sweden before June 1993 and who have received permanent residence permits. Of the approximately 50,000 Bosnian refugees in Sweden, 3,000 of them have settled in Malmö. The majority found their way to Sweden during the first years of the war (Spring 1992 - Spring 1993).

The third group which is included within the framework of this chapter is also the fewest in number (circa 250 people) and differs from the two previous immigrant groups from former Yugoslavia in that the government’s decision on its members’ immigrant status in Sweden was still pending in 1990ties. They came to Sweden with Croatian passports, after the visa requirements for citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina were initiated in June 1993, and then applied for asylum as refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Swedish Government, however, rejected these applications and referred to the refugees’ Croatian citizenship and the safety situation in their second home country, that is, Croatia. Since this decision attracted disapproval from both the refugees themselves and the general public, and considering the quickly deteriorating situation in Croatia in May 1995, the Government decided to issue temporary residence permits to the members of this refugee group (Slavnić, 2000).

Any analysis of the relationships among these groups must be based on the following facts. First, the formal status within Swedish society was, for each group, completely different. The ‘old’ immigrants had several decades of experience of life in
Sweden. As opposed to the newly arrived refugees, they have become a part of a larger Serbian network with both formal and informal contacts, and the majority became Swedish citizens. Bosnians with PRP enjoyed a relative security – at least concerning their immigrant status in Sweden – but in accordance with all other characteristics, they were social outsiders. The status of Bosnian-Croats with TRP was, however, uncertain, as they did not even have formal residence permits in Sweden.

Second, each group had different experiences in the war. The ‘old’ immigrants, had mainly experienced war at a distance and through reports by the news media. Confused and frustrated by the disparity in the Serbian and the international reports from the areas affected by the war, the Bosnian Serb immigrants in Sweden were in 1990s were marked by feelings of being treated unjustly in that they felt that the entire blame for the war was put on the Serbian side. Bosnian refugees with PRP displayed a traumatic experience of war, characterised by hunger, death, and the humiliation of being driven from the cities and villages where they have always lived. Their tormentors were in the beginning Serbian, and at a later stage of the war and in certain parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina, even Croatian military and paramilitary troops. Bosnian refugees with Croatian passports had often endured war conditions twice as long as PRP refugees. The majority had come from central Bosnia where in the beginning they were victims of the Serbian army, only later, after the war between Croatia and Bosnia had broken out, in municipalities like Zenica, Travnik, Vareš, Bugojno, where most of my Croatian informants came from, also becoming victims of the Bosniaks.

Third, the relationships among these three groups to a certain extent also involved class differences from the period before the war, conditions that were mentioned above. What relationships did these three groups have to each other here in Sweden, and, what influence did the Swedish institutional and social contexts have over these relationships?

As an introduction to the analysis of the empirical material, it is also necessary to scrutinise the broader social context that forms the framework for these processes among the individuals and among the groups mentioned here. The immediate social context in Malmö during this period was determined by at least three factors (Slavnic, 2000). In the first place, Malmö, as a traditional industrial city, was severely affected by the structural changes that the industrial society experienced at the end of the twentieth century (Back & Soininen, 1998). One profound consequence has been the closing-down of large industries, which has led to the fact that, ever since 1982, the city has had a larger unemployment percentage than the country’s average.

In the second place, the consequences of changes in Swedish municipal policy became increasingly obvious in the activities of the local institutions. The essential features of these changes were that the economy was given a more prominent position in relation to politics. Consequently, a comprehensive ‘rationalisation’ of the Swedish welfare system occurred in and through the townships (Montin, 1993, Montin and Elander, 1995). This development was the biggest source of frustration for the local politicians and civil servants whose job it was to live up to the same welfare goals,
although with considerably less resources. Considering the refugee reception, the increased demand for economising and economically effective operations became the main criteria for receiving and integrating refugees on the municipal level.\(^2\)

The third significant factor of the shaping of the local social context in Malmö was related to the continued high immigration rate (almost exclusively refugees) throughout the entire period. From the middle of the 1980s onward, Malmö namely had a higher annual quota of refugees than it was required to accept. However, new problems arose with the steadily increasing number of so-called secondary refugees. That is to say, those refugees who, of their own accord, began to move from those townships where they had originally been placed, to larger cities in southern Sweden, including Malmö. Most were still dependent on social allowance, which their ‘new’ townships had to provide. This tendency was especially apparent in Malmö during the middle of the 1990s when 50,000 Bosnian refugees were being placed in townships after having received PRP in Sweden in the summer of 1993.

