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Spanning National Borders: Split Lives of Croatian Migrant Families

SUMMARY

Using the ethnographic approach, the article describes three modalities of family arrangements practiced by Croatian migrants in Germany over the past thirty years. In all three, family members were divided between two localities in physical space, which were situated in different states – Croatia or Bosnia-Herzegovina and Germany: in one case only the father was a migrant while his wife and children stayed in the native country; in another the couple left for Germany leaving the child in Croatia; in the third the couple lived with some of their children in Germany while other children were living in Croatia. Some of these families were dispersed across international borders during the entire life and migration course (thirty years or more), while some experienced shorter or longer periods of separation followed by reunion of all or some family members, who crossed borders in one or another direction. It follows from this presentation that, rather than being a temporary phase aimed at reintegration of the family at a higher economic level, bilocality, viewed from a diachronic perspective, is a more or less continuous family arrangement and a way of life of migrant families. The question remains open as to whether transnational families are units in which emotional ties and closeness between its members are maintained. The data might point in this direction but might also lead to a hypothesis that, precisely because it is dispersed across long distances, the family needs to construct its unity (emotional if not physical) and therefore narratively presents itself as integrated and reconfigured.

KEY WORDS: economic migration, migrant family, transnationalism, bilocality

Studies of migrant families, their forms, and experiences of particular family members appeared almost simultaneously or immediately after the peak in migration of various nationals from ex-Yugoslavia to Western European countries in the 1960s and 1970s. Scholars have left us invaluable material and analyses of migration in its early phase (Baučić, 1970; Katunarić, 1978; Nejašmić, 1981; Morokvašić, 1987). In a study of a sample of 1807 pupils from emigrant families, Katunarić (1978) was among the first to speak of “bilocal families” in Croatian and more generally Yugoslav sociological literature. At a period when this vocabulary was rare and migrant families were considered in some way “incomplete” or “deficient”, and the migrants “up-rooted” (Handlin, 1966,

according to Katunarić, 1978: 11), Katunarić rectified this image and pointed out the rootedness of migrants in their milieus of origin, thus anticipating the so-called transnational paradigm in migration studies by at least ten to fifteen years (cf. among others: Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton, 1992; Faist, 2000; Guarnizo and Smith, 1998).¹

Transnationalism broadly refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people and institutions across the borders of nation-states (Vertovec, 1999). More narrowly, within the field of migration studies, transnationalism has been defined as “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. (...) An essential element of transnationalism is the multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants sustain in both home and host societies” (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc, 1994: 7). The multiple relations that the transmigrants maintain across state borders in the familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political realms have been given much attention in the past decade. Researchers have studied them focusing on the transgression of nation-state borders, the creation of transnational social fields, hybrid cultural forms, and specific migrant identities (cf. among others: Hannerz, 1996; Römhild, 2004; Şimşek-Çağlar, 1994; Smith and Guarnizo, 1998).

Studies of transnational families usually treat the topic from the aspect of identity formation in the second and third generations of migrants; they look into the loss of traditional values and customs of the migrant families and the ensuing generational conflicts; or they analyse migrant families from the gendered point of view. Various papers in a recently published volume on transnational families (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002a) analyse the spatial dynamics and temporal dimension of contemporary transnational families, which is the direction I want to take in this paper. The editors consider transnational families an elusive phenomenon, “spatially dispersed and seemingly capable of unending social mutation” (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002b: 3). The following definition of transnational families is proposed: “families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely ‘familyhood’, even across national borders” (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002b: 3).²

The transnational paradigm has been shown to be useful in the analyses of experiences of economic migrants, the so-called *Gastarbeiter* in Germany (Şimşek-Çağlar, 1994; Klimt, 2000; Faist, 2000). Although they have lived and worked in Germany for several decades, these migrants have not broken their relations with the country of origin. Quite to the contrary, intensive transnational ties seem to be a constitutive part of

¹ This is a revised version of a paper presented at the conference *(Post-)Yugoslav Migrations. State of Research, New Approaches, Comparative Perspectives*, Berlin, 8–10 December 2006. I thank an anonymous reviewer for his/her critical remarks on an earlier version of the paper.

² The latter definition holds entirely when applied to the Croatian migrant families that are discussed in this text, but my use of the term diverges from that of the abovementioned authors insofar as they understand the term “family” in its broader sense of extended family or kin, while I am using it to refer to smaller units – nuclear families consisting of a wife, husband and their children.

their incorporation in the societies of settlement (Faist, 2000: 257–258). Transnational family arrangements of migrant families are undoubtedly one of the factors behind the maintenance of ties with the countries of origin.

