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PRETTY AS A PICTURE: CROATIAN WOMEN IN NEW ZEALAND

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This article explores Croatian women's experiences of travelling to and living in New Zealand. It analyzes their displacement and placement, their stories about "homeland" and "home" and the reflection of these stories on the identities of second- and third-generation Croats in New Zealand.

Keywords: Women migrants; Memory; Identity; Gender; Imaginary homelands

Millions of Europeans moved to America at the beginning of the twentieth century. More than half a million Croats were a part of that migration, which was the biggest exodus in Croatian history (Cizmic 1981). The political situation in Croatia at that time created poor economic conditions. Suppressed by Austrians and Hungarians, even in the 1900s many Croats lived under a remnant of the old feudal system. It is not surprising that under those conditions people wanted to find a "better life" and "justice". Dalmatia, more than other Croatian lands, experienced hard times. A large flow of immigrants to "New World" countries resulted. Of these, a small trickle ended up in New Zealand, usually on the Far North gumfields.[1] Most of the migrants came from a few villages on several islands, and from an area along the Central and Southern Dalmatian coastline. Since then, chain migration from the same region has produced a numerically modest, but constant, replenishment of the community in New Zealand.

This article concentrates on narratives told by women who left Dalmatia between 1880 and 1950. It draws on ethnographic research in the Far North of New Zealand and Dalmatia carried out between 1999 and 2002 on Maori-Croatian contact in New Zealand. These two peoples—the Northern Maori tribes of Te Aupouri and Te Rarawa and Croats from Dalmatia—met in the gumfields and developed relationships which lasted from 1880 until 1950s (until the end of the gumdigging industry). In the course of my research, I interviewed many Maori-Croatian gumdiggers and their descendants, both in New Zealand and Croatia.

As it turned out, my ethnic identity, a Croatian woman who recently arrived in New Zealand, was very important for many of my informants, especially for the first-generation Croatian women as they felt that I was "one of them", that we shared the same cultural background and had a similar "foreign" status in New Zealand. I was fascinated by their

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stories and soon I realized that there was no academic research on this topic. The few theses on the history of Croatian immigration, written mostly by Croatian descendants, suggest only that Croatian women were brought to New Zealand by Croatian men. As Clifford (1994: 403) argues, migrant experiences are always gendered, but there is a tendency in diaspora studies "to hide this fact, to talk of travel and displacement in unmarked ways, thus normalizing male experiences". In this article I show that, despite the diverse reasons for leaving for each generation depending upon wealth, occupation, age, gender and political situations, there is a striking similarity in the narratives told by Dalmatian women. There is a something that is "persistently there" (Clifford 1994): the constant superimposition of patriarchal forms that shape their identities and memories.

Different generations of Dalmatian women, though coming from the same villages, arrived in New Zealand with a variety of passports: Austrian, Italian, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Later, when their homeland was again renamed, they were called "Yugoslavs" or "Croatians".[2] While all of these systems created new political, economic and cultural realities in Dalmatia, a patriarchal gender order inherited from the past persisted through these changes. Hence, men and women have different memories of leaving home, of what was left behind. While male migrant identity is mainly defined through the stories of initiative and success (economic migration) or search for justice (political migration), the identity of migrating Dalmatian women is based on family relationships—"women as cultural baggage" (Fortier 2000: 48). My aim in this article is to uncover the way their identity is constructed, to analyze the multiplicity of discourses and their impact on Dalmatian women's position both in Dalmatia and in New Zealand as well as the ways in which they created a sense of belonging in the new country, constantly negotiating between the present and the past in the name of the better future for their children.

My approach is inspired by a new body of work on "diaspora" (Ahmed 2000; Brah 1996; Clifford 1994; Fortier 2000). Brah proposes a concept of "diaspora space" as "the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of 'us' and 'them', are contested"; "diaspora space" includes "the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put' "(Brah 1996: 209). In that context of permanent tension, I examine how here and there are constantly re-negotiated in the formation of "home away from home".

GAZE

In 1986, Zuva Nobilo, a Croatian-born woman living in New Zealand, promised her grandson Stephen that she would write a little "documentary" for him on the Nobilo family, so that they could "have it forever". Going carefully through her memory, Zuva starts her "documentary" with a description of her and *Dida's* [grandfather's] birth-place—the Dalmatian village of Lumbarda on the island of Korcula. After a detailed description of Dalmatian customs and way of life during her childhood, she moves on to her New Zealand narrative; a narrative that begins with a gaze at photography.

> Your *Baba* [grandmother], holding a picture of *Dida*, outside home in Lumbarda on my wedding day, 22 January 1939. It was a proxy wedding. I had a nuptial mass with all the ceremonies, the choir sang and I heard myself say "I will" but it was more like play acting than the real thing. Before I could leave [my country] . . . I had to be legally married to Dida, but I was glad that I went through the proper ceremonies and not just in a government office. (Nobilo 1987: 54)

So Zuva, now a grandmother in New Zealand, remembers her proxy-bride experience, which she wants to transmit to her grandchildren. Thus what we have here is double nostalgia: the nostalgia of the past transmitted into the family future. In her wedding photograph, the groom is

FIGURE 1

missing—Zuva, in a white wedding dress, holds the photograph of her future husband to be. She casts a sidelong glance at his image, trying to establish some emotional ties with the flat surface of the photograph: a gaze at the future, at a new beginning in the unknown home 12,000 miles away, trying to imagine her absent groom. He is in New Zealand, and his absence is even more underlined by someone else's voice, his brother's voice, uttered instead of him—"I will"—that pierced the empty place like some strange uncanny body. In the second photo, we see all the members of the village staring at Zuva and the groom's brother—the empty place—as if trying to imagine this invisible bridegroom waiting in New Zealand.

