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***YOU'RE AT HOME – YOU'RE NOT HOME.* MIGRANT EXPERIENCE OF RETURNING “HOME”**

While focusing on the specific experience of migration and return, the author deals in her work with narrative and practical ways of establishing, affirming and even denying belonging to a particular physical space. As a supporting analytical construct she chooses the term “home” which, although adjacent in meaning, surpasses the more commonplace concepts implied by the term identity. Thinking about home in light of contemporary approaches to return migrations which emphasize plurality, complexity and ambivalence rather than uniformity of returnees' experiences, the author relies on the ethnography of the particular as almost the only acceptable way of grasping the “reality” of anthropological subjects (determined by the meanings that they themselves attach to their experiences of migration, return and home). In the context of such an approach, home emerges as a multilayered space of commonality defined by place, time, rights, obligations as well as other different criteria.

Key words: home, return, migrations, the ethnography of the particular

I formally met Stjepan and Neda,¹ a middle-aged married couple originally from the Imotski region [*Imotska Krajina*],² at their home in Zagreb in the autumn of 2007, into which they had moved after their return from Germany in 1992. I am

¹ In order to protect the privacy of my interlocutors, I am using imaginary names in this paper. The story I am presenting in this paper stemmed from the research I did when working on my dissertation (Vukušić 2010).

² The Imotski region is located in the inland southern part of the Republic of Croatia, in Dalmatian Zagora. It is an exceptionally emigrational area whose inhabitants, largely because of the impossibility of any notable economic development there (climatic conditions, the shortage of arable land, the surplus of agrarian population) started to look for better living conditions as early as at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, usually in countries overseas; migration in the later period was directed more to the countries of Western Europe and/or to the more fertile regions and larger towns within the borders of their own country (Anić 1989). During the 1960s and 1970s, there was particular intensification of migration towards Germany. An interesting fact is that the Imotski district had the highest rate of external migrants in the entire country in 1971, and that almost 9/10 of the total number of persons who had moved out lived and worked in Germany (Puljiz 1991:95).

not mentioning here the official moment of our first encounter merely as part of the research description of meeting in the field with the researched but, because of the absence of the corresponding assumed traits of communication that are customarily linked with “the first meeting” that characterised our conversation from the moment when I rang the doorbell of their house. Basically, our earlier *acquaintance* was based on the relatively small distance between our family houses, which we had left for different reasons: in my case, to go away to study at the mid-1990s, while they had gone to work temporarily as “guest workers” in Germany at the age of thirty, during the 1970s. The differences in our ages conditioned the differentiation in the degree of our familiarity: although we had probably not met in person before, they *knew* me somewhat more than I knew them, since they were in a position to perceive me as a daughter, grandchild or niece of people with whom they had (once) enjoyed relatively friendly relations. They tried to compensate for the lack of balance in our familiarity by showing me photographs of their daughter’s wedding that were a few years old, introducing a game of sorts into that process (*Do you know who this is?*) in which I was to recognise the faces on the photographs, and then they would inform me of some of the details from those people’s lives. Initially, I did not understand the point of the “game”, but as our conversation advanced, that is, as I gradually learnt more details about their lives, I became more aware that their attitude towards me could also be seen as part of their “Imotski folk in Zagreb” identity and/or a way of belonging to the region that they had left in migrating to Germany.³

If I say that the region of Imotski, Stuttgart and Zagreb are the three exceptionally important points in the course of life of this couple, will my statement seem somewhat anachronistic? Will it create the impression of rejecting the relative nature of contemporary viewpoints engendered by postmodernism which, among other, also criticise the shortcomings of traditional anthropological premises that locate the individual in the geographically and socio-culturally defined space of a particular community’s extensiveness? Here however, the perception of the mentioned spaces’ importance does not rest of the research assumption on the existence of some predetermined group of cultural (and other) features that would be inherent to those spaces so that, for example, they would serve as an arena for consideration of the repercussions of the individual’s confrontation with a space (culture) that would be more or less foreign to him/her. To the contrary, those spaces function here as points in which the subjects of narration themselves inscribe their lives or, more precisely, the different temporal segments of their lives;

³ I shall return later in the text to that notion and explain it.

segments whose “qualification” – as will soon be seen from their life stories – can be best understood as the consequences of networking of a series of subjective and objective factors that were imprinted on their lives, stamping them in a more or less pronounced way, at various spatial and temporal intersections. We can, of course, also recognise in those factors the reflection of various currents of the cultural traditions that they perceived, evaluated, accepted and/or rejected along their life's journey – marked considerably by migrations. In that light, the spatial and temporal framing of life seems to be an appropriate manner to systematise experience, since it helps individuals in ensuring the coherent nature of their own lives and/or in the conception of social and cultural order and in understanding themselves within that order (Fog-Olwig 2002:128).⁴ In other words, this is a matter of the way of expressing identity through which the constant active process of individual confrontation and coordination with the perceived socio-cultural values of the environment in which the individual finds himself/herself and in which his/her own, personal needs and desires are reflected (Čapo Žmegač 2002:18-20). It is understandable that the clash between those two worlds is more pronounced the further the individual is away from the environment that fulfils him/her intellectually or emotionally, that is, the environment which, in the broad spectrum of other diverse possibilities, he/she conceives as the place that is his/her own, based on some internal principle of established belonging.

