

RURAL WOMEN IN CROATIA-SLAVONIA IN 1900

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I would like to start with a brief word about primary sources on peasant women in Croatia-Slavonia in the years before the First World War.

The publications of the Royal Statistical Office in Zagreb contain data on births, deaths and marriages, religion, language, occupation, literacy, education, size of villages and individual farms, and details on houses, crops and crop yield and farm animals.¹ These dry facts are enriched by contemporary ethnographic material, primarily village studies and folklore collections made for the *Zbornik za narodni život i običaje južnih Slavena* (Journal of Folk Life Customs of the Southern Slavs) which was published by the Yugoslav Academy in Zagreb. Some of these materials were published in full or in part in the Journal, but most are still in the archives of the *Odbor za narodni život i običaje* (ONŽO) of the Croatian Academy.² Each of the village studies was done by a member of the village or larger community and based on *Osnova*³, a long questionnaire drawn up by Ante Radić, then editor of the Journal. Ante Radić also published *Dom* a weekly newspaper for peasants, and was one of the founders of the Croatian Peasant Party in 1904.

Only three village studies for the years between 1895 and 1914 were written by women: one a former schoolteacher married to a landowner⁴, one a rural postmistress⁵ and the third a peasant, Kata Janjčera, sister of Ante and

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¹ See for example *Statistički Godišnjak Kraljevina Hrvatske i Slavonije* (SG), Vol. I (1905) (Zagreb: Kr. Zemaljski statistički ured u Zagrebu, 1913)

² *Odbor za narodni život i običaje* (AONŽO) *stara zbirka* (sz)

³ Ante Radić, "Osnova za sabiranje gradje o narodnom životu." It was published in vol. II (1897) of *Zbornik za narodni život i običaji južnih Slavena* (ZNŽO), pp. 1-88.

⁴ Milena Sajvert-Pokupska, "Hrnetić", AONŽO sz #29.

⁵ Ana Walka-Stipetić "Kotar Sv Ivan Zelina" sz # 120.

Stjepan Radić.⁶ The majority of the authors of the village studies were men: rural schoolteachers, priests, professors, high school students, lawyers, men of letters. There were also quite a few studies written by male peasants. While the studies by women give a more detailed picture of the lives and concerns of peasant women, all of the complete or nearly complete studies based on *Osnova* are rich in information about women.

Croatia-Slavonia represented two-thirds of the historic Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia and Dalmatia. Although all three parts of the Triune Kingdom were within of the Habsburg Empire, Croatia-Slavonia in 1900 was a semi-autonomous polity in the Hungarian half of the Empire, while Dalmatia was an Austrian province.

Croatia-Slavonia bordered the Ottoman Empire from the late 15th century to 1878. By the 16th century the Ottoman Empire controlled almost all of Slavonia and a good part of Croatia. What was left of Croatia-Slavonia, known as “the Remains of the Remains” was divided between three small counties in the north under the Croatian Ban, and the adjacent Croatian and Slavonian Military Frontier. The Habsburgs reconquered the Turkish held parts of Croatia-Slavonia in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. The three counties of Civil Croatia were expanded, and part of Slavonia was made into three Slavonian counties. The six Civil counties came under the authority of the Croatian *Ban* (Governor), *Sabor* (Parliament) and county institutions. The Croatian and Slavonian Military Frontier was significantly enlarged and administered from Vienna by the Habsburg Military. A portion of historic Slavonia was also given to Hungary.

Most peasants in the Civil areas were serfs until 1848, while those in the Military Frontier served as peasant soldiers and held their land in return for military service. When Bosnia-Hercegovina was occupied by Austria-Hungary in 1878, it became the new Habsburg-Ottoman frontier. In 1881, the Croatian and Slavonian Military Frontier was dissolved and merged once more with Civil Croatia and Civil Slavonia.