> My dressmaker, who was my teacher, made my wedding dress and veil with some orange blossom. I thought I looked beautiful. *Dida*'s brother Ivan stood by me and two men witnesses. . . . It was more like play acting than the real thing—but I still can hear uncle Ivan when he was asked does he take me for his brother Nikola's wife, he said loud and clear "I will" and that was that. (Nobilo 1987: 54)

However, there is a second gaze inscribed in this photo, that from the future, that of the old *baba* who wants to tell the story to her grandchildren. "It was more like play acting than the real thing." The "real thing" did not happen because of her husband-to-be's absence, and at the same time "the real thing" will happen to her grandchildren. However, this empty space, this illusion, guided her to New Zealand, and inflected much of her life story. Here we have a temporal loop, an intersection of the past and the future, and the gaze travelling towards the photo of the absent groom, travelling *ad infinitum*, because of the illusion of everlasting presence. As Walter Benjamin famously wrote, the photographic image is "dialectics at a standstill" (Benjamin 1989: 50). In its arrest of time, it is always related to both the future and the past.

Then Zuva remembers a good feast in the bride's home an hour before the wedding—lovely *persuto*, all kinds of cheeses and salami and sweets like *krostule cukarine* and *Grk* wine to drink. Here some Croatian words enter into the English language and echo inexpressible trickles of memory: *krostule cukarine*. Perhaps because of this impossible intersection of two future gazes inscribed into the photo, we can move to the beginning of the story of Croatian women in New Zealand—a story that started in a few Dalmatian villages a long time before Zuva "decided" to travel to New Zealand.

"BEASTS OF BURDEN"

Abdelmalek Sayad argues that "before becoming an immigrant, the migrant is first an emigrant" and consequently "the structure and contradictions of the sending communities" are important for analysis as well as "the concerns and cleavages of the receiving society. . . . Immigration here and emigration there are two indissociable sides of the same reality, which cannot be explained the one without the other" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2000: 173–175). In line with this argument, let me start with a description of life in Dalmatia at the beginning of the twentieth century in the words of Marica Milich (born in 1907):

> My village of Podgora stood high above the Adriatic Sea on a mountainous plateau on the Dalmatian coast. It was a very old village. All the houses were in a cluster, and they were of stone, even the roofs were made of stone. . . . Karst and rocks everywhere. We had small pockets of cultivable land and we had some *blitva* [silverbeet], potatoes, cabbage and many fig and olive trees . . . and, of course, we had vineyards. My family also had a few sheep and goats. We didn't have a donkey, but many other families did. They would share them. As a matter of fact, all the villagers shared everything. We were helping to each other. . . . There were no roads at that time, just little paths between villages. Our village cemetery was by the sea and when somebody died men would carry that person to the grave on their shoulders. It wasn't a good life really. As a child I had to work constantly, I was baking bread, going to the mountain to collect firewood and grass and so on . . . some other kids were attending the school, but my family did not have money to send me to school . . . we were selling some wine and that's all the money we had. . . . [V]illagers used to tell that it was a time when vineyards spread everywhere and they were making good money . . . but I don't remember that. I heard that something happened to the vineyards . . . the grape plague. . . . I don't know. . . . [M]any of the men left our village because of that, they couldn't make any money in Podgora. (Interview with Marica Milich, Kaitaia, 1999)

Dalmatia was under the control of Austria-Hungary from 1815 until the First World War. Franz Josef's empire viewed Dalmatia as a buffer zone against the Turks and did not care about local development. In the 1860s, the local shipbuilding industry declined due to the development of iron-hulled ships in northern Europe. From 1880 to 1901, the North American insect *Phylloxera* almost devastated the Dalmatian vineyards. Compounding this natural disaster, in 1891 the Austro-Hungarian government reduced the import tariffs on Italian wines, which meant that Dalmatian wines were far more expensive and demand declined (Violich 1998). The isolation of Dalmatian villages created a strong sense of local community that is nicely illustrated through Marica's description of the way of life in Podgora.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, most peasants in the villages lived within the *zadruga*, numbering 60 to 80 members, and households of between 20 and 30 members were common. *Zadruga* practice (i.e., working for extended family and neighbours without wages during harvest time) persisted in some villages through the twentieth century as well. The dominance of the male in the family structure was very important: all men held higher social positions than women. Power relationships based on patriarchal ideology constructed "home" as the "only" place for woman. Even though women very often worked in the fields, men were always seen as the main breadwinners. Florida Vela, who arrived in New Zealand after the Second World War, tells a short anecdote about her mother's family that illustrates male authority in the house:

