

FROM THE ADRIATIC SEA TO THE PACIFIC OCEAN THE CROATS IN NEW ZEALAND

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The Croatian Community in New Zealand has a unique history. It is about 150 years old, its earliest arrivals were mainly young men from the Dalmatian coast of whom almost all worked as kauri gum diggers before moving into farming, and then into viticulture, fisheries and orchard business. Before large-scale urbanisation in the 1930s they lived in the north of New Zealand where there was also considerable contact with the local Maori population. The arrival of ever more women from Dalmatia, urbanisation and with it the establishment of voluntary associations, an improved knowledge of English, the language of the host society and, above all, economic betterment led to ever greater integration. After World War II migrants from areas of former Yugoslavia other than Croatia started to arrive in bigger numbers. Nowadays Croat people can be found in all spheres of New Zealand society and life, including in the arts, literature and sports. But the history of the Croats in New Zealand is also characterised by its links with the 'Old Country' whose political and social events, the latest in the 1990s, have always had a profound influence on the New Zealand Croatian community.

Key words: Croatian chain migration to and from New Zealand, Croatia(n), Dalmatia(n), Yugoslavia, Austria-Hungary, kauri gum digging, economic advancement, integration into Maori and Pakeha (white) host societies, women, urbanisation, voluntary associations, New Zealand Croatian culture, New Zealand Croatian dialects

On 22 November 2008 the Croatian community in New Zealand celebrated the 150th anniversary of the arrival of Paval Lupis from Dalmatia in New Zealand in 1858. Though immigration on a larger scale from what is now Croatia started only in the 1890s, Lupis is generally considered to be the first Croatian immigrant. The present article aims at providing a brief history of the Croatian community from those beginnings to the present day.

IMMIGRANTS IN A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS

All New Zealanders are immigrants, but their 'length of stay' in the new country varies considerably. In the present context, the Polynesian Maori – about 13% of the total population of around 4.3 million inhabitants (2009) – have been here longest, for about a thousand years. Most of them are intermarried with other New Zealanders, among whom the Croats feature prominently in northernmost New Zealand.

The largest group of the population of New Zealand, i.e. about three quarters, are usually referred to as 'New Zealand European'. Among them, those of Anglo-Celtic, i.e. English, Scottish, Welsh and, to a lesser degree, Irish origin, make up its overwhelming majority. They have a history of roughly 200 years in New Zealand and are the dominant group in politics, economy, life and customs. Their language, New Zealand English, prevails in all but the private and community spheres of non-English speakers, and it is mostly the latter who are bi-or multilingual.¹

Compared with the Maori and the Anglo-Celtic population, all other groups have shorter histories in this country, but especially the non-European groups amongst them, such as the Samoans and the Chinese, have increased considerably during the past decades. The largest cities Auckland and Wellington, where most of the Croats and their descendants live, are now multiracial, multicultural and multilingual places.

The history of these smaller groups is usually discussed in the context of 'immigration, integration and settlement' by members of both the dominant Anglo-Celtic host society and by the immigrants themselves. In this context, the immigrants from Continental Europe have, in the past, been treated as a kind of 'adstratum' to the Anglo-Celtic mainstream, with some having enjoyed a more favoured status (e.g. the Scandinavians, Germans, Swiss, Dutch) than others (people from southern and eastern Europe, among them the Croats). It is not surprising that the members of these smaller immigrant groups – especially the migrating generation – have seen 'immigration, integration and settlement' as the story of how they have succeeded within the New Zealand mainstream through hard work and by 'keeping a low profile'.²

As the indigenous population and through the Treaty of Waitangi, signed with the British Crown in 1840, the Maori occupy a special place within the mosaic of the New Zealand population: they are the 'people of the land' – the 'tangata whenua'. They have no 'hinterland' like, for instance, the Croats in New

¹ cf. STOFFEL, Hans-Peter *Neuseeland*. 1985; STOFFEL, Hans-Peter *Neuseeland. Schönster Süden der Welt*. 1997.

² cf. for instance the title of the English edition of Bönisch-Brednich (2002) on German immigrants: *Keeping a Low Profile*.

Zealand who can draw on the resources, including linguistic ones, of their homeland. On the other hand, the Croats are also affected, often negatively, by events in their far-away homeland over which they have no control. Even the New Zealand-born descendants of Croats are clearly aware of this 'hinterland' and the historical baggage inherited from their ancestors. The history of the Croats in New Zealand (and elsewhere outside their homeland) cannot be told without frequent reference to their reaction to events in the homeland.

Numbers and names

It is difficult to give a reliable figure of the number of Croatian immigrants and their descendants. Those born in New Zealand are automatically New Zealanders and in the census such people tend to identify as 'New Zealanders' or 'New Zealand Europeans'. The category of 'ethnicity' is perhaps the most ambiguous since people often confuse 'ethnicity' and 'citizenship' in the self-evaluation. Moreover, 'Croat' and 'Croatian' can be hidden under a multitude of so-called 'ethnic groups' such as, for instance: 'Austrian', 'Slav', 'South Slav', 'Bosnian', and 'Yugoslav'.

Even 'country of birth' proves to be a complicated category: Thus, a person born in, say, Sućuraj on the island of Hvar in Dalmatia would have been an 'Austrian' from Austria-Hungary until 1918, a 'Yugoslav' until 1992, and a 'Croat' since 1992. This complex situation is one of the reasons for New Zealanders to first call the Croats 'Austrians' and then, until 1992, 'Dalmatian(s)' or 'Dallies' (singular: 'Dally'; a nickname which, when used by non-Dalmatians, can occasionally also be derogatory). In fact, 'Dalmatians' or 'Dallies' has been the most popular name among the 'other' New Zealanders to refer to the members of the Croatian community up to this present day. (In the early years of settlement, the Dalmatians also had their names for the white New Zealanders of British origin: apart from the official *Inglezi* [the English] they were given the nickname *maslari* [butter-eaters])! Thus, Amelia Batistich writes:

*But to my child's mind it was all a confusion – all those names. Austrian. Dalmatian. Some said Croatian. And now Yugoslavs. We were a mixed-up lot.*³

The Croats were the second largest immigrant group from Continental Europe until well into the middle of the 20th century. The largest group from Continental Europe in the 1970s were the Dutch, but their history within New Zealand starts only in the 1950s and is thus far shorter than that of the Croats.

Up to World War II, immigrants from what is now Croatia came mostly from a number of small villages in Dalmatia. After 1945, immigrants from areas

³ BATISTICH, Amelia *Sing Vila in the Mountain*. 1987, p. 24. Passage omitted in the Croatian version 1981, p. 24 of the book.

of former Yugoslavia other than Dalmatia began to arrive in larger numbers but the Dalmatian element is still pre-eminent both in numbers and, as we have seen, in the perception of the 'other' New Zealanders.⁴

Numbers given for all people with a Croatian background in New Zealand are estimated to be nowadays between 70,000 and 100,000. Most of them consider themselves as New Zealanders with a Croatian background.

If we look at the figures from the 2006 Census, there were 2,050 answers for 'Croatia' as 'country of birth'. As for 'ethnicity', the figures given were 2,550 for 'Croat' and '891' for 'South Slav'.⁵ (Trlin 1979 provides the most authoritative and detailed figures up to the end of the 1970s).

The often turbulent history of Croatia has created, as we have seen above, a multitude of names to denote the Croats in New Zealand. It is not surprising, therefore, that 'names' are an important part for Croats living in New Zealand (and elsewhere) to denote their identity.⁶

In this article the following names (and the nouns [n.] and adjectives [adj.] related to them in brackets) have been used: To denote political units: *Austria-Hungary* (n. and adj. *Austrian, Hungarian*); *Yugoslavia* (n. and adj. *Yugoslav*); *Croatia* (n. *Croatian*); to denote an ethnonym: *Croat*⁷ (adj. *Croatian*); to denote geographical origin: *Dalmatia* (n. and adj. *Dalmatian*).

The special place of the Croats within the New Zealand population

Within New Zealand, the Croats occupy a special place which is unique compared to other non-Anglo-Celtic immigrant groups:

– Their link with the history of New Zealand is one of the closest and longest amongst Continental European groups, only the Scandinavians and the Germans come close in time-span and numbers.

⁴ Jelcicich/Trlin (1997: 276) distinguish five 'waves' of immigration from what is now Croatia: from the early 1890s to World War I (~ 5,000 arrivals), the 1920s until the Depression (~ 1,600 arrivals), the 1930s to World War II (~ 600 arrivals), the late 1940s until the early 1970s (~ 3,200 arrivals), and the 1990s (no figures).

