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Muslim Refugees in Serbia – Narrating Gender Role Identity Change[*]

Abstract: Forced migration is a highly stressful event that can cause changes in identity work. The aim of this research was to determine in what way the migration and prolonged stay in Serbia, a country that differs from both the refugees' heritage cultures and wished host cultures on many cultural dimensions, influenced the young Muslim refugees' gender role identities. Semi-structured interviews with seven female and eight male refugees coming from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, staying for several months in Serbia were conducted. Narrative inquiry, focused on recurring themes and changes in the past– and present-time narratives about gender role identities, yielded three types of narratives. The most frequent narrative, *Expressing what was suppressed,* points to identical past– and present-time narratives, but significant changes in the way gender role identities are expressed and pursued, self-confidence and interpersonal relationships. In narrative *Reinventing oneself* a major shift in gender role identity was noticed. Narrative *Remaining the same*, reflects changes in neither gender role identities nor their expression. Most participants applied integration strategies during the migration and moved towards individualism, femininity and rational values, whereas a few, exclusively male refugees, retained traditional patriarchal values.

Keywords: refugee, migration, culture, gender role identity, narrative inquiry

Identity and migration

According to a postmodern, socio-constructivist view, identity is a multifaceted and relational entity constructed by society and continuously developing, with different sub-entities that are tightly intertwined and in a constant process of change (Owens 2006). The inevitability of change becomes more salient in stressful and traumatic situations, such as forced migration (Betancourt, Abdi, Ito, Lilienthal, and Agalab 2015; Groen, Richters, Laban, and Devillé 2018; Tartakovsky 2007). It is known that in situations when individuals can no longer engage in important, potentially identity-defining roles and activities, the decline in certainty of their own self-concept is expected (Lodi-Smith, Spain, Cologgi, and Roberts 2017). The influences of such stressful experience on identity work are particularly conspicuous among adolescents and young adults because of their double liminal status (Turner 1967). They have to cope not only with pre– and post-migration experience, but also with questions related to their identity, the persons they would like to become and ways they can become such persons (Ndengeyingoma, De Montigny, and Miron 2014).

There has been a number of studies dealing with acculturation processes, changes in identity after resettlement, and characteristics of second-generation migrants living in host countries. From these studies we know that long-term immigrants apply different strategies when they have to adapt to the new culture. Berry (1997, Berry et al. 2006) described four strategies: *assimilation* (a person's tendency to abandon the heritage culture, and acquire the receiving culture), *separation* (a tendency to strongly maintain heritage culture and reject receiving culture), *integration* (striving to retain the heritage culture and acquire the receiving culture), and *marginalization* (a tendency to detach from both cultures). Similarly, Ehala (2012) talked about attitude types including *utilitarianist* (corresponds to assimilation), *traditionalist* (corresponds to separation), *modernist* (corresponds to integration), and *distancing* (corresponds to marginalization). Positive identification with both cultures (Berry's integration or Ehala's modernist attitude) among immigrants usually results in the lowest risk for mental distress, whereas negative identification with both cultures (marginalization or distancing) leads to the highest risk (Fassaert et al. 2011). Biculturalism may, however, create pressures to meet both the expectations of the receiving and origin culture, in some cases incompatible or antagonistic (Schwartz, Montgomery, and Briones 2006). The pressure is even higher for tricultural immigrants, that is, those who come from multicultural sending societies or become ethnic minorities in a multicultural receiving society (Ferguson, Iturbide, and Gordon 2014; Ferguson 2012). Sometimes contradictory expectations and outcomes may be a consequence of the fact that "integration" is not a uniform strategy, but encompasses multiple subcategories (e.g. Miramontez, Benet-Martínez, and Nguyen 2008; Schwartz and Zamboanga 2008).

However, what has rarely been addressed are issues of identity change and strategies when interacting with cultural values perceived as only "temporal". Therefore, our aim was to understand the process of identity change in young male and female refugees[1] coming from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan during migration on their way to their desired country of destination.

Gender, culture, identity and migration

In this research we relied on a postmodern approach to identity (Lemke 2008; Owens 2006) and on Identity theory (Stets and Burke 2000; Stryker 1980), which proposes that we have distinct components of self, called role identities, for each of the role positions in society that we occupy (Stryker 1968; Burke 1980). Role identities provide meanings for the self, not only because they refer to concrete role characteristics and provide guidance for behaviour, but also because they distinguish roles from relevant counter-roles and complementary behaviours. Role identities are both shared and idiosyncratic, and individuals need to negotiate these idiosyncratic "elements" with others who might have a different understanding of that particular role identity (Stryker 1980). Unlike social identity, where it is more important who one person is (and is not), in the case of role identity, it is crucial what one person does (and does not do) (Stets and Burke 2000).