> My mother used to say "*u pravim kucama je uvik i zena imala pravo kao i muz*" (in "proper" families the women were always equal to men). .. but I still think that she wasn't right. . . . I mean . . . she used to tell the story that in her family they had two chairs . . . one chair was for her father and another one . . . eh another one wasn't used because her mother and her grandmother would both stand up and not use it. . . . [H]er mother would say to her grandmother "*vi ste stariji . . . vi sidite*" (please sit down . . . you are older) but her grandmother would say to her mother . . . "*no, no ti si radila . . . ti sidi*" (no, no, you were working all day . . . please sit down and have a rest), so my grandfather said that he needs to chop down the second chair. . . . [B]ut it was not the question of the first chair and who would sit on it . . . never. (Interview with Florida Vela, Auckland. 2001)

This "micro-physics of power" (Foucault 1977), illustrated as a "first chair", may serve as a metaphor of continuity of male dominance in Dalmatian villages. This patriarchal gender order persisted throughout the communist regime as well. I do not want to say that there has been no change over time, shifting political systems and news from villagers who were living abroad certainly changed many aspects of life, but these had little impact on gender relations. Miri Simich, a Maori-Croatian woman talking about how women lived in Dalmatia after the Second World War constantly repeated "woman in Dalmatia is a beast of burden". Miri, born in New Zealand, lived in Dalmatia from 1947 to 1951. She remembers a tiny town by the Adriatic Sea—Igrane—and the "strange" way of life she witnessed, and in which she participated. Through her memories, a metonymic sliding enfolds from donkey ("a beast of burden") to woman and her position in Dalmatian society:

> [M]y Rudy wanted to go back to see how his people survived the war because there was the terrible war, you see. . . . We saved enough money for our trip, well I suppose we could be farmers with that money, but we decided to go. . . . We were supposed to go for good really, it was our intention. After we arrived there, Rudy could see it's no life for women. No, because women were beasts of burden, you know. They did everything. Everything. During the war, the Germans took away all donkeys. The donkeys were beast of burden. The donkeys were very good for carrying things. The coast by Adriatic Sea is a very mountainous . . . women there go to the mountain by themselves . . . to do digging. . . . [O]live trees are there . . . olive trees are everywhere . . . on the rocks. . . . [M]y mother in law . . . she had a job to pick all the fruit and leaves for animals. She carried it on her back. The men never carried anything. They carried just a little *motika* (tool). Even a little *motika* was too much for them to carry, they hooked it on a woman. It's too much for men. He just walked with his hands in his pockets. Oh yes. It was too much for them to carry a little *motika*. He hooked it on his mothers' back . . . or sisters' backs or wife's back . . . yeah. . . . They just smoked their cigarettes and it was OK. Ooooo but woman. She doesn't mind. She expects that. She knows all about that. I learnt how to do that sort of thing. I learnt everything . . . how to carry water on my back . . . how to carry olives and tools, how to wash cloth . . . yeah. . . . In Dalmatia everything was different. . . . I knew different ways to do things, of course . . . but they didn't want to listen. They think that their way is the best way. They treat women as animals. Silly people. It was really hard. . . . I am a hard working woman . . . after all, I am a half Maori a half Dalmatian . . . but people there . . . they are different race I suppose. . . . [T]heir women are beasts of burden. . . . I'll tell you . . . it's hard life. . . . You work for the family there, not for yourself. (Interview with Miri Simich, Auckland. 2000)

Miri paints a picture of a patriarchal society where most marriages were arranged by the parents, who took into account social status, wealth and honour. There were many cases of young men marrying, then going to New Zealand or America after a few months and remaining away for up to thirty years. Their wives were called "white widows". In fact, at the end of nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth centurys, there were numerous families in which the father, as the head of the family, and sons were absent, leaving mother and daughters to care for the family properties together. These women were under the constant gaze of the community. They were constantly judged for their way of living and managing the money sent by the men. Very often they were seen as "too lazy for any kind of work" and "immoral". These women worked very hard to satisfy both the community and their absent husband.

DALMATIAN "AMERICAS OF MIND"

Nineteenth-century Dalmatian villages comprised small populations with intellectual horizons extending only a few miles beyond the village limits, perhaps not even to the next

town. If some people moved to a new country to start a new life, others in the village caught the same idea of escaping from unbearable poverty. An entirely new picture of a world with immense possibilities would be introduced when a neighbour emigrated to America, Australia, Argentina or New Zealand. For Dalmatians, "America" was everywhere where life was better. When letters and photos arrived, families would gather together reading slowly about very often exaggerated earnings. Anything was better than poverty and heavy taxes. If for no other reason, in different Americas, one could find bread. So, through the fantasy frame of a "better future" the imaginary picture of a "new life" somewhere in "different Americas" was created. Everyone wanted to go to "America" and, in the central part of Dalmatia, New Zealand was seen as "America" too.