⁵ WALROND, Carl Dalmatians. In *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 21-Sep-2007.URL:

<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/NewZealanders/NewZealandPeoples/Dalmatians/en>.

⁶ cf. also below *From the SFR Yugoslavia to the Republic of Croatia*.

⁷ The form 'Croatian' can also be used as a noun, an ethnonym. In this article no difference is made between the two, and only 'Croat' is used but cf. TRLIN, Andrew – TOLICH, Martin Croatian or Dalmatian? - Yugoslavia's Demise and the Issue of Identity. In Greif, S. (ed) *Immigration and National Identity in New Zealand. One People, Two peoples, Many Peoples?*, pp. 220–221.

– They are most closely connected with one particular area of New Zealand: the region of the country's largest city, Auckland, and the region north of Auckland (nowadays called Northland) which is also the cradle of the European history of New Zealand.

– Almost all of the arrivals before World War II were, at least temporarily, engaged in one and the same occupation and in the same northern regions: they were "gumdiggers", i.e. they excavated the fossilised resin ('gum') from the kauri trees buried in the ground for thousands of years.

– They have made a substantial contribution not only to the economic development but also to the cultural life of New Zealand as a whole (e.g. in particular literature, painting, newspaper publishing) which surpasses that of many other ethnic groups.

– They have integrated not only into the Pakeha society (a name given generally to white New Zealanders) but also into the Maori population, especially during the first two to three decades of their settlement, and many New Zealanders have a Croatian-Maori ancestor in their family.

On the other hand they share a number of problems with Croatian migrant groups elsewhere:

– Not enough newcomers to replenish their ranks (an ongoing problem, but less so for the New Zealand-born generations).

– Defining core values such as: Can one be a good Croat even if one does not know Croatian? (ongoing, but largely decided in favour of a 'yes' answer).

– Friction between the generations who have already been here and newcomers, often based on a difference between rural vs. urbanised origin (ongoing).

– Political discord within the community caused by differing attitudes to developments in its home-country (ongoing).

– Discrimination, and at times strong pressures for assimilation, from the Anglo-Celtic host society. Immigrant groups from the South and East of Europe and from outside Europe were more frequently subjected to this than those from the North and West of Europe (now largely irrelevant).

None of these problems are exclusive to the Croatian community in New Zealand. The same problems have been observed, for instance, in Australia, though the Croatian and other Slav immigrant communities there are far more numerous than in New Zealand.⁸

Memory and history

The 'story' of a population can be seen both through memory and through history. "Memory is always a phenomenon of the present, a bond tying us to the

⁸ Cf. in particular the Polish community in Australia: KIPP, S., CLYNE, M., PAUWELS, A. *Immigration and Australia's Language Resources*, pp. 140–145.

eternal present; history is a representation of the past".⁹ Naturally, where an account is based on oral history it is important to remember that just as certain things are narrated, others are not narrated. There is also a gender difference in such narrating: "men talk about success [...] women talk about emotions".¹⁰ This is true also for the 'stories' of the immigrants from Croatia.

We have subdivided Croatian history in New Zealand into two major periods: (a) From the beginnings in 1858 to the end of World War II, and (b) from the end of World War II to the present time. These two periods apply equally to the history of the Croats' homeland and to New Zealand. Each of these two periods has a dividing line separating two different phases. These apply exclusively to the history of the Croats, in both their homeland and in New Zealand: For the first period: The creation of the *Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes* in 1918 (in 1929 renamed *Kingdom of Yugoslavia*); for the second period: the independence of the *Republic of Croatia* in 1992.

The pre-World War II period is the most unique and the most colourful in the history of the Croats in New Zealand and is often given more space in historical accounts than the later period.

Investigations of Croats and their history in New Zealand

There has been a number of monographs and entries in biographical and encyclopedic works on Croatian immigration, integration, settlement and contributions to New Zealand as well as a large number of theses and articles on specific topics related to Croatian individuals, the Croatian community and the Croatian language in New Zealand (cf. Bibliography).

The monographs have been mainly written by Croats born in New Zealand or who arrived at an early age. Leading chroniclers of their community are Andrew Trlin (1979; emphasis on economic and occupational integration) and Stephen A. Jelicich (2008; emphasis on histories of individuals and families between 1858 and 1958); other authors live in Croatia or have been in New Zealand for a number of years: Ivan Čizmić (1983; emphasis on political and economic life and ethnic organisations), don Ante Klarić (2000; emphasis on the Catholic Church), Senka Božić-Vrbančić (2008; specifically on the Maori-Croatian relationship). The New Zealand-born writer Amelia Batistich complements these studies on the fictional level – especially through her collection of short stories entitled *An Olive Tree in Dalmatia* (1963, reprinted 1980).

⁹ NORA, Pierre *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, p. 3.

¹⁰ BÖNISCH-BREDNICH, Brigitte *Keeping a Low Profile: An Oral History of German Immigration to New Zealand*, pp. 297, 301.

The present author has been investigating the dialects of the immigrants in contact with the Maori and English languages and his findings have been published in various articles (Stoffel, Hans-Peter, cf. Bibliography). His tape-recorded language specimens during the 1970s and 1980s are, to a large extent, based on the life stories of former gumdiggers and their descendants and have contributed to this article.¹¹

FROM THE BEGINNINGS TO THE END OF WORLD WAR II

The pioneers

Paval Lupis, whom we mentioned at the beginning, is regarded as the first of a number of adventurers and seafarers who came to New Zealand from the Adriatic shores between Trieste and Kotor, stayed for a while, returned to their homeland and sometimes returned again. Some are thought to have deserted from Austrian scientific research ships such as the *Novara* but there is, apparently, no evidence to such claims¹². As the first records show, most went to the South Island and about a third of them were goldminers.¹³ These records show strong similarity with the history of other settlers of the time, for instance the first Swiss in New Zealand¹⁴ where people of mainly rural origin reach New Zealand and are initially engaged in goldmining and other occupations in the South Island.

Emigration from Dalmatia

Immigration on a large scale from the Adriatic shores to New Zealand started in 1892 and numerically soon matched the other two major groups from Continental Europe, the 'Scandinavians' as they were called collectively in New Zealand (immigrants from Denmark, Norway and Sweden) and the Germans. The third group with about equal numbers was non-European: the Chinese. All

¹¹ Extracts from some of these interviews, translated into English by Senka Božić-Vrbančić, can also be found in her monograph BOŽIĆ-VRBANČIĆ, Senka *Tarara. Croats and Maori in New Zealand: Memory, Belonging, Identity*, pp. 94, 103, 119, 124–126, 142.

¹² cf. TRLIN, Andrew *Now Respected, Once Despised. Yugoslavs in New Zealand*, p. 33; STOFFEL, Gertraut M. The Austrian Connection with New Zealand in the Nineteenth Century. In Bade, J. (ed) *The German Connection. New Zealand and German-speaking Europe in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 21–22.

¹³ TRLIN, Andrew *Now Respected, Once Despised. Yugoslavs in New Zealand*, p. 35.

¹⁴ STOFFEL, Gertraut M. The Austrian Connection with New Zealand in the Nineteenth Century. In: Bade, J. (ed) *The German Connection. New Zealand and German-speaking Europe in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 92–93.

these four groups accounted for about 4,000 to 5,000 people each before World War I.

The Croatian immigrants were mainly young, single men from a small number of villages in Central Dalmatia between the area south of Split and the Pelješac Peninsula, its hinterland between Ravča and Imotski as well as its off-shore islands Brač, Hvar, Korčula and Vis.¹⁵ "About 16 per cent came from the small island of Korčula; another 11.5 percent from the single mainland village of Podgora".¹⁶ This pattern was similar to that of other small immigrant groups in New Zealand such as the Greek, Italians and Swiss who arrived from a number of small communities in their homelands.

Emigration from Dalmatia was part of the general emigration from the Austro-Hungarian Empire during the outgoing 19th century when some 3.5 million persons left between 1876 and 1910 for North and South America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, an exodus that was "exceeded only by that from Ireland."¹⁷

In their first years in the New World the emigrants from what is now Croatia were engaged in occupations which required minimal skills and minimal knowledge of English or Spanish. It included occupations with which they were either familiar such as horticulture, viticulture and fishing; or they worked in new occupations, for instance as diggers: for gold (e.g. in California, Australia, New Zealand), saltpeter (the 'salitreros' in northern Chile) or kauri-resin (the 'gumdiggers' in northern New Zealand). A look into the telephone directories of, say, the city of Split in Central Dalmatia, and Auckland or Northland in New Zealand will yield the same surnames of Dalmatian residents. The same would be true for other places with a considerable population from Dalmatia such as the cities of Punta Arenas or Porvenir in southern Chile or in San Pedro, the port of Los Angeles. And the same songs from Dalmatia can be heard in all these places. Pictures of young men excavating saltpeter in Chile¹⁸ or kauri resin in New Zealand¹⁹ show striking similarities of the place of work of the young male diggers.