Consequently, these three factors had a decisive influence on the creation of the social context within the framework of which the local politics and other actors operated. Two important consequences originated from these developments. The first was that a struggle developed over the distribution of the inadequate resources where the realisation of goals for one actor simultaneously and inexorably meant that the other actors had no chance of attaining their goals. The other consequence was that the question of prioritising, concerning the distribution of the existing resources, became increasingly important. Which groups and individuals had greater rights than others concerning the distribution of resources? The question of affiliation and of citizenship is a central matter in this context (Schierup 1990, Imhof, 1997). I find Turner’s (1993) definition of citizenship the most fruitful here. He views citizenship as a set of judicial, political, economical, and cultural experiences that define the individual as a competent member of society (substantial citizenship). Simultaneously, this means that these same experiences exclude all others who fall outside the definition from citizenship regardless of their possible formal citizenship. Turner concludes that in accordance with these competencies assigned in this manner, individuals and groups obtain different access to societal resources (Turner 1993:2). As we will see, one important dimension of relationships and tensions that emerged among different ethnic groups from the post-Yugoslav region in general and from Bosnia-Herzegovina in particular living in Sweden were related to the distribution of various resources. These tensions were ethnicified which in turn generated internal divisions and tensions.

The different functions of conflict

Before I continue with the analysis of the empirical material, I think that it is important, first, to present George Simmel’s (1908/1955) understanding of the term conflict as concisely as possible, as well as Lewis Coser’s (1956/1971) theoretical contributions. Indeed, Coser’s essay should be seen as a kind of complement to Simmel’s theory. In spite of the fact that both essays are included in the category ‘classical texts’, their relevance today is still intact (Nepstad, 2005). In his article, Simmel (1955:15)
proceeds from a criticism of the concept – which was widespread within his time and is widespread also in today’s sociological circles – that considers society only as a product of the effects of attractive forces and only to the extent to which their activities have not been disturbed by the effects of repulsive forces. According to him, however, social conflict is just as functional for society as is social harmony since conflicts facilitate the solution to diverse social incompatibilities. In that manner, a type of unity is recreated. This unity or harmony creates, on its part, conditions for new incompatibilities that in the end again find solutions through new conflicts. This is the foundation stone in the dialectics of social development.

Additionally, the conflicts help to ‘maintain’ the relationships between individuals and groups in society, according to Simmel 1955:19), by preventing the accumulation of negative emotional energy that otherwise might overload the relationships to a level where a breakdown occurs. In this respect, the function of the conflicts is to act as a kind of safety valve that prevents hostile attitudes from growing stronger, and in which the destabilisation of relationships between separate social actors is prevented or mitigated.

In light of this, and based on Simmel, Lewis Coser (1956) thinks that two types of conflicts can be perceived (Coser, 1956:48). A conflict that is used as a means of attaining a goal or realising an interest, he calls a realistic conflict. On the other hand, there are conflicts that are goals in themselves since they release accumulated aggression. Coser calls this type a non-realistic conflict.

Concerning the question of the relationship between conflicts and society’s stability on a macro-level, Coser thinks that a flexible society – that is, a society which possesses enough tolerance of conflicts and an ability to institutionalise those conflicts – can gain from conflicts since the conflict-filled behaviour, by creating new, and modifying old norms, and actually ensures the continued existence of the old social structure in the new situation (Coser, 1956:153). Rigid social systems, on the other hand, as a result of a lack of tolerance for conflicts and the inability to institutionalise conflicts, see an increasing number of safety valves as the only guarantee for their survival. This manoeuvre maintains the stability of the social structure as well as stability for society’s individual members in the short run; however, it does not maintain it in the long run since: ‘...safety valves are positively functional both for the individual and for the social structure, but incompletely functional for the both of them’ (Coser, 1956:46). According to Coser, safety valves are not just used to resolve a social situation that creates discontent, but also in order that such a generated energy can be channelled and aimed at an alternative object. Consequently, Coser concludes in his argument (Coser 1956: 156), it can be expected that non-realistic conflicts in a society often occur as a consequence of the rigidity of the social structure.

