

# How to Cope with Crisis - Families in Transformation

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## Abstract:

The paper gives an overview of the family life cycle in the Brčko District rural area in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the second half of the twentieth century. In the early 1960s, this area was heavily involved in the process of migration to more industrially-developed Western countries. Three large migration waves took place during this period. Based on intensive ethnographic research in the area, this paper emphasizes the role of migration processes in family transformation and the changes it brought to family forms and structures. The paper also stresses the fact that the family remained an important identity 'marker' for people both within and outside their communities.

**Keywords:** extended family, *geistarbeiter*, migration and family, family life cycle, Brčko District (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

## Introduction

By the mid-20th century, most of the population of the Brčko District<sup>1</sup> rural area was still living in extended patrilineal families, sharing common property, distributing their income equally, sharing houses, and organizing their work. The local term for such families is *zajednica*, or "community." Such communities commonly consisted of two, three, or more nuclear families, which adapted their forms and structures through the processes of family life-cycle changes depending on various external and internal circumstances. In the Brčko rural area, the family farm was at the center of family life, linking production and consumption, property, social status, and the identities of family members, which could be described as classic rural family farming (Seiser 2005).

I began my research in the Brčko<sup>2</sup> area of Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of larger project aimed at ethnological research into the everyday life, culture, and history of Bosnian Croats (Katić 2011, 2014).<sup>3</sup> The population structure in both areas is mixed and includes Croats, Bosnians, and Serbs.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper, I consider what happens to families when they are faced with large disruptions to normal life. In this region, intensive temporary labor migration by the male population left a deep mark on families<sup>5</sup> in the last decade of the twentieth century--a decade of transition and a decade marked as the decade of the *gastarbeiter* culture.<sup>6</sup> Although the region had to deal with several migration waves during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, my informants stressed the 1960s and 1970s migrations as the most intensive ones in every aspect. In a way, these migrations shaped individual and family memories, creating a kind of *lieu de mémoire* (Nora 1989). During this period, migration resulted in a better standard of living for many families, but at the same time prompted a number of changes in social norms and values. Put simply, it affected all segments of the life cycle for families and individuals. In this context, I pay particular attention to several of these issues: the division of labor within the family, changes in the roles of women and men within the family, proprietary relations, and finally, family divisions. One important aspect which I wish to highlight, and which the informants themselves isolated as a definite change, is the position of women within the family. They also emphasized the negative consequence of migration in separating families, life-in-motion, and the way in which, eventually, several nuclei are formed.

One of the main aims of the paper is to show how families have coped with the stress caused by migration in this region during the later 20<sup>th</sup> century. It has most often led to family division, or rather the restructuring and reshaping of the family, with one or more members of the basic family unit physically absent for most of the year. First, I give a brief description of the economic and social practices in the region, followed by an identification of the main migration waves of the area. In order to show the importance of migration trends during the 1960s and 1970s, in the first part of this paper I provide a context for the 20<sup>th</sup> century migration processes which affected this area. I then consider individual topics and show how family living standards changed, particularly material circumstances, changing relationships within families, changes in proprietary patterns, and issues regarding inheritance.

In addition to agriculture, husbandry was the main activity in which the families in this area were involved during the first, and much of the second half of the 20th century. After the Second World War, the combination of agriculture and additional sources of income formed the livelihoods of a large number of households. Seasonal jobs, in which most of the locals from Brčko District were engaged, were located in Vojvodina (Serbia) or Slavonia (Croatia). With the advent of additional sources of income for the family and the intense involvement of its members in the market economy, a number of parallel processes affected the lives of individuals and families. Thus, the combined economy with its division of labor probably affected both men and women equally, although with different dynamics (Muraj 1999).

All these factors integrated family members into a homogeneous community engaged in the joint effort to control the transfer of property between generations, to maintain the significance of particular assets, ways of contracting marriages, forming new families, and establishing the family's social status. Some authors mention that the reasons for migration are always a combination of a range of economic, social, and political motives (Lewis, in Živković, Šporer & Sekulić 1995). The basic motivation for migration in this area was economic, and most of most of my informants stated that they intended to accumulate enough capital to be able to leave their parental homes and build their own houses. In general, many of my informants left because they felt they had no choice.

