

# THE TRANSNATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF CROATIAN MIGRANTS AND THEIR DESCENDANTS BORN IN GERMANY

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## ABSTRACT

### **The Transnational Experience of Croatian Migrants and their Descendants Born in Germany**

The large number of Croatians who live in Germany maintain connections with their homeland of varying strength and intensity. This article analyzes the life stories of Croatian emigrants living in Germany and the migration experiences of two families convinced of the temporariness of their living and working abroad. Their transnational activities are influenced by the structure and functionality of the families observed, which conduct transnational practices that connect two geographically distant areas. The experience of the descendants of Croatian emigrants is also analyzed, as is their degree of transnational connection with their country of origin. Migrations and the transnational experiences of every individual contribute to a better knowledge and understanding of global processes of migration.

KEY WORDS: Germany, Croatian migrants, descendants of Croatian emigrants, family, transnationalism

## IZVLEČEK

### **Transnacionalne izkušnje hrvaških migrantov in njihovih potomcev rojenih v Nemčiji**

Veliko število Hrvatov, ki živijo v Nemčiji, ohranja stike s svojo domovino z različno intenziteto in močjo. Članek analizira življenjske zgodbe hrvaških izseljencev v Nemčiji in migracijske izkušnje dveh družin, prepričanih v začasnost svojega bivanja in dela v tujini. Na njihove transnacionalne aktivnosti vplivata struktura in delovanje obravnavanih družin, ki s svojimi transnacionalnimi praksami povezujeta dve geografsko oddaljeni področji. Analizirane so tudi izkušnje potomcev hrvaških migrantov ter stopnje njihove povezanosti z državo izvora. Migracije in transnacionalne izkušnje posameznikov prispevajo k boljšemu razumevanju globalnih migracijskih procesov.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Nemčija, hrvaški migrant, potomci hrvaških migrantov, družina, transnacionalizem

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## INTRODUCTION

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Germany was the primary destination country in Europe for Croatian emigrants. As a form of labor migration, emigration was considered a temporary solution, but over time the illusory nature of the temporary migration model became apparent. This article is not exclusively about a one-way migration process, as migrants have continued to maintain an active connection with their homeland on the familial, social, economic, cultural and political levels.

This article focuses on two families of Croatian migrants who emigrated to Germany in the 1970s and 80s in order to find “temporary” work. In addition to their primary goals, life-story analysis and reasons for emigration, we are interested in the migrant experience, transborder connections with the area they used to live in, differences in transnational family behavior, relationship with the homeland, transborder connections they use to tie the two geographical regions together and integration into German society, while also considering how the families are structured and how they function. The goal is also to analyze the influence of unilocality or bilocality of the family on the way of life and the experience tied to their return. The analysis also includes the descendants, whose transnational experience begins at an early age as a consequence of their parents’ transnational activities. With regard to their integration into German society in which they grew up and went to school, we are interested in the extent to which they have taken to and carried on with their parents’ transnational practices.

### Emigration of Croats to Germany in the Second Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

In the period between the two world wars, the most desirable destinations overseas gradually limited further admission of immigrants, which intensified emigration to European countries (Čizmić, Sopta, Šakić 2005: 15). The initial migration into the developed part of Europe was of a short-lived nature and reflected a tendency of most emigrants to return to their home country. The situation changed in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as Europe became the main destination for most migrants.

In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a period of strong economic growth began in countries of northwestern and central Europe, whose needs exhausted their resources of local labor. Workers were recruited from less developed European and non-European countries, most often on the basis of bilateral contracts. The employment of foreign workers in Western Europe reached its peak in the early 1970s, while the Federal Republic of Germany became the country with the highest number of foreign workers, reaching as high as 2.1 million (Nejašmić 2005: 146).

The postwar emigration amnesty in 1962 and the legalization of crossing (i.e. opening of) state borders allowed Croats, as well as other Yugoslav nationals, legal inclusion into the then-ongoing international migration processes (Mesić 2002: 95). The law that enabled the freedom to go abroad and return had political and economic roots (Heršak 1993: 282). That is, a certain degree of democratization of Yugoslav society and the emergence of economic anomalies prompted Yugoslavia to open its borders. Economic difficulties were increasing and so was the number of unemployed workers. Employment in Western European countries which needed labor for their intensive economic growth provided a temporary solution. For the most part, these countries adopted a model of temporary migration according to which the workers would satisfy the demand for labor during periods of conjuncture, and would return home at the onset of a crisis (Mesić 2002: 96).