Despite the fact that belonging, too, can have a whole series of meanings – on the individual or collective and/or contextual level at which it is considered or invoked – I shall limit myself in this paper to concentration on the assumed importance of the concrete physical space of origin in the context of the experience of migration and return, movements that undoubtedly intensify the specific type of negotiation of the individual with him/herself and with the environment in which he/she is located. In the light of that, relying on the concrete life story, I shall examine the return from immigration as a way of implementing belonging to the space of origin, and as a realisation of the immigrant aspiration to and yearning for home.

Home and return

The question of home – allied, of course, with identity and a sense of belonging as its potential synonyms – is one of the possible meeting points of diverse migrational paradigms. In the most simple terms, it could be approached in the framework of the assimilation paradigm by means of research into the way (or the

⁴ It is important to mention here that the manner of expressing that coherence is also conditioned by the spatial, temporal and relational circumstances in which the individuals find themselves at the moment of narration (Somers 1994).

simulation) of immigrant acclimatisation to a new environment that is unknown to them; it could function in the transnational paradigm as one of the concepts suitable for encompassing, understanding and connecting parts of practice in which individuals participate by surmounting the borders of physical space. Despite the fact that in such conceptualisations of home, too – shown here in a fairly generalised and “representative” manner – the space of origin is a more or less latent sub-text, the semantic over-lapping of that space with home in certain contemporary studies that deal with returnee migration is evident in the selection of the term *homecoming* as one of the paradigmatic concepts which is, among other, also a means of differentiation from other approaches to migrations, and from that part of them that deals precisely with return (Stefansson and Markowitz 2004).⁵ In connection with the foregoing, its innovativeness is based on the pro-active approach to return migration by which – instead of emphasising the problems and the human disappointments that emerge from nostalgic yearnings for return to the time left behind by immigration, as an assumed feature of earlier approaches to return – the complexity⁶ and ambivalence of that act is emphasised (Stefansson 2004), that is, is conceived as a consequence of Man's efforts to construct for himself a better and more satisfying future (Hammond 2004). Consequently, if the projection of the sought-after future implies being at a particular location, is it not possible to understand that location – as the presumed place of physical and emotional security and pleasure – as being identical to that very home, and that in its most desirable meaning? If we were to pause at this thesis and, in keeping with it, accept the thought that the implementation of the planned returned from immigration is an expected, natural and completely problem-free act that would anchor the individual (once again) in the place and community of his/her origin, we would be neglecting and underestimating the complexity, experiential ambivalence and individual creativity and inventiveness in imaginings of home and in its assumed realisation by way of return. In other words, by such an act we would be neglecting all those features of life that stem from the interplay of mobility – migration,

⁵ On the one hand, criticism points to the neglect of return in earlier migration paradigms and, in the context of that part of them that was concentrated on that segment of the so-called migrational circle, on the exaggerated emphasis of such research on human disappointment on return, on the other (Stefansson and Markowitz 2004). Referring to such comments, Jasna Čapo Žmegač (2010) presents arguments that show that return was not, after all, completely excluded from earlier paradigms. Moreover, explaining research choices on the basis of their relevance for society and the state in which the researcher is active, Čapo Žmegač shows that the question of return was indeed very much a part of research interest in the countries of emigration, while, logically enough, attention in the countries of immigration was directed more to issues of assimilation, integration, multiculturalism, and the like.

⁶ The plurality of returnee experiences derives, for example, from the remoteness of the states of emigration and immigration, on immigration policies, the social and economic structure, integration measures, and the like, but also on individual motives, return plans, the time of immigration, educational structure, and so on (Čapo Žmegač 2010:26).