Poor economic conditions accompanied by poorly developed infrastructure (between 1948 and 1989) made these areas some of the least developed in the country. Most of my informants especially looked back to 1952 as the year in which the entire area was struck by famine. One person related his experience, "When I went to Germany, we had straw-filled mattresses at home. I sold a cow so I could leave, so I could buy newer shoes, because I could not go in my old soft-soled shoes." After some time abroad--where they were able to make money--migrants would send part of their wages home and spent the rest on modest accommodation and food. One of my informants, who went to Germany as a blue-collar worker in the first migration wave, managed to save enough over several years to create dowries for his three daughters, enabling them to marry into well-off families, which he was very proud of. In addition, he modernized his own farm by buying a tractor and other machinery to make agricultural tasks easier. Another informant was able to afford to have his house connected to the electricity supply after only a few months working in Germany, and he shook the straw out of his old mattresses onto the fields and bought new beds. For him and his whole family, it was "a rags to riches" experience. The greatest impression he made on his family, as related by his son, describing how when he came home for the first time he was dressed in a suit and tie and brought the first gramophone ever seen in the village.

In the scientific literature, emigration in Bosnia and Herzegovina was often characterized as a specific phenomenon, and this was supported by figures on the state of migration. In a dozen municipalities, more than 20% of the population was known to have emigrated. Furthermore, the actual structure of the migrants was surprising, since those in

employment also migrated, though the majority were rural dwellers from poorly developed agricultural municipalities (Tanić as cited in Mežnarić 1985). Tanić observes that emigrants from these areas were forced to leave, even if they had jobs at home, because they were living on the margins of development (*ibid.*). At the same time, demographic hyper-population was occurring with more and more people seeking a way out of agriculture by becoming involved in industrial production. However, even this was not developed enough, so people were simply forced to leave, and they left in great numbers. Some areas lost almost a quarter of their active population. Mežnarić (1985) says that there were ninety six municipalities in which only one out of nine males between the ages of twenty and forty five stayed behind. Mikulić (1985) presents almost the same data, pinpointing Bosnia and Herzegovina as one of the most migration-stressed areas of former Yugoslavia. The records for the period from 1953 to 1961 show that around 180,000 people migrated, and the trend continued during the next ten years from 1961 to 1971.

Taking all of the material that I collected in consideration, it was obvious that, from the mid-1960s onward, families in these areas were in constant flux, especially those affected by male migration. Though this form of migration was supposed to be temporary, it often resulted in many migrants spending their whole lives shuttling between their families (remaining in their native lands) and abroad. To reinterpret Caroline Brettell, families in these kinds of situations were (mostly) “straddled across, rather than rooted in space” (2002, 246). Various factors influence the development of different family and household forms at any particular time. Times when changes occur in the course of a family's life are determined by the synergy of demographic, social, and economic factors. Thus, one form of the family can be replaced by another in a given period, either through natural causes (births and deaths), or changes in internal relationships and circumstances (family members moving in or out, marriages, etc.) (Rubić and Birt 2006). Changes are reflected not only in family forms or intrafamilial relationships, but also in value systems passed down within families. Even though there is a fair amount of literature on the make-up of the family (Hajnal 1965; Hammel 1972; Laslett 1972; Mosely 1976; Kaser and Halpern 2012; Kaser 2012, 2012a; Mitterauer 1996; Grandits, Hannes, and Grube 1996; Čapo Žmegač 1996; Leček 2003; Todorova 2006), little has been written about it relating to Bosnia and Herzegovina. I see my contribution through this paper as descriptive, and most of all I would like to shed light on this area in the context of the anthropology of the family. Issues regarding family change and continuity are widely discussed by ethnologists and cultural anthropologists (for details, see Hristov 2012; Hammel 1972, 1975; Laslett 1972; Hammel 1974; Kaser 2012). In order to answer the questions raised, I aim to take a closer look at the families, focusing on the life stories of my informants. By gaining a deeper insight into individual migration histories, I was able to explore the interconnections between movement and particular life events, and to show how different individuals, as members of larger family groups, informed to changes happening around them, and the strategies they used.

In researching migration and mobility, anthropologists and ethnologists have mostly focused their attention on micro level analyses of these phenomena, which has allowed them to place the family and household in the center. For a family and its members, the decision to migrate was a strategy to be activated in times of economic insecurity, to improve and secure their livelihood and to improve the family's economic situation. Migrants took charge of their lives and found ways of dealing with the difficulties that they or they families encountered. By resorting to different strategies, they were pro-active in dealing with the internal circumstances each family faced.