This model was used in the Federal Republic of Germany, where the term *Gastarbeiter* (“guest worker”) was created for Yugoslav workers as a reflection of the belief in the temporary nature of labor migration (Novinščak 2011: 12-19). Yugoslavia also went with that assumption when the migrant workers were dubbed *radnici na privremenom radu u inozemstvu* (workers doing temporary work abroad) (Novinščak 2011: 14).

In 1969, workers from Croatia accounted for the largest share of Yugoslavia's external migration, amounting to 42.4% of the total number of Yugoslav workers abroad (Heršak 1993: 282). The reasons for migration abroad can be divided into groups of economic and social factors. Unemployment, low income and lower living standards were a crucial motivation to leave. The predominant social factors include political dissatisfaction among a certain section of Croatian emigrants, the desire to maintain family connections, and personal reasons (Heršak 1993: 283; Mesarić Žabčić 2009: 207).

The circulation of foreign labor functioned well initially in both the receiving countries and those sending workers, and it reinforced the process because they were convinced of the temporary nature of labor migration. The 1973 oil crisis caused an economic recession and showed that the system of rotating foreign workers did not actually work. Despite the crisis, the majority of foreigners did not leave their host countries. Upon the realization that the temporary migration was becoming permanent, a process of limiting further inflow was initiated, which reduced the immigration of foreign workers, but did not stop it. The Croatian community continued to grow in the countries of Western Europe, particularly in Germany.

According to German statistics, 223,014 Croats live in Germany (census of 31 December 2011), which amounts to 3.2% of the foreign contingent and makes them the fifth largest minority in Germany (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2011: 257). Determining the exact number of Croats is difficult because German statistics listed them as part of the Yugoslav group up until the establishment of the Republic of Croatia. According to statistics of the Croatian Ecclesiastical Office in Frankfurt, 308,337 Croatian Catholics were registered in German parishes in 2001 (including Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina), which is significantly higher than the German statistics (Klarić 2002). Taking into account the fact that some Croats are not listed as Catholics and do not pay tithes, many have not changed their citizenship since the collapse of Yugoslavia, and some have taken German citizenship or are in Germany illegally, it can be assumed that there are around 350,000 Croats living in Germany today.

## **Transnationalism - Concept and Characteristics**

In addition to the traditional focus of migration research on studying the relationship between migrants and their host countries, as well as their integration into the foreign society (Čapo Žmegač 2003: 118), in the last two decades the relationships between migrants and their countries of origin have been more closely observed. This is a consequence of the changes in contemporary migration processes. More specifically, the second half of the 20th century is characterized by migrants maintaining strong and continuous connections to the homeland despite geographical distances.

The development of the modern world's social and economic system (Wakeman 1988; cited in Schiller, Basch, Blanc-Szanton 1999), the development of communication and information technologies (Gustafson 2004: 66) and the modernization of transport and cheaper transport services (Povrzanović Frykman 2001: 14) have furthered the development of more intensive connections with the country of origin. The process by which migrants establish and maintain numerous social relations, thereby linking their society of origin and their host society (Glick Schiller, Basch, Blanc-Szanton 1995: 48) is defined in the modern migration theory as transnationalism, and the people involved in the process, as transmigrants.

Many scientific disciplines use the term transnationalism to explain "phenomena and processes that transcend the boundaries of national states" (Čapo Žmegač 2010: 21) in economics, politics, society and culture. The increasing use of the concept of transnationalism among different scientific disciplines (Guarnizo, Smith 1998: 3) has led to doubts about the meaning and application of the term (Božić 2004: 190–196). Since the analysis of terminological issues goes beyond the purpose of this paper, it is enough to mention that in the broader sense transnationalism refers to multiple ties and interactions that connect people and institutions across the borders of nation-states (Vertovec 1999: 447) while in

migration research it focuses on transnational activities of spontaneous non-institutional actors (migrants) (Portes 2001; cited in Božić 2004: 196). Thereby a unique transnational social space is created (Kuti, Božić 2011: 317) in which an “exchange of goods, ideas, information, symbols and people” (Čapo Žmegač 2010: 21) takes place.