With a starting point in these theoretical concepts, I will, in the following sections, focus on the social reality of Bosnian refugees in the first years after resettlement in Sweden, including their relationships with different immigrant groups
from the Yugoslav/post-Yugoslav region in Malmö whom they encountered in the first stage of their integration process.

Conflicts and co-operation among immigrants from former Yugoslavia in Malmö

One of the most important topics for discussion I had with my informants during my recurrent visits to Malmö in the 1990s was about the conflicts among members of the aforementioned groups. My professional curiosity induced me to examine how, and to what extent, the earlier mentioned rational and evident conditions for conflict actually lead to conflicts. Such conflicts do occur, as my informants have told me. One of them said:

Informant: They’re always fighting. A friend of mine called this morning. He does not have papers and is a Croat. They went to a Bosnian Club and got beat up for no reason. He said: ‘As soon as I went in, I got hit on the back of my head.’ … What can I say? There’s nothing to say. Everything is falling apart. Now, Croats hate Muslims, Muslims hate Croats. Now they like the Serbs more than they like the Croats. That’s just how it is.

Although he started by saying that ‘they’re always fighting,’ he – in answer to my question about other fights he might have heard about – could not recall any other fights. This disparity between the accepted opinion of troubles and fights among immigrants from the post-Yugoslav region on the one hand, and the difficulties in presenting concrete examples on the other, can also apply to my other informants. They mostly talked about fighting in general, something which the following citation indicates.

Were there any conflicts there?

Informant: I haven’t heard about any. People fight more within a pure group than between the different groups. Some want to be better Muslims than the others, in another club, some want to be better Serbs and then there are fights. The few conflicts that you are asking about occurred for the most part at football matches, for example, between ‘Vuk Karadžić’ and one of our teams. Then when you ask whose fault it was, they always say, just like our politicians down there, that it was the other one’s fault. Never their own. Then the Swedish newspapers write about them both as if they were ‘primitive Balkan people.’ It is a slap in the face, not only for those who caused the fight and brought shame on themselves, but also for all of us regardless of when we arrived in Sweden.
This citation gives witness to the fact that open conflicts among the different immigrant groups from post-Yugoslav region have occurred. We cannot draw conclusions about how widespread the conflicts are based solely on my selection of informants. However, it is probably correct to assume that these conflicts, in their frequency or cruelty, have not lived up to their ‘expectations’ of the nature of the conflict considering the depth and cruelty of the war from which they have fled. Fights between Serbs and Bosniaks at a football match are not different in any way from the clashes between football hooligans that we see in our arenas every Sunday. It seems as though the fight at the Bosnian Club could also be classified as a ‘common’ bar brawl. In addition, the informant did not emphasise the fight in his statement. The fight in itself is not something that bothers him so much. That which causes him the most worries and saddens him most is the fact that everything has ‘shattered’ among the different groups, and people do not help each other in everyday situations anymore.

Similar opinions were voiced by my second informant who sees the kind of aggressive behaviour manifested during the above mentioned football match, as unacceptable since it damages both groups.