In the context of the theory of systemic migrations, observing microstructure includes focusing on the creation of informal social networks by individuals, to be used when he or she needs them. At such times, he or she is forced to deal with all the types of stress such

situations impose, and above all, to cope with completely new relationships which may be forming within his/her family, now separated from himself or herself. The individual who has left, and those who remain behind must create new conditions to enable them to maintain and build on existing relationships in order to keep in touch with their closest family members and relations. This is the moment when transnational families arise, and it is interesting that the proportion of social capital invested by the individual is only likely to reap rewards for future generations, rather than the pioneers themselves (see Rajković Iveta and Mišetić 2010).

Various models of residence and family life were characteristic of the families with migrant members. Separation affected relationships between husbands and wives, and parents and children, as well as between siblings who had been part of the same community until the family was divided. Thus family life could actually be characterized as multi-local (see Čapo Žmegač 2003: 124-128), and this was exacerbated when women also began to migrate. According to J. Čapo Žmegač, there were several variations of trans-local experience which families experienced, and continue to experience to a greater or lesser extent. There were families in which only the father lived and worked away from his family, and those in which both parents were absent, leaving the children in the care of grandparents, uncles, aunts, daughters-in-law, etc. I agree with Čapo Žmegač, when she says that the effect of transnationalism or translocation between countries cannot be defined unambiguously. Apart from the positive effects (improving the family's economic standing) of migration, there were also negative ones (alienation of marriage partners, or parents and children, children being brought up away from their parents, household conflicts, etc.).

### **Migration patterns in the course of the twentieth century: the emergence of *gastarbeiters***

In 1963, when Yugoslavia opened its borders for unskilled and low-skilled workers to travel to Western, industrially developed countries, the number of Yugoslav emigrants abroad grew considerably (Gmižić 2014). Emigration from the Brčko District in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be traced in three large migration waves. The first began in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when most people emigrated to Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (and Croatia and Slovenia). During the second migration wave in the 1980s, men who emigrated abroad for work were joined by their entire families (wives and children). The third wave occurred in the early 1990s for entirely different reasons, the outbreak of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Once again, people emigrated to Croatia, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, and other European countries, depending upon where they were able to find refuge. The main reasons for emigrating during the first and second waves were economic, whereas in the third wave, they were mainly political.

Migration during the later 1960s and 1970s was one of the fundamental processes that completely changed the way of life in this region in the following decades and pushed the area towards modernization. Those most frequently involved in this temporary (though long-term) labor migration were men who spent their entire careers, and sometimes even their entire lives, on the road between their home villages and workplaces abroad. As they acquired and accumulated capital, they brought it back home, which resulted practically overnight in a shift from a sort of pre-industrial to an industrial culture (for example, with only one member working in Germany a family could replace horses with tractors for farming or upgrade straw mattresses to proper beds, as some of my informants described their rapid economic progress) (see Katić 2014: 14). First generation migrants often had every intention of returning, although most of them ended up spending their entire working lives abroad. One of my informants described how he always viewed his time abroad as a temporary measure, a temporary life, while his real home and whole life were "back here,"

meaning his birthplace. In his heart, he had never really moved away and the idea of returning kept him going, while frequent visits and contacts with family members showed how this desire never weakened.

It should also be mentioned that this area was familiar with a high degree of seasonal migration from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century continuing through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when many people from this region, including women, went to Bačka (today Republic of Serbia) and Slavonia (Republic of Croatia) for short-term seasonal work, usually performing jobs in agriculture, construction, and other related jobs (Katić 2014). For example, the family of one informant from Gornji Vukšić saw two brothers going to Slavonia and Bačka for seasonal work over a period of ten years, while the middle brother stayed at home and kept the farm going with the women. More and more children were being born and there were more mouths to feed, yet their income from agriculture was insufficient, so someone had to go. It was much easier "when Germany opened up, because we could go there and make money."

### **The effect of migration on normal family life: the 'permanently separated' family**

Most of my male informants were newly married at the time of their migration, or were planning, or in the process of starting families of their own. Their family members found the distance and separation hard, and in the early days, the only available means of communication were letters or occasional phone calls. They could not travel frequently from their place of work back home, mostly because of the poor traffic infrastructure. If they did go home, it was for the holidays or summer vacations. In spite of the communication problems at certain times, their economic and emotional concerns for those they had left behind, particularly children and elderly parents never wavered. "Maintaining family links was in most cases the basic incentive in the wide spectrum of transnational migration practices, for both migrants and their families, and the reason why the transnational area emerged and developed between families and individuals who were absent from the family home" (Jernej 2010: 62). The new experiences of the families and the absence of some members changed their previous daily lives, although they continued to be shaped to a large extent by unbroken contacts between the two sides – those who remained, and those who had left (Birt and Černelić 2014). It was only in the early 1980s that regular bus routes were introduced, enabling migrants to go home more often, and this was particularly useful for those living near the border, and others who were engaged in "illegal activities," who made use of trips home to smuggle coffee and other requisites lacking at home across the border.