Our focus was on the concept of gender role identity, defined as a set of behaviours expected of men and women in a certain society, which becomes particularly salient when they take positions seen as typically feminine (e.g. like those of mother) or masculine (like those of father) (Stets and Burke 2000; Stryker 1980). In Western societies, there is a shared understanding that women should be expressive, caring and interpersonally orientated. In contrast, male behaviours are typically instrumental, reflected by the traits of independence, proactivity, and self-confidence (Kidder 2002). Moreover, the two genders tend to place different priorities on work and family roles. Gender theories tend to rely only on data obtained from people living in Western societies, and neglect and exclude realities beyond this. By exploring views of identity change (with a particular focus on gender role identity) in refugees coming from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, and living for several months or years in Serbia, this paper expands on theories created on the foundation of Western people's experience.

Although the culture (and therefore ethnicity and religious adherence) has not been directly addressed by this research, relying on the concept of multiple identities and intersectionality (Carastathis 2014), we assumed that the fact that our participants were coming from Muslim countries (Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan)

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[1] In this paper we will use the term refugee to point to both refugees and asylum seekers.

coloured their experience and the way they constructed themselves and changes in their role identity. In order to understand the complex interplay between different aspects of social and role identity based on culture and gender, we relied on several dimensions of cultural differences. In the following section, we will discuss the approaches and models developed by Hofstede, Ehala and Inglehart, and patriarchal values in the context of three types of countries – typical Southern and Western Asian Islamic (refugees' countries of origin, such as Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan), Serbian (refugees' transit country) and Western (refugees' countries of destination, such as Germany, Austria, UK, Belgium or France).

The Islamic societies from Southern and Western Asia are considered to be high on Hofstede's (1991) masculinity scale, meaning that social expectations and the division of duties between men and women are clear. Marriage is central in Islam and is incumbent on every man and woman unless physical or financial obstacles make it impossible (Karlsson and Mansory 2007). As wives, women are not supposed to contribute to the household by earning a salary or being socially engaged, but through the nurturing of the values of Islam, by influencing their husbands and male relatives, and by socializing youth into Islamic culture (Cook 2001; Hasan 1981; Willmer 1996; Grünenfelder 2013).

Concerning Hofstede's (1991) collectivism–individualism dimension (or similar Traditionalism–Utilitarianism dimension proposed by Ehala 2005, 2012), migrants from Africa, the and Asia usually migrate from collectivist (or traditional) cultures to Western European countries, which usually lean toward the "individualism" (or utilitarianism) pole. In collectivist countries, traditionalist values prevail; the emphasis is on stability and continuity of a society, interdependence and conformity to collective responsibility within the family, and respect for authority (Ehala 2005; Inglehart 2007; Renzaho, Dhingra, and Georgeou 2017). In collectivism-based interdependence, the individual's position in the group or situation dictates behaviour; therefore, knowing one's place, behaving according to one's role, and putting the needs of the group before one's own needs are central dictums that shape self-construction (Cross, Bacon, and Morris 2000).

Similarly, Inglehart proposed the Traditional/Secular-Rational dimension and Survival/Self-expression dimension as two key dimensions of cross-cultural variation (2007). He asserted that in agrarian societies (such as some of those in the Southern and Western Asia), religious and traditional values prevail, whereas people living in industrial societies (typically those in Western Europe) adopt secular and rational values. Societies high on Survival values tend to emphasize materialist orientations, low tolerance for foreigners, homosexuals and other out-groups and traditional gender roles, while societies that emphasize self-expression values also emphasize subjective well-being, tolerance and imagination (Inglehart 2007). This is closely related to emphasis on personal autonomy and self-fulfilment, core elements of Hofstede's individualism (1991).

Research done by Hofstede showed that the Serbian index for collectivism is high, as well as the indexes for power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity, which positions Serbia between the typical Western countries, such as Germany or France, and Southern and Western Asian countries or, even, closer to countries such as Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005). Although recent studies showed a shift towards individualism in Serbia, its relative ranking and position among other countries remained similar over time (Podrug, Filipović, and Stančić 2014). Low tolerance for out-groups and appreciation of traditional gender roles, highly present even among youth (Radoman 2012), position Serbia closer to traditional and survival values than to rational and self-expression values.