In 1900, eighty-two per cent of the population of Croatia-Slavonia was engaged in agriculture, and slightly more than half of those working on farms were women.⁷ The majority of farms was small and owned and farmed by peasant families. Almost three quarters of all farms (71.5 %) were five hectares or less in size.⁸ A family can live from five hectares if the land is good, the family

⁶ Kata Jajncérová, “Trebarajevo Desno” ZNŽO vol 3/1 , pp. 55-139, and vol 3/2 pp. 211-251 (1898) and AONŽO sz # 31. On the importance of Jajncérová’s study see Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, *Struktura tradicijskog mišljenja* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1984), pp. 86-100.

⁷ Fifty-one per cent were women. Vol. I (1905), p. 89.

⁸ Jozo Tomasevich, *Peasants, Politics and Economic Change in Yugoslavia* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1955), Table 17, p. 389.

not too large, the land is cultivated intensively, credit is available and the farm is near markets and good transportation. Few areas within Croatia-Slavonia met these criteria.⁹ Another quarter of the farms were from five to twenty hectares in size, and the rest, those more than twenty hectares, represented less than 1% of all farms.¹⁰ These included large estates belonging to nobles, and the church.

Before 1848, most peasant families lived in extended family *zadrugas*.¹¹ The *zadruga* was a complex household that owned property jointly, worked and lived together, and shared the products of their labor. It was a hierarchical system with rank determined by age and gender. The *zadruga* was led by the *gospodar*¹², usually the eldest male, who supervised everything, consulted with the married male members about work, finances and organization, and served as the link between the *zadruga* and the outside world. Work was divided by age and gender as well. The tasks of the female members were assigned and directed by an older woman, usually the wife of the head. *Zadrugas* varied in size from 10 to 15 members to 40 or even 60. Farming was basically for subsistence.

Zadrugas were patriarchal in form and ideal. Adult married men were joint owners of the land. Marriages were arranged by the *gospodar*. Women either married in (wives) or out (daughters). Wives belonged to the *zadruga* through their husbands and their children. If a woman was widowed and wanted to marry out of the *zadruga*, she was expected to leave her children behind. Young married women were at the bottom of the hierarchy in the *zadruga*. They got up first in the morning, washed the feet of the *gospodar* or other adult males, stood at meals. In Topolovac, for example, the young women would stand around the table and take turns to come forward and take a spoonful from the common bowl, while the men and elderly sat and ate.¹³ Children sat at another small table. The *gospodar divided the bread, a major part of the meal*.

Zadruga quarters were crowded¹⁴ and there was little privacy. Here is a description from Otok in Slavonia:

⁹ Mijo Mirković, *Ekonomska historije Jugoslavija* (Zagreb: Informator, 1968) p. 321.

¹⁰ Tomasevich, loc cit. .

¹¹ Much has been written about *zadrugas*. Recent important studies are Dragutin Pavličević, *Hrvatske kućne zadruge I. (do 1881)* (Zagreb: Liber, 1989), and Dunja Rihtman –Auguštin, *Struktura tradicijskog mišljenja* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga 1984). See also Vera St. Ehrlich, *Porodica u transformaciji* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1964).

¹² Terms also used for the *zadruga* head were *gazda*, *domaćin*, *starješina*.

¹³ Mirko Frankol, "Topolovac," *AONŽO* (sz) 82, p. 18.

¹⁴ Married couples often had a small one room structure near the *zadruga* house where they kept their possessions and slept in good weather.

When the woman gives birth she does it in a room where the household live and sleep. She is in pain, and there are heartless men who will not leave the room while she is in pain and giving birth, but they poke fun at her and make crude remarks, and in this shame each woman swears she will never become pregnant again.¹⁵

Women may have been looked down upon in patriarchal culture just for being women, but the work they performed was as important to the functioning of the whole as that of the men. The men did the heaviest jobs. They ploughed, and hoed, and planted. They cut hay and harvested crops. They cut and transported wood, drove the carts, took care of the livestock, and tended the vineyards. In winter they made and repaired simple furniture and farm implements, made barrels, carved wooden bowls and spoons. Women were in charge of the housekeeping, cooking, preserving food, cleaning, tending children, bringing water into the house, making fires, washing clothing and household linens, and all stages in the making of clothing and textiles. They were responsible for the garden, the dairy products, and poultry. The women also worked in the fields with the men when their labor was needed, especially during harvest time. Tasks were rotated among the women.

