

## **WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THE DISSOLUTION OF ZADRUGA IN THE 19TH CENTURY SLAVONIA**

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*Following in the path of M. Gavazzi's interest in the South Slavic and Balkan zadruga families, the author focusses her discussion on the role of women's entrepreneurship in the process of zadruga dissolution. This women's role is inferred from demographic sources and from selected ethnographic accounts from 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Women's individual property within Slavonian zadruga, and the manner in which it was managed, is contrasted with brotherly loyalty in managing the zadruga common patrimony. This micro-level, family process is related to several macro-level social processes: the 18th century colonization of Slavonia, a demographic explosion and subsequent efforts to limit it, and the development of peripheral agricultural markets in the 19th century. The author concludes that "women really did pull zadruga apart", but in a sense much different from the interpretations of early ethnographies.*

### **Following in Milovan Gavazzi's path**

I would first like to greet the participants of this symposium and say how much I regret not being able to attend in person at this time. By sending this small paper I would like to pay due respect to our foremost teacher and ethnologist, professor Milovan Gavazzi. He left the deepest trace in the formation period of ethnology in Croatia, and I feel privileged that I had a chance to experience some of his spirit and leadership during my undergraduate studies at this university. Diligent, tolerant and endlessly curious about the world around him, professor Gavazzi was for me an early model of dedicated scholar.

The title of this paper is rather broad<sup>1</sup>. I will narrow it down to discussing aspects of new ownership relations within Slavonian family, and particularly to the role of women's entrepreneurship in developing post-1848 culture and economy. A curious aspect of Slavonian culture, in view of its generally patriarchal surroundings, is a relaxed - even lax - nature of relations among women and man, seeking of pleasures, a restriction of the number of children, and an effort to maintain a desired level of

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was read at the annual conference of the American Association for the Advancement of the Slavic Studies, Phoenix, AZ, 1992.

affluence. I will try to explain the nature of this 19th century culture by two main factors: the recent history of Slavonia as an area of new colonization, marked by openness and a pioneering spirit; and the fact that, along with adjacent Danubian lands, its 19th century peasant economy was drawn into peripheral agricultural markets that fed the Western European capitalist core. Among the 19th century Croatian regions, it was only the wheat producing north-east that participated intensively in these new developments, thus distinguishing itself from still mostly subsistence-based, patriarchal cultures of South-east Europe.

One of Professor Gavazzi's many interests and projects was the south Slavic and Balkan extended family - the *zadruga*. He started the project of collecting information on *zadruga* at the Department of Ethnology of the University of Zagreb, and edited first volume of the published material.<sup>2</sup> Particularly interested in various forms of *zadruga*, its distribution and possible origins, Gavazzi also devoted some writing to the discussion of its inevitable dissolution in the 20th century. He noted different forms in which collective and individual ownership coexisted in *zadruga*. A great diversity of *zadruga* forms in its final phase, concluded Gavazzi, was a "peak before disintegration which follows", a disintegration which started in the western and northern, less conservative south Slavic regions after mid - 19th century (Gavazzi 1978/1964: 88). More generally, he also pointed to the connection between the feudal order, special military administration and the ecological context of subsistence economy on one hand, and the *zadruga* form of family on the other. No doubt, the *zadruga* type of family was favorable to, and strengthened by, feudal social system, including its military bureaucratic variant (Gavazzi 1978/1964:90).

Following in Milovan Gavazzi's path, I will look into some aspects of the *zadruga* life in its final, post-feudal phase. But my topic is more specific in focus: the role of Slavonian women in this disintegration of *zadruga*. Precisely because they were excluded from ownership in the feudal *zadruga* patrimony, and because they were less bound by the obligation of brotherly loyalty and solidarity, women could freely and creatively embrace new economic opportunities when they presented themselves. In older, early 20th century ethnographies, we often encounter statements that "women's quarrels pulled *zadruga* apart." Yes, in a broad sense, such statements are correct. By the mid 19th century, as the centuries old feudal patriarchal order collapsed, women proved to have been active bearers of new, emerging social relations. Contrary to stereotypical depictions, they were not conservative guardians of traditional, patriarchal domestic hearths.