Another cultural characteristic relevant for this topic is patriarchy, defined as a system of social practices founded on the belief of both male and elders' superiority (Therborn 2004). The majority of Muslim countries are characterized by a long-established patriarchal system (Moghadam 1992; Karlsson and Mansory 2007). In Serbia, the women's emancipation process began after World War II, in the period of socialist modernization of society and the massive entry of women into the labour market, which contributed to gender equality both in public and in private spheres. However, family life patterns remained under great influence of a patriarchal model, which has become even more influential after the war in former Yugoslavia and during the economic crisis. Serbian society is thus stretched between a strong patriarchal regime and emancipatory tendencies (Vujadinović 2009). In that respect, Serbia is positioned between the regimes typical for Muslim countries and those typical for Western countries.

Although we have not found studies addressing gender role changes during migration, we assumed that this aspect of role identity could be strongly influenced by a prolonged stay in a country that nurtures cultural values different from both the values of the refugees' countries of origin and their countries of destination, Serbia being such a country (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005). One ethnographic inquiry showed that the characteristics of the new context and important adults from the new context (e.g. field workers from asylum centers or teachers) shape refugee adolescents' ethic identities (Camino 1994), thus giving support to our assumption that other component of identity, such as gender role identity, might me influenced by diverse experience in a "transit" country.

The present study

Increasingly large numbers of people have been forced to flee worldwide because of armed conflicts taking place in the Asian and African countries. One of their routes went through Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Hungary to West European countries and the United States. Thousands of

refugees and migrants in Serbia were prevented from continuing their journey towards the West when the EU closed its borders to people from the Asia and Africa on March 1, 2016. Serbia thus turned from a "transit" country to a country in which migrants have been living from several months to several years. According to UNHCR data, at the time when this research was conducted, in summer 2017, there were about 5.500 migrants, most of them coming from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and Syria[2], accommodated in 18 governmental centres across the country.

The goal of this research was to explore in what way the migration and prolonged stay in Serbia, the country that lies between the refugees' countries of origins and desired countries of destination on many cultural dimensions, have influenced the gender role identities of young refugee men and women. We strived to explore the positions and movement of young refugees along two dimensions – the dimension own-complementary (male–female, with particular focus on the roles of husband/wife and father/mother) and on the dimension of time (in the past, in the country of origin – in the present, in Serbia). The research questions that guided our work were:

1) In what way did young refugees construe their own gender role identities and complementary gender role identities (male–female dimension) while living in their countries of origin?

2) In what way did young refugees construe their own gender role identities and complementary gender role identities after the prolonged migration and stay in Serbia?

3) What were the most striking changes in young refugees' gender role identities and how they construe these (potential) changes?

Methods

Participants

The participants in this research were 15 refugees (seven females and eight males) age 16 to 25, coming from Afghanistan, Iran or Pakistan and staying for several months or years in Serbia (see Table 1). Although they stated different reasons for migration, what they had in common is an experience of unsafety and threat. Some of them lived in areas with armed conflicts, where all people were endangered, whereas some experienced open discrimination and threats as individuals.

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[2] For more see https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/57706

Table 1. Participants' characteristics

Name	Gender	Age	Country of origin	Causes of migration	Length of the journey	Length of stay in Serbia	Company travelling with	Preferred country of destination
Bahaar	Female	25	Iran	Individual/ Family threat	4 years	2 years	a friend	no specific
Amina	Female	23	Iran	Individual/ Family threat	3 years	2 and a half years	a friend	Belgium
Samira	Female	16	Afghanistan	Individual/ Family threat	16 months	10 months	family	Germany
Setayesh	Female	16	Iran	Individual/ Family threat	15 months	5 months	mother	Germany
Sonia	Female	16	Iran	Individual/ Family threat	15 months	6 months	family	no specific
Fatemeh	Female	16	Pakistan	Armed conflict	16 months	9 months	family	no specific
Atefa	Female	17	Afghanistan	Armed conflict	2 years and 2 months	9 months	family	no specific
Bahram	Male	19	Afghanistan	Armed conflict	2 years	1 year and 8 months	alone	Germany
Ozair	Male	18	Afghanistan	Armed conflict	2 and a half years	9 months	alone	UK
Basir	Male	16	Afghanistan	Armed conflict	1 year	8 months	family	Austria
Mohamed	Male	19	Afghanistan	Armed conflict	14 months	5 months	alone	Serbia
Said	Male	18	Afghanistan	Armed conflict	2 years	8 months	alone	France
Mustafa	Male	18	Iran	Individual/ Family threat	1 year	11 months	alone	Serbia
Ahmet	Male	18	Afghanistan	Individual/ Family threat	1 and a half year	9 months	alone	no specific
Javid	Male	18	Afghanistan	Armed conflict	2 years	1 year	alone	no specific

Data generation and interpretation

We approached our participants in the premises of a Serbian NGO which provides educational and psychosocial support to refugees accommodated in Asylum Centre in Belgrade. We obtained signed research consent forms, that had been previously translated into the refugees' mother tongue. Particular attention was devoted to the provision of adequate information to the minors who took part in the research and who gave their informed consent, in addition to the consent of their parents. Participants were clearly told that their participation was voluntary and that they would not bear any consequences if they decided not to participate in it anymore at any time. They were assured that data will be

stored and used in line with the protection of privacy principle. Therefore, we will use only aliases in this paper.