¹⁵ cf. STOFFEL, Hans-Peter The Dalmatians and Their Language. In *Atlas of Languages of Intercultural Communication in the Pacific, Asia, and the Americas*. Map 24.

¹⁶ BELICH, James Paradise Reforged. *A History of the New Zealanders. From the 1880s to the Year 2000*, p. 233.

¹⁷ PETRIE, Hazel Croatian Immigration to New Zealand Before World War Two. In V. Parker and K. Vautier (eds) *Look North: Over the Hills and Far Away*, p.180.

¹⁸ LETICA, Silvija (ed) *Dodiri svjetova. Hrvatska i Čile. Encuentros entre dos mundos. Croacia y Chile*, p. 23.

¹⁹ BOŽIĆ-VRBANČIĆ, Senka Tarara. *Croats and Maori in New Zealand: Memory, Belonging, Identity*.

The emigrants were rural-based people; their core values could be described as Croatian ethnicity, Croatian language (in the form of various dialects) and culture, and Catholic faith. The dialects of the migrants from Dalmatia in the various parts of the world were largely the same, and in many cases there existed and still exist contacts between individuals of the various groups. "Iden u Ameriku" [I am off to America] could often mean emigration to any country overseas.

The immediate reasons for emigration to the countries of the New World were mainly the following: a trade agreement between Austria-Hungary and Italy in 1892 which was unfavourable for Dalmatia, combined with a disease of the grapevines called phylloxera which destroyed much of the winegrowing industry in Dalmatia, the collapse of the ship-building and fishing industries in the Eastern Adriatic, and the reluctance of young men to serve in the Empire's army where conscription had been introduced in 1881.

And so, kauri resin became the 'new gold' – as we hear in a song (c. 1991) by Rudi Šunde (*The Figs and the Vines* 1997: inside back cover page):

<i>Zbogom Dalmacijo,</i>	<i>Farewell my Dalmatia,</i>
<i>Zbogom lijepa domovino,</i>	<i>Farewell lovely homeland;</i>
<i>U tuđinu putujemo,</i>	<i>To a foreign land I now go,</i>
<i>Zlatnu smolu kopati.</i>	<i>There to dig that kauri gum. [sic]</i>

Chain migration to and from New Zealand

Emigration meant, above all, economic betterment. And, indeed, the remittances of money back to the home-country became an important part of the economy in Dalmatia. Originally, the emigrants had envisaged only a short stay away, to earn enough money as fast as possible and then return home. In New Zealand this could be achieved at that time by gumdigging. They followed others who were already there, who had written letters to those back home or had returned permanently or temporarily from New Zealand and were full of stories of what they had seen and earned. Thus, men who had spent time in New Zealand might return to Dalmatia and then again re-emigrate to New Zealand with their fathers, sons or other relatives.

Thus started a chain migration which has been the basis and characteristic feature of Dalmatian migration to and from New Zealand up to the present day; it has been defined as "that movement in which prospective migrants learn of opportunities, are provided with transportation and have initial accommodation and employment arranged by means of primary social relationships with previous migrants".²⁰ Chain migration provided security amongst other families and friends from the same villages in the new country. On the other hand this

²⁰ TRLIN, Andrew *Now Respected, Once Despised. Yugoslavs in New Zealand*, p. 33.

very security amongst their own may have delayed integration into the host society to some degree.

The gumdiggers

In the early days the migrants were exclusively men, often as young as thirteen, who would leave their villages, take a steamer from one of the European ports and after several weeks arrive at Auckland where these *noveli* [new arrivals] could meet up with other countrymen in the various Dalmatian boarding-houses and were then taken to the gumfields:

*All he [the new arrival] owned was the suit he wore and what his straw hamper held; some small change jingling in his pockets and two strong and willing hands.*²¹

The kauri tree (*Agathis australis*) grows only north of latitude 38° South and thus gumdigging and early Croatian immigration were essentially confined to the areas to the north of Auckland (this could be called the cradle of Croatian immigration and settlement), to Auckland itself and to areas immediately to the south and east of Auckland. Nowadays this is an area of farmland and forests, often the result of hard labour of the very same migrants who were the original gumdiggers on that land, and by their descendants. In the Far North, in the area of Parengarenga there were so many 'Austrian' gumdiggers that the place was nicknamed 'Little Vienna'.

Other rural-based immigrant groups initially also show centres of early settlement, such as the Swiss in Taranaki and the Scandinavians in Hawkes Bay albeit not as exclusively as the Dalmatians in the North, and without a gumdigging phase between arrival and taking up farming and other occupations.

During the heyday of gumdigging, in the 1890s and the first decade of the 20th century, up to 11,100 tons (1899 figure) were produced and mostly exported²² for the production of varnish and linoleum. Much of the gumland in the north was a remote, bleak place, covered in swamps and ti-tree. And once the resin, the 'gum' had been excavated, the soil was even poorer. In that environment the migrants set up their camp consisting of a number of shanties – huts made of corrugated iron or sacking and calico stretched over a ti-tree frame. The gumdigger did not need much for his work. A spade, a spear to locate the gum, gumboots, a knife for scraping the gum and a hurdy-gurdy – a gumwashing device looking like an old-time washing machine – to clean the

²¹ BATISTICH, Amelia *An Olive Tree in Dalmatia*, p. 77.

²² REED, Alfred *The Kauri Gumdiggers* p. 181.

gum were his main tools in the early days.²³ Later on more sophisticated machinery was introduced. "The most arduous operations involved the draining of swamps – originally to make gum extraction easier – but ultimately this resulted in bringing thousands of acres of land into farm production".²⁴

There were various grades of gum. They were sorted and sold to gum-merchants and so, living frugally, the gumdiggers could improve their lot. This life has sometimes been romanticised – once it had become a distant memory. There was, indeed, companionship, adventure and closeness to nature, but in the North there was also a lot of rain, especially in winter, and a blazing hot sun in summer. Standing in gumboots up to one's thighs in a watery, muddy pit was seen quite differently by the 'poet of the gumfields' Ante Kosović (also spelled Kosovich). In his collection of poems, *Dalmatinac iz tuđine* [A Dalmatian from an alien land] published in Split in 1908, he starts with a nostalgic look back to the place of his youth, Dalmatia, and then goes on to warn young Croats from coming to this "wasteland", this "emptiness" ("pustoš" – in a physical and spiritual sense) of the gumfields in New Zealand. But this did not deter other young Dalmatian men from joining those already in New Zealand.

The Maori-Dalmatian connection

The gumdiggers from Croatia were not on their own on the gumfields. Several thousand others, mostly British and Maori diggers, also worked there. By mentality and way of life the Dalmatians from the Mediterranean were closer to the Maori than to the British. Like the Maori, the Dalmatians worked as a collective and shared a communal way of life while the British tended to be individual diggers. And both Maori and Dalmatians were at the edges of the then dominant 'English'.

Božić-Vrbančić²⁵ speaks of a "stigmatising process" which excluded the Maori and the Dalmatians "from the dominant culture", but that at the same time "this process of exclusion" also "constituted the conditions of their relationship".²⁶ But the Dalmatians were mostly young men, with few Dalmatian women in New Zealand before 1914. And thus, many Dalmatian

²³ Anna Roberts' novel *Luka* (1987; Tauranga: N.Z. Moana Press) provides an insight into a Dalmatian gumdigger's life on the fictional level.

²⁴ JELICICH, Stephen A. *From Distant Villages – the Lives and Times of Croatian Settlers in New Zealand, 1858–1958*, p. 55.

²⁵ BOŽIĆ-VRBANČIĆ, Senka Tarara. *Croats and Maori in New Zealand: Memory, Belonging, Identity*, p. 99.

²⁶ *ibid.*

men lived with, or married Maori women "[...] and thus integrated into New Zealand society by that route".²⁷

We now find a considerable number of mixed descendants, and today the Dalmatians can claim to share a history not only with the white Pakeha of New Zealand but also with the Maori population. Some of the Dalmatian-Maori offspring consider themselves as Maori, others as Pakeha. However, with the arrival of more women and complete families from Dalmatia after the First World War this close Maori-Dalmatian relationship began to weaken (cf. below: *Women*).

The Maori-Dalmatian connection is, even nowadays, a visible feature of New Zealand's North where the traveller is welcomed by street signs in three languages – Maori – Croatian – English – such as < Haere Mai – Dobro Došli – Welcome >.