In this paper I will look into the modalities in which Croatian economic migrant families in Germany have dispersed across space. I shall address the questions of why spatially dispersed families come into being and whether the separation of family members leads to unstable relations and emotional detachment among its members. In an effort to answer these questions, I shall rely on migrant biographies that recount family experiences over time.³ The longitudinal dimension will enable an analysis of family arrangements in the migratory situation as a *process* in the family life course.⁴

Following Marc Augé's dictum that the ethnological ideal is not to isolate representative samples from a supposed totality but to explore in depth particular situations to arrive at comparisons and possible generalizations (Augé, 1989: 32), I shall base this presentation on *an ethnography of the particular* (Abu-Lughod, 1991), on three family biographies recounted by Croatian migrants in Munich. Two migrant families are from Croatia and one is from Bosnia-Herzegovina. They have been chosen among fifty migrant family histories that I gathered during fieldwork in Munich, because each of them represents a somewhat different family arrangement with transnational characteristics – one with the husband in Munich and the rest of the family in the country of origin, another with the couple in Munich and the child in the country of origin, the third with the couple and some of the children in Munich while some of the children are in the country of origin. Each of them is repeated in more than just the selected case.⁵

The remainder of the text is divided into three parts. Migrant families' biographies are presented in the first part. Then, the biographies are compared with respect to changing living arrangements over the migrant family life course and the mobility of its members. In the final section it is argued that the changing migrant families' living

³ The migrant family biographies have been reconstructed based on interviews that I conducted among Croatian economic migrants in Munich in 2002 and 2004. (The research was enabled by a fellowship from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation from Bonn, Germany, 2002–2003 and by funding of the No. 0189001 project by the Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2002–2006.) They are thus the result of a methodological technique that gathers individuals' narratives about themselves and their experiences. The limited scope of such a data source stems from the side-effects of narrative data, for any narration about the self is unavoidably a self-construction and self-presentation (to the researcher and to oneself) and cannot be taken at face value (more on this point see Čapo Žmegač, 2007). It should also be noted that the families who accepted to talk to me about their life in migration, although they might have lived through periods of hard work and scarcity, represent relatively "successful" migrants (in terms of economic standing and good family relations), who have precisely for that matter self-selected themselves as my interlocutors.

⁴ On dynamic perspective in analyses of the family life course see Hareven (1978, 1994); in migration studies see Klimt (2000).

⁵ Besides the three transnational family arrangements presented, we can imagine other possible arrangements: for example, that a couple without children lives separately – one partner in Croatia/Bosnia-Herzegovina and the other in Germany; or that only the wife lives and works in Germany, while the husband and children live in the country of origin. However, none of these was encountered among the interviewed families. Similarly, no case of family reunion in Croatia/Bosnia-Herzegovina is presented since the fieldwork research was conducted in Germany and not in the countries of origin.

arrangements are dependent as much on macrostructural policies regulating migration as on the entire migration biography, the plan of return, and the phase in the (migratory) life course of the family.

Migrant family 1

Marija⁶ was born in 1941 and came to Germany with her husband in 1970 after he lost his job in the textile industry in a small town in eastern Croatia. She decided to join her husband although she was not very eager to go. So, the couple emigrated while the son stayed at home. They arrived in Germany with the idea of return. Since the return seemed imminent and soon to follow, they bought a house in the husband's natal town in Slavonia, in which they would live once they returned. The husband did not live to return; he died in 1996. Several years before his death he allegedly dreamed of return, and could not wait for it to happen. But the couple judged that they could not return before they retired, for their savings were not enough to live on. After the husband had died, Marija decided to stay until she reached retirement age. She will have earned her retirement in Germany after eight years of work in the textile industry and 25 years as a cook.

At the time of our conversation Marija was about to retire and leave for Croatia. She did not have much to take to Croatia for she has lived all her life in a rented apartment, modestly furnished with used pieces that she would occasionally find via newspaper sales. She had ambivalent feelings about going back: on the one hand, she had been living in Germany for over 30 years and claimed to have got used to living there. She feared that she would have difficulties in getting around and managing everyday necessities in the new surroundings in Croatia. Her house in Slavonia not being her real home, for she lived in it only for short periods when she was on vacation, she feared she would not like it. On the other hand, the return seemed attractive because of her son and his family, who are a source of joy to her, and from whom she would not like to be separated any longer.

After having lived for more than 30 years in Germany, Marija states that her life and that of her husband was a "normal life". Her only sorrow is that she left her son when she and her husband left for Germany:

How shall I put it, it was difficult, because my child was down there in Croatia. We were actually separated. Hm, I don't know, if I had had such an opportunity, if we had had an opportunity, maybe it would have been better down there [in Croatia] than here. Firstly, when the family is divorced, I mean when you are not with your child, that is not easy. And then, we bought a house in N. and then we always used to say, still only one more year and we shall return. And this is how it happened, my husband did not return.