Women also possessed something most men did not - private property in the form of their dowries which could include money, livestock and land. This property could be drawn on if the *zadruga* got into financial difficulties.¹⁶ There seems to have been a female subculture¹⁷ where women helped each other and worked together to subvert male authority, such as stealing a bit of communal provisions to eat or trade with a peddler for a pretty kerchief or pot, or sharing information about birth control. They also were more experienced in managing private property than the men. Women were often blamed for the division of *zadrugas*, partly because of their private property and because of quarrels in which the husbands sided with them.

The *zadruga* served well under serfdom in Civil Croatia and Civil Slavonia, and during long absences of the peasant soldiers in the Military Frontier¹⁸ for it provided a labor pool and a self-sufficient economic unit. It was, however, a conservative institution. When serfdom ended in Civil Croatia and Slavonia in 1848,¹⁹ *zadrugas* began to divide into smaller *zadrugas* and single family

¹⁵ Josip Lovretić and Pavao Subašić. "Otok, narodi život i običaji", ZNŽO, vol. 2, p. 340.

¹⁶ Rihtman-Auguštin, *Struktura tradicijskog mišljenja*, p. 171.

¹⁷ Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, "O ženskoj subkulturi u slavonskoj zadruzi, in *Žena u seoskoj kulturi Panonije* (Zagreb, Etnološka tribina, 1982), pp. 9-21. She also discusses this briefly in *Struktura tradicijskog mišljenja*, pp. 169-172.

¹⁸ In the Military Frontier the *zadruga* was compulsory. See Karl Kaser, *Slobodan seljak i vojnik; Povojačeno društvo (1754/1881)* (Zagreb, 1997) vol. II, chapter 5.

¹⁹ For an analysis of the complex legal and institutional changes during this period see Mirjana Gross, *Počeci moderne Hrvatske; Neoposlutizam u civilnoj Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji 1850/1860* (Zagreb: Globus, 1985)

farms. Division spread rapidly to the Military Frontier with demilitarization. It was speeded by the growing rural money economy and legal changes favoring private property.²⁰ *Zadrugas* had always divided when they were too large or when there was trouble within, but the rapid and widespread *zadruga* division of the second half of the nineteenth century was something new. The government tried to halt division, and the peasants responded by dividing secretly.

Zadruga division meant that everything was divided: land, buildings, livestock, farm tools, food and seed reserves, even household furnishings. Furthermore, since there was no tradition of primogeniture, the single family farms were threatened with further division with each generation. Division impoverished the peasants, inflated the price of land, and, together with an extended economic depression, forced many young men into emigration.²¹

By the year 1900, most peasant women in Croatia-Slavonia lived in small *zadrugas* or single family farms. Here the wife and husband and their children and aging parents had to do all the tasks the larger *zadruga* had done, but on a smaller amount of land.

Peasant women played a crucial role in the post-division farm. Marriage was expected and essential. Most young women began to prepare for marriage at 15. Of all marriages taking place in 1901, 44% of the brides were under 19 years of age and 25.5% were between 19 and 25 years of age, while the majority of the bridegroom were somewhat older.²² Young men usually married right before their army service at 18, or when they returned from service.

Marriage brought in strong young labor, produced children who were the future workforce, and guaranteed security to the parents when one day they were too old to work. Almost all men married, even those who were deaf and dumb, blind, crippled or mildly retarded.²³ There was always a poor girl eager to marry into a family with a good farm and her labor would replace his. Most girls married, even those with minor physical defects. The badly crippled, tragically ugly, and girls with "bad" reputations found it hardest to marry.²⁴ Sometimes a boy would "steal" his bride. In former times this meant taking a girl to his house by force, but by the end of the nineteenth century it was more

²⁰ Pavličević, *Hrvatske kućne zadruge*, chs. 3-5.

²¹ Between 1880 and 1913, approximately half a million people emigrated from Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia. The vast majority of those who left were men between the ages of 14 and 44. Većeslav Holjevac, *Hrvati izvan domovine* (Zagreb; Matica Hrvatska, 1967), pp. 31, 33.