> Work was what Mama came to New Zealand for—and to see America. In the old country, she explains, all the new world is "America", not just America on the map. "Everyone wants to go there," says Mama. "I used to listen to them talking about it and I would say to myself: 'I will see this America, too!' " (Batistich 1980: 39)

It is hard to establish how it all started, how people from Central Dalmatia heard about their "America" and the gumfields of the Far North of New Zealand. In any case, by 1924, more than 6,000 Dalmatians were registered in New Zealand, mostly working as gumdiggers (Trlin 1967). The golden kauri resin was woven into the imagination of people from Podgora, Vrgorac, Imotski, Korcula and so on:

> "Nova Zelanda!" They said the name over, liking the promise that it held. Father Ilya had even got them a piece of the kauri gum from the museum in Vienna. It looked like rich and wonderful stuff. They all wanted to hold it, to feel its polished smoothness, to look into its mottled depths for a sign of the future. "A new kind of gold!" . . . the villages' patriarch pronounced, and Father Ilya said: "It means gold and that's what you'll never get if you stay here. I tell you young men, go. Look for a better life in a new country far from the troubles here." (Batistich 1980: 12)

In the beginning, emigration did not occur in family units. Typically, a young man who was unemployed at home was first sent to work in a foreign country, to earn the money that the family needed for its various expenses: to repay debts, to build a house, and so forth. Soon this became evident throughout Dalmatian villages. Deteriorating roofs were tiled, houses of the "New Zealanders" were bigger and more beautiful; new fields were purchased and recovering vineyards spread. Churches and bells were repaired and new schools built. As Vinko Djikovic, a local historian and poet from Zaostrog, says: "The bells rang—New Zealand."

> Here in Zaostrog . . . our local priests helped to raise money to send our poor young boys to "Zelanda". . . . These poor boys had to promise in front of all the villagers that the first money they earned would be sent to the Church . . . not to mother, not to father . . . but the Church. (Interview with Vinko Dikovic, Zaostrog, Croatia, 2000)

M Gareljic, a retired teacher from Podgora, notes:

> New Zealand was always present in this region . . . especially in Zaostrog and Podgora. It was in everybody's mouth. Every house that was a bit bigger and nicer, you could be sure it was built with New Zealand money. . . . There is an inscription on the biggest house in Porat: "God helps New Zealand." (Interview with Gareljic, Podgora, Croatia, 2000)

Drago Krznaric, who immigrated to New Zealand in 1958, remembers one occasion during his childhood in Podgora:

> [T]here was the sound of the church bell which announced to the villagers that somebody had passed away. The villagers in the vineyard started calling each other, "Do you know who has died?" My father just took his cap off and crossed himself, and said, "It must be someone in New Zealand." (Hutching 1998: 62)

In Dalmatia, a new social imaginary was created, an imaginary that included both those who stayed and those who left. The fantasies of those who stayed about the life of those who left were included in everyday life. In the language of psychoanalysis, "fantasy gives meaning and purpose to the subject's life", but this meaning by itself is a part of fantasy. In other words, "people don't have fantasies. They inhabit fantasy spaces of which they are part" (Hage 1998: 70). Yet moving from one phantasmic structure, Dalmatia, to the "America of the mind" was not a smooth process for Dalmatians. It was touched by the broader relationship of two Empires: the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the British Empire.

NEW ZEALAND'S "OTHERS"

When Croats left the stony Dalmatian villages, they entered the structured space of the British Empire, within which all people around the world were surveyed and classified. As Thomas Richards argues: "the British Empire was more productive of knowledge than any previous empire in history" (Richards 1993: 6). The Empire's will to control the world was supported by the idea of British superiority and the possibility of knowing all the far away corners of the kingdom. The British saw their Empire as a sort of unity, but as Richards argues, this unity was based on the imperial archive: "a fantasy of knowledge collected and united in the service of state and Empire" (Richards 1993: 6). The Empire's scientists and administrators collected much information (they surveyed, mapped, took censuses, described different people, their customs, religions, languages, etc.) which they organized in a series of classifications. "The truth was of course that it was much easier to unify the archive composed of texts than to unify an empire made of territory" (Richards 1993: 4).

This powerful fantasy construction of the imperial archive filled in the gap between the British desire to control its colonies and the impossibility of this control. In New Zealand, as in many other parts of the British Empire, the cultural reality that was created at the end of the nineteenth century was based on a hierarchy where the British race was put on the highest level, above all others, where domination of "inferior" by "superior" was considered a natural condition.

This construction of the political space based on fantasies of knowledge may be viewed through Laclau's and Mouffe's (1985) principles of equivalence and difference. The logic of difference tends to expand the political space, enabling a proliferation of different meanings and positions. By contrast, the logic of equivalence, by subverting each differential position, creates a second meaning. For example "in a colonized country, the presence of the dominant power is every day made evident through a variety of contents: differences of dress, of language, of skin color, of customs. Since each of these contents is equivalent to the others in terms of their common differentiation from the colonized people, it loses its condition of differential moment . . . thus equivalence creates a second meaning which . . . though parasitic on the first, subverts it, the differences cancel one other out insofar they are used to express something identical underlying them all" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 127), freezing a metaphor in an allegory or symbol.

In the British imperial archive, at the time when Croats were coming to New Zealand, the logic of equivalence, prevailed. This entailed simplification of the New Zealand political space and expansion of the paradigmatic pole of meaning over different strata of population. We can say that almost everyone was ensnared by some kind of metaphor. The logic of equivalence, something identical to the ideal type of New Zealander, first operated on the level of "whiteness" and excluded indigenous people—Maori. However, "whiteness" itself operated on different levels and at different intensities: there were "pure white" or "dirty

white", one white more equal than another, etc. In this classification, Slavs were considered not white enough, an inferior race, and consequently they were not welcome.