Additionally, the citations indicate that those conflicts and antagonisms that these groups of immigrants brought with them from the Balkan region were not the source of the conflict in the above mentioned cases, but instead were simply a convenient way of expressing the collected negative energy whose real ‘generator’ came from somewhere else. In much the same way, regular football matches act as safety valves for the channelling of Swedish youth’s aggressions (a fight between, for example, fans from Malmö and Helsingborg). What these two types of fights have in common, however, is the source of the aggressions that are in this manner ‘emptied’, a source that lies in the contradictions within the Swedish social structure. The following example adds to the confirmation of these statements, but also describes the confusion people feel over the actual origins of their frustration. I have already mentioned that the potential source of conflict between ‘old’ and ‘new’ immigrants from the Yugoslav region might lie in their different status in Sweden. In this context, one of the ‘old’ ones said:

…Here, we were the most appreciated group before that shame came upon us. Now we are all from the former Yugoslavia, those who have stayed to die here, and their children to live here, they are reduced to a level of savagery, unappreciated and all. It is not only those who have come here as victims of war who are paying for that which happened down there in Yugoslavia, but even we who have built up this country.

‘We’ and ‘the others’?

Regarding the just mentioned discourse of savagery, it is a part of a general politically and media-promoted understanding of the War of Yugoslav Succession as an irrational,
non-realistic conflict. Mark Duffield (1996, 2001) calls this discourse ‘new barbarism’ and describes it as the external mirror-image of the ‘new racism’ that dominates the attitudes toward immigrants internally in the West. My informants never questioned the basic logic or the premises in this discourse, but only their own position within its framework, by making relative the connection between their group, the ‘old’ immigrant guest workers, and the refugees, as we can see in the following quote:

…We are now placed in a much worse situation than the refugees who have papers [PRPs]. They have more ‘purchasing power’ than what we have in everything. Now I have had to ask a friend for help in finding work because it does not pay off to retire. I would get around eight thousand Swedish crowns per month. After paying the rent, the electric and the telephone bill, I have nothing left… For them, it is more profitable not to work. If they work, then they have to pay everything themselves. Then you don’t have anything left. But, as it is now, they get everything paid for, plus, they find themselves a small extra job. That is moonlighting… There are those who already have a car, and a nice one too!

Along with the opinion that society unfairly gives the refugees those things that a native Swede has to work hard to acquire, this informant also thinks that the refugees carry a large part of the responsibility for the deteriorating relations within the immigrant clubs.

…They have taken over the clubs. They don’t work and can just sit there all day, and the first thing they did was to bring unrest between those of us who have been here for 30 years. Hell, now nobody has good contact with anyone. Earlier, we didn’t even know who was Macedonian, who was Serbian, or any others… Now, you always first ask who they are and where they come from. And the one who is asking arrived only yesterday. And according to him, I should be fighting with those who come from Serbia, with whom I arrived in Sweden together once upon a time, with whom I have worked together, and with whom I still have good relationships…

On the other hand, one Bosnian refugee with a TRP says about the ‘old’ immigrants:
...Those, our people who came here twenty years ago, they are the worst scoundrels that exist. They won't help one little bit. They would kill each other for money. Their appreciation for Swedish crowns is as big as a house. They won't even offer you a cigarette. Then they criticise you for coming here. Like, ‘Why have you moved here? Why aren’t you fighting?’ That’s what Serbs, Croats, and all the others say, no one will help. They wouldn’t even give you food if you were hungry. I turned to both the Serbian and Croatian clubs for that kind of help during the time when I was in hiding. They wouldn’t give me anything. Not even a kilo of flour...

Several interesting things can be noted in this citation. In the first place, the normative qualifications such as ‘scoundrels,’ ‘riffraff’, all clearly demonstrate the traditional stereotypes about guest labourers, something that has been previously discussed in this chapter. What is more significant in this context is that the complaints with which the informant criticised the old immigrants were complaints such as, they are stingy, egotistical, narrow-minded and insidious. Through this, we witness again how the basis for the conflict (transferred from their native country) is mixed together with its actual source, between those who try to protect their positions and those who have nothing to lose. In order to show that the ethnic antagonism from their native country actually has a secondary meaning in the present situation, I will cite an additional example. In the previous citation, all of the ‘old’ immigrants, regardless of whether they are Serbs, Croats or Muslims, are the same Scrooges and riffraff to my informant. The following citation indicates that the ‘formal’ background to the animosity can also be ethnically determined, while the conflict’s actual basis is the same. The following statement comes from another Bosnian Croat with a TRP and concerns Bosniaks:

...Muslims save. It’s true. How they do it, I don’t know. They all have money saved. And I don’t go anywhere for the last ten days before pay-day. No money. On the other hand, how could I have any when I am used to living as I did down there [in Bosnia]?