The nine-year old son remained with Marija's mother and brother. Since they were separated by a distance of approximately 1000 km, the parents did not visit the child more than three or four times a year: for Easter, Christmas, and their annual vaca-

⁶ The name of this and other migrants are pseudonyms.

tion. Marija underlines that her mother was quite young when she took over the care of the boy. Her brother, the child's uncle, played a significant role in his life. Marija states that she had no "problem" with the son due to the fact that he was growing up without her and his father. During the time before migration she had taught the child working and hygienic habits, and appealed to him to "finish schools" so that he would have an easier life. The son fulfilled the mother's wish, and graduated from the University of Zagreb. The communication between the parents and the child was conducted via letters in the 1970s, and later by telephone. At a certain point the couple wanted to bring the child to Germany, but, allegedly, he refused: he was already in his teens and did not want to part from his friends. Today Marija thinks this was for the better, for, had he come he would not have graduated from a university and would have married a German girl. The son, who is married and has three children, lives in a town near the capital, Zagreb.

Summing up her relationship with the son, Marija said:

We have a very good mother-son relationship, we have very close relations and good ones. He takes care, he takes immense care of me. When his father died it was a catastrophe for him, and if anything happened (to me) I think that he... he would not let me go to an old people's home... neither would my daughter-in-law. I feel safe. They want to have a house built, and it is planned that they have an apartment for me, next to theirs, under the same roof, so that I have mine and they have theirs. This will be fine, if I live to enjoy it.

Migrant family 2

Joža is a Croat from central Bosnia, who left his home village at the age of 20 to work in Germany. For almost 30 years he was working in the construction industry, and then found an easier job as a janitor in a *Spielsalon* in Munich. For the first seven years he lived and worked in Frankfurt, but after he had married a woman in his natal village, he moved to the south, to Munich, in order to be closer to the family.

Joža is proud of his achievements in Germany. He claims to have been among the best construction workers in his firm for 17 years. His philosophy is that if you work hard you can achieve something:

You know how it was here: you had to work. If you had any clue, if you knew how to work and if you made an effort... Whoever wanted to work and who made an effort, you know, he made it, he had to make it. Those who did not want to work [did not make it].

He does not complain about hard work in the construction industry; he liked this job for two reasons: on the one hand, the pay was good and he managed to save a lot; on the other, it enabled him to spend longer periods in Bosnia during the winter season. Besides these longer periods spent at home, Joža was often, sometimes twice a month, travelling home to Bosnia. In the 1970s and early 1980s, private entrepreneurs organised bus services from Munich to Bosnia: buses would leave on Friday afternoon for Bosnia and return late at night on Sunday evening. Not only was his family growing – in the period of just over ten years they had four children – but he was heavily inves-

ting in his house and property in Bosnia and his presence was needed. Commuting every second weekend or so was quite exhausting, but he did it since he was indispensable for supervising the investments. Joža speaks of himself as the “main family axis” because he was needed on the farm and because he was financing everything that was being implemented in the household and on the farm.

Since his plan was to stay in Germany for a short period – until he earned enough for a house – his family joining him was never discussed. However, he kept postponing his return. He gives a somewhat ironic, even caricatural portrayal of how his stay was being prolonged (see below).

The war that broke up in his natal country in 1992 marks a big break in his and his family’s life. In order to protect his family from the war Joža brought them to Munich: two of his daughters had already passed the age at which they could be given permanent residence in Germany and were allowed to enter Germany only with refugee status, while the two younger sons and his wife were able to get permission to stay on the basis of family reunion. The family reunion brought tensions and even conflict into the until then well-functioning family. Neither Joža nor his wife were used to living together; the wife did not manage well the housekeeping in his apartment. It was difficult, especially at the beginning when they lived in the one-bedroom apartment that Joža has been living in for years. The wife spoke of other difficulties, including her not knowing German and, how, for the first time in her lifetime, she had started to work outside the household.

Joža thought once again that this was a temporary move and that the family – like himself in the previous period – would not stay in Munich for good. It occurred to him that the return to Bosnia would perhaps not be possible because of the war and he felt that he needed to secure another retreat for the family in case anything “develops badly” in Germany: “Even today *we do not know how it will be here* [in Germany] *and until when, you know how it goes*”. Therefore, as many other Bosnian Croats forced out of their homeland by the 1992–1995 war, he bought land in the surroundings of Zagreb and started to build a four-apartment house. The construction of the house was interrupted, and only one apartment was finished because at some point Joža realised that he could invest better in Munich. So a two-bedroom apartment was purchased with a bank loan.

The entire family lives in Germany at the moment. The daughters married and regulated their residence status. After initial language problems, the sons managed to finish professional schools; one is a salesman, the other a mechanic, and both, although earning their own living, live with their parents.

At the time of our encounter, Joža was considering early retirement. He had three possibilities as to where he would live afterwards: he could either stay in Germany, return to Bosnia or go to Zagreb. Having secured three possible places to return to, he speaks opportunistically about his return: “If it is better there [Bosnia or Croatia], I will go there; if it is better here [Germany], I will stay here”. Judging his overall life, he said: “I fought hard and made it. (...) There were good days, and there were bad days – it is thirty years now. One lives through everything. I cannot say that you always fare well”.