The Maori called the Dalmatians 'Tararā' which is generally thought to mean 'fast talkers' but could also be a 'transliteration' of 'Dalmatia(n)'. "Tararā" also appears in Maori-English dictionaries: as "Yugoslav"²⁸ and "Dalmatian people".²⁹

One of the Tararā-Maori was Mira Szaszy (1921-2002), one of the children of Lovro Petricevich and his Maori wife. Lovro (born in Živogošće, Austria-Hungary 1888, arrived in New Zealand in 1903, and died there in Ahipara in 1976) became a revered *kaumātua* [elder] in the Maori community of the North and was referred to as 'Rōrana Tararā' [Lawrence the Dalmatian]. He spoke Croatian, Maori and English. One of his children, Mira, was the first Maori woman at the University of Auckland to gain a degree, and she later became the president of the *Maori Women's Welfare League* and in 1990 was awarded the title 'Dame'. In 1999 a 'Tararā Day' was celebrated in Western Auckland where Dame Mira and the New Zealand Governor-General unveiled a monument to commemorate the shared Maori-Croatian history.

Before World War I "[a]t times Croatian was the dominant language on the streets of Kaitaia, Dargaville and the Victoria Street area of Auckland where

²⁷ KING, Michael *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, p. 369; That these relations were not necessarily conventional forms of marriage is born out by Jelichich's "preliminary survey" of pre-1925 marriages which points to relatively few marriages with Maori women and "clearly shows a preference for in-race marriages at 60.5 per cent, marriages with New Zealand European women at 32.2 per cent and with Maori women 7.3 per cent" JELICICH, Stephen A. *From Distant Villages – the Lives and Times of Croatian Settlers in New Zealand, 1858-1958*, p. 298.

²⁸ WILLIAMS, H.W. *Dictionary of the Maori Language*, p.506.

²⁹ RYAN, P.M. *The Reed Dictionary of Modern Māori*, p. 244.

most of the boarding houses were centred".³⁰ But by the 1940s English had become the dominant language outside the home and the community domains for both the Maori and the Dalmatians. At school only English was allowed, and pressure to assimilate was strong.

Immigration and restrictions

The Dalmatians were ceaseless and systematic workers digging through large areas 'on face', i.e. systematically digging up complete areas, working together in groups. This, and fear of being swamped by 'the Austrians' in general led to complaints from British diggers and settlers, and several restrictions to digging and immigration were introduced at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century. There were also misgivings because the Croats were seen as 'birds of passage' sending money home and returning there as soon as possible, thus not contributing to the development of New Zealand.

The result was the *Kauri Gum Industry Act* of 1898, followed by the *Immigration Act* in 1900. Kauri gum reserves were established where licences were needed. 'Aliens' (not just Dalmatians) were excluded from these reserves and could dig only on private land. This led to the naturalisation of around 100 Croats per annum between 1903 and 1914 and also started a move into other occupations leading to more stable settlement. Furthermore, "[t]he emergence of the Croatian language press, the closer involvement of the Church, the emergence of leaders and the interest of local politicians"³¹ contributed to this development. But it was interrupted by the First World War when the Dalmatians, as Austrian subjects, had to endure much humiliating comment in the press and even government reports.

Problems caused by the Austro-Hungarian affiliation

Most of the Croats were citizens of Austria-Hungary, there was a consul from that country in Auckland, and New Zealanders at that time referred to them as 'Austrians' and to their language as 'Austrian'. The large majority of the Croats resented this situation since they did not see themselves as 'Austrians'.

But during World War I, when Austria-Hungary was supporting Germany (against Britain), they were treated as 'enemy aliens'. Though most Croats sided with the forces against Austria-Hungary and eagerly awaited the creation of the *Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes* (which incorporated Serbia, an ally of Britain during World War I) and some 60 Croats even volunteered and served in

³⁰ JELICICH, Stephen A. *From Distant Villages – the Lives and Times of Croatian Settlers in New Zealand, 1858-1958*, p. 50.

³¹ Ibid.

the New Zealand Army, suspicions remained and some Croats were interned. This changed, at least officially, after World War I when the new state was created in 1918 (in 1929 renamed *Kingdom of Yugoslavia*).

Newspapers

There were nine Croatian-language or bilingual Croatian-English newspapers published by the New Zealand Croats between 1899 and 1919, and some also later, but most were shortlived (cf. Jelich/Trlin 1997). In the two more successful ones, *Zora – The Dawn* and *Napredak* they intensively discussed their status in New Zealand as well as the forthcoming creation of their own state. They called themselves *Hrvati* [Croats] and made it clear to their host society that they were a Slavic, not Germanic people, from Croatia, Dalmatians from the Adriatic Coast. Thus, on 6th February 1914 Matthew Ferri wrote in *Napredak*:

Braco Hrvati! Na ovaj grieh ustanimo i odbacimo ono gnusno ime Austrians, vec prikazimo Englezima da smo mi slobodni i nezavisni hrvatski narod [...] [sic]³².....Brothers, Croats! Let us stand up and reject this distasteful name Austrians, let us, instead, show the English [i.e. New Zealanders] that we are the free and independent Croatian people [...]. (Translation HPS)

From temporary to permanent settlement

The occupation of gumdigging ranked very low; by inclination or necessity it was seen as transient and the gumdiggers as given to alcohol though the latter did not apply to most Dalmatians. But their status began to improve once gumdigging became only a part-time occupation, with gumdiggers gradually acquiring land to establish farms and a more settled life and digging gum only occasionally for some additional income.

Between 1890 and World War I some 5,000 people from Croatia had arrived. But there was a constant coming and going, with some moving between Dalmatia and New Zealand several times. Though a large number of them left New Zealand to live in their newly-created state after World War I, many returned to New Zealand because the *Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes* was not what they had expected it to be. There were also new, first-time arrivals. What was started in the years before World War I but discontinued because of the war, now recommenced with increased speed: Some small settlements began to spring up. There, gumdiggers could buy cheap land to establish farms, orchards and vineyards.

³² STOFFEL, Hans-Peter Slavische Volksgruppen in Uebersee: Ethnika für die Dalmatiner in Neuseeland. In *Zeitschrift für slavische Philologie* 45/2, p. 261.

One such settlement was Herekino near Kaitaia which nowadays consists of only a few houses and a number of surrounding farms. In the *New Zealand Index* for 1921 we find 12 Dalmatian surnames for Herekino out of a total of 70, and the occupation of 11 of them was given as 'vigneron'. The school roll for 1925 contains 10 (out of a total of 18) surnames of Dalmatian origin, for 1930 it was 11 (out of a total of 33) and for the period 1949–58 still 27 (out of 144). The most common surnames for the area were Grbich, Kunicich, Lunjevich, Posinkovich, Urlich and Veza.³³ A visit to the overgrown graves outside Herekino bears testimony to a once numerous Dalmatian population.

Two male descendants of a Maori mother and a Dalmatian father in New Zealand's Far North recall these early times of settlement and farming in a conversation with the present author in the 1970s.³⁴

I moj otac, on je unda trgova u gomu, i štokiper, on je prodava, znaš, hrana ljudinam...

And at that time my father was trading in kauri-gum, he was a storekeeper, and he was selling, you know, food to people... (Translation HPS).

Ka' je goma prista, unda su počeli metit štogod zemlje u trave, pa unda kupit štogod krave, pa tako je počea muzit biće dvanaest krava.

With the end of the kauri gum [industry] they started to put land into grass, and then they bought cows, and he started to farm about 20 cows (Translation HPS).

Another interesting source is the *Northland Farm Locations Atlas* (Dargaville 1971). Though by the 1970s the bulk of the Dalmatian population had moved further south, this atlas shows a large number of Dalmatian surnames for farm owners in former gumdigging areas such as Waiharara, Awanui, Herekino and Dargaville.³⁵

Women

"Undoubtedly, the life force in Croatian families has always been the woman".³⁶ But there were very few Croatian women in New Zealand until 1920. If single

³³ All the above figures on Herekino elicited from *Herekino School Centenary 1888–1988*, pp. 17, 66, 68.

³⁴ STOFFEL, Hans-Peter Slavisches in Polynesien. Zum serbokroatisch-maorisch-englischen Sprachkontakt in Neuseeland. In *Slavic Themes. Papers From Two Hemispheres*, p. 26.

³⁵ Maps on pp. 9, 13 and 35; cf. also STOFFEL, Hans-Peter The Dalmatians and Their Language. In *Atlas of Languages of Intercultural Communication in the Pacific, Asia, and the Americas*. Map 24.

³⁶ JELICICH, Stephen A. *From Distant Villages – the Lives and Times of Croatian Settlers in New Zealand, 1858-1958*, p. 300.