but also more generally, as consequences of the impact of the development of diverse types of contemporary technology on our everyday life and the overall accessibility to localities, ideas, objects, and so on – and, as a response to such factors, the human wish for stability (Stefansson 2004). In that interplay – despite the diverse variants in which mobility can be understood, also including its cognitive and/or imaginative aspects – there is a continuous raised awareness and shaping of the human perceptions of self and one's living environment and, as a result of that, of the former, current or some potential new home as a foundation of Man's identification. Such a viewpoint is connected to an extent with those conceptualisations of home that – criticising the “fixed nature” of traditional classifications of identity, while emphasising the importance of movement, or, more precisely, the relation that is established between mobility and perception, mobility and order, and mobility and individuality – comprehend it as a way of searching for identity and/or as an analytical construct by which it is possible to condense, connect and supersede traditional classifications of identity (Rapport and Dawson 1998b). In the light of such conceptions, identifying home with the stable physical space in which the individual lives, leaves and returns to, appears as being anachronic; its stability is annulled by the overall mobility by which space, time and human identities become exceptionally fluid, while the home is shaped in jokes, gestures, the way one wears one's hat, that is in routine practices and social interactions or in movement itself (Rapport and Dawson 1998a:7, 1998b:27). Despite the criticism which, due to the relativisation of the importance of physical space, such a view of home is given in individual studies that deal with home in the context of (return) migration (e.g. Al-Ali and Koser 2002:7; Markowitz 2004; Steffanson 2004), it is important to mention that the “pluri-local” definition of home offered by Rapport and Dawson also leaves space for those of its views which, from the perspective of return migrations, concentrate dominantly on the concrete physical space, that is, on the place of the migrant's origin. However, it is important to emphasise that the place of origin as an inspiring framework for immigratory life (Markowitz 2004), as the home one yearns for, does not stem from the incarceration of the individual in a physical space, but rather that the semantic “contours” are shaped for him primarily in the consequential nature of the evidently physical but also, inevitably to a certain extent, the social and cultural and/or cognitive relocation.⁷ The extent to which the idea of the place of origin as home will be given precedence over or be subordinate to other, everyday practical factors or understanding of that concept oriented to specific objectives, whether either of them will be of permanent or of merely transitory character, and whether those ideas will be mutually competitive or, for their part, augment each other and be rearranged, depends on the concrete

⁷ A good example confirming the paradox that, in order to comprehend where we belong, or find our home, we need to be relocated from that space (Rapport and Dawson 1998:9) – see hooks 2009.

experience of relocation and/or return.⁸ As a consequence, the ethnography of the particular imposes itself as the only acceptable manner of grasping “reality” through particular meanings that the anthropological subjects themselves attach to their experience of migration and return and/or home (Čapo Žmegač 2007:91). By the use of that strategy, one avoids anthropological generalisations by which human experience is homogenised (Abu Lughod 1991), and, as a result, the negating of a categorisation, of sorts, of people according to one of their common “marks of classification”, in this case migration/return (Fog Olwig 2002:143). In addition, research attention concentrated on the individual experiences of migration and return demonstrates itself to be one of the ways of establishing the thesis of plurality and/or the complexity and ambivalence of returnee experiences that is stressed by the contemporary approaches to returnee migrations.

Further on in this paper, I shall be returning to the story touched on in the Introduction; the story that largely confirms the thesis on return as one more aspect of immigration (Čapo Žmegač 2010), primarily because of the fact that its actors with their return from immigration have not settled in a place that is known to them both intimately and physically, the place of their origin, but in a location that is almost completely unknown to them. In that light, with fulfilment of the wish for return, have they also found the home to which they primarily, intuitively belong? The converseness of acceptable answers to that question – which, despite the fact that the narrators themselves do not use the word home or belonging – is testified to by their narrations, primarily as a consequence of the mixing of physical and symbolic meanings that they, focusing on the individual spatial and temporal segments of their lives, apportion to that concept. To put it differently, home will emerge in their stories as having multiple meanings; as a place in the present, but also in a specific conjunction between the past and the future; as family, house, settlement, region, and state; as a mode of interpersonal understanding; as a place of security and pleasure (Morley 2000); as a place of specific types of exchange between socio-economic and moral rights and obligations (Douglas 1991), while the concrete context of their lives will define the parameters of the outward attitude (inclusion/exclusion) that will generate the relevance of particular ideas of home, and also demonstrate that the individual can have more than one home at the same time (Hammond 2004:51). Finally, the story that follows will also testify to the possibility of the existence of home as some “sacred” place; a place which, on the basis of the features that individuals attach to it, functions as a *perpetuum mobile* of sorts of the sense of their lives.⁹ What is that place, what is its relation towards

⁸ On the search for home that commences with forced relocation of the individual from his/her “home”, see Bagarić 2011.

⁹ It is possible in a certain sense to link that with the division into the everyday home – which makes it easier for the individual to define him/herself in the present, on an everyday basis – and the family home, which gives him/her a sense of his/her own, personal history (Hammond 2004:50).

other, mobile ideas of home (Bagarić 2011), and what are the ways of uniting with it in this concrete case, shall be seen from the narrations that follows.

You're at home, you're not home

Stjepan and Neda were born, grew up and married in a small place in the Imotski region, from which they left together to do temporary work in Germany during the mid-1970s.¹⁰ They say that they intended to remain in that country for two to three years, until they had put aside enough money to solve basic existential issues (housing), but instead they spent their entire working lives there. Their planned short-term stay abroad – otherwise characteristic to the majority of “guest worker” families (Čapo Žmegač 2005:258) – did not eventuate, and they returned to Croatia together with their sons only in 1992. Although their choice of the time to return to Croatia was extremely unfavourable in the socio-political sense (*the worst possible moment, during the time of the war*), it figured in their private life almost as a juncture that could not be missed. From the priority given to the importance of the stage in so-called individual or family life (Hareven according to Čapo Žmegač 2007:104) over the historical, helps one to understand the seriousness of the decision of this married couple regarding their imminent return to Croatia, in keeping with which they also organised certain aspects of their lives in immigration.