Through everyday life activities, transmigrants develop and maintain multiple connections and relationships on the familial, economic, social, cultural and political levels with people, groups and organizations from the country they emigrated from. Participation in a variety of transnational practices encourages the development of fluid and multiple identities in migrants (Glick Schiller, Basch, Blanc-Szanton 1999: 36) which allow them to simultaneously connect with the country of origin and the host country and facilitate adaptation to various societies, as needed. Migrants form the most intense transnational relationships with families and relatives from the country of origin, which constitutes the most important basis for transnational practices. A special form of “mutuality and solidarity” is formed between them (Faist 2004: 19), based on verbal communication, physical contact, monetary and material exchange and gift giving. Some researchers criticize the transnational paradigm by referring to the history of migration in which they claim that connections and relationships of this kind have always existed (Guarnizo, Smith 1998: 16). Certain transnational elements were detected in migrations from earlier periods and can therefore be considered as “predecessors of today’s immigrant transnationalism” (Povrzanović Frykman 2001: 14).

Transnational migration is a reflection of contemporary global changes, and its theory has become a fundamental new approach to migration in the last twenty years, replacing the theory of assimilation and multiculturalism (Čapo Žmegač 2010: 21–22). Transnationalism interprets migration as “a complex and ongoing process rather than a one-way street” (Glick Schiller, Basch, Blanc-Szanton 1992; Vertovec 2001; Portes 1999, 2003; cited in Colic-Peisker 2006: 211) within which migrants constantly go across and beyond the boundaries of countries of origin and settlement (Čapo Žmegač 2010: 22), which allows them to simultaneously embed themselves into both societies (Glick Schiller, Basch, Blanc-Szanton 1995: 48). It can therefore be said that movement between two different national states is actually a “fundamental way of life of transmigrants” (Čapo Žmegač 2003: 117).

## Research Methodology

The article contains an analysis of life stories and experiences of Croatian migrants and their descendants living in Germany. The data on which the analysis was conducted was collected through semi-structured interviews. Individual interviews were conducted with the subjects during their visits to Croatia in 2010. More personal information was acquired through personal relationships with the subjects and through informal conversations during a visit to Germany in 2012. Staying in Germany provided an insight into understanding the way of life of migrants, and personal acquaintanceships made the interviews possible.

The main subjects of this article are two migrant families originating from northwestern Croatia. One family lives together in Germany (a married couple with two daughters), while the other is geographically separated (the mother and father live in Germany, and the daughter in Croatia). In order to respect the subjects’ wishes for anonymity their names are fictitious, making the portrayal of the family biographies and analyses of life experiences easier.

The interview comprised three groups of questions: emigration and life in Germany, transborder connectedness with the homeland and return to the homeland. Transnational life is a central research topic and the greatest attention is therefore given to transnational relations and activities practiced by all family members with the aim of ascertaining the degree of integration into German society, the “*zwei Welten*” thesis (Ivanda 2007: 279), transnational experience and relations with Croatia.

The assumption is made that individual migration experiences, international migration processes and a more diffuse circulation of people can be a valuable contribution to a better understanding of contemporary migration trends. At the same time they offer a partial insight into the process of familial, but also social networks in the localities where they live, the focus on adjustment to the new locality and society and mobility as a way of life. The analysis of transnationalism through the life experience and perspective of the individual enriches knowledge and contributes to a broader understanding of the phenomenon, which raises many new questions and gives incentive for further research.