Dalmatian men did not wish to continue their transient lifestyle they could marry Maori or other non-Slav local women. As we have seen, partnerships with the former were relatively common because of a similar lifestyle.³⁷ Partnerships with other New Zealanders, especially of English, Scottish or Irish origin did happen, but were often frowned upon by the parents of a potential bride because a foreign, especially 'Austrian' or 'Dalmatian' husband was not something seen as desirable for a family of British origin. Thus, in a letter to the editor of a Northern newspaper signed "one of the Ichs" (a nickname for people from Dalmatia based on the predominance of surnames ending in -ić/-ich) wrote: "Some of us have married English girls and perhaps more would do so if the girls would marry us".³⁸

The first woman from Dalmatia arrived in 1900, "much the same time as women first appeared in the Croatian settlement in the United States".³⁹ It is difficult to establish exact numbers for women until World War II since they were often not registered separately when whole families arrived under the quota of 3,500 which was set between the two world wars. Jelicich⁴⁰ mentions the figures of 166 arrivals of women between 1900 and 1914, and a further 596 between the two world wars.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, in the villages of Dalmatia, the women had to take up more and more chores of the men, who had emigrated at least temporarily, or were coming and going. With permanent emigration becoming more widespread, whole families would now arrive in New Zealand. In other cases men would return briefly to Dalmatia, find a bride and marry and return with her to New Zealand. Where such direct contact was not possible, contact was made by way of letter and photographs, with the prospective bride coming to New Zealand and marrying here. When the immigration laws changed and "prevented young women to arrive 'on spec'",⁴¹ this led to marriages 'by proxy'. This was extremely risky and many a young woman found

³⁷ That these relations were not necessarily conventional forms of marriage is born out by Jelicich's "preliminary survey" of pre-1925 marriages which points to relatively few marriages with Maori women and "clearly shows a preference for in-race marriages at 60.5 per cent, marriages with New Zealand European women at 32.2 per cent and with Maori women 7.3 per cent" JELICICH, Stephen A. *From Distant Villages – the Lives and Times of Croatian Settlers in New Zealand, 1858-1958*, p. 398.

³⁸ *The Figs and the Vine. Gumdigging in Kaipara*, p. 13.

³⁹ PETRIE, Hazel *Croatian Immigration to New Zealand Before World War Two*. In V. Parker and K. Vautier (eds) *Look North: Over the Hills and Far Away*, p. 187.

⁴⁰ JELICICH, Stephen A. *From Distant Villages – the Lives and Times of Croatian Settlers in New Zealand, 1858-1958*, p. 298.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 300.

herself legally married to a man she did not like. In one of her stories Batistich (2000: 1) writes:

Uncle Tony is not one of your romantics. When he decided to get married he went about it prosaically enough. He wrote to his sister in the old country and told her to pick him out a good, strong girl, not too old and not too young. He married her by proxy, and when she came out to New Zealand Auntie Lucy was already Mrs Fistulich, and there was not much she could do about Tony's being fat and nearly bald.

However, by and large, families created on the basis of letter brides or by proxy did succeed despite the lack of romance, the extreme loneliness suffered by many women in remote areas of New Zealand, and the enormous hardships.

Urbanisation and new occupations

The arrival of more women from Dalmatia also promoted the gradual change from temporary to permanent settlement, together with the geographical and occupational diversification which is fundamental to the development of Croatian settlement in New Zealand. Until close to World War II rural settlement prevailed, but more and more people moved to the bigger centres of the North – Whangarei, Dargaville and especially Auckland where the locality of Oratia in the west of Auckland (now a suburb of Auckland) is often referred to as 'Mala Podgora' ([Little Podgora]; Podgora on the Adriatic being the place of origin of the majority of settlers living in Oratia).

Gumdigging became at best a stop-gap occupation between emigration from Dalmatia and permanent settlement in New Zealand in the vicinity of other people from Dalmatia, often from the same villages. Viticulture, horticulture and fisheries became increasingly more important. Though we can now find descendants of the immigrants in all occupations, these three main areas of occupation – with the wine industry in first position – would come first to mind when New Zealanders are asked if they knew 'Dalmatians' and what they were engaged in. More and more Dalmatians also moved to areas south of Auckland, including the South Island.

Associations and clubs

The Croats in New Zealand had always been keen to meet socially, to play, sing and listen to stories, and to debate their life in New Zealand and, last but not least, events in their homeland. And many were also dedicated followers of horse races. Ante Kosovich, in one of his – rarer – less earnest writings called *Dalmatinci diskutiraju formu konja prije utrke* [*The Dalmatians discuss the form of the horses before the race*], and written probably during the 1940s – illustrates this passion of his countrymen. About a certain Joe Urlich, arriving "with pride" in his car, he says:

*On se javlja drustvo ponosito
Pak njim kaze svi bakajte Sito⁴²
Od ostali toje sada dosti
Vidi te me danas na reskosti.
[sic]*

*He salutes the company with pride
That Seato's to be backed he wont hide.
Others don't matter, he's number one
horse
"So look for me today at the race course."*

[sic]

Until 1930 "[s]ocial life generally revolved around the larger gum camps and gatherings in boarding houses, homes and at religious observances" (Jelicich 2008: 171). Attempts to form organised associations or societies did not materialise until the process of urbanisation had started. The boarding-houses, located in the centre of townships, had provided a centre for young males between arrival and departure to the gumfields and continued to be a centre for Croatian social activity for a while. It has been suggested that "the social equivalent of the Jewish-owned drugstore clique or of Greek Cafe society were informal groups which met sporadically at one of the several Yugoslav-owned boarding-houses in Auckland".⁴³

The concentration of an ever increasing number of Dalmatians in larger townships – both from internal migration and through new arrivals – and especially family units and later on older males from elsewhere in the North meant that specific centres for social events, entertainment and Dalmatian culture and life were required. This led to the establishment of organised societies during the 1930s, with their own premises in the centre of Auckland. These societies have been influenced ever since their foundation by the political beliefs of those who made up their membership – which included royalists, supporters of 'jugoslavenstvo', of Marshall and then president Tito and Titoism, communists, Croatian autonomists, practising Catholics and clergymen. It is no accident that histories of Croatian/Dalmatian/Yugoslav societies in New Zealand invariably include a discussion of the political stance of the members or their governing bodies, of political views regarding events in the homeland and, accordingly, how these societies should be named.⁴⁴

Clubs and societies were set up in various places of the northern part of the North Island and also in Wellington. In Auckland, the community's largest

⁴² Sito/Seato is the name of a horse. *bakajte* is the imperative of the NZ Croatian verb *bakat* < Engl. *to back* (a horse).

⁴³ PETRIE, Hazel Croatian Immigration to New Zealand Before World War Two. In V. Parker and K. Vautier (eds) *Look North: Over the Hills and Far Away*, p. 185.

⁴⁴ there were several name changes; for a list of these names in Croatian cf. KLARIĆ, don Ante *Povijest Hrvatske katoličke misije Sv. Leopolda B. Mandića u Aucklandu (Novi Zeland) (1904–1999)*, p. 93.

centre, two major societies eventually emerged during the 1930s: The *Yugoslav Club* and the *Yugoslav Benevolent Society* (which underwent several name changes). While these societies catered for their particular membership, they both also supported weaker members of their community, and provided assistance to Yugoslavia during World War II. Both these two major societies still existed in the 1970s, and in 1983 merged to become the *Yugoslav Society*, only to split again into two different societies in 1992 (cf. below).

World War II

After the capitulation of Yugoslavia to the Axis powers, New Zealand Croats were no longer under the threat of becoming 'enemy aliens', as during World War I, but they were still seen in a rather negative light, and were themselves torn between the Yugoslav Government in Exile in London and the partisans under Tito. For others the internecine wars amongst the Yugoslav factions as well as the so-called *Independent State of Croatia (NDH)* run by the Ustasha were also a problem.

But both major societies of the community supported the war effort in Yugoslavia materially and organised fund-raising all over New Zealand, and most sided with the partisans and Tito. The evacuation of 40,000 civilians and wounded partisans from Dalmatia to the El Shatt refugee camp in Egypt in 1944 generated great concern in the community for the fate of possible relatives, and the New Zealand government allowed entry for those who had families here. But the end of the war and the (re-)establishment of Yugoslavia, this time as a *Federal People's Republic (FNRJ)* under President Tito (in 1963 renamed *Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia - SFRJ*), created new tensions in the community though most of them "accepted that fact as a political reality".⁴⁵

FROM THE END OF WWII TO THE PRESENT TIME

History (almost) repeats itself

We have seen that at the end of World War I many Croats left New Zealand with great hopes to establish a better life in the newly-formed *Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes*. But many returned disillusioned, ready to now put down roots in New Zealand, others arrived as new immigrants. The same happened after World War II: once again, a number of people left New Zealand, this time for a new life in Tito's Yugoslavia, but, once again, many were disappointed and returned, and with them came new immigrants.