Female participants were interviewed by a female researcher and a female interpreter for Farsi (Persian language), whereas male participants were interviewed by a male researcher and a male interpreter. Both interviewers have already developed trustful relationships with the participants through educational and psychosocial support activities they provided to them for months. They were both educated in the field of psychology and counselling and passed a series of trainings on refugee protection and support. Interpreters were also thoroughly trained and had several years of experience in working with refugees. In addition, before being engaged as interpreters by the NGO two researchers worked for, interpreters signed a code of conduct which addressed the issue of confidentiality, among others. In three cases (two females and one male) refugees spoke English fluently, so the interviews were conducted in English, without the interpreter. Interviews were audio recorded with the participants' permission.

We opted for the constructivist-interpretative paradigm and qualitative approach because it enabled us to capture the lived experience of our participants and obtain an enhanced understanding of refugees' construal of gender role identities over time. Data were collected through the technique of semi-structured interview, which lasted from 60 to 90 minutes. The interview guide contained questions regarding the refugees' construal of gender role identity and its potential changes due to prolonged forced migration. We asked participants about the way they construed their own and complementary gender role identities when they lived in their country of origin (past-time narratives) and how they have construed them at the time when interviews were conducted (present-time narratives), using nonleading language and closely following the interviewees. The researchers used probes and follow-up questions to facilitate in-depth exploration of these issues.

Since we have comprehensive stories about past and present with the main character facing various challenges, sometimes including very stressful events (even life changing events) in different contexts, we considered narrative inquiry the best approach to data (Connelly and Clandinin 1990). After we transcribed the interviews, we entered them in the software MAXQDA. Firstly, two authors (none being an interviewer, but having experience with direct work with refugees) started analysing interviews one by one, separately, and then they started searching for similarities and differences in the participant's stories, being engaged in memoing alongside. Recurring themes were coded inductively as they emerged from the data. The themes such as marriage practices, children upbringing, marital relationship and professional life emerged from both past and present narratives, starting to form a coherent story about the identities *then* and

now. After the themes and their relationship have been proposed, two authors discussed the results with the third author (one of the interviewers) and a critical friend (female interpreter who helped in realization of some interviews and who has a refugee background herself). Authors reflected on their own presumptions related to refugees' heritage culture and discussed with a critical friend potential biases stemming from different value systems they and their study participants held. Since twelve out of fifteen participants left Serbia before data analysis was completed, our way of substituting participant validation was to check conclusion with a critical friend. Through investigator triangulation and self-reflection, we strived to accomplish credibility of results, as well (Flick 2000; Lincoln and Guba 1985).

In the following sections, we will present interpretations and conclusions derived through both analysis of separate individual stories and analysis of common themes across the stories and their relationships. Given the methodological approach and number of participants, this research lay no claim to generalizability; it provides insights into some of the ways young refugees construe their gender role identities and changes in identities due to prolonged migration.

Results

Past and present gender role identities – Changes among young females

An analysis of the female interviewees' narratives revealed that they have one characteristic in common – all have already adopted more liberal and modern attitudes than typical people in their country of origin regarding the education of women and practices around work. They agreed that education and having a job and career have been important aspects of their life

> Amina: *I imagined going to work, because the only thing it could make me satisfied in my life was to fulfil my dream which was to have a job, to work and to be a doctor. It's so important to build a career because job brings us income and we feel more independent, self-confident, we can be more social and have more chances.*

The experience of migration and living in Serbia has not changed their view on education and work; indeed, for some of them the main cause of migration was the social rejection and even subtle threats they received because they had modern attitudes and wishes for their life. Therefore, we decided to call their narratives **Expressing what was suppressed**. In the narratives there were no events that triggered their desire to migrate, but it was the constant pressure by their surroundings to behave according to social norms that motivated them to

leave the country. They claimed that pressure and rejection caused a lot of fear, but also anger and frustration

> Atefa: *My aunt came from Australia and she proposed to me to marry her son, but I didn't want to marry him. She was insisting a lot. I was afraid at the beginning and then I said, it was like someone wanted to force me and if they would continue like that I would start fighting back. At the end she accepted my No.*

Common for all of them is that they had a great support from their parents, in spite of a lack of understanding, pressure and rejection from their extended family, friends and neighbours, who adhered to more traditional values. They describe their parents as open-minded, supportive, and respectful, as in the following examples:

> Samira: *My family was different. Suitors were coming and my father rejected them all. In most cases you just become miserable since there is no happiness in the fact you are married. It was difficult. You cannot tell everyone what is that you want to and love to do. When they were asking why I do not want to get married my father replied that we want to go to Europe [...] We had a private tutor of mathematics because people were against us girls going to school. Although we did not go to school constantly, we had private lessons every day.*
> Amina: *My parents encouraged me a lot, my family all the time was telling me: "Don't worry, we can support you in all situations until you get your job since you are talented".*

In the context of family life (roles of husband/wife and father/mother) we again determined that no fundamental change appeared due to prolonged migration. Two types of narratives appeared. One, called "**reconciliation-oriented**", was present among females (five of them) who wished to reconcile the desire to work and be independent, and desire to get married and have children. However, they expect their husband to support them in their professional development, to participate in child upbringing and, to some extent, in the household chores.

> Setayesh: *For me, it's very important to work, to be independent and decide easily how to spend my money. When you are spending another person's money you have to discuss on what you are spending money. [...] I haven't changed my mind regarding marrying, having children. I still want that. Since I came here, I believe I can work, and I believe that husband should help me in the house. Regarding children, I feel that I should be more responsible, and I haven't changed my opinion.*

Another narrative, that we called "**separation-oriented**", reflects very negative attitudes towards marriage. Two female participants witnessed many negative examples of marriages and unhappy families, so they decided not to have their own family.

Bahaar: *I was disgusted by the issue of getting married and have children. I have never had these desires to get married and have kids.*

Atefa: *I didn't want that [marriage]. I want to be an independent person – from all aspects – financially, emotionally, everything. And to try to work on myself to be a good person.*

Although there were no significant changes in the "content" of gender role identities, our female participants stated they changed the way they can express and pursue these identities. In Serbia they felt free to express their wishes and ambitions, and they started to feel more confident in their abilities and chances for the future. After they left their countries of origin and went through many hardships, they started to perceive themselves as brave, wise, independent and strong. The levels of anger decreased, and they started to feel more *peaceful, calm* and *free.*

Samira: *When we were coming, I did not see myself as a girl anymore, I considered myself more as a man. When someone sees me weak as I am, he wonders how I got here and that is what I am proud of. During the entire time, with smugglers, I was the one helping them to communicate since I can speak English and that is something I am proud of. Because there they were saying how women are incompetent. There were a lot of men who did not know how to write their name in Latin, and I knew it. In Afghanistan, girls had to endure constantly, so I wondered why I am a girl and why I need to listen to somebody's words, but I see now that it is nice to be a girl.*

Past and present gender role identities
– Changes among young males

Among male participants, we recognized three patterns. Four of them have already had more liberal values before the migration and they even decided to leave their countries of origin because of the pressure to obey rigid traditional rules. Like female interviewees with the same narratives that we called **Expressing what was suppressed**, these males talk more about equality, love, understanding between the spouses, as opposed to more traditional narratives of strict gender role divisions, women as weaker and men as those who make decisions. They have positive attitudes towards their wives working and see themselves helping their wives with the household chores, as illustrated by the following excerpts:

Ahmet: *My personal opinion is that I may never get married [...] Since I was seven, I hated marriage. I have watched the unsuccessful marriage of my parents, brother and sister. They all pretended that it was good, but it was not. [...] In my opinion, having two children, maximum, is quite enough. [...] Economically speaking, it is very desirable and good for a woman to work. I have no problem if a woman is working out of the house.*

> Mustafa: *I think it is important for every person to find himself. The average man in Iran and Afghanistan does not have his own desires and plans, he never stops to see what he really wants, he just follows what his family imposes to him. [...] For me, it is only important to marry a girl I love and not to get married only to do so. I would perhaps have one child. My wife and I would take care of him equally. Everyone who has a child was not forced to have him, it belongs to the father as well as the mother, likewise the obligations around that child. [...] And house chores we would share and split in half.*

The second pattern was noticed only in one case and it reflected a major shift in the gender role identity, so we called that narrative **Reinventing oneself.** That male interviewee used to have a traditional understanding of gender roles, but after migration and during his stay in Serbia, he claimed he adopted more liberal values. He talked about himself in his country of origin as childish, whereas now he perceives himself as wiser and smarter.