Namely, Stjepan and Neda capitalised on their several first years of “hard physical work” in Germany with the purchase of a restaurant, which brought in satisfactory income and, in comparison to previous years, a more peaceful and pleasant life. However, when their oldest child, their daughter, was at the age to start school, they decided to return her to Croatia to be educated there. She lived with relatives in Split, while she saw her parents and her brothers, who continued to live in Germany, several times a year. Neda spoke through her tears about how difficult it had been for them to be separated from their daughter, when recounting her memories of a particular family gathering:

One Christmas, Josipa [her daughter] came to us by plane. Our middle son (...) had forgotten from summer what his sister looked like. And he said to me: “Mama, who is this little boy?”

However, they persevered with their lives apart because it was that very daughter who was a guarantee of sorts of their return to Croatia:

But if she had stayed on in Germany, she would have finished school there, and university, she would have found a job and founded a family... and would never have returned. (Stjepan)

¹⁰ Nenad Popović (2008) has made some interesting observations about the absurdity of calling such work “temporary”.

So the time of return was also connected with her:

Josipa spent her primary school years in Split, we paid others so that things would be good for her. She finished secondary school and, after that, she had to decide where she would go. Then my wife said that Josipa had to study in Zagreb, and then all of us would go. (Stjepan)

That the idea of returning to Croatia – despite the fact that they lived relatively well in Germany – was constantly present as part of their life plan is demonstrated by their statements on the way in which they raised their sons.

You can't return your child to Croatia unless you have raised him to be Croatian (...) Unless you have raised him to be Croatian in Germany, so that he knows his mother tongue, he cannot go back to Croatia, and if it happens it will happen on short notice. (Stjepan)

Marjan [one of the sons] didn't know a word of German right up until he started kindergarten. (...) I never sent the children to the German church that was below our window. We managed somehow and sent them to the Croatian [church], 2 km away. As for me, may God forgive me, I rarely went to church up there [in Germany], I didn't have the time to go to our church, and I couldn't go to the German one in front of my nose, it didn't draw me to it, to me it was, God forgive me, as if it wasn't a church. That's why I wanted the children to socialise with our people. (Neda)

Despite the fact that they had bought a house in Split in the meantime, where they used to stay during their annual vacations, Zagreb was the city in which they had decided to live in permanently with their children on their return to Croatia. The crucial role in their choice of Zagreb as the city in which they would settle – and not Split or their birthplace – was undoubtedly its state of development, that is, the assumed accessibility of high-quality content and services (schools, the university) offered by that city, which was the most necessary in that phase of their lives (cf. Čapo Žmegač 2007:100).

Apart from their daughter's wish to study in Zagreb, the choice of that city was also motivated, at least equally, by concern for their sons:

We didn't want to return down there [to Split] because the children down there are crafty, they have too much money. And we didn't want to confine our children to the house, they need company. I was afraid that I would not be able to influence them, that their peers would crush them... (Neda)

Consequently, despite the domination of objective parameters in the choice of the place of return, it will be obvious in the continuation of their narrations that, at least partly, their notion of the mentality characteristics of the three environments did have some influence on their final choice. In that light, the interweaving of the objective and subjective features of the three potential destinations of return, Zagreb shows itself to have been some sort of “middle-of-the-road solution” of sorts.

They experienced Zagreb as a safer and healthier place in which to raise their sons, who were of pre-school and primary school age at the time of the family's return to Croatia. Their perception of (in)security, which they did not explain in any detail, can be linked at least partly to the occasionally somewhat stereotyped images of the Croatian north and south, or of Zagreb and of Split. Along with the latter part of that “opposing” pair made up of those two regions or cities, they are also connected by the notion of liberated, open people – whose evaluation is subject to the characteristics of situations in which they are used, and move in a broad span between the two extreme poles – sometimes encroaching upon the privacy of others in their uninhibited way. In addition, if we pause for a moment in the world of prejudice, both of those environments possess models according to which an internal *cultural* distinction is made between the inhabitants within the framework of region, which is often founded on the place of origin and/or living. Looked at from that aspect, there is cultural branding in Dalmatia, by which individual human behaviour in particular situations is carried out on the basis of belonging to the island or coastal region and/or its hinterland.¹¹ Both Stjepan and Neda have experienced such stereotyping:

What is it that they call us down there? Hmm... *Vlaji!* [Vlachs or Wallachians]
There is one [woman] down there beside our house... They had land but they sold it all, and everything that they sold *went through their stomachs*. And now they have nothing for their children. And they gossip about us that we have gotten too big for our boots when we have such a big house; that *all of us* down there have big houses. And who's to blame that she sold [everything]. *We earned* everything that we own. (Neda)¹²