After some time spent in migration, the family would save enough money to build a house. Frequently, if they had enough land, sons and even grandsons built houses next to the original family home, thus forming small communities. Most informants confirmed the participation of the entire family in building a new house. The construction of new houses intended for several generations to inhabit simultaneously led to the disappearance of traditional dwellings, which were either demolished, or extended and adapted to meet the family's needs. Parents helped their sons, who would have had to leave the family home at some point anyway, while keeping them close to their parental home on part of the plot. Thus the older generations made sure their descendants remained close by, directly ensuring their own security in old age.

Because--or in spite-- of additional earnings and the combination of different sources of income, the land that a family owned remained the basic denominator of its economic and social status. This was especially true because women, or one or both parents, continued to live on the property, which was a sure source of regular income. It was also partly due to family strategies, in which it was important to keep up the household, even if there was no

man around to be its traditional head. This proved to be a good strategy if men were injured, slightly or seriously, as often happened, while carrying out hard physical work. The family was then safe from loss of income. One informant's father sustained a serious spinal injury after five years of migrant work and had to give up work for health reasons. Several other informants reported similar situations. In addition, the older generations were only familiar with farming, or combinations of farming and herding. The social value of land at such times was greater than its economic value. Land or property was not just an economic asset, but *family capital*, in the sense of social and cultural capital. Although leaving to work elsewhere furthered the life of the long-distance family, it also helped people become independent, since it was easier to be independent with independent financial means. The need for independence obviously existed previously, but could not be met without financial independence. The social crisis, like the agrarian crisis, coincided in a family life cycle experiencing the growth in the segment of the population which was living longer. The cycle of complex, extended family structures grew longer and the family continued to provide economic and social security for all members of the household, whether they lived permanently in the household, or in a different country. As long as they were part of the family, this kind of security was provided by other family members and their insistence that the family property stayed intact. This was something which the older generation in particular insisted upon, as parents were convinced that a living could only be found on the land, the only way they knew, and the way their parents and ancestors had lived before them. They were highly skeptical of change, even when family living standards improved to an obvious extent.

Most of the people I spoke to, and their parents' generation, had 'many' children, "because if you only had one, you might as well have none, so I had ten" – as one of my informants said, trying to persuade her grandson to have more children. Another said regretfully, "Today, if they have two, they don't need a third." Migration flows have also affected the age at which people get married so that today the well-established patterns of marriage within families are changing. My informants told me that the old custom was always to marry within the family and they would not take a wife without their father's approval. They were obedient, in awe, and too shy to do otherwise. By the end of the 1970s, the age at which people were getting married was rising and young men were able to buy cars after just a few months working abroad, which was previously unthinkable. They had assets, which meant they could be independent of their families, and so the family's influence on the choice of a marriage partner declined. "Up till then, parents did a lot of cajoling and complaining."

### **Female participation in migration**

As I have already mentioned, migration during the 1960s and 1970s, especially in the early stages, was sex-selective and therefore had an important impact on child-bearing and the division of labor within the family, as well as the family structure and gender relations. This changed in the following years, and according to data from the 1981 census the percentage of women in the total number of migrants from Bosnia and Herzegovina had risen to 29.1% (Mežnarić 1985).

So we can say that in the late 1970s, the 'feminization of migration' began (Nyberg 2005, 2). I noted many examples of passive female migration, when male migrants sent for their wives and children. This was partly the result of individual decisions to have their wives and children with them. Some informants mentioned loneliness and the desire to live with their families again. From the examples I noted, it can be concluded that the first migrants, who left in the 1960s and early 1970s, tended to take their wives and children with them

extremely rarely, but this trend changed, and the younger generation of migrants, born in the early 1960s, usually took their wives and children abroad with them.

For the old generation of migrants leaving wives and children behind was part of the family strategy to ensure that the family property would be maintained, and it would always be possible to return. Initially, those who left intended to return, so it was not necessary for their wives and children to go with them as my informants explained to me, but in the following years, this situation changed.