> The Austrians [Dalmatians] on the fields are a great evil at the present time. . . . [T]he North will be destroyed by the Austrians. . .[3]

> It is unquestionably time that the people of New Zealand woke up to a recognition of the evil consequences that must follow this influx of Austrians. Did I say Austrians? Well, I am wrong. They are not Austrians. . . . They are Russian Slavs and consequently are very much more undesirable as colonists than Austrians would be . . .[4]

This logic of equivalence preceded or incited new laws and regulations. A deep psychic fear of the "other", in this case the "over-industrious other", soon become interwoven into the fabric of the social system. The Colonial government introduced the Kauri Gum Industry Bill in 1898 to restrain the influx of Dalmatians on the gumfields. In 1908 and 1910, other restrictive laws against "aliens" on the gumfields were passed, protecting the interests of the British gumdiggers. Using Foucauldian terminology, we can say that a specific visual field was constructed for all people who were not considered good enough to populate colonial New Zealand.

Croatian gumdiggers were under constant surveillance. The Commission that was formed to check them had a right to judge something other than crimes. The aim was to examine how "normal" Croats were by making "a normalising judgement" (Foucault 1977). The examination consisted of traditional methodology: "a normalising gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish". Only, in this case, "the normality" of Croats was judged according to their suitability to be incorporated into colonial society, and punishment would consist in removing these aliens from the gumfields. Thus, the Croats, once defined as different, were forced to prove their loyalty in every possible way, which affected their own identity. Consequently, even before a Dalmatian woman set foot on the "Promised Land", her place in the global structure of the British Empire was already marked. In addition, like other migrant women in New Zealand at that time, a Dalmatian woman was a rare phenomenon. New Zealand was "a man's country".

"A MAN'S COUNTRY"

In New Zealand history, women migrants were very often connected to the processes of establishing a new life in the country, a stable life based on family values (Phillips 1987). Women were seen as both a stabilising and civilising factor for the community. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centurys, the gum-diggers' world was almost exclusively male. In *A Man's Country*, Phillips (1987) portrays this world of the frontier and the specific male culture that had developed in New Zealand. It originates from British village society's division of labour in which the men carried out the jobs demanding great physical strength while women were occupied with domestic drudgery. Therefore the role of colonization, of taming the distant wilderness, was usually considered to be man's mission: "the strong and the bold who go forth to subdue the wilderness and conquer new lands" (Phillips 1987: 5).

On the frontier of a new and strange environment, a masculine culture developed and gumdiggers (like goldminers, whalers, bush workers and other itinerant workers) were part of that culture. At the end of the nineteenth century, "members of the urban elite and respectable settlers" were concerned with this male culture of the frontier and its "wandering lifestyle". So, differentiation emerged between "the itinerant males who carried with them dissolute habits and outdated economic traditions" and "the settlers, men who acquired land, resided in one place and consequently adopted a new ethic of savings and hard work"

(Phillips 1987: 50). The New Zealand Government believed that the fastest way to "civilize and settle down" the wandering male population was "to marry them off". In this differentiation between settlers and sojourners, Croatian men slowly enter the chain of equivalencies. Those of them who brought wives and fiancees made the move from migrants to settlers.

Settler narratives are connected with the growth of the community and, as Fortier (2000: 50) points out "in this respect, the settler community is not only familiarized, but it is feminized insofar as the promise of continuity is configured in terms of the female presence". For Fortier, even though men most often instigate women's migration, "women, moving through historical moments and geographical spaces, mark out the thresholds of identity and difference, being and becoming, migrancy and settlement, past times and new times" (Fortier 2000: 49). Croatian woman, step by step, entered onto the stage of British Empire, allowing the new beginning of one ethnic community—the Croatian community in New Zealand.

Many Croatian gumdiggers simply wrote letters to their villages asking for a marriage to be arranged. This was due not merely to the patriarchal custom of the time, but also to the gender politics of the Dominion, which discouraged mixed marriages. Some kind of racial hygiene was seen as a national strength. It was argued that, by marriage with foreigners, the colony would lose its power. Women who married foreigners had to forfeit their New Zealand citizenship. Some of those who married Croats during the First World War were defined as "dangerous aliens". For example, Miriam Bridelia, born in New Zealand, married Peter Soljak, a Croat, in 1908. After that she was treated as a foreigner. She was turned away when she registered for a bed in a Tauranga nursing home preparatory to the birth of a child; her name was removed from the electoral roll; in 1919 she registered as an alien "but only when it was made clear that if she did not she would go to prison" (Coney 1993: 131). Miriam protested several times to the Prime Minister, and she also publicized the troubles of New Zealand-born women married to aliens. However, it was not until 1948 that the New Zealand Government gave women their own independent nationality

So the gap between young Dalmatian men and Anglo-Saxon women in New Zealand was greater than the 12,000 miles that separated them from local women in Dalmatia—culture, customs, above all the language and racial prejudices, could not be easily overcome. Most Dalmatians followed the practice of arranged marriages inherited from their villages: the gumdiggers would ask around the camps whether anyone had a cousin or a sister that would want to travel to New Zealand. If no agreement was reached by the fire on the gumfields, gum-diggers would simply write to their parents and ask them to choose one of the village girls for them. Impoverished Dalmatian villages, on the crossing between the nineteenth and twentieth century, were almost deserted: a large number of young men had already gone to America, Argentina, Australia or New Zealand. Since the women themselves dreamed of beautiful places faraway, the word "New Zealand" glittered like the promise of gold.