It is important once again to observe their resistance towards being evaluated only on the basis of their origins – (*all of us, Vlaji*) instead of by the hard work that they have invested (*We (Stjepan and Neda!) earned everything that we own*) – in the context of their care for the future of their children. Therefore, when this married couple says unanimously: “The mentality of people here in Zagreb is the same as in Germany”, they are emitting two semantically and value-based messages that are almost diametrically opposite to one another. Their sons are also aware of these “facts” and, as Stjepan and Neda say, they, too, often stress this as the main reason for the ease with which they fitted in at school and in society. On the other hand, to Stjepan and to Neda, that similar mentality in Zagreb and in Germany, about which more will be said later, prolonged the experience of being different.

¹¹ That does not mean, of course, that the same models do not function also at the national level. To the contrary, at that degree, too, there are identifiable and clearly separable stereotypes by which the mentality of the geographical region of Dalmatia is divided into the Dinaric (which encompasses a region broader than only the Dalmatian hinterland) and that of the coastal or Littoral region and/or the islands.

¹² The brackets and italics were added subsequently.

That identification, based on the tempo of life dictated by a big city and the size of the population, also relates to the frequency and character of social contacts. From such a viewpoint, (larger) cities are credited with a higher degree of possible anonymity, whose importance to Stjepan and Neda can be read off indirectly from the quotation about the “problem” with their neighbour in (the smaller city of) Split. From their perspective, Zagreb shows itself to be a city in which their children can grow up as individuals and be free from cultural branding based on the origins (of their parents). It is also a city in which they could fulfil one of the more important plans they had for their children – providing them with a good education.

I brought the children back here, to Zagreb, they have accepted Croatia, Zagreb and school well, completed university studies, and this one, the youngest, will too. I have all the capital of the world, I have guided my children, and that was what I wanted. My objective was always to guide my children [in the right direction]. My three [university] degrees, that is my capital! Because I would never permit it that my child goes to dig in Germany the way I had to. (Stjepan)

Nonetheless, Stjepan and Neda, despite the fact that Zagreb enabled the implementation of their most important plans in life – return to Croatia, uniting the entire family, and university education for the children – have still re-examined from time to time their decision to settle in Zagreb:

Now I am pleased, I am pleased because... I always thought about them [the sons]... I was sorry to leave Germany, but I am pleased only because they are satisfied, when I can see that they are not suffering, that they have never said to me “why did we come back?”, that they are sorry that they left Germany... There, that is what keeps me going. (Neda)

Thus, it is evident that when Stjepan and Neda were deciding on the course of their family's life, they directed their attention primarily to the needs of their children. They are quite satisfied today, convinced that they did the right thing for their children, and find confirmation of that in the fact that their older son rejected an offer to work in Germany or Austria, because he wanted to live and work in Zagreb. Despite the fact that their son's reasons for such a decision could have been prompted by certain practical considerations,¹³ Stjepan and Neda, who obviously continue from time to time to re-examine their decision on return and their choice of Zagreb as the place of family unification, are helped by this interpretation in validation of the soundness of their own decisions in life. Nevertheless, that Zagreb in relation to Split – in which they used to spend their vacations – or the Imotski region – as

¹³ For example, the volume of work and other characteristics of the job, love, and the like. Despite the fact that it would be useful to know the viewpoint of the children in regard to this and other parts that follow – it was not possible for me to talk to them – the parents' “representation” and interpretation of the childrens' attitudes was significant because it was possible to understand it, as mentioned above, as a way of confirming the fittingness of their decisions in life.

the place of origin of their parents – is the city that the sons experience “as their own”, is understandable since that is where they grew up. :

Nothing attracts them down there (...) They say, Mama, you like it down there, you like Dalmatia and all that, it means nothing to us, we were born in Germany, but we grew up here in Zagreb... (Neda)

The difference between the sons, the daughter, and the parents in relation to Zagreb, Split, and the village of the parents' origin in the Imotski region can thus be interpreted when linked with their age when they came to Zagreb, being essentially conditioned here by the early life experiences of each member of that family. It can be seen in the above quotation that, in the words of the mother, the sons' feeling of (non) attachment to a specific place is connected with the place of their *growing up*. By the same “formula”, that is, the importance of the life phase of growing up in the attitude of the individual towards a particular place, and his/her potential sense of belonging to a certain place (Gulin Zrnić 2009:150-157) can be seen and understood, because the spaces to which the parents relate differ from those of the children. So, in contrast to her brothers who, in the words of the mother, experience Zagreb as their city in the full sense of the word:

Josipa is crazy about Split. She says she would go back down there tomorrow if she could find a job. I always say to her ‘what do you lack here?’ but she insists... (Neda)

One can understand Josipa's love for Split if one recalls that, as a child separated from her family throughout her primary and secondary schooling, she lived with relatives in Split.