Migrant family 3

Kata (b. 1952) and Martin (b. 1944), then a young couple from Međimurje in Croatia, came to Germany in 1969, first to Hannover and two years later to Munich. Both had jobs as factory workers, secured on the basis of the interstate agreement between Germany and Yugoslavia. Since they moved to Munich, Kata has been working as a cook in the same establishment, while Martin has changed several jobs (working as a construction worker and driver) finally to settle as a janitor in a block of apartment buildings. During the 20 year period, both have held side jobs: Martin as a musician over the weekend, and Kata as a waitress.

Their initial plan was to stay for five years:

We came to Germany, you know how it was then. Five years, that was it at the most we said, five years and that's it. Then, we shall go home to work in farming. Now those five years have become 36 years.

Parallel to their work in Germany, for the first 15 years they were also working in Croatia, helping the husband's aging parents till the land. With time it became more difficult to continue working on two fronts, but it took almost 15 years before they made a decision on where they would definitely settle down:

We were in a dilemma: here or there? And the longer we were here, the more accustomed to it we became. It was more difficult to decide, for, here it was safe, I had a safe job, and we could exist with the money we earned. Farming the land on the other hand, I did not know how that would go,

said the husband. In the mid-1980s when the situation in ex-Yugoslavia started to deteriorate, and after the wife had spent some months at home with her new-born child, they finally made a decision not to return.

Kata and Martin have four children; the two older were born in Croatia, the two younger children in Germany. They took the first-born daughter with them when they first came to Germany: they worked shifts and took care of the five-month infant alternately. But when their second daughter was born a year later the couple decided to leave both girls with their grandparents in Croatia, since they had just moved to Munich and thought they could not take care of two small children. After having settled in Munich they did want to bring the children to live with them but, Kata claims, her mother would not let them go. With the birth of the third child, the decision was different: at first the child – a son – lived with them, but when he was six they sent him to Croatia to school, because they were still planning to return and wanted to spare the child language difficulties once they returned. Their son was already attending the seventh grade in an elementary school in Croatia when the couple finally made up their minds and decided they would stay in Germany. At that point they resettled the son to live with them. In the meantime, a fourth child had been born, whom the couple kept with them in Munich. For the two older daughters it was already too late to seek permission for family reunion. Today, Kata and Martin feel sorry that they lived apart from their two older children and that they sent the third one to school to Croatia. They speak of very emotional farewells from the children, whom Kata was visiting regularly every two weeks. They blame the family separation on their plan to return and the fact they they

constantly postponed it. On the other hand, they claim not to have had any “problems” with the children; they were under the firm supervision of Kata’s mother. Today, the older daughters, who live in Croatia, are married and have children of their own. One has graduated from the University of Zagreb, the other one has a four-year professional school qualification. After returning to Germany, at the age of 13, the son had language problems, but was able to finish an apprenticeship as a mechanic; the youngest daughter is finishing a professional school to become an *Industriekauffrau*. The son has married and moved out to a house near Munich, which the family helped him buy, while the youngest daughter is living with her parents. They claim that they are all on good terms and feel happy when they meet in Germany or in Croatia for family gatherings or weddings.

At the time of our meetings, Martin was forging plans to return to his natal village in a couple of years: “As soon as I retire, I will be at home. Nothing would keep me here”. His wife still has several years to work, but he would like her to quit working and to return with him. The two children who live in Germany are not considering return.

Bilocal family arrangements: a comparison

The three families have had both similarities and dissimilarities in their life trajectories in Germany and Croatia or Bosnia-Herzegovina. The two couples and the man who came to Germany in search for a job had a plan that would keep them in Germany for only several years.

Macrostructural factors that influenced the planned short-term stay of the migrants are rather well-known. Above all, this was the German policy of foreign labour rotation in the 1960s and 1970s. The term *Gastarbeiter* was coined at the time to denote that temporary and changeable labour force, mostly men below the age of 40 (Kolinisky, 1996; Lapeyronnie, 1992; Bougarel, 1992; Münz, 1995). By its cultural policy – the development of bilingual education aimed at retention of migrant cultural identity – Bavaria was efficiently supporting the rotational recruitment of foreign labour (Lapeyronnie, 1992; Bougarel, 1992). Therefore, maintaining ties with the country of origin and, moreover, leaving wives and/or children in the country of origin, was in direct correlation with German and Bavarian migration policy at the time. The Croats were reaching Bavaria (and other parts of Germany) with the aim to return to their country of origin after their labour contract expired and their immediate financial plans were realised. Therefore, the plan to return – moreover, the plan to return as soon as possible – was an inherent part of their coming to Germany in the first place. However, the people featuring in this text did not return, even after thirty years had elapsed from the time of resettlement.