> Bahram: *This is ridiculous in Asia, that most of the house chores women do. The good thing about Europe is that it's divided between wife and husband. Before three years ago, when I was home, when I sit with my friends, smoking shisha, we used to think that: "Yeah, if we had wives now, they would cook for us, they would clean everything". But now, I am realizing, oh my god, how childish I was. And now I think, I am realizing that my brain is growing.*

Another group consists of males (three of them) whose past– and present-time narratives look the same – they used to have and still have traditional gender role identities. They value traditional cultural views in a positive way and wish to come back to their countries of origin after the armed conflict ends and they earn enough money for marriage. One of them even stated he would never leave Afghanistan if there was a peace. These male participants do not talk about love, but respect, they have no elaborate reflections on gender roles but cite the Koran. Since they do not perceive any major change in their gender role identities, we called this narrative **Remaining the same**. Typical illustrations of this narrative follow:

> Ozair: *Well, it is not possible not to get married, it is the first thing I will do when I come to Europe, I will marry and have at least 12 children. But I will bring a woman from Afghanistan, who my parents find for me; I would never marry a woman from Europe. [...] A woman is not allowed to work outside of the house, she works in the house. If I can, I will help her sometimes but that is on her. The reason why we are all here is to work, to bring money into the house so the women could live in peace. [...] I would make all the decisions, maybe I would ask her for an opinion if I need one, but behind the closed door.*
> Mohamed: *In the beginning, she will be a stranger to me because I haven't seen her never in my life. I will be stranger for her. His mom and his wife will take care of our children. Like in Afghanistan, I will provide money one day and household chores will be on her. [...] There are no changes. Only there* [in his

country of origin] *there is no education and no peace, whereas here there are both education and peace. I am the same as in Afghanistan.*

Said: *At the time, I did not think about it so much. I think I was thinking of it like everyone else, it is important for a man to marry a good wife and to have children, that is normal, it cannot be different.*

Male refugees with the narratives *Reinventing oneself* and *Expressing what was hidden* stated they changed the ways they cope with stressful situations and act in interpersonal relationships. Like female participants, they became wiser, calmer, more patient and tolerant. They see that change as a result of experience during the journey, their everyday experience with people they meet in Serbia, and their participation in diverse group activities and practices in Serbia provided by local and international NGOs, schools and other stakeholders. They improved their interpersonal and intercultural competencies – they state they can better assess people, they are not judging others only against their culture, they resolve problems through dialogue and not fight, as explained below.

Ahmet: *I am more mature and smarter now. I think that violence is not a solution, that problems need to be resolved with a head.*

Javid: *I was given a goal, the work I have done partly, now I am trying to finish. I am thinking about a better future and life. [...] I am trying to make a plan and program, to improve myself so I could be a perfect man capable to see how I can solve those problems. [...] It may seem the same when you look at it from the side, but from the inside, it is not the same. Before when someone was shouting at me for no reason, I would hit him, but I do not do that anymore. Now I am relaxed, and I try not to react.*

Those who stated their gender role identities remained the same explained that they construed themselves as "normal", "good" men while living in their countries of origin and that there is nothing, they would like to change about themselves. They lived according to religious principles and obeyed the traditional cultural norms. The way they deal with problems remained the same. Only the context is different.

Mohamed: *I was normal. I listened to my mom and dad. [...] There are no changes. [...] I wouldn't change anything in myself.*

Discussion

The way the majority of our female participants have developed their female role identity resembles Berry's *integration* strategy (Berry et al. 2006). However, that strategy has not been developed only during the migration, but these females adopted values typical for their desired countries of destination, even while they lived in their countries of origin. However, in these countries they

were not able to openly express and live according to these values. In the new environment, they felt safe to openly pursue their goals related to education, work, and family life. Several months or years in Serbia served as a kind of a safe "testing the ground" to attune their own values with the values typical for more individualistic and less patriarchal societies, and to carefully build up their plans, since it was not the final, desired place of living they invested a lot of positive expectations in. Our female interviewees stated they would like to graduate from university (mostly from a discipline that is perceived as appropriate for women, like medicine or teaching), to have a job, to marry and build an honest and respectful relationship with a husband, and to have children. Although they strive for equality, they perceive themselves as primary caregivers and those most in charge with household chores, which are residues of their heritage cultural values.

Two participants, with the "separation-oriented" narratives, adopted strategies similar to Berry's *assimilation* or Ehala's *utilitarianist* attitude value (Berry et al. 2006; Ehala 2012) – they reject to comply with traditional gender roles and pursue values that are more typical for Western, individualistic societies – autonomy, emphasis on individual achievements and equality of individuals. On the dimension interdependence–independence, they are closer to the pole "independence" than the first group of female participants and, possibly than many young females from Western cultures as well. This is in line with recent studies that showed that some young women in Western countries resolve the tension between dominant social discourses that emphasize independence and their needs for a relationship by giving up romantic relationships and motherhood (Sanders and Munford 2008). Our participants dissociated from the role identities that their mothers and other women from their cultures adopted because they witnessed their tragic stories, like unhappy marriages, domestic violence, subordination, lack of respect and lack of control over their lives.