Zoran: How is it that they have money?

Informant: How? What do they eat? For example, when we go to work together with them, I take out my lunch of ham, tomatoes, juice and so on. Because if you are going to work you have to eat properly. Then those Muslims take out their bread and jam. I didn’t even eat that when I was a child. And then he spreads the jam on the bread and says ‘I can’t
afford anything more.’ ‘But you get money when you work,’ I say, ‘Where is the money?’ Then he says: ‘My wife takes care of the money, we are saving.’ And he just works. Just like me, he has two children. The money comes from the government. His rent is cheaper than mine because the government pays for everything for him. In addition, he works like an animal and still doesn’t have any money. ‘You will die like that, starve to death,’ I say to him. He doesn’t react; he just spreads his jam and eats. And saves money…

Two levels of meaning characterise this citation. The first is in concordance with a tendency to depict Bosniaks as less ‘cultural’ in a sense of modern Western culture, a tendency occurring even before the war between Serbs and Croats, and Bosniaks, which Tone Bringa has emphasised (1995: 61). On the second level, which is the most significant as far as this chapter is concerned, the informant attempts to undermine certain characteristics of the people he talks about (thrift and care for family) by seeing them as stingy and unable to widen their view beyond the limited world of their own interests. This hostile attitude clearly has its origins in the insecurity the informant himself feels as a result of life with a temporary immigrant status. The Bosniak against whom he vents his hostilities cannot be held responsible for that insecurity since it has not arisen as a consequence of the relationship between my informant and the Bosniak concerned, but instead as a consequence of the relationship between my informant and the Swedish social system that has placed him in that position. Venomous comments about Bosniaks are nothing more than a safety valve for the channelling of the collected aggression created within the relationship between the informant and the Swedish social system. The same can be argued about the spreading of rumours by refugees and ‘old’ immigrants about each other, which was mentioned earlier. There is an additional important point that should be made here. Although the informant slanders the Bosniaks, he constantly co-operates with them. In an earlier case, we saw that a refugee, who according to his own statement considered the ‘old’ immigrants to be ‘scoundrels,’ did not hide the fact that he continues to socialise with them. Despite the obvious animosity between individuals from these groups, the fact remains that in the end, the complete disintegration of the relationships and the negative feelings are not allowed to take over completely. The following section is going to deal with this positive side of their internal relationships.

**The ‘other others’**

In the following citation, one of the informants describes what the co-operation can look like in practice:

Zoran: How do they find work?
Informant: I find a landowner and there is only work for five days. When that is done and I am willing to work more, he takes me to another landowner. Then that one takes me to a third and so on. When the season is over, you have come to know five landowners. Some of my mates have also come to know five other landowners so that together we might know twenty or so landowners in the region.

Zoran: Are they your compatriots or are they Swedes?

Informant: Mostly ours, but there are Swedes as well. But even them… that one called Nisse hires mostly us for example. Of course, it’s all unlawful moonlighting. The wages are from 25 to 30 crowns per hour, and the working hours are twelve or even fourteen hours a day. That makes it 400-500 crowns each day. But it wears you out. So everyone works as long as he can and then they turn their position over to someone they know.

Zoran: Regardless of whether it is a Bosniak, a Croat, a Serb or one of the ‘old immigrants?’

Informant: That’s right. If I don’t plan on working anymore, why should I give my job away to some Pole when I can give it to one of ours instead. So then, you tell one, and then another, and a third and so on, you see. This is just how it works.

What is striking here is that together with, or perhaps despite, all of the negative energy circulating among the inhabitants of the former Yugoslavia described earlier, now it is suddenly normal that the tip-offs about jobs and other possibilities go to ‘one of our own’ as opposed to ‘those Poles.’ My informants obviously define themselves, in relation to other immigrant groups, as belonging to only one group. The following citation gives evidence of this:

Zoran: Do the children in school have any problems with the Swedish children?