In all three cases my interlocutors recount quite candidly, sometimes with self-irony, how the plan of return kept changing and ended up in an unintended sojourn in Germany of over thirty years. Joža’s recital perhaps best expresses the process of postponing the return:

You know, I built a house. Then [I thought], if I could only arrange it so that I have everything that I need in the house: furniture, bathrooms, everything. When I arranged

that... then I opened a shop on the ground floor, now I need to take care of it. I made an arrangement with Upi [a grocery store] to work there when I came back. I thought 100 percent I would return. When I return I will work there in person. Eeh, I told myself, I will have a job in my own house. And then I settled that. Now, [I thought] if I could save a little bit, to have some money when I go there [he laughs]. This is how it was. (...) Then, I told myself I should buy a small truck, for transportation. And then, I told myself, a little bit more savings. Then I bought a tractor, various other equipment, bought land [he laughs]. I told myself, to have it all when I retire. When all of this was achieved, finished, then I said, a little bit more savings, then we will ... I needed sheds and a garage... when you have a tractor and a car. (...) Everything, when I fixed everything, it started... It started to tremble, politics started to change everything. (...) I say, I had not even taken a rest from all that I had done, when the war broke out.

For others it was not the war that triggered a postponement of the plan to return; for Kata and Martin it was the difficulty of living parallel lives in two places located in two states, and the dissatisfaction with life in Croatia that made them stay in Germany. For Marija and her husband, there seems to have been no key event that made them stay so long in Germany – they just kept postponing the return, judging that their savings were not enough to live on if they returned.

Because of the pending return, which was planned to be effected after several years had elapsed from the time of migration, and a concomitant need to economise as much as possible during the time spent abroad, these people had made various arrangements leading to families dispersed over international borders. In two of these cases, both husband and wife migrated leaving the child(ren) in the care of the grandparents. Thus, they gave precedence to the conjugal over the filial relationship. In one case, it was the husband who migrated abroad while the wife and the children stayed at home. Here, the natural maternal role (cf. Erel, 2002) was given precedence over the conjugal relationship.

In materialising these transnational living arrangements, my interlocutors relied on their extended families. Children in the third migrant biography were quite mobile in the earlier stages in their lives, living at some point with their parents in Germany, at another with their matrilineal or patrilineal kin in the home country.

It was the plan of return and the children's schooling that determined the children's mobility and the change of caregivers in the cases in which both parents migrated. Except for short periods at an early age, the mobility of Kata's and Martin's older daughters was confined to *intra*-national mobility. Their brother, however, alternated longer periods of living in the two countries; after having spent the first six years with his parents in Germany, the parents – who at the time still forged the plan of return and wanted to avoid their son having language problems on their return – sent him to elementary school in Croatia in the care of his maternal grandmother, and seven years later, when he was thirteen, they brought him back to Germany. His last move was determined by his parents giving up their plan of return and not by better schooling opportunities. Had schooling considerations been dominant in determining this last move, his parents would probably have not resettled him at the time when he was approaching the end of elementary school in Croatia. When they brought him back to Germany, his langu-

age skills were judged insufficient for him to be enrolled in an adequate grade and school in Munich. Therefore he attended a bilingual school, which restricted his schooling opportunities later on. This case demonstrates that parental international mobility and the split family arrangement entail children's mobility, even when they are left at home at the beginning of migration. However, these cases do not demonstrate that children's schooling is of primary importance in deciding family and children's movements (cf. Schiffauer, 1991; Şimşek-Çağlar, 1994). The primary factor influencing the mobility of family members seems to lie in the *changing* project of the migrants' return. It is decisive for family separation and reunion.⁷

Although the parents knew that their children were in the safe hands of grandparents, physical separation from the children was not easy for the parents in the two presented cases (cases one and three). As soon as they settled in Munich and had the means to afford it, or realized that the return would not occur soon, they tried to reunite with their children. These efforts were not successful, for, according to the migrants, either the children or the extended family in the country of origin opposed such a move. In no case did the part of the family living in Germany decide eventually to return and thus reunite its members. With their four children, couple three claims to have strived for family reunion over almost fifteen years. At times they succeeded, so that they lived with all of their children at some phases in their life course and with some of them at others. However, they also lived without any of them at other periods. This family, then, experienced various living arrangements throughout its migration history. They were a function of the stages in their migration course, which were determined by the extent the migrants were settled in Germany, by the currently valid plan of return and by the age of the children.⁸ Both the wife and the husband express sorrow that they did not succeed in reuniting the entire family for good; both wish they could somehow have divided themselves in order that they simultaneously lived with all of their children, on both sides of the border. The fact that they were often paying visits to the children in the country of origin for the first fifteen years does not compensate for this painful separation. The husband foresees that the future will be similar, for, again, after he will have returned to Croatia, two of his children and their children will be living in another country and again, his immediate family will remain dispersed across international borders. This means that his return to Croatia would not be an entirely satisfactory arrangement, no matter how eager he may be to return home.