Finally, with his comment: “We are born on that unhappy stony [ground] without borders, [but there's no way] a man could put into words his love for that stone...” Stjepan almost confirms the naturalised link of a human being with the place of his/her birth, which was also to be confirmed later by Neda.

Apart from love for their birthplace, Stjepan and Neda also causally connect their life's achievement – the “guidance” of their children – with the area from which they originated.

There's also something here in the genes. (...) That's why our people have been successful. Because they were naturally gifted, they were born with [university] degrees. Take my mother, for example, she did not know how to read or write. She sold wine and drinks, and then she would spread out the bank notes in the evening... [by appearance, and colour] and she knew how to count the money exactly. That's the gift of the people from our parts... God gave to us... in created us there where there is nothing anywhere. He gave us that stone, and from that stone we created... everything! (Stjepan)

Although they often returned to *putting children on the right path* in our conversation (education, finding a job and establishing one's own family) as the fundamen-

tal sense of their lives, which had brought them to Zagreb and kept them there, nostalgia for the place in which they grew up threaded from time to time through parts of their narrations.

That blighted place draws you to it. When you see that stone down there...
(Neda)

Thus, no matter the extent to which they have developed an affective link with the new environment, it is obvious that it cannot replace their strong connection with their place of origin (Hammond 2004:47).

They did not return there primarily because of the children, aware of the fact that they would not have been able in that way to assure them the quality of life that they wanted for them:

If I had returned there and taken these two sons, what would I have done for them, destroyed their lives!

However, the nostalgia that Stjepan and Neda feel for the place where they grew up is intensified by the fact that – unlike many other Imotski folk in Zagreb, who plan to return to their native place when they retire – they will never go back to spend their old age there. Since his mother's death almost twenty years ago, no-one has lived in Stjepan's family house. His brothers have moved away and rarely visit the house, no-one enters it, it is not being maintained and it is not suitable for a longer stay. In addition, there is no real desire to settle the property rights connected with the house and the property, which prevents Stjepan from investing in and renovating the house for the family:

I would rather go down there than see God, but it's not settled, nothing can be done... (Stjepan)

Although they are conscious of the situation, they continue to talk – or, more specifically, to dream – about how their life would look if they returned there. They would grow their own fruit and vegetables and have their own grape-vines, Neda also dreams of having a goat *because it would be stupid to live there in the village and not have a goat*, and she would always keep the goat beside her (*wherever I go, it would go, too*)...

Through the images offered by their imaginings about life in their native village, the thought that they expressed to me at the beginning of our conversation becomes clear, when they had spoken of moving to Zagreb: *you're at home, but you're not home* [*jesi kući, nisi kući*]. In this sentence the word *kuća* [home] assumes a twofold meaning, and indicates the homeland and the immediate native place. Returning *home*, to the homeland, meant the fulfilment of the immigral aspirations to this couple, and the family plans closely connected with them. However, that they were still not *home* in the narrower sense can be read off partially from Stjepan's comment above about the identical mentality of Zagreb and Germany.

Moreover, the question of mentality is closely linked with the issue of prejudice, by which it is almost always stamped in some cause-and-effect sequence that is not always clearly distinguishable. The position of the person expressing prejudices emerges as one of the key places in researching stereotypes (Pickering 2001). In that light, it should be noted that Stjepan's identification of the two mentalities, when he speaks of not-being *home*, does not reveal to any extent the components or the points of similarity between those two mentalities. So he does not emphasise any "objective", "external" parameters – if they can be called that in the framework of prejudice – by which the two spaces are similar to one another, but rather perceives their identical nature largely on the basis of his own life experiences – in those two environments.

People from our parts like each other best and value each other best abroad, out in the world (...) We have been abroad, for us Zagreb is also *in foreign parts*, do you understand. But we socialised with people abroad, our people... You go to Stuttgart where we were, and the main meeting-place is the railway station and the church. The church kept us going... If you went to Germany today, there's none of that, but that generation of ours in the 1970s... We knew, on Saturday morning we went to Stuttgart to the station, we knew exactly the place for us to meet. All of us. And we talked there just as though we were at the [the village café], the same thing: [do you know] where they are; how are they; who has a good voice; when are we going home. It's the same thing in Zagreb, too. If I go to the market here [the neighbourhood market] I know exactly where I will find particular people (...) I know all about in which corner any of them will be. (Stjepan)

It is clear from the above quotation that Stjepan draws the parallel between Stuttgart and Zagreb on the basis of his own experience of spending his free time in those two cities. However, it can be assumed that the adjective *our* (*our people*) that he uses in identifying those two experiences is still not semantically identical, or at least not fully, in his Stuttgart and Zagreb everyday life. In keeping with the quoted semantic dichotomy of *home* (*you are at home, not home*), it would seem that the scope of the adjective *our* from the Stuttgart experience is somewhat broader than it is in the Zagreb experience, so that it is once again possible, in accordance with the situational definition of identity (Čapo Žmegač 1997), to connect it with the national (Stuttgart) and/or the local (Zagreb) frameworks.