## **LIFE STORY OF THE GEOGRAPHICALLY SEPARATED MIGRANT FAMILY**

Stjepan was born in Croatia in 1957, and lived there until 1969 when he moved to Germany with his parents. As workers undertaking what they thought of as temporary work, they believed that their stay abroad would be temporary, and Stjepan was initially left in the care of his grandmother. As educational problems started to arise, and due to the lack of parental supervision, a decision was made for Stjepan at the age of 12 to join his parents and start attending a German school. According to Stjepan, he was well received, mastered the German language and eventually came to love living in Germany. At school, he socialized with Germans, foreigners, but also Croatians. During his school years he visited and kept in touch with the homeland. His parents, while working abroad, also worked the land in their hometown and because of that returned to Croatia frequently. After completing his education, Stjepan went on to complete his military service in 1976. He did not return to Germany, but stayed in Croatia because of Nada, whom he had met during a visit to his native region. He looked for a job in his field, but despite having authenticated certificates, his qualifications as a car mechanic were not recognized in Croatia. He was required to pass new exams. Stjepan agreed until he saw the amount of additional study required. Stjepan says: "the books were stacked a meter high and because of that I went back to Germany. The company in Croatia wanted to hire me, but not without proper papers." Because of the inability to find work in his vocation, he re-emigrated to Germany in the hope of finding work, but in the meantime the situation had become complicated. After completing his military service he was supposed to return to Germany within a month, but Stjepan had already been in Croatia for a year and because of that he was only granted a tourist visa. In Germany he met a Croat, a gas station owner, who offered him work, and his German spouse helped in getting a permanent work permit. He was employed at the gas station, and two years later, at the car service station where he works today.

Nada, born in 1958, is from the same county as Stjepan. She studied at an economics secondary school while working at a hospital. When Stjepan went to Germany in 1978, Nada remained in Croatia. The couple got married at the end of that year and soon became parents. Nada and the child moved to Germany to join Stjepan, and in order to keep the family together they get permanent residence permits. In addition to personal reasons, there were also economic incentives for Nada's going to work in Germany. Her original family was in a rather difficult financial situation and her earnings were modest. They lived with Stjepan's parents for a short time, but the relations were thin and Stjepan's parents insisted that the grandchild be brought to Croatia to be cared for by Nada's mother, which eventually happened. After a year of working in Germany, Stjepan and Nada had enough money and rented an apartment. At this point, the child was still with Nada's mother, and Nada says:

We worked all day, and I also worked evenings in a restaurant. Every Saturday and Sunday were workdays for me, and my husband's parents did not want to babysit our child and so we had no one else there to look after her. We thought it best for her to stay with my mom. After we became financially stable we wanted to bring her to [live with] us, but she had already started going to school and did not want to come to Germany.

The need for a stable economic situation as a condition for being able to physically connect with their child affected the future of how the family functioned and permanently defined the family landscape. The daughter was integrated into the social life of her environment and did not want to separate herself from her grandmother and her friends in Croatia. She had physical contact with her parents during Christmas, Easter and summer holidays which she spent in Germany, and during her parents' visits to Croatia.

Nada and Stjepan had planned to stay in Germany for a couple of years until they had earned a substantial amount of money. For financial reasons they prolonged their stay, and remained in Germany for over 30 years. Their daughter grew up with her grandmother, uncle and aunt taking care of her and her education.

## **LIFE STORY OF THE GEOGRAPHICALLY CONNECTED MIGRANT FAMILY**

The life story of Josip, who was born in Croatia in 1957, coincides with Stjepan's at certain points. They come from the same area and are childhood friends. In the 1960s Josip's mother emigrated to Germany in search of temporary work and Josip stayed with his grandmother. He joined his mother in 1972 at the age of 15 and he finished his secondary school education as a car mechanic. He went on to complete his military service together with Stjepan. Josip, as opposed to Stjepan, returned to Germany because of his family (mother and sister) and employment opportunities. Despite his return to Germany he continued to visit his hometown, where he met Marija, whom he married in 1981. Marija, born in 1958, emigrated to Germany because of her marriage to Josip. She worked at a store, her family was not in a difficult financial situation and she points out that her motive was exclusively personal. In Germany she changed jobs, from cleaning jobs to working in a pastry shop, and now she works in a bookstore. Josip has been employed as a mechanic since the very beginning.

They had planned to stay in Germany for up to five years, but their stay was prolonged for more than 30 years, partly because of financial reasons and partly because of their family. Their two daughters were born in Germany, and Josip's mother looked after them, which made Marija's and Josip's life abroad a lot easier. They planned to return to Croatia with their daughters and that is why the girls attended a Croatian/German bilingual school. At home the parents spoke in their regional dialect, and in school the girls learned the standard Croatian language. The constant delay of their return to Croatia led to the daughters' complete integration into German society, which also put into question the parents' plan to relocate to Croatia.