### **Structure and demography of Slavonian family**

After the Karlovci treaty with the Ottomans of 1699, Slavonia opened for colonization and planned development. The latter included the establishment by the Austrians of a Military Border in 1702, as well as large scale migrations of people from

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<sup>2</sup> *Seljačke obiteljske zadruge*, edited by M. Gavazzi, Etnološki zavod Filozofskog fakulteta, Zagreb 1960.

the north, south and west into Slavonia. Due both to natural increase and immigration, the growth of Slavonian population was phenomenal: from an estimated population of 64500 in the year 1698 (Gelo and Krivošić, 1990:17), it increased to 265641 in 1785, and to 332478 by year 1847 (Kessler 1981:121).<sup>3</sup> Where deserted homesteads and hamlets once stood for decades, new households sprang, all of them neatly recorded in newly introduced local tax records and censuses.

The sheer growth of the population would have caused significant cultural changes. But they were also born by the migratory processes that took place. Many last names in the censuses reveal an influx of newcomers from Bosnia; others came from the region of Križevci and Đurđevac military regiment in the northwest, many of Orthodox faith; still others were German and Czech speaking populations, Catholic as well as Calvinist. And even older populations, "the natives", moved to new homesteads or into few bulging, old towns. Thus the repertory of last names in a census is sometimes significantly altered in a very short time. The town of Đakovo, for example, had 72 last names in 1702. Eighteen years later, only 12 of the "old" family names remained, while 27 new ones appear (Gelo and Krivošić 1990:13). The new settlers encountered abundant, fertile land, but almost everything else had to be rebuilt in Slavonia. Many "native" families were left without able-bodied men after the bloody liberation wars, and the role of women in maintaining family economy must have been unusually prominent in comparison to other regions of Croatia. For example, in the census of "household heads" of 1698, even 30% of household heads in the city of Požega were widows (*viduae possessionatae* - Gelo and Krivošić, 15).

Perhaps surprising is the fact that the average size of the 18th century Slavonian family was relatively small: between 7 and 8 members (cf. Gelo and Krivošić, 1990; Čapo 1991; Hammel 1992). Although all of the household censuses include the category of "married brothers and their sons", which indicates a *zadruga* family structure, average family size was generally far below our usual visions of what *zadruga* should look like. But more than the actual number of members, it is the fact of a common ownership, production and consumption that characterizes a *zadruga*, a specific form of family economy. In the Slavonian Military Border area, larger *zadruga* families developed and remained longer, due to specific regulations there. In the civil Slavonia, differentiation of families according to size and wealth became more prominent in the 19th century - in Gavazzi's words, this was "the peak before disintegration" (1978:88; cf. Čapo 1991:336-337). The growth in size, recorded by 19th century observers, was most probably a strategy to keep the family wealth together in the face of rapidly changing economy and society. For large peasant families, having many hands under one roof and restricting personal consumption, ensured a good life for a while.

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<sup>3</sup> While Wolfgang Kessler uses E. Fényes' statistical survey of 1865, Gelo and Krivošić offer their own estimate for the Slavonian population in 1780: 380700 inhabitants. The choice of figure to rely on is not as important in this article as the essential fact of the rapid population growth in Slavonia in the 18thC.

The 19th century civil Slavonia, however, became open to the exploitation of forests and minerals, to planned cultivation of some crops for the European market, and most important of all, started exporting its grain surpluses to the markets of Pest and Vienna. Money entered the peasant family in many ways, and corrupted from within the feudal *zadruga* economy. Wealth acquired new meanings and proportions, which is still documented by lavish gold-embroidered costumes, silks, rich traditional repertoire of daily and festive foods, well built homes and newly expanding baroque Slavonian towns. Thus, the Slavonian family became faced with a new problem: how to manage, retain and avoid scattering the family wealth through children's marriage, dowry, or simply, lack of discipline. One strategy was the already mentioned clustering together in large *zadruga* for a short time. But another strategy developed in Slavonia to manage the newly acquired wealth: reducing the number of children.