An analysis of female refugees' changes in emotional reactions showed that they also moved from traditional towards more modern positions – they construe themselves as stronger and braver than before, they do not show their emotions easily to others, they are less concerned with what other people think, and they see themselves as independent, more assertive and more self-confident than before. Some of them have already shown some of these characteristics that are not typical for women in their countries of origin before the journey, but all of them built on these characteristics during migration. They all agreed that they improved their interpersonal skills and intercultural sensitivity and they learned how to better cope with stress during the journey, so we might say that the consequence of prolonged migration was posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996; Vishnevsky, Cann, Calhoun, Tedeschi, and Demakis 2010).

Male refugees showed more variance in their narratives. For some of them (five participants) migration and prolonged stay in Serbia was either a life-changing experience that caused major changes in identity work, or it was a way of fighting for and liberating gender role identities that were not accepted in their countries of origin. Although they come from societies with traditional and Inglehart's survival values (Inglehart 2007), they talked about equality, love, achievement of personal goals, "finding oneself", respect for children's wishes and tolerance towards different worldviews – values typical for societies high in femininity and individualism. On the other hand, there were three males who have not questioned any of the values and beliefs from their culture of origin and who remained the same during the journey. For them migration is only a way of obtaining more financial resources that are needed for a decent life, as defined by shared cultural norms, in their countries of origin.

Limitations

This small-scale research was not intended to produce generalizable data, but to shed light on some changes in identity that young people on the move may experience and strategies they may use in putting different value systems together. Difficulties in gaining access to refugees and obtaining their written consents prevented us from collecting more generalizable data. However, we strove to provide trustworthy conclusions by employing investigator triangulation (where all three authors had a comprehensive knowledge of the context and experience in providing psychosocial support to refugees), self-reflection and discussions with a critical friend who shared many of the experiences and cultural characteristics of our participants. Another limitation is connected to the structure of the sample. Firstly, there were some participants who were directly affected by war, whereas some other participants did not live in parts of the countries with armed conflicts but experienced some form of threats or oppression directed towards themselves and/or their families. Additionally, most of our male participants travelled alone, whereas none of the females travelled alone, which made a comparison of their narratives and common themes more difficult. We also need to mention limitations related to language and interpretation – some interviews were conducted in English, which was not the mother tongue of either researchers or participants, and some were conducted with the help of interpreters. In both cases, it is possible that some meanings and ideas have not been precisely conveyed with as much detail as they would be if the researcher and the refugee spoke their mother tongues. It is also possible that participants were not honest enough because of their status, compared to the researcher, and assumptions regarding answers researcher might want to hear,

but we believe that this was prevented to much extent by having participants who already knew researchers well, and by involving interpreters who either grew up in participants' countries of origin or lived there for some time. Finally, more reliable data on identity changes could have been collected through a longitudinal study that would also entail the refugees' narratives after they settle in desired host countries.

Conclusion

Through this qualitative study, we strived to understand in what ways migration and a prolonged stay in a "transit" country have affected the gender role identities of young male and female refugees. Despite methodological limitations, having in mind the specific context of the research and the participants' characteristics, we believe that this study provided relevant conclusions.

Our participants, young refugees from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, reported three paths of gender role identity change due to migration – we called these narratives: *Remaining the same*, *Expressing what was suppressed*, and *Reinventing oneself*. Those refugees (males) who adhered to traditional cultural norms, perceived by them as "normal" and unquestionable, reported no change – their past– and present-time narratives have the same psychological and interpersonal elements. For them, the migration is a way of retaining the old identity, an instrument that will enable them to live according to traditional norms in their countries of origin or in the heritage cultural communities in some Western country of destination. This position strongly resembles Marcia's identity foreclosure status (Marcia 1966) – these male refugees have never question traditional cultural norms and they are highly committed to them. On the other hand, those refugees (both males and females) who talked critically about the dominant values in their cultures of origins tend to adopt strategies of *integration* or *assimilation* (Berry et al. 2006) – for them, the prolonged migration is a way to freely express and build on suppressed identities. It has also been proven as an instrument to build self-esteem and confidence that they will be able to pursue their authentic wishes. On the cultural dimensions described by Hofstede (1991), Ehala (2012) and Inglehart (2007), they moved significantly towards individualism, autonomy, independence, and rational and self-expression values. According to Marcia's theory (1966), we can conclude that refugees with either *Expressing what was suppressed* or *Reinventing oneself* narratives are characterized by achieved identity status – they have been critical, open to exploring and they are committed to pursuing their goals.