Informant: They don’t with the Swedish children. Croatian, Serbian and Muslim children from Bosnia seldom have any problems with the Swedish children. The children from Iraq and Iran have problems however. Our children don’t have many problems in school. For example, it doesn’t happen that Serbian or Croatian or Muslim children from Bosnia, that they are organised into different groups so that they
fight or something, or mob each other. Instead they stick together, they play basketball and chess together, go out with girls together. Otherwise, they do well in school; they have learned the language quickly. The Iranians and Iraqis who came to Sweden ten years ago have not managed as well as those Bosnian children who have been here only five years.

The citation above reveals an inclination to see one’s own group – and in this concrete case it seems as though the term includes all three of the immigrant groups that are covered here – as somehow better and more valuable compared with the other refugees as well as other immigrant groups on the whole. What is more important, this view is congruent with the view that the surrounding society has about them. Fredrik Miegel (1999) describes how the Bosnian refugees are construed as a type of ‘aristocratic refugee’. Bosnians are seen as being less aggressive, easier to fit into the Swedish society, ambitious, and more competent and better educated than the members of other refugee groups. Such a definition is constructed and maintained by the state and municipal civil servants responsible for dealing with refugee issues just as much as by the Bosnians themselves. Even if it is all about mere subjective values and judgments, these constructions, according to Miegel (1999), eventually demonstrate a tendency to be institutionalised as empirical facts, as indisputable truths. In this form, the constructions become a valuable ‘symbolic capital’ that the refugees naturally try to cash in on as much as possible in their daily lives. The possession of this ‘symbolic capital’ makes possible the holding of an advantageous position in the hierarchical scale of inclusion – exclusion, which increases the individuals’ and the groups’ chances of being defined as competent members of society. In turn, this is something that, if we continue to follow Turner’s (1993) definition of the term citizenship that was presented at the beginning of this chapter, brings about the occupancy of an advantageous position in the distribution of society’s real material resources. The informant cited last clearly tried to emphasise the differences between his and all of the other immigrant groups, while simultaneously trying to erase, or tone down, the differences between his group and Swedes.

Recent developments in inter-ethnic relationships and the boundary making

How have the intra-group (within the Bosnian group) and external distinctions (to other immigrants in Sweden) evolved in recent years? The recent data imply that the tensions among different ethnic groups from Bosnia-Herzegovina and elsewhere in the post-Yugoslav region, which occurred in the 1990s, did not have the same intensity. There are several explanations for that. First, the memories of the war are not as fresh today as they were in 1990s. Second, probably equally important, the divisions we found in the 1990s (such as those between old and new Bosnian migrants, labour migrants and refugees, Bosnian refugees with permanent protection and those with only temporary
refugees, etc.) have lost their importance. Most of new Bosnian refugees who have stayed in Sweden changed their status, inter alia; by obtaining jobs, permanent settlement, and citizenship. In other words, internal distinctions between “us” and “them” and “new” and “old” Bosnian migrants have become gradually more blurred, while the relative importance of external boundaries, and distinctions to other, more stigmatized non-European migrant groups have been maintained. It should be mentioned that there are still many tensions to trace among the Bosnian immigrants in Sweden, and the gossiping about the other ethnic groups from Bosnia-Herzegovina and elsewhere in the post-Yugoslav region is still evident. However, it seems that it is less acceptable to insult each other on ethnic basic. My impression, based on participation in ethnically mixed gatherings, and large number of informal interactions with members of all three groups, is that solidarity and intra-group support and cooperation dominates the relations between Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats. The blatant conflicts and fighting happens more seldom than it was the case in the 1990s, and the conflict-seeking individuals are marginalised in all three ethnic groups.