⁴⁵ JELICICH, Stephen A. *From Distant Villages - the Lives and Times of Croatian Settlers in New Zealand, 1858-1958*, p. 295.

Immigrants from non-Dalmatian areas of former Yugoslavia

This time the new arrivals were not just from Dalmatia but from all areas of what was then Yugoslavia. This meant that the Croatian community in New Zealand consisted no longer almost exclusively of Croats from Dalmatia and this altered the previously homogeneous 'Dalmatian character' of the immigration from former Yugoslav lands. Many were refugees and displaced persons and rejected Tito's 'new' Yugoslavia.⁴⁶ With them came new ideas, new dialects and variants of the language and even other languages from within Yugoslavia. The new arrivals were not exclusively rural, and were better educated. According to Trlin⁴⁷ the integration of these new arrivals into the existing Croatian community had been "...until recently, unsuccessful", and he continues: "This is hardly surprising as the new arrivals had little in common, economically, socially or politically with the Dalmatian founders of Yugoslav settlement in New Zealand."

The integration of newcomers into an existing, already well-established community is also a generational problem. Anecdotal evidence about newcomers and their 'demands' and 'behaviour' points to similar problems in other ethnic societies in New Zealand and elsewhere. More recent newcomers are often seen by earlier immigrants and their descendants as expecting immediate red-carpet treatment – compared with themselves who 'had to work hard to settle in and keep a low profile' and often felt more comfortable talking English. However, this also shows the extent to which the earlier settlers have already integrated into the New Zealand host society.

Economic advancement

By the 1970s the community had moved on, and in 1971 82% of the immigrants from (former) Yugoslav lands were urban residents⁴⁸. Economic advancement which had taken off in the 1930s had proceeded further. Already in 1948 the then Consul of Yugoslavia in Auckland, John Totich, wrote to the author of *The Kauri Gumdiggers*, Alfred Reed:⁴⁹

Today the Yugoslavs are no longer just engaged on the gunfields. About a couple of hundred remain on the northern fields, with a few merchants in the city dealing with the kauri trade; the remainder are employed, or follow nearly

⁴⁶ cf. ČIZMIĆ, Ivan *Iz Dalmacije u Novi Zeland*, p. 165; KLARIĆ, don Ante *Povijest Hrvatske katoličke misije Sv. Leopolda B. Mandića u Aucklandu (Novi Zeland) (1904–1999)*, p. 76.

⁴⁷ TRLIN, Andrew D. *The Yugoslavs*. In K. W. Thomson and A.D. Trlin (eds) *Immigrants in New Zealand*, p. 96.

⁴⁸ Figures cf. TRLIN, Andrew *Now Respected, Once Despised. Yugoslavs in New Zealand*, p. 134.

⁴⁹ REED, Alfred *The Kauri Gumdiggers*, pp. 178–179.

every profession and industry in New Zealand. Farming is the most popular pursuit, with that of orchardist and winegrower following. The fishing industry, especially in the province of Auckland, is mainly in the hands of the Yugoslavs. Drainage and public works, consisting of road-making and railway construction have employed Yugoslavs for the past thirty years, as also did the flaxmilling and bushfelling industry of bygone days. They are to be credited with the improvement of thousands of acres of swamp-land in the Auckland province alone, with their draining. From the second generation born here in New Zealand we have a priest, doctors, dentists, lawyers, chemists, scientists, university lecturers, school teachers, architects, civil servants, engineers, mechanics, nurses – in fact descendants of the early Yugoslavs will be found in all walks of life.

What Totich summarizes here for the immigrants in 1948 (using the term 'Yugoslavs') still applies to a large extent in the first decade of the 21st century, but with the number of people engaged in the professions mentioned in his last sentence much increased.

Trlin provides a number of important factors which characterise the specific Dalmatian path – the establishment of small businesses such as a "restaurant, fish shop, vineyard, dairy farm or orchard". In this way the Dalmatians' "traditional craving for independent self-sufficiency and the establishment of an inheritance for offspring" as well as their "striving for greater economic security"⁵⁰ could be best satisfied. This would also provide greater social security by replacing the original village community by the family unit. Many such enterprises relied for a long time entirely on family input. Like other immigrants, Dalmatians have discovered that, in New Zealand to be self-employed, provided an excellent, perhaps even the best way of advancement.

Becoming fully-fledged New Zealanders

An important factor in the economic and social advancement was language. It is no accident that in a majority of reports the 'lack of the language' (meaning no or minimal knowledge of the language of the host country – usually English or Spanish) is given as a formidable impediment to the advancement in the host society.⁵¹ This was, of course, not confined to emigration to New Zealand. Šeparović⁵² presents a survey among returnees from all over the world in Blato on the island of Korčula:

⁵⁰ TRLIN, Andrew D. The Yugoslavs. In K. W. Thomson and A.D. Trlin (eds) *Immigrants in New Zealand*, p. 91.

⁵¹ cf. STOFFEL, Hans-Peter Dialect and Standard Language in a Migrant Situation: The Case of New Zealand Croatian. In *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, p. 163.

⁵² ŠEPAROVIĆ, Zvonimir *Od Sydneya do San Francisca. Dijaspore ili rasutost mještana Blata na Korčuli diljem svijeta*, pp. 149–155.

Na pitanje koje su najveće poteškoće koje je imao u svijetu – odgovor najčešće glasi: nepoznavanje jezika (85 posto), težak rad, tuđina, "nerazumijevanje među našima", nezaposlenost, zdravlje, tj. zdravstveni razlozi.

In answer to the question what were the biggest difficulties which the interviewed person had had out there in the world – the most frequent reply is: lack of knowledge of the language (85% of respondents), hard work, the foreign land, "misunderstandings among our own people", unemployment, health, i.e. health reasons (Translation HPS).

Among the early gumdiggers many could neither read nor write. The late Peter Yelavich, one of the few loners still living in a shanty near Waiharara in the 1970s, explains in a conversation with the author in 1972:

[In the evenings] mi bi škrepali gomu, strugali gomu. A neko bi uvijek čita – to je bilo u stara doba – imali bi naše stare historijske knjige i onda bi jedan bi čita, a drugi bi slušali. Bilo je, bilo je gŕ smelokopača koji nisu znali ni čitat ni pisat. Oni bi pomljivo to slušali i oni bi bili sposobni, sposobni kasnije to pripovidat reči do reči, tako su bili zainteresirani. I tako je life, život je bija u kaŕlogorima, I mean naseobinama, vesea. Bavilo se čitanjen, pisanjen, svjetskon politiki, i tako dalje...⁵³

[In the evenings] we would scrape the gum, scrape the gum. And someone would always read– this was in olden times – we had our old history books and then one would read and the others would listen. There were gŕ gumdiggers who could neither read nor write. And they would listen attentively and they were able, able to re-tell this later on word for word, [because] they were so much interested. And so, life, life in the caŕ in the camps, I mean in the small settlements, was a happy one. People would read, write, [discuss] world politics, and so on..... (Translation HPS; ŕ denotes hesitation)

But they taught themselves to write their own language and they acquired basic English in contact with New Zealanders. The latter was more difficult for women, who often stayed in a farm-house or in a family environment distant from English-speaking people. But gradually this problem became less prominent and their New Zealand-born children can be seen as the 'real bilinguals' with the mother-tongue learned as children, and with English – with a New Zealand accent – learnt outside and at school. Their Croatian is, of course, the dialect passed on to them by their parents, together with lots of

⁵³ STOFFEL, Hans-Peter Dialect and Standard Language in a Migrant Situation: The Case of New Zealand Croatian. In *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, p. 159.

anglicisms. They find it hard to understand a speaker from the 'old country' giving a speech in their clubs or to read publications in Standard Croatian.

Where the clubs had to run English language courses in early years, they now have to offer courses in Croatian for people who wish to (re-)learn the language of their forebears. At the University of Auckland, the present author introduced a beginners' course of Croatian in 1976. Its participants were both New Zealanders without any family connections with Croatia and descendants of Croats with no or minimal knowledge of the language who wanted to acquire a knowledge of the language so that they could visit their relatives in the 'old country'.

With a good knowledge of English, integration proceeded further. While there are still more in-marriages, out-marriages into a non-Croatian environment were becoming ever more frequent.

Apart from language, integration into the host society also manifests itself in preferences for food, body language, life and customs, changes of surnames – to mention just a few. They show that the lifestyle of second and subsequent generations can no longer be distinguished from the prevailing New Zealand way of life, except perhaps in the family and communal domains.