²² Only 16% of the bridegroom were under 20, 36% were between 20 and 24, and 24% were between 25 and 29. *SG*, vol. 1, p. 169. There is no information in the village studies about when *menses* usually began for girls, but being ready to marry was clearly tied to physical maturity. In Gage the author writes that girls and boys begin looking for marriage partners when "the boy grows hair and the girl grows breasts. Rade Bosnić, "Gage," *AONŽO*, sz 127c, p. 623.

²³ Vatroslav Rožić, "Prigorje", *ZNŽO* vol. XII//2 (1907), pp. 239 -240.

²⁴ Nikola Novaković, "Staro selo Štefanije", *AONŽO*, sz. 110c p. 488, and Juraj Božičević, "Šušnjevo selo i Čakovac", *ZNŽO*, vol. 11/1, p. 107.

often a form of elopement, used to avoid the costs of courting and marriage, or if one set of parents opposed the match.²⁵ Marriage usually followed.²⁶ There were also common law marriages. Here is an example from Kamenci: “Those who live in common law marriages don’t worry about it, they say why a priest should tie together that which I tied together at night when I kissed her.”²⁷

A peasant woman on a small farm had to perform all the tasks women had done in the extended family *zadruga*, but now she had to do them by herself, with the help of her mother-in-law and her daughters. She kept the house in order, cooked, bore and raised the children, washed the clothes and household linens, made clothes for her family, helped her daughters prepare items for their dowries, tended the vegetable garden, fed the poultry, milked the cows. She carried water, made the fire in the morning, she was the first to get up and the last to go to bed. She also worked in the fields with her husband and children. Babies were left with old women or older children or carried out to the field to be nursed. Sometimes women and girls also worked outside the farm. They went as paid farm laborers on larger farms or estates, or to other small farmers as labor in trade for something the family needed such as use of a cart and horse or oxen to plough their fields.²⁸ Women also sold eggs, milk products and other fresh produce at local markets.

For centuries peasant women had been responsible for making the clothing and textiles for their families. This process began with the planting of flax and hemp seed, soaking and beating the plant fibers, spinning flax and hemp and wool into thread or yarn, weaving cloth.²⁹ Sewing, knitting and embroidery came last. Homespun textiles and traditionally embroidered clothing were an important part of girls’ dowries. Each village and region had its own distinct folk costume. The colorful woven fabrics and richly embroidered clothing and towels and pillowcases were beginning to be seen by government officials and nationalist *literati* as an important part of Croatian national culture, and they were displayed at regional and international expositions such as the ones in Budapest in 1885 and 1891, and Zagreb in 1891.

Yet home production of these items was actually declining. Women living on the small farms simply did not have time to do the work and were buying inexpensive cotton thread and cloth at the markets instead of spinning and weaving their own. More and more clothing and footwear was purchased from local craftsmen, especially for the young men and women nearing marriage.³⁰

²⁵ On this custom see Vesna Čulinović-Konstantinović, “Otmice kao tradicionalni oblik pribavljanja nevjeste kad naroda Jugoslavije”, University of Zagreb, Ph. D dissertation, 1965.

²⁶ Bogdan Krčmarić, “Smiljan”, *AONZO* sz.98, p. 65

²⁷ Marko Badinovac, “Građa iz sela Kamenaca”, *AONZO* sz. 17, p. 27.

²⁸ On the system of bartering labor see Suzana Leček, *Seljačka obitelj u sjeverozapadnoj Hrvatskoj 1918-1941* (Zagreb, 2003).

²⁹ In some parts of northern Croatia men did the weaving.

³⁰ There is a long section on this in *Osnova* and the studies give detailed accounts of how much a typical set of clothing would cost.

Life in the small family farm had many good sides. Parents let their young people have some say in choosing marriage partners. There was more privacy. You could eat yourself full more often than in the *zadruga*, buy what you wanted if you had the means, make decisions about whether to try new methods of farming. You had more control over your children. Neighbors became an important part of life, for they were the ones to whom you turned when your well ran dry, or you needed salt for cooking. There were dances for the young after church, and spinning and corn shucking parties, wedding celebrations, holidays, and pilgrimages to special shrines. The social framework of life now moved from *zadruga* to village, or in large villages, to the neighborhood.