WEDDINGS . . . WEDDINGS . . . WEDDINGS

Many letters travelled from New Zealand to poor Dalmatian villages, and many "letter brides" were sent to New Zealand. Antica Belich, who arrived in 1900, explained how her father arranged her marriage. In her grandaughter's words:

> [I]n the north of New Zealand was Ivan Belich. . . . [W]hen Ivan heard that a woman whom he knew was returning to Dalmatia, he begged her to do her best to find a suitable wife for him. . . . [T]his woman met up with Antica's father . . . she described in glowing terms the sub-tropical climate of Dargaville and the wonderful future for hard-working people in New Zealand. She told Stipan how thrilled Ivan would be to have one of his daughters for his wife. (Keene 1987: 9)

The couple were married in St Patrick's Cathedral in Auckland and moved to live in Sweetwater, in a gumdigging camp. "For five days a week, she worked on the gumfields with the men, while on the two remaining days she attended to household duties. Of course, she cooked the meals for the family and often others every day" (Keene 1987: 9). Antica explained that she knew just one rumour connected with the good soil: "Don't put your hand in New Zealand soil for too long or your fingers will grow!", but her fantasy of New Zealand turned out to be a gumfield—a desolate, isolated, poor wasteland.

Totally unaware of the conditions in New Zealand—of bleak, barren gumfields—with the idea of a "better life in their minds", young Croatian women would travel 12,000 miles, almost half way across the globe, to marry a husband they had never seen, sometimes not even in a photograph. Marica Milich says:

> It was the year 1935. I was 28 and everyone in Podgora treated me as a spinster. When Cleme Milich sent a letter asking for a wife my mother told me: "You must go. This is a good opportunity for you." The journey to New Zealand I remember very well. I didn't speak any English . . . nobody told me that people speak different languages. . . . [I]t was terrible . . . I can tell you . . . it was terrible. . . . I can remember seeing Cleme from the boat at the port in Auckland. He looked older than on the photo that he sent to Podgora . . . and his suit wasn't nice too . . . ohhhh . . . I was afraid. I didn't like him. I really wanted to go back home. (Interview with Marica Milich, Kaitaia, 1999)

After a long journey, Marcia found herself in Auckland and, while waiting in one of the Dalmatian boarding houses for the boat for the Far North, listened to strange stories about the "natives". Ignorant boarders told her that "the natives were awful savages and that they would eat her for dessert". She was really frightened: "I didn't know that black or brown people existed at all. Nobody told me that." She did not have any idea that the first wife of her husband had been a Maori woman. The nice photo sent to Podgora did not speak about that. Waiharara was so depressingly ugly at first sight that Marica wished "there were a bridge over the oceans". In the end, she married the man for whom she had travelled halfway around the world. She was immediately taken to an old shanty on the gumfields to take care of the children from Milich's previous marriage; to cook, to clean, to scrape gum. She worked from dawn to dusk.

> My husband's house was worse than my family house in Podgora. I just couldn't believe it. Waiharara was just the end of the world to me. So, I had to do all the cooking, washing and gardening. Sometimes I had to cook for a lot of Dalmatian men there . . . my hands were badly ruined washing so many clothes. (Interview with Marica Milich, Kaitaia, 1999)

The patriarchal structure of Dalmatian villages and family pride prevented Croatian women from including in the trade of fantasies the stories of suffering. None of these stories about shock and hard work reached Dalmatia, and "new brides" kept coming with new hopes. As Marica explains:

> I never told anyone in Dalmatia about my hard life here . . . and the first shock that I had when I saw my husband's house. . . . I didn't want my mother to worry and I didn't want people from my village to stop coming here . . . ooooooo, no. . . . [W]e needed them here . . . so I sent some beautiful photos . . . picnic on the beach . . . everyone nicely dressed . . . yeah . . . never the photo of the gumfields . . . never. . . . If I did . . . they would stop coming . . . so, we encouraged them to come. . . . When Cleme, my husband, sent his photo to Podgora asking for a woman who will marry him he sent a nice photo, not a gumdigging one. On that photo, he looked as an aristocrat. . . . I thought that his life in New Zealand must be wonderful . . . but when I saw him . . . to tell you the truth . . . if there were a bridge across the ocean, I would go back to my home in Podgora. (Interview with Marica Milich, Kaitaia, 1999)

Marica still keeps photos of her husband Cleme dressed in the fancy suit, a mask to lure her, and the others, into a long voyage. We could say that Croatian men were sending photos as images where they appeared likeable to others, representing what "they" would like them to

be. The question to ask here is for whom they were enacting these roles? Which gaze is considered through these identifications? Which gaze is implicated when Croatian women, once caught in the reality of New Zealand life, continued to send seductive photos to Dalmatia? If the photograph captures and freezes one moment in time (Benjamin 1989), how did these "frozen" moments support fantasies of "different Americas" for people in Dalmatian villages? These photos, as well as nicely written letters describing New Zealand as a haven for all workers, were sites of desire for both those who stayed and those who left Dalmatian villages. They were necessary because the "real thing" never existed—they never had referents in reality, and for those who left they served as a reflection of the better life they could not have, they were a vision of the better life through the reputation their senders could establish in Croatia. At the same time, they were vehicles of desire for a better life for those who stayed in Dalmatian villages.