In distinction to other parents, the Bosnian migrant does not mention having had emotional difficulties because of the long-lasting separation from his children and wife.

⁷ The changing plan of return could also influence temporary return of one (with or without children) or both partners to the country of origin, without, however, the returnees severing ties with Germany. I have encountered several families in which one or both partners returned only to re-emigrate several years later. In such a case, it is possible that a locationally united family until a certain time, temporarily splits between two countries and lives dispersed until the final decision is made as to whether everybody will return or whether those who did return would re-emigrate. See Čapo Žmegač (2006) for such an example.

⁸ Under the German migration law only children under age 16 are allowed to enter the country upon request for family reunion. This explains why the couple could not bring over the two older daughters once they decided to stay in Germany.

To my question whether he had any difficulties stemming from family separation he answered: “you know how it is when you are alone: you have to cook for yourself, and wash”. He also mentioned that frequent visits home were exhausting, and that after the family reunited in Germany he could finally have a rest. He finds satisfaction in what he perceives as his very successful role as bread-winner and caretaker and takes pride in the way he fulfilled his parental duties, which he primarily sees in catering for his family’s material welfare and security (in terms of securing a refuge for them in case a need should arise). He pursues this goal, even in a period when the children are grown up, live on their own, and are financially independent. This demonstrates a cultural system in which the father’s physical absence from the family household is accepted and the parental (paternal) role fulfilled in securing a house and general material welfare for the family.

In the latter case, family reunion seems not to have been pursued by either of the parents. The break-up of Yugoslavia and the war that struck Joža’s native land had an immense impact on this family and served as a catalyst for the family reunion – in Germany – after twenty years of spatially separated life. Had he known what would happen, claims Joža today, he would have brought the family to Germany earlier. However, since the family lived very well in Bosnia with the aid of earnings from Germany he saw no reason to resettle them in Germany.

It does not follow from the migrant narratives that the transnational family arrangements caused estrangement or any particular difficulties in either parent-parent, parents-children or sibling relations. The parents underlined their very good relations with their child(ren) in Croatia or Bosnia-Herzegovina. The youngest daughter of Kata and Martin, who lives in Germany, assured me of her very good and close relationship with her elder siblings and their families who live in Croatia. Joža’s elder son mentioned no traumatic events in relation to his former life without his father in Bosnia. A daughter of yet another couple, who has lived all her life in Croatia with her paternal grandparents, while her parents and her younger brother have lived in Germany, adamantly insisted that in spite of international dispersal theirs was a functioning family, and that she was brought up by her mother and father (living in Germany) and not by the grandparents with whom she lived, except for the annual two-month holiday she spent with her parents in Germany. If anything, she reproaches her parents for not having let her younger brother live with her in Croatia. However, this woman, today in her mid-thirties, does admit a past conflictual phase in her relationship with her parents. This came about in her somewhat turbulent adolescence, whose effect on her relationship with the parents she could not dissociate from the effect of family separation.

In spite of these allegedly harmonious intra-familial relations, these migrant families demonstrate that a family is not necessarily a uniform entity in terms of language acquisition and educational achievement (cf. Erel, 2002). Due to diverse migration histories and experiences of family separation and reunion, children and parents within any one family speak German and/or Croatian to a varying degree of fluency; some are monolingual, some bilingual, some speak better German, some Croatian, while some only speak the dialect of the region of origin and not the standard Croatian language.

The education of children within any one family is also diverse. It appears that those who remained in the homeland, in the care of their grandparents, received a better education – some even earning academic degrees – while those who lived partly or entirely in Germany did not do so well in the German schooling system. In part, this can be explained by the fact that they arrived in Germany at an advanced age (late teens), with practically no (e.g. family two) or little (e.g. family three) command of the German language. Whatever the reasons for this might be, it appears that the separation from the parents did not negatively impact the schooling of those who were left in Croatia or in Bosnia-Herzegovina,⁹ but it did have an impact on those children who had more mobile trajectories and were resettled once or several times in order to join their parents.¹⁰

Tentative conclusions

In spite of the fact that several decades had elapsed since their migration, it is difficult to locate Croatian migrant families only in the places to which they had migrated. On the one hand, not all family members migrated – in the cases under discussion here only the parents, or one of them, migrated while the rest of the members of a nuclear family (some/all children and/or wife) did not, and lived all or part of their lives in the places of origin. These families have thus had a double location in physical space, in far-apart places (600 to 1000 kilometers) located in different nation-states. Macrostructurally, bilocality and transnational family arrangements were enabled by German labour migration policies and Bavarian cultural policies regarding resident foreigners at the time of migration of the people under review here. On the one hand, these policies encouraged contractually limited employment, short-term stays of the foreign labour force and its rotation, and offered opportunities for schooling in the language of origin. On the other hand, they contributed to the fostering of the plan of return among the labour migrants. As I have argued elsewhere (Čapo Žmegač, 2005), the plan of return was not a purely rhetorical figure among Croatian economic migrants in Munich. It was real and actually influenced migrant family arrangements, living standards, and investments in and perceptions of Germany and the homeland. Within the limits set by the society of settlement, realisation and/or deferral of return were, however, individual family decisions, made on the basis of concrete circumstances in the life of the migrant family and on the opportunities in the countries of origin and settlement, and perceptions thereof (Čapo Žmegač, 2006).