In 1900, the rural economy of Croatia-Slavonia was just emerging from a long economic depression.³¹ Credit was very tight. The majority (56%) of the direct taxes collected in Croatia-Slavonia went to Hungary, and the remaining 44% made up the budget of the autonomous government, most of which went to pay the salaries and pensions of civil servants and teachers, and finance road construction and river regulation.³² Between 1870 and 1900, the Ban's government introduced compulsory elementary education, market inspectors, and a network of rudimentary public health and veterinary services. Although these services were badly needed, the burden of paying for them fell on the local communes, in other words on the peasants. At the same time phylloxera decimated many of the vineyards, an important source of income for peasant families.

While the large *zadrugas* had been more or less self-sufficient, marketing only a small amount of what was produced, the smaller farms were more closely tied to the market. What the peasants sold at market was not really surplus, except in the richer parts of Slavonia. The smallholding peasants sold their grain and vegetables and milk and eggs and livestock and poultry because credit was tight and they needed money to pay taxes and debts, buy seeds and tools, and purchase things the family needed and could no longer produce themselves. If the peasant families could not pay their taxes or debts, they would lose their farms. They needed their farms to live. There was hunger in many villages, especially in the springtime when the old stores of food were used up, work was intense, and the new crops were not yet ripe.

In the years between 1901 and 1905, twenty per cent of all babies under the age of one died in Croatia-Slavonia.³³ In 1901, children of four and under made up 47% of all deaths in Croatia-Slavonia.³⁴ It is difficult to say exactly

³¹ See Rudolf Bičanić, "Agrarna kriza u Hrvatskoj, 1873-1891", *Ekonomist*, nos. 3/5 (1937) pp. 3-32, and Igor Karaman, "Kapitalistička ekonomika u hrvatskoj do Prvog svjetskog rata" in his *Hrvatska na pragu modernizacije (1750-1918)* (Zagreb: Ljevak, 2000), pp. 192-237.

³² SG vol. 1(1905) pp. 916-917.

³³ *Statistički Atlas Kraljevina Hrvatske i Slavonije 1875-1915* (Zagreb: Kraljevski zemaljski statistički ured, 1915) p. 19.

³⁴ SG, vol. I (1905), pp. 204-205.

why the children died because few were seen by doctors.³⁵ The village studies say they died of “cough” or “sore throat” or “stomach trouble” or simply of “weakness”. There was little understanding in the village of how disease spread. The peasants were used to living with fleas and lice and flies and roaches. Few had latrines. Manure piles stood open in the farmyard. Tuberculosis spread quickly in crowded rooms. Syphilis was endemic in some areas. Peasants washed their mouths and hands and feet regularly, and changed clothes on Sunday but rarely bathed. In low lying regions near the Drava and Sava rivers there were frequent floods which polluted ground water. Women delivered their babies alone, or with help of a family member or local *babica*. Women were supposed to be protected from heavy labor before and after childbirth, but this was not always possible. Here is citation from Hrnetić near Karlovac: “We say that for forty days before birth and forty days after it...the grave is open for a woman.”³⁶

Children were important to the small peasant economy. As soon as they were old enough, girls and boys would take small animals and poultry to pasture and help with home and farm tasks. On a small family farm every hand was useful and labor was a major way of paying debts and bartering service. Life in the extended *zadruga* had been in some ways easier for children. They may have been hungry at times, but they worked less and had more time to play.³⁷ Children were necessary, but too many children threatened the prosperity of the single family farm, since property after death of the parents was divided among the sons, or daughters if there were no sons. In addition girls needed dowries. Many children died, as we have seen above, and many were born. Childbirth and child-rearing housework, textile production and farm work aged women fast. By the time she was in her forties a woman moved into middle age.