When seasonal labor migration started to include women, their mothers-in-law would look after the children. In these cases, the parents (more often the mothers) would visit their children frequently. So the family experience in one part of the family life cycle was both multi- and trans-locational, and this intensified particularly in the period when women also went to work in Germany (Čapo Žmegač 2003). However, if only men emigrated, their wives would join their husbands' parents in farm work, as well as performing their usual duties – taking care of the children and the household. If the wife joined her husband after a while, the children would stay temporarily with her husband's parents until they were old enough to start school, when their parents would take them abroad with them, depending on the family situation.

As a result of the men's absence, women often experienced new gender roles and responsibilities, mostly in relation to family farms. Most of my informants emphasized the difficult position and hard lives women led in rural areas, primarily due to the absence of the male workforce. The change in family structure due to division also caused a change in the relationship between men and women. Women, at least those in nuclear families, had to take care of the entire household and perform most of the everyday household and farm chores. One of my informants told me he had left his wife and children behind, and his wife led the household. His father was still alive, and helped out, while he sent them money from Germany.

The change in the woman's position within the family was gradual and occurred as a process of 'feminization' of agriculture in the villages of this region triggered by increasingly longer absences of men; men returned only to help in important agricultural work but sometimes not even then. Women were therefore forced to perform male jobs. In some cases, this was one of the reasons for postponing a family division, as a result of a joint decision taken by all the family members. One of the brothers who remained on the farm would to cope with the physically demanding jobs.

The increasingly significant economic role played by women was reflected in their greater role in everyday family life, as they now participated in making important decisions in the household. Depending on their status, some women were already influential in decision-making within the family and household, especially mothers. Now, women began forming their own strategies within the female group in the family, by taking care of the household in their husbands' absence, making small contributions to the family budget, and caring for the less independent family members, such as the children and older people (Hareven 1991).

When men left the household for longer periods, this led to changes in the lives of the women, increasing their workload, although little changed generally in the value system. This can be interpreted as one of the strategic decisions made by families as their members adapted to new circumstances, or rather one of the reasons why the basic family structure remained intact until the second half of the 20th century. Although women were leading households, decisions were still taken jointly, according to one informant, for example, they decided together that their children would no longer wear traditional costumes, but modern clothes, and this was a great relief to women, whose job it was to make fabrics and clothes. Until the Second World War, typical female jobs involved work related to the home and

kitchen: childcare, cooking and laundry (Leček 2003). In extended households, the allocation of everyday chores had a rigid structure. The men agreed on their jobs for the next day over dinner. These tasks were their main occupation during a normal day in the household. Depending on the time of the year, they had to discuss seasonal tasks, too. The same was true for the women--if something special needed to be done the next day, the mother-in-law was in charge of organizing it. This kind of situation was actually helpful to many women, as in extended families, nobody had to do all the heavy chores by herself, and there was constant support from other male family members if her husband was absent from the household for some reason. Many of my female informants were quite ambivalent about their position in the extended family; on the one hand they complained a lot about their status, but on the other hand, the positive side of the arrangement was that they had constant help with heavy household chores. R.I.'s household was no exception, but all my informants mentioned the equal division of labor and 'easier' life they enjoyed in communal situations. Changes in traditional production methods, the use of new technology, and the way land was cultivated also resulted in changes in the division of work in the family. People started to implement new technology and new cultures (or old crop-farming methods were reviewed), and this coincided with changes in land ownership (due to the process of household division).

In addition to their activities at home, women became more involved outside the household, especially after the Second World War. Their minor earnings from working or selling products from their traditional domains (e.g. the garden - selling eggs, dairy products, vegetables and fruit), meant a steady additional income for the household (Leček 2003). Money earned in this way was spent on basic supplies that could not be produced in the household itself, such as coffee, sugar, salt, etc. Although this additional income would be spent as part of the household budget benefitting all members, women would often secretly keep some for themselves and their nuclear families, especially their children. They saw it as a way of protecting their own family unit in the extended household. Another way of making extra money was sewing, weaving and embroidery, but this was reserved for the few skilled women who could do it well and also owned a loom.

### **Families in the process of division**

The disintegration of family communities is a protracted, extremely complex social process which affects people's life cycles. Family division, as my data shows, happened in almost each family under different circumstances, but was most intense and ran rife in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when many families divided, or at least, those who had something to divide up, did so. As my informants stated, 'we were living separately', thus creating a 'temporarily separated family' and now we divided. Division was usually demanded by a brother who had spent a certain amount of time working abroad.

