

BOOK REVIEWS

Marko Valenta and Sabrina P. Ramet (editors), *The Bosnian Diaspora. Integration in Transnational Communities*, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 335 pages, ISBN 978-1-4094-1252-6

Review by Cristina MATIUTA

The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1991-1995) generated large migration flows, various estimations indicating that 1.4 million Bosnians (38 per cent of population) are living today outside Bosnia. The largest Bosnian communities can be found in Western European countries and neighboring countries which emerged with the break-up of Yugoslavia, as well as in North America and Australia. What is the situation of immigrant communities? How have Bosnian migrants and refugees been incorporated in receiving societies? What is their day-to-day life like? Do they maintain contact with their home country?

The book reviewed here, *The Bosnian Diaspora. Integration in Transnational Communities*, edited by Marko Valenta and Sabrina P. Ramet, tries to answer to these questions, providing a comprehensive insight into the Bosnian diaspora.

The book is organized into three main parts, preceded by a theoretical chapter about the study of ethnicity in immigrant societies- *Herder's heritage and boundary making approach*, written by Andreas Wimmer. In this chapter, professor Wimmer argues for the necessity to avoid the Herderian fallacy of assuming communitarian closure, cultural difference and shared identity when studying immigrant communities, and to be aware of the variety of boundary-making strategies that one finds among individuals sharing the same ethnic background.

The first part of the book- *Integration Outcomes and Transnational Engagements*-, including five chapters, deals with the various aspects of Bosnians' integration in Australia, Norway, America, Serbia and Austria. Thus, in the chapter dedicated to Bosnian diaspora in Australia, Hariz Halilovich explores the multiplicity of

relationships between place, identity and memory among Bosnians migrants. A “chain migration”, with migrants assisting family members, friends and neighbours to migrate and join them in Australia, is seen as a key feature of Bosnian migration here. They are not simply refugees waiting to return to their homeland, but a community developing “a multiplicity of attachments to places through living in, remembering and imagining them”.

The next chapter is focused on integration assistance provided by Norwegian authorities, that makes the Bosnian, along with other factors, one of the most integrated groups into Norwegian society. The Bosnian experience in this country teaches us that the scattered settlement in small local communities may result in high degree of social integration if the immigrants are not perceived as culturally very distant by native local population and also that the integration into the mainstream society is not only reconcilable, but even facilitates the transnational engagements on individual level.

As concerns the Bosnian diaspora in the United States, Reed Coughlan points out that memories of violence, ethnic conflict and war undermine attachments to the home country among refugees and the transnational ties among people who were forced from their homes are substantially weaker than among those who came to the U.S. as immigrants.

In Serbia large expenditure were dedicated to support the needs of refugees and the process of finding solutions (return vs. integration) for many refugees is still not finished, while in Austria there are differences in terms of integration between the earlier waves of Yugoslavs guestworkers who had migrated in the 1960s and early 1970s and the latter groups, particularly the immigrants of Turkish background, whose integration is more problematic.

The second part of the book- *Transnationalism from Above and Below*- analyses the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together, in multiple ways, their country of origin and their country of settlement. Transnationalism from above refers to different policies and repatriation programmes that generates involvement of migrants in the socio-economic development of their home country. Some host countries and international organizations encouraged Bosnians to become involved in different projects in Bosnia; at the same time, various NGOs and the Bosnian authorities have organized several programmes with the aim to reconnect expatriates with their home country. Transnationalism from below includes, as several contributions to this section suggest, the sending of remittances, migration assistance, visits to family members and friends in Bosnia and various collective



engagements generated by the migrant grass-roots movements and ethnic organizations.

The last part of the book- *Identities, Day-to-Day Realities and Multiple Belongings*- refers to the variety of individual and collectives identities and modes of belonging. The culture and the religion of migrants are sometimes perceived not only as distant but also as having negative characteristics. This is the case of Muslims in Switzerland, discussed here, whose majority come from Bosnia-Hertegovina, Albania and Macedonia and who are perceived as more foreign and problematic than immigrants adhering to other religions. Integration of migrants in host countries involves the acceptance of norms, values and traditions, but even if the migrants and the indigenous members of the host society share common values, norms and a common language, they do not necessarily gain the acceptance of the majority. The situation of refugees in Croatia, after the Yugoslav war, traeted here, is relevant from this point of view. The authors argue that Bosnian Croats were less exposed to discrimination, ethnic prejudice and harassment than Serbs and Bosniaks who took refuge here. However, education and class have made a difference for the acceptance of the newcomers and the integration has been easiest for businessmen, artists and skilled professionals, in other words, for the educated and the successful.

As appears from this brief description of its content, the book represents undoubtedly a valuable contribution for those interested in migration, ethnicity and the displacement effects of Yugoslav conflicts. By exploring various dimensions of integration, transnationalism and identity and the challenges for migrants (whether immigrants, temporary workers or refugees), their connections with the homeland and their adaptation to their new environment, the volume broader our understanding on of the complex migration process.