The initial transnational family arrangement was satisfactory for some families (case two), and had it not been for wider political processes in the country of origin, it would have probably been a durable living modality of this family. However, in other cases it was probably a less satisfactory pattern, since they claim to have strived for re-

⁹ This is in tune with earlier findings that the school success of children from migrant families is not dependent on the absence of parents (Katunarić, 1978: 75).

¹⁰ Another element of internal family differentiation might be citizenship, when e.g. children or some of them decide to take up the German citizenship, while parents and some of the children do not. This is not a case in any of the families discussed here.

union. In case three, this striving was occasionally successful and resulted in *changeable family arrangements*, i.e. in shorter or longer periods of separation followed by reunion of all or some family members, who crossed borders in one or another direction. Some of the family members were particularly locationally unstable, even “volatile” (cf. Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002b), as, for example, some children who changed the place of living several times over their life course.

There is another reason why these migrant families cannot be unambiguously located in one bounded physical place: those who migrated have never really taken leave of their places of origin (cf. Herrera Lima, 2001). Especially in the first decade or even for two decades after migrating, migrants were not only regularly visiting and monitoring the lives of those family members who were left behind (especially the children, but also grandparents), but they were also engaging in diverse economic activities in those places; they were actually living parallel lives in two places located in two countries, their “here” and “there” were intervoven into a common field. Even after it became clear that they would not be returning soon, their places of origin were not entirely abandoned because they had children who lived there. Their bilocality led to bifocality (cf. Rouse, 1992) throughout their migrational history, with periods of more or less intense physical presence and transnational activities in both places.¹¹

These two characteristics of migrant families: cross-sectionally, bilocal¹² placement of diverse family members and some members living bifocal lives, and longitudinally, changes in geographic location of individual family members resulting in changing family arrangements over time, make impossible any attempt at precisely and uniformly locating them in only one physical space over time and characterizing them in any essentialist terms. It follows from the analysis of the three cases in a diachronic perspective that, rather than being a temporary phase aimed at reintegration of the family at a higher economic level (Katunarić, 1978: 43ff), bilocality and transnational family arrangement might be viewed as more or less continuous family arrangements and the way of life of migrant families.¹³ This results from a synergic effect of a particular family time (the stage in the family and migration course) and the related decision-making on the one hand, and historical time and the constraints that it brings about on the other.¹⁴

In spite of their physical separation, these migrant families claim to have retained a network of good relations and emotional attachment.¹⁵ As evidenced in one case (family two), it is family reunion rather than family dispersal that brings about – albeit temporarily – tensions and conflicts inside the family. Analysing transnational families

¹¹ Compare Čapo Žmegač (2006) for an analysis of the ebbs and flows of transnational activities at various stages of migration.

¹² Sometimes also triplelocal, as in case two and other cases that I have encountered.

¹³ There are, of course, also families who have not practiced bilocality and whose members have lived together throughout their entire migration history. Why some chose one or another family arrangement can be explained only within particular migratory contexts.

¹⁴ For the concepts of family and historical time, see Hareven (1994).

¹⁵ This should not be generalized as relating to the entire migrant population, for, as mentioned in Footnote 3, the families that in some way suffered from the geographic separation of their members or were not doing well in economic terms were not willing to share their experiences.

in the context of USA–Mexico transmigration, Herrera Lima (2001) argued that, instead of conceptualizing dispersed migrant families as unstable and unviable units, we can conceptualize a type of *family reconfiguration with translocal and transnational dimensions*. This is a hypothesis applicable to the cases under review here. However, the insistence of my interlocutors on there having been firm and harmonious relations between dispersed nuclear family members – with occasional problems – should not be taken at face value. It might point to a prevalent *family ideology* and a *narrative family reconfiguration*. In other words, it might be hypothesized that precisely because it is dispersed across long distances, the family needs to construct its unity (emotional if not physical) and therefore presents itself as integrated and reconfigured. This point is worthy of further examination (perhaps using other techniques of data gathering, see Footnote 3) and comparative analysis of particular cases.