### **Transnational Activities of Croatian Migrants at the Social Level**

Over the decades spent abroad, Stjepan and Nada continued to maintain strong connections and relationships with their family, especially with their daughter who grew up in Croatia under the care of her grandmother, Nada's sisters and brother. After Stjepan's and Nada's daughter returned to Croatia, they sent money home so a telephone line for communication with the family could be set up. While their daughter was growing up the parents mostly communicated with her by telephone. More recently communication takes place through modern communications via e-mail and through online communications software. Nowadays Nada communicates with her brother and sisters every 2–3 days, which used to be quite rare because of call rates. Stjepan talks to that family as well as with his own, which returned to Croatia upon retirement. Relationships with the family are also maintained through physical contact, by visiting Croatia approximately 3–4 times per year for up to 3 weeks at a time. Stjepan and Nada also spend six weeks of vacation in Croatia. They come in time for the Catholic winter holidays and in summer, and the rest of their vacation is used according to current needs. They mostly travel

by car, especially Stjepan, who enjoys driving and does not mind driving for 10 hours, while Nada also travels by plane.

Josip and Marija also maintain relationships with their family in Croatia, especially with their parents and Marija's brother and his family. They communicate by phone daily and visit twice a year (a total of four weeks), always during summer, less frequently for Christmas and according to current needs. Josip's sister and mother have returned to Croatia, and contact through transnational space is maintained via telephone and personal visits. The frequency of physical contact with the family has diminished over the last 10 years. Josip and Marija used to visit their homeland together with their children during Christmas, Easter and summer holidays. With increasing obligations in Germany (study and work), the girls have reduced their physical transnational activities, which is why the parents, in order to spend the most important holidays together, did the same.

### **Transnational Activities of Croatian Migrants at the Economic Level**

Migrants also establish and maintain transnational family relations and activities at the economic level. Stjepan and Nada constantly provide material and financial support for their daughter and her secondary family. Nada also helped her mother and says: "I bought the house, paid the utility bills, bought clothes and whatever else was necessary." The habit of regular giving to her sisters and brother still continues to this day. Stjepan and Nada invested the money they earned to purchase and renovate a house in Nada's village where they plan to live when they return from Germany. Because of their prolonging the decision on their permanent return, their daughter lived there for a short time with her family before moving to the outskirts of Zagreb. This led Nada and Stjepan to sell the house because they also own the house where Nada was born, which they renovated a few years ago for, as they say, their upcoming return to Croatia.

Buying a house is not a simple move, but an act that encourages transnational activities of the owner, as evidenced by Nada and Stjepan's example. After the purchase they began a process of equipping and furnishing the house with items from Germany, which stimulated the migrants towards more intensive transnational activity, and the family's help with administrative and financial affairs, as well as with maintaining and looking after the house, strengthens those connections. It can therefore be said that the purchase, renovation, furnishing and maintenance of the house can be considered "activities that require regular and maintained contacts across national boundaries" (Portes, Guarnizo, Landolt 1999: 219; cited in Čapo Žmegač 2003: 119).

A connection at the economic level is also present in Josip and Marija's case, but it is of a slightly lower intensity. Marija did not help her primary family as much materially and financially due to their more stable financial situation. Today she says "I help my parents a little" while the rest of the family receives gifts when she visits. Using the money earned in Germany, Marija and Josip built a house in Marija's home village for them to live in upon their permanent return, but until then it is being used for their accommodation during visits to the homeland. As in the previous case, the construction and maintenance of the house required frequent transnational communication with the family in Croatia.

### **Integration of Croatian Migrants into German Society**

Just as there is a difference in the intensity of transnational activities between the interviewed subjects, there is also a difference in the level of integration into German society. The subjects are not integrated to the same degree, just as they are not equally well connected with the local Croatian community.

According to their own statements, the subjects have mastered the German language without any major problems and are proficient in its use. Nada and Marija learnt it at work, whereas Stjepan