Known as the "white plague", the 19th century Slavonia showed a rather early phenomenon of a drastic reduction in the number of children (otherwise typical for industrialized nations). Some anthropologists have hypothesized that the phenomenon can be explained by the colonist nature of the 18th century Slavonian society which had rapidly increased in numbers and then, encountering limits to its growth and wealth, started drastically regulating its numbers. While other areas of Croatia experienced overpopulation and then emigration (cf. Supek and Čapo, 1994), Slavonia had no emigration but introduced "white plague" instead. While elsewhere *zadruga* were falling apart by division and the emigration of males into the white world, Slavonian large families got reduced by the inside factor of women's offspring regulation.

Drastic as it was, the widespread abortion practice in the 19th century Slavonia indicated that women had an unusual authority in determining the family size, which was again connected with their role in the family economy. All patriarchal characteristics did not disappear; in fact, it was often a mother-in-law who dictated a young daughter-in-law how many children she could have. Young women paid a high price for this new practice: doctors' reports mention that if church bells rang after a young women, the only question people asked was "Did she die from TB or abortion?" (Sremec: 1940).

Needless to mention, the Military Border Slavonia practiced just the opposite strategy of forbidding the money economy for as long as possible, and by the same token retaining large families with many able-bodied men well into the second part of the 19th century.

### **Women's entrepreneurship**

The single most important cultural factor for women's eager participation in non-*zadruga* kind of work was the introduction of dowry. Peasant *zadruga* and families in general had hardly known the custom of bestowing an inheritance (in land, cattle or money) to a daughter at the time of marriage. It used to be the custom only among aristocracy and free urban citizens - while peasants legally had nothing to pass on to their children individually. That generally changed by the 19th century in Slavonia,

even before the dissolution of feudalism in 1848. A. M. Reljković does not mention dowry in his critical account of the life in Slavonia in the 18th century (Reljković: 1762). Yet, all ethnographic sources of the 19th century contain a statement that a girl could not find a husband if she did not have a dowry. The practice apparently spread rapidly.

What Reljković does mention (1914: 144-148) is that women bring division to brotherly *zadruga* because they sell food outside of the house, as well as flax and silk, or they process silk at home and sell, or keep cattle and rent it out to others for draft work, keeping the money to themselves. Golden ducats are mentioned as the desired goal of many women, but also as a sort of a bank, because the gold could be sold and bought again, depending on changing circumstances.

The 19th and 20th century sources are much richer in information on what women do to complement the *zadruga* economy. They would, for one thing, take eggs from the *zadruga* hens, sell them at a marketplace, and buy their daughters jewelry, or silk and thread for weaving (Lukić 1924: 283-285; cf. Petrović 1991:194); surplus vegetables from the *zadruga* gardens were also sold (Lovretić 1879; Petrović, 1991). Plots for textile crops and the tools for processing them were women's private domain - so if they made more than necessary for their family members, the surplus again was sold and the women kept the money.

But women did more than stealing from the *zadruga* commons and converting into their private chests. When dowry became a custom, there were numerous arrangements as to how this separate, private property should be managed. They could rent out the *osebac* ("separate property") and keep the proceeds in money (Lukić 1924:106); it could be rented out "in half" to sharecroppers (Španiček 1992:66); dowry cattle could be kept in *zadruga* and fed with other cattle in it (Palošija 1992:58); pigs were raised by women, sold and golden ducats bought to be worn or used to buy pigs for new raise-and-sell cycle (Sremec 1940:26) etc. What a woman would accumulate, she would endeavor to pass down to her daughter at marriage, enhancing her chances to look for a better-off husband.

While most 19th century accounts of Slavonia talk about "separate property", that is, individual women's property within *zadruga*, some emphasize that the members of large, extended families prohibited individual property, thus struggling to keep the *zadruga* integrity intact. Typically, it was a rule that held the longest in the Dinaric zone, but it was followed elsewhere too. Stojanović mentioned that a wife's property was not managed separately in a *zadruga* in Sikirevci, while Palošija offers such information for a *zadruga* near Bjelovar (1992: 58).

Finally, by the second half of the 19th century, many women were not just processing silk, weaving, embroidering, crocheting and sewing for their less skilled village neighbors. Rather, a full-scale cottage industry was set up in many places. Some women specialized in working at home, while others specialized in marketing the products for profit in booming urban centers where folk art became respected and fashionable commodity (Sremec 1940).