There are also some other things that have changed since 1990s. It should be noted that some internal boundaries have changed and new ones have emerged. As I mentioned, in the 1990s the Serbs experienced the largest stigma. They felt being unjustly blamed for all the horrors that happened on Balkan in 1990s. These feelings are are much less prominent today among Serbs in Sweden since the Serbs are not in the media’s focus any more. The focus is on other issues that were not as dominant in the 1990s as they are today, such as question of Muslim religion.

The anti-Muslim debates have made Bosniaks more exposed to stigmatization than Serbs or Croats. Also the current distinction, between “us” and “them” within the Bosnian migrant communities in Sweden, is influenced by anti-Muslim debates. We can find two kinds of strategies of boundary making which are related to Muslim religion. In their attempts to erase, or tone down, the differences between their group and Swedes some Bosnian Serbs and Croats will emphasize that they are different from Bosniaks (Muslims).

Unlike these people, other Bosnian Croats and Serbs will advocate on their behalf arguing that Bosnian Muslims are not like other Muslims. They will argue, as many Bosnian Muslims in Sweden also do, that most of the Bosnian Muslims are non-religious” and emphasize their European origin. In other words, we can say that while the first strategy of boundary making, and attempts to approach the majority groups, is based on intra-group distinctions within the Bosnian community, the other is rather based on drawing boundaries between Bosnians and other, more stigmatized, non-western immigrant groups.

**Discussion and conclusions**

My findings can be summarised on several levels. First, something can be said about the nature of the conflict that exists between groups in a manifest or latent form.
According to the popular and conventional view of the War of Yugoslav Succession, the conflict is a consequence of hundreds of years of irrational hate between the country’s ethnic groups, or in Coser’s terminology, it was a non-realistic conflict. In opposition to that perception and in agreement with a vast body of scholarly literature (see for example Ramet 2004a, 2004b), I argue that the war in the Balkans, as most wars in the past, was a realistic conflict and was consequently about power, interests, and values. The cruel experiences that the refugees brought with them to Sweden constitute the conditions for a continued conflict, which also did occur in one way or another. These conflicts however, first became non-realistic then and were used for channelling of the growing aggression, which in turn originated in new realistic conflicts which refugees got involve in. This time, these realistic conflicts occurred in Sweden and were connected to a ‘real’ struggle for a position in society, as with ‘real’ social exclusion processes that constitute barriers in that struggle. In summary, the conflicts and antagonisms among immigrants from former Yugoslavia in Sweden have more to do with the Swedish social structure than with the war in the Balkans, and even less to do with the allegedly hundreds of years of hate among the Balkan peoples.

Consequently, we can discuss two types of conflicts. On the one hand, there is an internal conflict between individuals and groups from the former Yugoslavia. On the other hand, there is an external conflict among all of those groups together and the structural barriers that prevent the self-realisation of individuals and groups in society. Since these two types of conflict are conditional for each other on several different ways, I must first describe the manner by which outside social forces create the conditions and framework for the development of the conflicts.

These forces are nothing other than those social practices (political, economical, cultural) that on the one hand, according to Turner, decide those criteria by which individuals and groups are defined as socially competent, and on the other, aim all resources towards members of society according to the contents of that definition. Consequently, it concerns the inclusion process of those who are competent enough as members of society, and at the same time, the exclusion of those who lack that competence.