and Josip mastered it during their education in Germany. The issue of language is closely related to the initial adaptation and socialization in the foreign society, which is also confirmed by Nada's statement: "I initially had problems because of the language barrier; I was undervalued. But once you learn the language it is much easier to fit in." The highest level of integration into German society has been achieved at work. Stjepan and Nada say they have good relations with their colleagues at work, but their socializing rarely extends outside of working hours. Nada says, "People here keep mostly to themselves, you are a foreigner here, and most of my time is spent working anyway so I don't really have the time." Marija and Josip say they are integrated into the German society as much as they need to be in order to feel content. The circle of people they socialize with is a mix of Croatians, Germans and other foreigners. Stjepan and Nada point out that in their private life they socialize with Croatian relatives and friends who originate from the same region. Perhaps such a narrowly selected social circle within the German society is a reflection of their emotional connection with, and orientation towards, the homeland. Josip and Marija have established contact with Croatian associations and clubs in Germany through participation in Croatian cultural programs, Catholic parishes and through the involvement of the Croatian sports association. Socializing with Croats who participate in associations is transmitted into the private sphere, especially in the case of Croats originating from the same region. On the other hand, Stjepan and Nada are not involved and do not participate in any programs of Croatian associations in Germany. They have no need or desire to engage in the activities of Croatian associations because of their continued focus on work and their return to Croatia.

In Stjepan and Nada's case, the feeling of being foreigners in Germany is still present. Despite the fact that they have been living there for thirty years and have not had any bad experiences, according to Stjepan, the feeling is present and he says: "I maintain close contacts with Croatia and I want to return home." That feeling was more intense at the beginning due to his limited knowledge of the German language. It can be concluded that both of them are integrated to an extent that meets their needs; they say they are well-integrated at the workplace, but they are insufficiently involved in German society as a whole. In contrast, Josip and Marija no longer feel like foreigners in Germany and say that they fit in well within the German society. It can be said that their process of adaptation and integration is more effective partly because of the inclusion of their children into German society, which was then required of them as well. Life in a foreign country and transnational practices influenced the transformation of the subjects' identity. Over time they developed new, multiple identities that enable them and make it easier to adjust to both societies, German and Croatian, as required.

## **Return to the Homeland?**

From their very arrival the lives of both families were influenced by their plans for their return. In Stjepan and Nada's case a return to the homeland is certain; they do not plan to stay in Germany. They are coming back! Nada says: "I did not plan on staying so long, but unexpectedly we stayed longer. My daughter remained in Croatia, and I have grandchildren too and that's the biggest reason to go home, but also because of my sisters and brother with whom I've remained close."

They are aware that returning home will not be easy, but since they travel home often they say, "Adjusting won't be hard." Although both plan to return before retirement, they say, "Maybe next year or in a year or two." The reality of the constant delays is slowly becoming apparent to them. They say: "It depends on our health and finances, the problem is the pension, if we go earlier we will have to live off of our savings, but regardless we will definitely go back before retirement."

Both state that finances are the main reason for delaying their return, and the economic crisis in Germany and Croatia. There is also the fear that their savings will not be enough if they return before retirement. A year after our interview, we visited Nada and Stjepan in Germany and learned that in addition to the above mentioned reasons, there is also an emotional basis which partially fuels the



continuous delay of their return. That is, Stjepan and Nada are accustomed to their almost solitary life together in Germany, and although they work a lot, they say that they have more peace and are not burdened with family problems as is the case when they are in Croatia. On the other hand, the working conditions in Germany are becoming increasingly difficult. Nada says, "Salaries used to be better and workers used to be better appreciated." Both say, "Maximum efficiency and overtime work is sought after and we aren't young."

After thirty years, the question of whether moving abroad is worth it causes ambivalent thoughts and feelings for Nada and Stjepan. Nada says, "I don't know if it was worth it or not, financially speaking yes, but I was away from my daughter and we were working all the time, from that point of view it wasn't worth it." Stjepan says, "We do not have much of a life, we just work, you people at home know how to enjoy yourselves and despite having less money you get more from life than we do." They have met their expectations on the financial level, but not on the personal and social levels (separation from their daughter and life subjected to work).

For Marija and Josip, their return back home remains uncertain, although they were sure of it for years. They do not know whether they will remain in Germany or go back home, because their children have decided to live in Germany. If they decide to come back, that will happen only after they have met the requirements for retirement. As opposed to Stjepan and Nada, Josip and Marija agree that going abroad has paid off and their expectations from work and life abroad were met.

One of the indicators related to the issue of returning is the question of housing. Both couples of Croatian migrants live in rented apartments because of their planned return to Croatia and their desire not to get involved in credit debts. Stjepan's and Nada's housing situation has not changed; they say, "It's too late now to buy an apartment in Germany," but Marija and Josip have bought one. This act is interpreted as a consequence of the realization that a return will not happen soon. They have accepted this reality; their children will finish their education in Germany, and will probably remain there.