Finally, these migrant cases demonstrate that by maintaining bilocality, or even triplelocality, migrants kept open their options for a better and secure life. They took advantage of it in the past when the immediate lives of their family members were in danger, for example, when the war broke out in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Having decided it was better to remain in Germany, another couple could reunite with at least one of their offspring precisely because of almost fifteen years of intensive transnational activities. Options also remain open for the migrants' return, which calls for reconceptualization of the concept of return in migration studies (Čapo Žmegač, 2005). Each of the two (or even three) options might serve as an escape if a need for it should arise in two other places.¹⁶ This illustrates very well the ability of transnational migrant families to “reconstitute and redefine themselves over time contingent on spatial practicality and emotional and material needs” (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002: 3), and their strategic use of bilocal (or multilocal) transnational family arrangements.

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¹⁶ This escape-function of bilocality (or triplelocality in this case) will be operable, however, only in the parental generation. If the offspring living in Croatia were to search for betterment in another locality, it would be more difficult and, due to stringent immigration laws, quite impossible to resettle in Germany and get permission to work. For those living in Germany, who might want to resettle in Croatia, this administrative hurdle would be absent because they hold Croatian citizenship. Yet, they might encounter other societal obstacles to their full incorporation into the chosen society.

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Jasna Čapo Žmegač

PREKORAČUJUĆI NACIONALNE GRANICE: RAZDVOJENI ŽIVOTI HRVATSKIH MIGRANTSKIH OBITELJI

SAŽETAK

Koristeći etnografsku metodologiju, autorica opisuje tri načina na koji su hrvatski migranti u Njemačkoj uredili svoj obiteljski život u posljednjih trideset godina. U sva su tri članovi obitelji bili podijeljeni između dvaju lokaliteta smještenih u dvije države – u Njemačkoj i u Hrvatskoj odnosno Bosni i Hercegovini. U jednom slučaju otac je migrirao a žena i djeca živjeli su u Bosni; u drugome bračni je par migrirao a dijete je ostalo u Hrvatskoj; u trećemu bračni je par živio s nekoliko djece u Njemačkoj dok su ostala djeca bila u Hrvatskoj. Neke su od tih obitelji živjele na dva mjesta tijekom cijeloga životnoga i migracijskoga tijeka (trideset i više godina), neke su pak imale iskustvo kraćih ili dužih razdoblja odvojenoga života nakon kojih su slijedila razdoblja zajedničkog života svih ili samo nekih članova obitelji koji su prelazili granice u jednome ili u drugome smjeru. Autorica zaključuje da, gledano iz dijakronijske perspektive, bilokalnost nije privremena etapa s ciljem da se obitelj reintegrira na višem ekonomskom stupnju već je manje ili više kontinuirani način uređenja obitelji, ustvari način života migrantskih obitelji. Otvorenim je ostavljeno pitanje jesu li transnacionalne obitelji snažnije povezane jedinice u kojima članovi održavaju emocionalne veze i bliskost. Podaci se mogu interpretirati na taj način ali mogu voditi i prema hipotezi da razdvojene obitelji trebaju konstruirati svoje jedinstvo (emocionalno ako već fizičko ne postoji), te da se stoga kroz naraciju predstavljaju integriranima.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: ekonomska migracija, migrantska obitelj, transnacionalizam, bilokalnost

Jasna Čapo Žmegač

A CHEVAL SUR LES FRONTIÈRES NATIONALES: VIE SÉPARÉE DES FAMILLES MIGRANTES CROATES

RÉSUMÉ

S'appuyant sur la méthodologie ethnographique, l'auteure décrit trois façons dont les migrants croates en Allemagne ont organisé leur vie familiale au cours des trente dernières années. Dans les trois cas, les membres de la famille étaient séparés entre deux localités situées dans deux Etats distincts: Allemagne et Croatie ou Allemagne et Bosnie-Herzégovine. Dans le premier cas, le père a émigré tandis que la femme et les enfants vivaient en Bosnie; dans le second cas, le couple a émigré mais l'enfant est resté en Croatie; dans le troisième enfin, le couple a émigré avec plusieurs enfants en Allemagne, tandis que les autres enfants restaient en Croatie. Certaines de ces familles ont vécu à deux endroits toute leur vie durant et durant leur période d'expatriation (trente ans et plus), certaines en revanche ont connu des périodes plus ou moins longues de séparation, entrecoupées de périodes de vie commune de tous ou plusieurs membres de la famille, qui migraient vers l'un ou l'autre Etat. L'auteure conclut que, dans une perspective diachronique, la bilocalisation n'est pas une étape temporaire ayant pour objectif de rassembler la famille à un niveau économique supérieur, mais est plus ou moins un mode durable d'organisation de la famille, en fait un mode de vie des familles migrantes. La question de savoir si les familles transnationales sont des unités dont les membres entretiennent des liens émotionnels et une proximité reste ouverte. Les données peuvent être interprétées de cette façon, mais peuvent aussi conduire à l'hypothèse selon laquelle les familles séparées doivent construire leur unité (émotionnellement, en l'absence d'unité physique), et que pour cette raison, dans le discours elles se représentent comme intégrées.

MOTS CLÉS: migration économique, famille migrante, transnationalisme, bilocalité