Cleme Milic's nice portrait is still in Marica's photo album. Her picnic photos and copies of letters sent to Dalmatia are there too. They are reminders of the past and gaze for the future, for the future generations and "the real thing" which will happen to them. New fantasies are constructed, new desires emerged.

HOMELANDS OF THE MIND

"The past is a foreign country" claims David Lowenthal (1985). However, as Salman Rushdie (1991) notes, this idea could be inverted. We can say that, in one way, for the first generation of Croatian women in New Zealand, the present was "foreign" and the past was seen as home. Their past, preserved in many different forms, in one way testified to their group's "foreignness". Treated by their host country as "different", they withdrew into a community of their own, cultivating nostalgic memories of "the old country". They were living in the past and for the past, creating their own mental pictures about homeland which Rushdie calls "[homelands] of the mind". Yet these "homelands of the mind" were vividly transmitted to the second generation too—to the gaze of a "better future".

Very often these memories are materialized not only through photos and life narratives, but also through the "social life" of specific things, like the carpet that Marica showed to me. Her *chilim* [rug], made by her mother as a wedding gift, as it was the custom for every bride in Dalmatia to bring to her new house bedding or a rug, is still unused. This rug preserves, like memories of the homeland, some traumas, like the memory of giving birth on the gumfield.

> My mother made one rug and two beautiful pillowcases for me, but I don't have pillowcases any more. When I gave a birth to my first child, I decided to give them as a gift to the woman who was there to help me. . . . [Y]ou see . . . I didn't know anything about giving birth. . . . [M]y husband left home at 5.00 AM, and even though I was in pain he told me to milk a cow. . . . [Y]es . . . it was terrible. I remember . . . I was in terrible pain but I milked the cow. . . . I was crying and screaming. . . . It was late afternoon when one woman appeared . . . she said that my husband sent her to help me . . . and she did help me. I was very grateful and I wanted to give her something, but I didn't have valuable things . . . so I gave my beautiful pillowcases. . . . [Y]eah . . . I remember that day . . . my first child was born and that night my husband gave me a box, in which we used to keep eggs . . . you know . . . for kid's bed . . . yeah. . . . I think that my *chilim* is still beautiful. I never used it. Few years ago, I divided it in three pieces . . . for my children . . . yeah. That's my gift for them. (Interview with Marica Milich, Kaitaia, 1999)

Matija Henderson, one of Marica's daughters who got a piece of the *chilim*, together with her mother, visited her mother's Dalmatian village of Gornja Podgora for the first time in her life twenty years ago. After receiving a warm welcome from the entire village and their own family, Matija went to visit her mother's house. She was overwhelmed. In her memory, she

clearly remembered each room and each stone; she remembered the scent of lavender and rosemary and "recalled" her grandmother making meal in the kitchen.

Matija knew that her memories were not her own, but her mother's memories, and it was hard for her to believe that the sounds and voices of her mother's childhood had become so deeply carved into her own memory:

> I know that I belong to New Zealand, my life is in Kaitaia . . . you see . . . but emotions were so strong. . . . I was really confused . . . at the same time everything there was so familiar and known in one way, but in another one everything was new and strange . . . but I can tell you . . . the smell of Dalmatia, karst, rocks, Adriatic sea . . . that smell was somehow already part of my life. (Interview with Matija Henderson, Kaitaia, 1999)

So, Marica's "imaginary homeland", her memory of inhabiting the Dalmatian place, became her daughter Matija's memory. The past, the present and the future—"the three moments of time which our ideation involves"—intermingled together, in constant dialectical interplay of things imagined and desired, remembered and retold, things that form the "multi-placedness" of home. Yet this "multi-placedness" of home in the imagination of migrants does not mean that they do not feel anchored in the place of settlement (Brah 1996: 194). Of course they do, but this anchoring is like "daydreaming"—it establishes itself as a continuous search for full identity, playing with things "lost and sacrificed", and things "lived and gained".

As my informant Marica put it:

> All my life I was dreaming about Podgora, its sounds and smells, its goats and donkeys, its people . . . my people . . . its Sunday market in front of the church, its *poklade* (carnival), the sound of church's bell, the Adriatic . . . all my life . . . it was a daydreaming and nightdreaming . . . yeah . . . and in 1982 my daughter Matija took me there. That was my first trip home since coming to New Zealand in 1935. We visited my family. What I saw there is a good life. Everything is different now, you know. They have nice houses there . . . and they don't need to work very hard. My village Gornja Podgora is abandoned now. They moved to live by the sea. The mountain is still there . . . and my mother's house is there . . . yeah . . . you know it was there in that house that I realized that home is here. I was happy to see my family there, but my life is here, in Kaitaia . . . with my children. (Interview with Marica Milich, Kaitaia, 1999)

As Brah argues, "home is a mythic place of desire . . . it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of origin" (Brah 1996: 172). This mythic place was once "lived experience", the locality which defined remembering, feelings, smelling, seeing and so on. In Ahmed's words, locality and subject inhabit each other and the question of migration is not only about the re-location of cultural baggage, but also about how "bodies re-inhabit space" and how "spaces re-inhabit bodies" (Ahmed 2000: 90). Marica returned to her place of origin, but what was missing was exactly her feeling of being at home. All her life in New Zealand was affected by this mythic space, a space which suddenly failed to make sense of belonging which resulted in the subversion of the unfamiliar New Zealand space into the familiar one—a new home.