Unfortunately, ethnographic accounts give us little information on other forms of women's participation in early post-feudal economy. For example, we do not know much about young women who served in village and urban homes; about those who earned money by daily wage (although we know the practice spread rather early in some Dinaric regions - which must have had some consequences on the zadruga economy); about those who specialized in selling produce in urban marketplaces; about those who went early into some professions (tailors, teachers, nuns...). What was their relation to and influence on their parental or conjugal households, some perhaps still in the zadruga form?

### **Toward a Conclusion**

Let us reiterate the thesis from the beginning of the paper. There is little doubt that the most significant changes in the family structure and ownership happened in the core Slavonian regions (and further into Bačka, Banat, Srijem and Hungary). Ethnographies from this area give much space to clarifying what constituted individual, private property in a zadruga, and what was *kućno*, i.e. common in the large family household. As we go westwards, the distinction is less dwelled upon in various ethnographies, while in the southern, Dinaric regions, the stand towards individual ownership becomes openly prohibitive. To the contrary, a zadruga in Tavankut (Bačka) is reported by Černelić (1992.) as having individual property not only for women, but also for sons, parallel to the existence of common patrimony. This combination obviously could not work for very long. At a macrolevel, Slavonia - a part of the Pannonian plane - was the only South Slavic area in the 19th century which was drawn into specialized agricultural production for western European markets. This situation, along with a political centralization and state intervention into economic development, deeply affected the micro - level of family life.

Returning to the point of cultural norms and values governing family life, Slavonia was a rich, open space of new colonization, with shattered patriarchal traditions and new opportunities opening up for families and women in particular. As such it differed from mountainous regions with mainly subsistence domestic economy and patriarchal culture in place, where changes arrived only in this century - and then often in the form of emigration from the "passive regions".

We have seen that Slavonian women, while still living in the zadruga, expanded and adjusted their traditional areas of activity (poultry raising, vegetable gardening, textile processing...) to benefit from the growing market economy. In this activity they were freer than their husbands or sons since their property was already individual and they owed no "natural" group solidarity. This situation contradicts our usual image of women as more conservative element in the family, the guardians of tradition. Here, in fact, the subjective (insider's) and the objective (analytical, from a distance) views of the women's role in the destruction of the patriarchal zadruga really come together: yes, women did pull the zadruga apart, not simply because they sparked quarrels among brothers, but because they were quick to grasp the new opportunities emerging with the changing nature of economy and society.

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## ŽENSKO PODUZETNIŠTVO I RASPADANJE ZADRUGE U 19. STOLJEĆU U SLAVONIJI

### Sažetak

Slijedeći interes profesora Milovana Gavazzija za južnoslavensku i balkansku zadružnu porodicu, autorica posvećuje svoj prilog jednoj užoj temi: ulozi ženskog individualnog vlasništva i poduzetništva u procesu razgradnje zadruge u Slavoniji. Svoje teze autorica zasniva na podacima iz etnografskih izvora 18-og, 19-og i 20-og stoljeća te iz demografskih izvora. Ženski "osebac" i načini na koje se njime upravljalo, predstavljao je proturječje i opasnost za bratski, zadružni život i gospodarstvo. Autorica interpretira uvođenje ženskog individualnog vlasništva u Slavoniji kao neizbježan proces povezan sa širim procesima kolonizacije, demografskim skokom i svjesnim ograničavanjem potomstva te razvojem tržišne poljoprivrede orijentirane na tržišta Budimpešte i Beča.

Suprotno čestim stereotipnim shvaćanjima seljačka su gospodarstva relativno brzo reagirala na te šire društvene procese. Slavonske žene su naročito brzo i vješto prilagođavale svoje tradicionalne aktivnosti (uzgoj peradi i povrća, obrada tekstila, sitna trgovina) novim, tržišnim uvjetima, neopterećene zadružnom solidarnošću koja je sputavala njihove muževe. Takvom interpretacijom uloge žena u kasnom periodu slavenskog zadružnog života, autorica ispravlja čestu sliku žene kao konzervativne čuvarice tradicija u aktivnu pripadnicu svoga društva i vremena, koja je znala iskoristiti nove uvjete i mogućnosti.