## **Transnational Way of Life of Two Croatian Migrant Families**

Over time, most Croatian migrants' plans for temporary employment abroad evolve into so-called "permanent temporariness" (Čapo Žmegač 2003: 26). The cases above also demonstrate the continued postponement of their return in order to earn more money, and the belief in the insufficiency of their savings, which turn a few years abroad into their entire working life. Despite that, the desire to return is kept alive and ever-present in their minds, as evidenced by both examples of migrant families.

Going to Germany did not mean severing ties and relations with family who remained in the country of origin; on the contrary, connections were maintained and adapted to the new transnational space in which they were placed. By constantly crossing national borders through verbal and written communication and physical connection, migrants "live parallel lives in two areas located in two countries" (Čapo Žmegač 2007: 45). The family connectedness that is maintained despite the geographical dispersion of its members makes up the foundations of their transnational activities. This is achieved through oral communication, physical contact, economic assistance and constant emotional care of family members for each other.

Both migrant couples have active transnational lifestyles, but differences in the frequency and intensity of their transnational behavior can be observed. The reasons for this could be the structure and functioning of the families. While Josip and Marija live together with their children in Germany, circumstances and different life decisions made by Stjepan and Nada have resulted in a separate way of life for their family. The reason for Nada's and Stjepan's intense connection with their homeland is their daughter. It can therefore be concluded that the way migrant families function affects the shape and formation of their transnational space as well as the degree of connectedness with the country of origin. A geographically separated family has more intense transmigrant activities than a physically

connected migrant family, and the transnational way their family functions is one of the reasons why they maintain closer ties with the homeland. The transmigrants whose family is geographically separated maintain more frequent and intensive connections with the Croats from the homeland, primarily with family, they visit the country more often and are more focused on their return and less integrated into German society. They are not looking for deeper connections in the host country because they are planning to return home. The desire to return and physically connect with family prevents them from attaining a more intensive involvement with German society, but also from connecting with the Croatian community in Germany. They remain focused on the primary reason they are in Germany, which is work and better living standards.

The geographically connected family has accepted the reality that they will stay in Germany longer than they planned to. By delaying their return they became aware that they will not be able to realize a joint return to the homeland anytime soon. The stories of migrants and the myth of returning home are considered realistic and are interpreted as a mechanism that gives migrants strength, power and value as human beings (Bolognani 2007) in places where such value is denied (Mesarić Žabčić 2009; Čapo, Jurčević 2014), while the myth of returning home simultaneously affects the structures of family life in Germany. The thesis about the myth of returning home requires a more extensive analysis and critique, which is unfortunately outside the scope of this article.

Marija and Josip's daughters' involvement in the German system required a higher degree of integration into German society, while connecting with the Croatian community in Germany, as a way of maintaining contacts with Croatian culture, represents a counterbalance to assimilation. The daughters adapted to the transnational activities of their parents, and now the parents are adapting to the decision to stay in Germany, which then puts the family's return to the homeland in question. Should they ever return to Croatia the children will still represent a permanent link with Germany.

## **Transnational Experience of Croatian Migrants' Descendants**

Iva and Sanja (Marija and Josip's daughters) were born and raised in Germany, where they live today. They learned the Croatian language from their parents, a dialect of their native region. They attended a Croatian school and religious education in the Croatian language and therefore also know the standard Croatian language. After high school, they enrolled in and completed college. They were well accepted in school; Iva says, "No one can tell that I'm not German." Their circle of friends consists of people of various nationalities. Iva socializes more with Croats and Sanja with Germans. They are acquainted with the work of Croatian societies in Germany. As opposed to Sanja, Iva is involved with a Croatian cultural association and sings in the church choir. Both girls have an interest in Croatia, but of varying intensities. Iva follows events in Croatia, either via television or the Internet, while Sanja shows less interest in them.