This chapter’s empirical material indicates that several years of residence in Sweden, familiarity with the language and culture, and the years invested in the ‘building up of the country,’ in no way guarantee the ‘old’ immigrants more ‘citizen’ competence in relation to the newly arriving refugees. All of them are inexorably defined as residing on the same level. In the same manner that the Swedish social structure constitutes a ‘real’ prerequisite for conflicts within the group, it also constitutes a ‘real’ prerequisite for solidarity within the group. Acting individuals in this case have, of course, much less autonomy in relation to the structure then those citizens that possess substantial citizenship, but they are not completely dominated by structure. They still have some free manoeuvre room, which they try to extend by using the resources and strategies that they share with other immigrants from former Yugoslavia.
This brings us to the second important issue that needs to be addressed in this summary, which is the nature of the solidarity. As we have already mentioned above, the Swedish structure exerts a kind of double pressure on the immigrants from former Yugoslavia. On the one hand, they must oppose the social practices ‘from above’ which place them on such hierarchical ladder of ethnic differentiation, while on the other hand they resist the pressure ‘from below’ from those who are located at a lower position in the ethnic hierarchy. According to Simmel and Coser, the outside pressure brings about the necessary strengthening of solidarity within the group. This solidarity is not based on some sort of rigidity (in the form of unconditional submission and loyalty to the group values and/or interests) but rather on a kind of flexibility and mutual tolerance by which a within-group stability that is necessary for external conflicts is achieved. That is how the Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian children suddenly become ‘our’ children when seen in relation to children from other ethnic groups who, in a subjective manner, are perceived as being located at a lower position within the ethnic hierarchy. At the same time many informants obviously use the same racial discourse when they talk about other ethnic groups, which they perceives as being of less value than his own, as does the primary ethnic group to exclude and discriminate all of the secondary groups including the informant’s own group. This makes it appear as though they are trying, using this attitude, to cause the general racial discourse to ‘pass’ their group without affecting it. It is as if they cause their group to be seen as the discourse’s excluding subject and not as its excluded object.

The solidarity has its basis in at least three factors. First, the experience of living in a common society, having a common language, sharing a culture, lifestyle, manners, and customs, etc. Second, the groups have been placed in a common social position within the Swedish social structure, something that has been discussed above. Third, they have mutual interests and need each other. One of these interests is, naturally, to keep the conflicts under control, that is to say, trying to avoid them whenever possible. This is accomplished in several ways. First, conflicts are avoided by suppressing or pushing aside the mutually hostile feelings, or expressing them in a somewhat more acceptable form such as gossip and spiteful remarks instead of regular fights. If gossip has the upper hand in relation to open conflicts, and if a spirit of co-operation exists (in spite of the rumour spreading), then it can be argued that the prevalence of solidarity will be established as the primary form of relations when compared with the conflict.

Second, the group ‘exports’ the mutual hostility and aggression further in two directions. One direction is towards other ‘lower-position’ groups in the ethnic hierarchy where latent hostility and even open conflicts occur more frequently, and in addition, in the other direction toward the ‘main enemy,’ which is the system, meaning social structures of exclusion. Here, the collected negative energy is diverted through various forms of cheating the system by illegal practices, such as moonlighting, smuggling, illicit distilling, etc. What is important in this context is that in both cases it is a question of a non-realistic element in the otherwise realistic conflicts. The conflicts however, remain intrinsically realistic since the concrete adversaries of the described
groups, that is the objects against which the aggression or hostility is aimed, increasingly are the same, ‘realistic.’ However, through this, the operation’s goals are displaced. Now, the goal is not the resolution of the unsatisfactory situation, but simply the releasing of the negative energies. In practice, the number of safety valves existing in society is increased in this way, which means that the conflicts are not functional for the system in the long run either.

According to Coser, the parallel increase in the number of safety valves and non-realistic conflicts in society reveals the rigidity of the social structure. In concrete cases, the rigidity is about the system’s inability to integrate all individuals and social groups into society on equal conditions. As long as the quantity of citizens’ rights and duties is dependent on their ‘ethnic’ competence, the quantity of negative energy within society will continue to increase, which will in turn cause a further increase in various social safety valves, that is to say non-realistic conflicts. In the end, the whole situation will give rise to deep structural breakdowns that can easily land out of reach of the rational and sensible social controls. This revealed itself in all desirable clarity with the war in the former Yugoslavia. In the developed Western countries, this development is today demonstrated when hostility towards foreigners and racism take on forms that are harder to keep under society’s control.

References


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Notes:

1 Beginning with the 1971 census the official name for this ethnic group in socialist Yugoslavia was Muslims (with a capital letter M). This term was used by the Western mass media from the beginning of the war. In 1993, the decision was made to officially rename Bosnian Muslims Bosniaks in order to confirm their national identity beyond religious connotations.

2 About Swedish immigration and integration policy, as well as local refugee reception during the 1990’s, see Södergran, 2000, and Kadhim, 2000)