These conclusions may be relevant for practitioners working with refugees in both "transit" and host countries, who should adapt their psycho-social sup-

port strategies according to the refugees' identity status. They can also be a basis for further research aimed at understanding the personal and sociocultural factors that strongly influence narrative change, as well as the relationship between the change of narrative and the well-being of both male and female refugees. They also shed new light on acculturation models such as Barry's or the significance of cultural dimensions such as Hofstede's. In several cases our participants adopted more individualistic values, but not as a result of moving *towards* values typical for desired country of destination, but as a way of moving *away from* the negative personal experience with family relationships. Although these models proved to be relevant in understanding the changes in gender role identities of young refugees' "in transit", the mechanisms of such changes, inner motives and interplay between the personal and (heritage, transit and host) cultural, including the concept of 3D acculturation (Fergusson et al. 2012), need to be further investigated.

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Izbeglice muslimanske veroispovesti u Srbiji –
Narativizacija promena u rodnim ulogama

Prisilne migracije su izuzetno stresan niz događaja koji može izazvati promene u tome kako konstruišemo identitet. Cilj ovog istraživanja je bio da utvrdimo na koji način migracija i produžen boravak u Srbiji, zemlji koja se razlikuje i od zemlje porekla i od željene zemlje destinacije po više kulturnih dimenzija, utiče na konstruisanje rodnih uloga kod mladih izbeglica muslimanske veroispovesti. Obavljeni su polustrukturirani intervjui sa sedam osoba ženskog i osam osoba muškog pola koje su izbegle iz Avganistana, Irana i Pakistana i u trenutku istraživanja boravile nekoliko meseci u Srbiji. Primenjena je narativna analiza sa fokusom na teme koje se ponavljaju i promene u sadašnjem i nekadašnjem narativu o rodnim ulogama. Tako su dobijena tri tipa narativa. Najčešći narativ, nazvan Izražavanje skrivenog, ukazuje na istovetne sadašnje i nekadašnje narative, ali na značajne promene u načinu na koji se rodne uloge izražavaju, kao i promene u samopouzdanju i interpersonalnim odnosima. U narativu Ponovno građenje sebe utvrđene su značajne velike promene u konstruisanju rodnih uloga. Najzad, narativ Ostajanje istim, odražava izostanak promena i u konstruisanju rodnih uloga, i u načinima na koje se ispoljavaju. Većina učesnika u istraživanju primenila je tokom migracije strategiju integracije i približila se vrednostima individualizma, femininosti i racionalnosti, dok je manji broj, isključivo učesnika muškog pola, zadržao tradicionalne patrijarhalne vrednosti.

Ključne reči: izbeglice, migracije, kultura, rodni identitet, rodne uloge, narativna analiza

Réfugiés de confession musulmane en Serbie –
Narrativisation des changements dans les rôles de genre

Les migrations forcées sont une suite d'événements particulièrement stressants qui peuvent provoquer des changements dans notre manière de construire notre identité. L'objectif de cette recherche a été de déterminer de quelle manière des migrations et des séjours prolongés en Serbie, pays qui diffère du pays d'origine et du pays de destination désirée sous plusieurs aspects culturels, influe sur la construction des rôles de genre chez de jeunes réfugiés de confession musulmane. Des interviews semi-structurées ont été effectuées avec sept individus de sexe féminin et huit individus de sexe masculin qui ont fui l'Afghanistan, l'Iran et le Pakistan et au moment de l'enquête séjournaient en Serbie depuis plusieurs mois. L'analyse narrative a été concentrée sur des sujets récurrents et des changements concernant les rôles de genre entre le récit présent et celui d'autrefois. C'est ainsi qu'ont été obtenus trois types de récits. Le récit le plus fréquent, appelé Expression du caché, rend compte de la similitude des récits du présent et du passé, mais aussi des changements importants dans la façon où se manifestent les rôles de genre, ainsi que des changements liés à la confiance en soi et aux rapports interpersonnels. Dans le récit Reconstruction de soi de grands changements ont été trouvés dans la construction des rôles de genre. Enfin, le récit Rester le même, reflète l'absence de changements aussi bien dans la construction des rôles de genre que dans les manières dont ceux-ci se manifestent. La plupart des participants à l'enquête ont au cours de leur migration adopté une stratégie d'intégration et se sont rapprochés des valeurs de l'individualisme, de la féminité et de la rationalité, alors qu'un nombre moins important d'entre eux, exclusivement composé de participants de sexe masculin, ont conservé des valeurs patriarcales traditionnelles.

Mots clés: réfugiés, migrations, culture, identité de genre, rôles de genre, analyse narrative