The village studies reflect a deep division in the attitude towards children. In Croatia, especially in the areas which were formerly Civil Croatia, large families seem to have been accepted. In Slavonia families were limited. This would later be called the Slavonian “White Plague”. Here is a citation from the village of Lobar in the Croatian Zagorje: “Every woman wants to have children, as does her husband and says ‘That’s why God created me, to have children. My children are my future and in my old age they will support me. No one in our house has died of hunger yet, and God willing, neither will my children.’”³⁸ Having children won a woman respect in Prigorje and one without children was mocked.³⁹ In Gage near Dvor big families were the norm and women who had abortions were

³⁵ See Elinor Murray Despalatović, “Zdravstvene prilike na hrvatskom selu krajem 19. stoljeća i uloga općinskih liječnika,” *Zbornik Mirjane Gross* (Zagreb, 1999), pp. 267-277.

³⁶ Milena Sajvert-Pokupska, “Hrnetić,” *AONŽO* sz 29, p.343.

³⁷ Ivan Filaković. “Prkovci,” *AONŽO* sz 57, VI p. 3.

³⁸ Josip Kotarski, “Lobar,” *ZNŽO*, XXI/1, p. 59.

³⁹ Rožić. “Prigorje,” *ZNŽO*, XXI/1 p. 241.

despised and “cursed to the ninth generation.”⁴⁰ In Smiljan in Lika the peasants wanted lots of children, preferably boys, because “Until the age of 10 the girl only shits in the house, and after that she’s a terrible expense.”⁴¹

Children were not as welcome in Slavonia. This may have been because the peasants in Slavonia had better land and were more educated,⁴² or because they were a different cultural and historical mix.⁴³ In much of Slavonia one or two children was considered enough. The study from Gradište⁴⁴ reports that “Children are expensive, disobedient and trouble. Little girls are the best. They don’t curse or hit and they leave the house when they get married.” The author also noted that couples without children seemed to get along better than those with children.

Birth control was practiced in Slavonia,⁴⁵ as was abortion. The richest data on abortion comes from Varoš near Slavonski Brod, where the author of the study⁴⁶ estimates there were probably no more than ten women in the village who had not had abortions. They aborted because they had too many children already, because they didn’t want to lose their looks, they were too old for childbirth and child-raising, or because the father was not the husband. Abortion was not new to the village, but had increased markedly after division. First the woman would try to bring on the labor herself. If this did not work she would go to one of the three women in the village who specialized in abortion. Most women in Varoš who died under the age of 30 died of botched abortions or childbirth.⁴⁷ This was all done secretly although the men may have given tacit consent. Abortion was considered the responsibility of the woman. Abortion was also common in Otok and even the subject of a song :

“Don’t worry dear mother
That I will have a child
I’ll buy a little powder
To drive out the little devil”⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Rado Bosnić, “Gaga”, *AONŽO sz*, 127c, p. 493.

⁴¹ Krčmarić, “Smiljan”, *AONŽO*, sz 98, p. 65.

⁴² All four Slavonian counties had a much higher percentage of school age children in school than the four Croatian counties. *SG*, vol. I1905), p. 695.

⁴³ Most of the village studies done before World War I from Slavonia come from villages in the former Slavonian Military Frontier. The Military Frontier was more permissive in many ways than the Civil areas. On the eighteenth century see Maja Kožić, “Bračni život Slavonske Graničarske žene u svjetlu suvremenih zapisa”, in *Žena u seoskoj kulturi Panonije*, pp. 15-21.

⁴⁴ Šimo Varnica, “Gradište”, *AONŽO sz* 35, p. 80.

⁴⁵ The birth control method used most was withdrawal.

⁴⁶ Luka Lukić, “Varoš”, *ZNŽO*, Vol. XXV/1, pp. 165-166.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ “Otok”, II, p. 376.