Although the German (and, in general, migrational) every day use of the adjective *our* could be designated by the degree of inter-human understand and/or (common) linguistic communication, the linguistic sameness as far as Stjepan and Neda are concerned would also have to overlap with national belonging for them to call an interlocutor *ours*. Apart from their being members of the Croatian nation, the people with whom Stjepan and Neda spent their free time also shared many other social characteristics with them. It would seem that perhaps the most important aspect in that regard would be the degree of education, as one of the

most significant parameters in economic migration, by way of which one can understand the motivation to migrate and also the position of the migrants on the social scale within the environment to which they migrate. In the initial years, Stjepan and Neda, similarly to many of their friends at the Stuttgart railway station, did heavy physical work (*I would not permit my child to go to Germany to dig the way I had to*). It seems that their social life was limited to a considerable extent to the railway station and the *Croatian church*. It can be observed as a cross-section of sorts of their internal needs and material possibilities and/or their plans for the future along with the (free) time they had available:

We did not travel around various resorts, nor did we go to the cinema, nor out to dinner, nor did I visit any foreign country... you just worked. If you intend to save!
(Neda)

You left poverty behind, you went to gain something and, what was most important, and to live within [the limits of] however much you had. And also to save. Never with a loan, I never took out a loan in my life. (Stjepan)

Today, Stjepan and Neda live in Zagreb on the pensions they earned abroad. They own a semi-detached house, which Stjepan says are *the most elite houses in the neighbourhood and perhaps in Zagreb*. They are relatively healthy and, since they are not employed, they have quite a lot of free time. They spend most of their time in everyday household preoccupations (cooking, tidying, maintaining the house and carrying out minor repairs). They are oriented towards their immediate family – their sons, who live with them, and their daughter, who has founded her own family and lives nearby. The remainder of their social contacts, excluding those that are necessary and superficial (in public places, in transport, shopping, in the park while they watch over their grandson) are oriented towards people with whom they are connected by their place of origin. They emphasise that they never miss the meetings organised by settlers in Zagreb from the area of their region. They often socialise with members of two families from their area who are settled in the same neighbourhood. In the afternoons, Stjepan goes to visit the nearby Mediterranean bowls court on almost a daily basis, except during the winter months. He says that 99% of the men there are *from Imotski* and that he *feels at home there*. Recounting some of the happenings, that is, part of the conversation they conducted while guests at lunch at the home of one of the families mentioned, with whom they are on friendly terms, Neda says, among other:

(...) we had a wonderful time, we laughed... If you are not feeling too good, you don't have to go to a doctor... [just] that will heal you.

The pleasure that they attach to that and similar socialising with people from *down there* stems from their feeling, as Stjepan says, *that they are home*, and or, from the perception of the freedom of communication and general norms of behaviour that mark such get-togethers. For its part, that freedom is conditioned by concep-

tions of differences in habitual behaviour that characterise and contrast the two environments. Zagreb as a constant of what is, conditionally speaking, an opposing pair, sometimes is in opposition to Dalmatia as a region, and sometimes the Imotski region as one of its parts, in various parts of their narrations.

There is something, you come to church here – and no-one says anything, you go to the doctor, and no-one says anything. People down there speak more, they are more open, and you make friends in a flash... Here, neighbours don't [even] know their neighbours. (Neda)

In addition to the earlier mention of the dichotomy of mentality in Croatia, Neda's statement also seems to invoke the opinion on the city from the first half of the 20th century, when it was described as a place in which there was disintegration of the harmony in inter-human relations that marked the so-called traditional community, and that they were based on interest, fluidity, brevity and were impersonal (Rapport and Overring 2007).

From that aspect, Stjepan and Neda's "non-integration" in the city in which they live could also be regarded as a consequence of the lack of the symbolic capital that that city (neighbourhood) has for them. However, although one gains the impression from particular parts of their narration that the "non-integration" is a result of their conscious decision not to include themselves actively in the life of the neighbourhood in which they live – which would potentially ensure them company that was more diverse in origins – it seems more acceptable to observe that aspect in the context of their overall life experience. Stjepan and Neda settled in Zagreb, a city unknown to them until then, in middle age. It was not possible for them to find there places and people to whom they had been intimately connected in the earlier stage of their lives, and they possessed no "Zagreb memories" by which they would have felt "enrooted" there, in this or that manner. On the other hand, although they could have taken employment, they have lived in the city from the beginning on their savings and pensions from Germany. Hence, they were deprived of the various forms of social contact enjoyed by employed persons,¹⁴ which can eventually grow into closer, friendly relations. Caring for their minor children occupied them completely and, along with their socialising with families with which they were connected by place of origin, their social needs were fully met. Today, too, when their children are fully grown, almost the same frameworks of social life mark this married couple. They emphasise that they have contacts from time to time with people from other Zagreb neighbourhoods, whom they largely meet at annual get-togethers with settlers in Zagreb from their original region.