But there remains the heritage – Croatian food, especially the much-loved lamb on the spit, the kolo dance and often at least a passive knowledge of the language so that they could understand their grandparents when the latter talked Croatian. In surveys done between 1975 and 1990 most respondents are in favour of learning Croatian (this, at least, is an intention!) but they often add: "First of all, my children should be good New Zealanders". Language (meaning Croatian) is "nice to have" but English is more important for the job and life in New Zealand. "This is the reality", was the prevailing view among descendants of the immigrants from Dalmatia in the late 1980s.

A similar comment regarding language is made by Ljubomir Anić with reference to Chile:

*... da je jezik vrlo važan, ali ne i isključivi čimbenik koji određuje pripadnost jednoj etničkoj grupi.*⁵⁴

...that language is very important, but it is not the one exclusive factor which determines whether one belongs to a given ethnic group (Translation HPS).

Thus, one could be a good Croatian or Dalmatian without an active knowledge of the language. Communal life and with it voluntary associations assured the coherence of the community. In 1983 the *Yugoslav Society* and the *Yugoslav Benevolent Society* merged into the *Yugoslav Society*, and there was also the *Croatian Club* – a smaller grouping formed in 1972.

⁵⁴ LETICA, Silvija (ed) *Dodiri svjetova. Hrvatska i Čile. Encuentros entre dos mundos. Croacia y Chile*, p. 9.

Nikola Jelinčić captures the atmosphere in these clubs from the point of view of the outsider and onlooker from the homeland:

Klubovi su najpopularnija mjesta njihova okupljanja. Tamo stariji ljudi kartaju briškulu i trešetu, igraju na balote, prepričavaju uspomene, a jednim okom stalno su na plesnom podiju gdje im sinovi i kćeri balaju. Najveća je sreća za naše iseljenike kad im se djeca međusobno žene, pa su iseljenički klubovi već dugo prave burze za vjenčanja. U njima je na neki način konzervirana Dalmacija od prije pedesetak godina.

*Sviraju tamburice, čuju se stare pjesme, ali pjevaju se i one novije kao 'Skalinada', 'Moja Ane broji dane' i sl.[...]'*⁵⁵

The clubs are their [the Croats'] most popular meeting places. There the older people play card games [briškula and trešeta], and bowls, and tell and re-tell their memories, thereby constantly but discreetly following the dance floor where their sons and daughters dance. Our emigrants experience the greatest joy when their children marry within the community, and the emigrants' clubs have, already for a long time, been real marriage markets. In a way, we find here the preservation of Dalmatia such as it was some fifty years ago.

One can listen to the tamburitsas or the old songs, but they also sing more recent songs such as 'Skalinada', 'Moja Ane broji dane' and many more.
(Translation HPS)

By the 1980s the Croats could be found in all walks of life and professions, from orchardists to university professors, lawyers and politicians, and some of them have even made it to the annually-published *Rich List* (a list of the 100 richest people in New Zealand) in recent years. We now find people of Croatian descent holding high office in local and national government, and a considerable number have been awarded honours in recognition of their contribution to the advancement of New Zealand as a whole. The Croats had become respected members of the New Zealand society by the beginning of the 1980s, hence the title of Trlin's book: *Now respected, once despised* (1979). But the way there has not always been as smooth as it now often seems when memory has faded.

Cultural life

So far we have looked at material progress and contributions to New Zealand society. But the respect of the Croats within New Zealand society has been enhanced in no mean way by their integration into the mainstream New Zealand cultural life such as literature and painting. To illustrate this, let us look at

⁵⁵ JELINCIC, Nikola 100 godina našega iseljeničtva u Novom Zelandu. In *Iseljenički kalendar*, p. 107.

literature where, naturally, the topic of putting down roots in New Zealand occurs frequently.

We have already mentioned and quoted from the two foremost New Zealand-Croatian writers. Coincidentally they both have their roots in Zaostrog on the Adriatic Coast. Ante Kosović (born Zaostrog 1882 – died Auckland 1958) was born there, wrote his *Dalmatinac iz Tuđine* and other poems in Croatian and for the Croats; he is hardly known among non-Croats. On the other hand, Amelia Batistich (1915–2004) is without doubt New Zealand's best-known 'Dalmatian' writer both among her own community and among the other New Zealanders. The daughter of Dalmatian parents, she was born in Dargaville north of Auckland and has always seen herself as a 'New Zealand writer with Dalmatian roots'. She wrote her novels and stories in English but some of her work has been translated into Croatian. Most widely known is her collection of short stories under the title *An Olive Tree in Dalmatia*, first published in 1963. With a fine insight into the psyche of her heroes and heroines she shows the often painful way of letting go – but never completely – of Dalmatia and of becoming a New Zealander. Thus, the story *A Dalmatian Woman* ends with Lucia, a bride by proxy, beginning to feel at home in the new country:

And the funny thing was that she was soon used to it all. The rough kindness of the man, his clumsy lovemaking. The hard days and harder nights on the sack bed. The old country faded from her thoughts. She began to feel herself part of something in the making. The acres of land became an obsession with her as with him, and when their first child was born and she brought it home from the hospital, she held it up to the land and said – 'See what we are making for you!'.⁵⁶

And, in a way, the whole history of the Dalmatians is contained in the realisation of Ana and Stipan that they have lived a lifetime in New Zealand and built up their farm at a place called Tiritiri and that they now belong to the 'new country', New Zealand. They had returned to Dalmatia in their old age but realised that they no longer belonged there.⁵⁷

'What is that you are writing there?' she bent forward to look closer at the clumsy lettering and spelt out TIRITIRI. Something broke inside her when she saw it. 'You think of it, too?' she said.

He nodded his head slowly: 'Yes.'

'It is too many years to forget,' she went on quickly. 'A lifetime against a youth-time.' He didn't speak. 'Stipan...' she pulled at his sleeve.

'Eh, Ana?'

'Let us go back. There is nothing for us here.' She had said it.

⁵⁶ BATISTICH, Amelia *An Olive Tree in Dalmatia*, pp. 107–108.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Dalmatian fictional heroes have also found their way into the work of several well-known New Zealand writers with no connection to Croatia such as William Satchell, Frank Sargeson, Maurice Gee, and Joan Rosier-Jones. And in his poem *An Ordinary Day Beyond Kaitaia* Kendrick Smithyman⁵⁸ uses a Dalmatian-Maori funeral to play with the word MATE which can mean 'dead' (Maori), 'Matthew' (Croatian), 'mate' (English):

*I write in her dust
on the bonnet of our station wagon
M A T E. That will do, for a time.*

Among the artist community we find Milan Mrkusich, born in Dargaville in 1925, one of New Zealand's leading modernist painters whose best-known work among visitors to New Zealand are probably the "large plates of coloured enamel windows on the Te Papa [Museum] building [in Wellington]" (Arts Foundation of NZ).

The first-generation migrants had placed high value on a good education for their children – perhaps because they themselves often had had only little, if any. A symbol of symbiosis of the wine business and higher education is a New Zealand-born Dalmatian viticulturalist who became the first member of the London Institute of Masters of Wine (MW).

Sport

Sport, especially Rugby, plays a very important part in New Zealand life and culture. Dalmatians have been prominent in it and this has been a great integrator. In the early years of gumdigging there was bowling and also bodybuilding and athletics, but during the period 1920-1940 "participation in sport was still foreign to Croatian families".⁵⁹ However, by the late 1940s they were prominent not only in New Zealand sports such as Rugby and Bowling but also, for instance, in sheep-shearing competitions. As the 'Dally All Blacks' (in this case restricted to New Zealanders of 'Yugoslav' origin) they toured their home-country, and return visits of various sports teams to New Zealand also took place. The clubs took an active part in the organisation of sports events.

The world opens up

The 1970s brought an opening up of the world for all New Zealanders: in 1973 – one of the most significant years in New Zealand history – Britain joined the (then) European Economic Community. New Zealand lost the automatic access

⁵⁸ *An Ordinary Day Beyond Kaitaia* Kendrick Smithyman 1971, p. 92.

⁵⁹ JELICICH, Stephen A. *From Distant Villages— the Lives and Times of Croatian Settlers in New Zealand, 1858–1958*, p. 250.

of its primary produce to Britain, and was thus forced to diversify, become really independent and find markets in the wider, especially the non-British and non-English-speaking world. At about the same time, easier and cheaper access to the 'rest of the world' through travel and communication further enhanced this diversification.