In 1900, the majority of peasant women in Croatia-Slavonia could neither read nor write. Although four years of elementary education became compulsory for both boys and girls in 1874, fewer girls than boys attended from the start, and the majority of those who did tended to drop out after two years.⁴⁹ There were differences, of course, by age. The highest rates of non-literacy were among the older women: women in their sixties were 84% non-literate, women in their forties were 70% non-literate, women in their 20's were 52% non-literate.⁵⁰ The situation would not improve immediately, for girls of 10 were still 47% non-literate.⁵¹ Girls were needed at home to work and take care of the smaller children, and they needed time to prepare for marriage. Peasant families recognized the value of education for boys, for the boys would have to go into the army, and might even travel to America for work. Literacy meant they could write home and keep in touch with the family. Literacy for men meant that they no longer had to sign documents with an X and trust that what literate people said was written in the documents was true.

Peasant women in the year 1900 still lived in oral culture. Oral culture was rich in stories and songs and proverbs, riddles, jokes, words for healing, words for cursing, and words of prayer. It taught the girls and women their place in family and community. When you read the village studies made by peasants or the educated children of peasants, there are constant echoes of the oral culture. The pages are full of conversations, proverbs, folk songs drawn upon to answer specific questions. What the women knew of history came from stories, reminiscences of the old and epic songs. They knew the names of plants and stars and local fields, woods, mountains and hollows. They lived in a world of uncontrolled forces and powers – powers that had to be placated by established rituals. They believed in fairies and witches and magic. They went to church, recited special prayers during the day, and relied on folk healers. They lived far from ideas of progress, the discoveries of modern science, the agricultural and industrial revolutions, the germ theory of medicine. They were open, however, to “things” that made their lives easier such as petroleum lamps, store bought clothes, matches, and umbrellas.

What did peasant women know about the outside world? They knew the neighboring villages and market towns. They knew the nearby shrines and places of pilgrimage. They knew the world as far as their feet could take them, and a bit further for if the family had a horse and wagon. They learned about other countries from the stories told by military veterans and from men who had gone to nearby countries as temporary workers, or to America and other lands abroad. They also learned from their children. If their children went to school the children could read newspapers aloud, and entertain the family

⁴⁹ SG vol. I (1905), p. 699.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 63.

⁵¹ Ibid.

with stories and poems from their schoolbooks as they clustered near the fire on winter nights.

Peasant women knew little of politics. Croatia-Slavonia politics were dominated by the nobles and the educated elite. Less than 2% of the population had the vote.⁵² Eligibility was determined by amount of taxes paid, rank and education. Voting was public and by voice. Very few peasants voted. The existing political parties were preoccupied with questions of state rights and Croatia's relationship to Hungary, and indifferent to peasant concerns and needs. This began to change with the founding of the Croatian Peasant party in 1904.

Frauen auf dem Lande in Kroatien und Slawonien um 1900

Zusammenfassung

Aufgrund Literatur und statistischer Angaben wird in dieser Arbeit das Leben der Frauen auf dem Lande in Kroatien und Slawonien zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts dargestellt. Die meisten Frauen auf dem Lande lebten damals in kleinen Hausgemeinschaften oder in individuellen Haushalten. Innerhalb dieser kleinen Gemeinschaften mussten Frau, Mann, ihre Kinder und Eltern alle Aufgaben erfüllen, die auch in größeren Hausgemeinschaften üblich waren, die in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts noch existiert hatten. Für Frau war Ehe etwas wünschenswert und außerordentlich wichtig, wofür die meisten von ihnen schon im fünfzehnten Jahr vorbereitet wurden. Rechnet man alle Ehen, dann waren im Jahre 1901 44 % der Bräute jünger als 19 Jahre und 25,5 % von ihnen war im Alter zwischen 19 und 25 Jahre. Die meisten Frauen auf dem Lande in Kroatien und Slawonien waren um 1900 schreibunkundig. Kroatische Bauernfrauen lebten an der Wende zum 20. Jahrhundert noch immer in oraler Kultur, die aus Erzählungen, Gedichten, Rätseln und Scherzen, aus Worten für Heilen, dann aus Worten für Fluch und für Gebet bestand. Alle diese Worte lehrten die Frauen über ihren Platz und ihre Rolle in der Familie und in der Gemeinschaft.

⁵² Only 1.9 % of the population had the vote in the election of 1908. I have calculated this percentage from lists published in *Dom* (19, February, 1908).