¹⁴ Apart from those that are necessary and relate to communications in the workplace, this role can also bring certain contacts that are not connected with the job itself. For example, people can start to recognise each other and then become close eventually, realising that they use the same public transport route at the same time, and the like.

People from our parts like each other best and value each other best when they are abroad, [out] in the world. People from our parts are jealous of each other only in the place in which they were born. They love each other best abroad. (Stjepan)

With this married couple, their social concentration of people from the (broad) region of their origins, as can be read off from the above quotation, stems from their conception of behavioural characteristics and/on inter-human respect and solidarity within the given group (cf. Sarup 1994:99). More intensive socialising with people of specific origins is not a result of “forced” division and limitation of social contacts by Stjepan and Neda.

It is conditioned to a large extent by the social structure of the Zagreb neighbourhood in which they settled in the early 1990s. Compared with the Saturday outings to the railway station in Stuttgart so as to find *their [own] person*, the “search” in Zagreb for such a person often comprehended a mere visit to the local market or attendance at Sunday mass. This married couples’ orientation towards such people – remembering the statement *you're at home, you're not home* – certainly also served as one of the ways of ensuring coherence – undoubtedly disrupted by arrival in an unfamiliar environment – in their lives. It could be said that the *home* to which Stjepan and Neda will never return is symbolically constructed by their concentrating attention primarily on their own family, and then on people who, by their social characteristics, would be potential and desirable neighbours to its, conditionally speaking, physical counterpart. From that perspective is also possible to clarify the situation with the photographs of “familiar faces” that they offered me: that was a way of confirming our sameness based on common acquaintance with people with whom past experience connects us in qualitatively different ways. In that regard I shall mention how Stjepan and Neda – as far as the manner of actualisation of social contacts is concerned – set themselves and the company they seek apart from the environment in which they live, by a challenge of sorts to some of the “city” habits of behaviour, with the objective of emphasising closeness and constant openness to socialising with people from their place of origin:

Just come along, come to [see] us sometimes with your family. You can always come, nobody has to make an appointment at our place, just come in through the courtyard. We here never make an appointment ourselves, we just come and if anyone is at home, fine, if not, no harm done. (Neda)

It can be said about Neda and Stjepan that they are people who are satisfied with the outcomes of their own decisions in life, and also with their choice of Zagreb as the place in which they live. The house at the Zagreb address really is home to this married couple, because that is where their family is. However, when Stjepan thinks about the future, he says:

We are here, the entire family. It's normal that each person should also think about his grave. I sometimes fool around about how the graveyard here is spreading... But no, I would never buy a grave here, only in [his place of birth], only there... (Stjepan)

It becomes clear that the perception of home as a place of togetherness with the family changes with respect to the state of personal vitality. While their Zagreb home – because of the family – is the only place where Stjepan and Neda would really want to live, they would definitely not want to be buried in Zagreb. Therefore, it can be concluded that their perception of home is linked to the constantly active process of confirming their sense of belonging to their own immediate family, among other, and also by means of their daily joint negotiations, conferring and decision-making on the individual problems of each of its members (cf. Douglas 1991).

However, the choice of the place in which someone will be buried is a decision which, at least while they are alive, is usually left to the individuals themselves, and an effort is made after death to respect such decisions. When, as in the case of this couple, the family's place of domicile and their home do not coincide with the desired "place of eternal rest", death shows itself to be the only way to return to one's own roots.

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JESI KUĆI – NISI KUĆI. MIGRANTSKO ISKUSTVO POVRATKA "DOMU"

SAŽETAK

Usredotočujući se na konkretno iskustvo migracije i povratka, autorica se bavi narativnim i praktičnim načinima uspostavljanja, potvrđivanja, pa i opovrgavanja pripadnosti određenom fizičkomu prostoru. Kao nosivi analitički konstrukt pritom je odabrala pojam doma, kojim se, među ostalim, nadilaze tradicionalne koncepcije njemu značenjski bliskoga pojma identiteta. Promišljajući ideju doma u svjetlu suvremenih pristupa povratnim migracijama koji naglasak stavljaju na pluralnost, kompleksnost i ambivalentnosti, a ne na uniformnost povratničkih iskustava, autorici se etnografija pojedinačnoga nametnula gotovo jedinim prihvatljivim načinom dohvaćanja "stvarnosti" antropoloških subjekata (određene značenjima koja oni sami pridaju svojem iskustvu migracije, povratka i doma). U kontekstu takva pristupa dom je izniknuo u višeznačju, bivajući i prostorno i vremenski, odnosno po pravima i obvezama ili nekim drugim kriterijima definiran prostor zajedništva.

Ključne riječi: dom, povratak, migracije, etnografija pojedinačnoga