Yugoslavia had always been easier to travel to, and to leave for emigration or temporary work, than other communist countries of Europe. Many New Zealanders of Croatian origin had had good contacts with their homeland before the 1980s and also travelled there, and people from the 'old country' had come to visit New Zealand. But now the world opened up for nearly everyone. In fact, one could consider the 100th anniversary of Croatian settlement in New Zealand, which the community celebrated in late 1979, also as the beginning of increased accessibility of the homeland.

Though still 24 effective flight hours from Europe, lower i.e. more affordable airfares meant more frequent trips to Europe and equally more frequent visits from the homeland, be that in the form of family reunions, sports teams, music groups, writers and many more. People who had never been back to the 'Stari kraj' since their arrival in New Zealand – often 50 years or so – and also New Zealand-born generations wanted to visit the homeland. And when they had been there once, they often wanted to do repeat visits. While these were individual visits, contacts also became ever more frequent between the clubs and official bodies, including organisations such as the *Matica iseljenika* [Heritage Foundation] with its offices in Zagreb, Split and Makarska. This showed, according to Nikola Jelinčić:⁶⁰

...da će se veze sa Starim krajem održavati i onda kad iseljenika (godine čine svoje) više i ne bude.

...that the relations with the 'old country' will continue even when the time comes and the immigrants (the advancing years will see to that) will no longer be around. (Translation HPS)

Increased contacts also developed between New Zealand and former Yugoslavia generally, and two New Zealand prime-ministers visited Yugoslavia during the 1970s and 1980s.

Then came electronic communication which further increased contacts. Both travel and communication improvements have been ongoing ever since the 1980s.

At the end of the 1980s, the number of New Zealanders of 'Yugoslav' descent was estimated to be around 50,000. Of these only 2,763 were 'Yugoslav-born' according to the 1986 Census, and most of them were over 55

⁶⁰ JELINČIĆ, Nikola 100 godina našega iseljeničtva u Novom Zelandu. In *Iseljenički kalendar*, p. 107.

years old. The community was definitely getting older. However, the heritage was still there and in the *Yugoslav Society* people could dance to Dalmatian music but youngsters could also have a disco and Croatian language courses and kolo dancing, and a *Genealogical and Historical Society* was founded as a branch of the Society.

The then *Yugoslav Society* was still larger than other Continental European clubs but, nonetheless, at a Symposium held in late 1990 concerns were raised about dwindling numbers of newcomers and about New Zealand's immigration policy which still "discriminate[d] against potential immigrants from Yugoslavia" and participants feared that "[i]f this current trend continue[d] the Yugoslav community in New Zealand [would] lose its identity and [would] face extinction".⁶¹

However, in the late 1980s, cohesiveness of the community, concentration of representative numbers of Croats and especially their descendants in a number of towns or suburbs and accessibility to a major cultural centre were still present. On the other hand, there was a very high level of integration into the New Zealand society. Most were fond of their heritage but wanted to be first and foremost New Zealanders.

From the SFR Yugoslavia to the Republic of Croatia

The collapse of the *Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*, the independence of the *Republic of Croatia* in 1992 and the open warfare in the homeland put the New Zealand Croatian community and its associations and clubs under considerable strain. In the ensuing crisis of identity first the Auckland-based *Yugoslav Society* and then gradually all clubs north of Auckland chose to return to the name 'Dalmatian' (for 'Yugoslav') rather than to adopt 'Croatian', and the *Yugoslav Society* became the *Dalmatian Cultural Society*. This was seen as an un-Croatian act by the opposite side and a separate *Croatian Cultural Society* was founded. Together with the already existing small *Croatian Club* this new society vigorously supported Croatia and its struggle while the *Dalmatian Cultural Society* adhered to a wait-and-see approach and continued to admit people from other areas of former Yugoslavia and also other Slavic countries.

Perhaps the words "Croatianism"⁶² on the one hand and "dalmatinstvo" (Klarić 2000: 110 [Dalmatian-ness]) on the other, both with negative connotations, sum up the situation. Some members of the New-Zealand born

⁶¹ Symposium on Yugoslav Immigration and Settlement in New Zealand, November 17, 1990, held in the rooms of the Yugoslav Society (Inc.) Eden Terrace. Auckland [Transcript], pp. 9, 17.

⁶² JELICICH, Stephen A. *From Distant Villages – the Lives and Times of Croatian Settlers in New Zealand, 1858-1958*. p. 14.

generations felt uncomfortable and ashamed about the war of their 'relatives' in former Yugoslavia and the infighting among their people in New Zealand, others enthusiastically supported the new republic and its war effort. Various other bodies also separated into a Dalmatian and Croatian entity, for instance the bowling fraternities⁶³ or the programmes on a local Auckland radio station. The Yugoslav Embassy in Wellington was closed by the New Zealand government which recognised Croatia almost immediately after it had declared independence and a Croatian Consulate was established in Western Auckland.

By now, things have become less agitated. Both 'Croats' and 'Dalmatians' travel to the new republic, some now own property there and most look forward to their homeland moving ever closer to Europe and its institutions. (For a detailed discussion of "Croatian or Dalmatian?" cf. Trlin & Tolich 1995).

In New Zealand the Croats have settled furthest away from their homeland. But if one considers most of the 20th century in far-away Europe as a time of conflict (including two world wars), then the Croatian community in New Zealand has been affected by this fact for most of its existence. The physical distance of 20,000 kilometres between the 'Stari kraj' ['old country'] and the 'new country' has made little difference.

The situation since 1992

As we have seen, the minimal replenishment of the community had caused great concern at the *Symposium* in 1990. But then the improvement came unexpected – caused by the homeland wars. In 2001 the New Zealand Census showed for 'country of birth' 2,280 persons from 'Croatia'. This was only slightly fewer than the number of 2,763 for all 'Yugoslav-born' people in New Zealand in 1986.

Both temporary and permanent migrants as well as refugees began to arrive and the clubs again sponsored many of them. In addition to migrants from Croatia there were also arrivals from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and other parts of former Yugoslavia. Most of these newcomers were well-educated and had a prior knowledge of English.

The situation of the Croats vis-à-vis their homeland is now largely on a par with that of other migrant communities from Continental Europe and depends mainly on financial resources, prestige and personal preferences. No more does there a 'culture in exile' have to be maintained (e.g. by those rejecting Yugoslavia) and there is less politically-inspired support in what the homeland provides for the cultural needs of its community in New Zealand. The 'Stari kraj' – Croatia – now enjoys an improved status compared with the time before 1992.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 256.

During the 1990s people have occasionally been encouraged to return to the new Croatia. But the long-established migrants and their descendants and even those who have arrived in the 60s and 70s have become 'newzealandised'. They have their families, their work and their pensions and medical insurance here, they own property, are integrated into the host society and do not know the Croatian language sufficiently, if at all. Naturally, the situation is somewhat different for more recent migrants for whom re-migration is a real possibility, whereby the skills learned in New Zealand can be put to profitable use back in Croatia.

The future

In one way, it is not difficult to predict the future of the Croatian community in New Zealand: the newcomers, if they stay, will again become 'newzealandised' like those before them. On the other hand, it is difficult to predict the intensity of their everyday 'Croatianess' though it is likely to become more all-Croatian rather than stay mainly Dalmatian. The same can possibly be said about language, with Standard Croatian and city speech becoming more prevalent and the dialects of Dalmatia retreating further.⁶⁴

The strong historical connection with the rural North will further weaken, a fact that has already been taken into account in the entry for 'Dalmatian' in Orsman's *New Zealand English Dictionary*. There, in the 1995 edition the earlier reference to "...in New Zealand especially one who settled in North Auckland"... (Orsman 1979, p. 266; 1989, p. 279) has been replaced by the more general ..."a New Zealand resident of Dalmatian extraction"...(1995, p. 71).

Auckland, with 33% of the national labour force and 32% of the country's resident population (*New Zealand Herald*, 25-01-09), attracts the bulk of immigrants overall. It is also likely to remain the hub of Croatian activity and act as a place of cohesiveness.

Contacts between Croatia and New Zealand are frequent in both directions, electronic communication fast and mostly on the basis of the standard language or in English, travel relatively easy. But much will also depend on the immigration policy of New Zealand, the attractiveness of New Zealand and Croatia and, last but not least, sufficient numerical replenishment of the New Zealand Croatian community.

Nowadays, the Croats form but one of the smaller communities from Continental Europe in New Zealand, albeit with a special relationship with the

⁶⁴ cf. STOFFEL, Hans-Peter The Croatian Language in New Zealand: A History of its Contact with Maori and English. In J. Genzor, M. Bucková (eds) *Favete Linguis*. Studies in Honour of Viktor Krupa, pp. 216-217.

Maori community and with the North and its history. Like other smaller European communities they have been overtaken in the past twenty years by the vastly increased numbers of the Asian and Pacific Islands communities.

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