The girls' inclusion into the German education system was the beginning of a more active process of integration into German society. Despite their complete integration they accept their Croatian roots as an integral part of their identity and view them as an advantage. In parallel with the process of integration into German society, their transnational behavior also started evolving through physical connections. The girls spent their holidays with their grandparents in Croatia. Their physical contacts continue although they have been less frequent in recent years due to commitments in Germany and visits to other countries. They make up for the less frequent contact with their family by telephone, the Internet, and by family members visiting them in Germany. The girls made friends in Croatia, but communicate with them exclusively via the Internet. In the last couple of years Iva and Sanja have been visiting the country once a year to see their family and to go to the seaside. Although Iva maintains a closer connection with Croatia, the sisters are not planning on moving to Croatia. Germany is the country where they grew up, they like it there because of the multicultural society and the opportunities to progress and have a career. They identify with the views of the Germans, but also have a sense of connection with Croatia.

## CONCLUSION

Germany is the European country with the largest contingent of Croatian migrants. Despite the geographic distance, migrants maintain an active connection with the homeland thanks to the possibilities offered by modern technology and transportation. For the purposes of this article we analyzed two Croatian families who live in Germany and whose migration and transnational experiences can help create a better understanding of contemporary migration processes.

The article reveals the very complex and divergent experiences of two families who have emigrated to Germany and their desire and the emotional dimension related to their return to the homeland. Each story provides insight into the experiences, motivations, surprises, collisions, illusions and disappointments encountered in preparing to return home, and at the same time reveals their multi-layered, dynamic identities. The reasons for both families' migration are both economic and personal. The original plan, according to which they were to return to Croatia after a few years, has been delayed for over more than three decades. One of the interviewed nuclear families has succeeded in preserving its structure, while the other family is geographically separated and forms their family life in accordance with that.

Upon arriving in Germany both families became transnationally active and still maintain family and social connections with the country of origin today. Despite spending their working life in Germany, both families remain linked to the transnational Croatian process without interrupting their strong cross-border ties with the area where they used to live. Transnationality is an integral part of their life, i.e., their life is structured and guided by transnational thinking and behavior. Both families are tightly linked to their birthplace which is constantly present as a possible place of return, because of their memories, nostalgia and the fact that it is and always has been a major axis of their identity.

Going to Germany for economic and personal reasons, and the conviction in the temporary nature of such a decision should be regarded as an initially unplanned migration process. In parallel with the adjustment to the foreign society they continued to foster connections with the homeland, while simultaneously adapting to the new circumstances. The most active transnational communication was achieved with family members who live in Croatia through physical and verbal contact, economic support and emotional attachment. There are similarities in the migration experiences and transnational activities of the two families, but there are also differences that distinguish them. Considering their life experiences and personal perspectives, the observed differences in their transnational behavior may be related to their family situations.

The separated family life where a child is committed to the care of the closest family members in the country of origin had repercussions on the intensity and frequency of contact with family and relatives, and indirectly with the homeland. In the case of this family a higher degree of transnational activity can be observed. The family which lives together in Germany was more active in crossing national borders in the period when a return to Croatia and involvement of children in the Croatian school system was planned. Along with delaying the decision to leave Germany, an intensive process of integration into foreign society took place for both the children and the parents. After accepting the fact that the children will remain in Germany, they have delayed their return until retirement. Meanwhile, the other family is constantly preparing their return, even though it is constantly being postponed for a more convenient time. It seems that complex family relations and family structure affect the development of transnationalism and the degree of connectedness with the country of origin, and therefore also, albeit indirectly, the adaptation and incorporation of migrants into a foreign society.

The intentions and different motivations of Croatian migrants to return to Croatia have shaped their way of life and the way of life of their descendants born and raised in Germany. The example of the two young girls shows the form and intensity of their transnational connectedness with the country of origin. Since birth the girls have been adjusting to two completely different social and cultural spaces,

while the constantly delayed return directly caused their deeper integration into German society and with it a reduction of transnational activity. Contact with family in Croatia, although decreasing in intensity, is still an integral part of their lives. Their pride in their Croatian origins does not diminish their view that Germany is the country of their future, which affects the emotions of their parents and will put any decision of coming back to Croatia to a test. This family's return is characterized by complexity and ambivalence and ultimately by an unpredictable outcome because of the particular degree of integration and acculturation of the descendants.

Based on the life stories of these two families it can be concluded that regardless of the fact that these families live between two countries, being affiliated with two spaces can be an advantage and a form of symbolic capital, and can also provide some security in today's world. This can also be retrospectively interpreted as a distinctive gain in comparison to the average German family. Intended returnees, definite or not, therefore build transnational bridges and secure links with the homeland for Croatian migrants of all walks of life.

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