> It is impossible to return to a place that was lived as home, precisely because the home is not exterior but interior to embodied subjects. . . . The experience of leaving home in migration is hence always about the failure of memory to make sense of the place one comes to inhabit, a failure that is experienced in the discomfort of inhabiting a migrant body, a body that feels out of place. The process of returning home is likewise about the failures of memory, of not being inhabited in the same way by that which appears as familiar. (Ahmed 2000: 91)

But what is it that appears "familiar" for Croatian woman—the smell of Dalmatia (constantly missing in New Zealand) or "the smell" of a better future, a lifetime invested for children and grandchildren?

Stories told by the first generation of Croatian women in New Zealand are constantly enveloped in narratives of sacrifice—sacrifice lived in the past and present for the imagined future of their children and grandchildren.

> It was a hard life struggling to build [our place here] a business, but we enjoyed what we were doing. The greatest thing was our desire to build a better future for our children. My wish is that you grandchildren create same opportunities for your own children and, if you follow in the footsteps of your *Dida* and *Baba*, I am sure you will not go wrong. (Nobilo 1987: 80)

Again, what we have here is double gaze, the past and the future constantly intermingled in the present—Zuva's wish to transmit to their children and grandchildren this founding value of sacrifice, justified with desire for a better future for their children, which in turn expects the children and grandchildren to sacrifice for their children, and of course their parents and grandparents. There is a paradox here. Even though the sacrifice is seen as some kind of investment for a "better future", it becomes a site of memory that needs to be remembered by children. Those memories of sacrifice, as well as memories of homeland, are not constant and unchangeable, they are constantly revised and transformed.

As we have seen, even though the first generation of Croatian women in New Zealand, through their memories, sometimes enfold a surrealistic panoramic view of "imaginary homelands" filled with the smell of pine trees, dry pine needles, the hot rays of the sun, they remember the hard stony surface of the Dalmatian coast and cooling dark in the stone house, everything different from mild, humid, constantly windy New Zealand air, or cold Pacific waves, yet they never come to the "real thing". It is like Zuva's description of her proxy-bride wedding. In other words, when migrants' memory fades into the text, is transmitted to the second or third generation, it becomes a cliché that tries to convey some unique experience of home. Perhaps because of that we have a constant flowering of clichés and stereotypes in migrant narratives, or perhaps because of the suffocated memories.

However, because of the impossibility of the "real thing", the impossibility of a real wedding, a proxy bride experience illustrates inaccessible *jouissance*, so obvious in any immigrant narrative, in Croatian women's narratives. Homeland memories, in the same way as the two future gazes inscribed in the photo, lead us to a strange topography in any immigrant narrative. An unusual temporal dimension of daydreaming described by Freud (1953: 147) fits Croatian women's narratives, or any immigrant narrative. Freud described a time paradox of daydreaming where past, present and future are strung together on the thread of the wish that runs through them. Croatian women's experiences of daydreaming shape this topology. Very often, through their memory, they are transported to a childhood embedded within an idyllic pastoral scene full of pleasant Mediterranean smells, something opposed to the "harsh" (another ideologically charged word) environment; so this memory soothes the plight of the present—the bleak gumfield ("nothing but bush and swamp and ti-tree") loneliness, "not another woman near", and so on—and serves as their wish for a better life that is going to be fulfilled in the future. Hence the ideology of sacrifice—Croatian women transpose their wish to the future through their children, or even, like Zuva, to their grandchildren. This sacrifice becomes a site of memory. Let me end with a quote from Amelia Batistich's short story that I think nicely illustrates the topology of daydreaming in the immigrant experience, as in the experience of Dalmatian women:

> I like Mama's stories about Dalmatia. It is such a lovely place there. You have lots and lots of grapes and the sun shines a lot. . . . Sometimes I wish Mama had stayed in Dalmatia. Then we could live in the story too. (Batistich 1980: 8)

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Notes

1. Kauri gum is the fossilized resin of the massive kauri trees that once formed vast forests over the northern half of the North Island of New Zealand. By the 1840s, it was known that kauri gum could be used for oil varnishes and a kind of "gum-rush" started in Northland. Gumfields attracted people from all around the world.
2. In this article, I mostly concentrate on emigration from Dalmatia that occurred between 1880 and 1950. Because the topic is broad, the depth of coverage inevitably varies. Further research is necessary to provide coverage of emigration that occurred from Socialist Federate Republic of Yugoslavia and Republic of Croatia.
3. *New Zealand Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives* H–12, p. 48.
4. *New Zealand Observer*, 13 May 1893, p. 2.

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