It is possible to define changes in traditional values which were prompted by migration processes in the 1960s and 1970s as the most important trigger of division; before that, household life functioned because "everyone respected their elders more", among other things. People could not, or did not want to criticize their elders. In the mid-1960s, the situation changed, and families had fewer children. Yet, even only sons no longer wanted to continue living with their parents, but instead wanted to live separately with their own nuclear families. Perhaps this was the origin of the song which one of my informants recalled, "You're not the boss if you have oxen, but you are the boss if you have sons." The traditional pattern, which had been to blame women for all the family's shortcomings, even the division of a 'happy family', was repeated over and over in examples given by my informants, no matter the gender. Apart from conflicts between female family members



(which was perhaps over emphasized as part of the family strategy) there were reports of conflicts between brothers, or brothers and fathers, that is, male family members. These relationships were generally ignored in the popular and scientific literature, while the "female faults" in family division were given prominence. During my interviews my informants mentioned the number of factors which had influenced family divisions –migration being the one of them of course, but would often end by saying something like, "It was mostly the women's fault." Life in joint family households, which had been the norm, was thus disturbed, even though migration was first seen as a way of improving the entire family's financial position. As time went by, those who stayed behind became increasingly frustrated for various reasons.

The family of one informant lived in an extended household comprising his parents, himself and his two brothers, and their wives and children. After he, as the older brother, agreed with his father and the younger brothers to join a relative in Germany and work temporarily as an assistant builder, there were increasingly frequent tensions within the family. As the years passed and more children were born--his brothers had two each--but my informant had only one. At a certain point, he thought the family's income and food were not being distributed fairly. His own nuclear family received less, because there were only three of them. According to him, the sisters-in-law did not get on very well anyway, and their relationships were reflected among the children. The family decided to divide. He admitted that if he had not had his own income from working abroad, he would have had to wait several years for his independence. They finally split up at the end of the 1970s. In his case, and the entire situation he told me about, it was clear that a strong patriarchal pattern was still present, in which separating from the family was seen as a bad thing. In his case, it happened even though the parents and sons alike tried to ignore their everyday problems and keep the extended family together for as long as possible. Finally, when families decided to divide, vertical, three-generation families consisting of parents, sons, and their families were formed, as well as the nuclear families. In fact, as my research in this area shows, usually one married son, frequently the youngest, inherited the family house and basic property, that is, he stayed on the family farm with his parents. Naturally, this did not mean the complete disappearance of family communities; according to various accounts, they persisted and became modernized in this area well into the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the informants frequently reported their own experiences of family division in the late 1980s).

In households with several brothers, sometimes 'temporary' labor migration would be planned so that at least one male family member would stay at home and assume responsibility for the main farm work, with the help of the female and other remaining family members. This arrangement lasted for as long as the family members agreed on the conditions arranged. Division was usually demanded by a brother who had spent a certain amount of time working abroad.

When a family decides to divide, the process can take several years, particularly if the parents are not yet ready to hand over the management of property and finances to their children. It sometimes takes even longer for practical reasons, for example, in the case of one informant with two brothers who decided to separate from the family. Their father had agreed to build a house for each son, so several years passed between the decision and the actual, physical separation. They continued to carry out some joint tasks and practices after the division, they continued to work together, but went home to sleep in their new house at night.

Life in joint family households, which had been the norm, was thus disturbed, even though migration was first seen as a way of improving the entire family's financial position. As time went by, those who stayed behind became increasingly frustrated for various reasons. This was exacerbated when original agreements about how money should be shared were overruled; some wanted to keep the money they had earned for themselves. When a family

decides to divide, the process can take several years, particularly if the parents are not yet ready to hand over the management of property and finances to their children. It sometimes takes even longer for practical reasons, for example, in the case of one informant with two brothers, who decided to separate from the family. Their father had agreed to build a house for each son, so several years passed between the decision and the actual, physical separation. As the youngest son in this family, my informant stayed with his parents in the family home. Interestingly, they continued to carry out some joint tasks and practices after the division. In the family of the informant from Gornji Vukšić (Brčko), after the brothers separated and moved into a newly built one-story house, they continued to work together, but went home to sleep in their new house at night.

This traditional, patriarchal pattern, according to which one son always takes care of the family, was maintained even when large numbers of local inhabitants decided to leave these areas. When his son got married in 1979, one informant had already been working temporarily in Austria for several years, and his son had worked with him at one time. The time came for a generation change and my informant retired, while his son continued working. At that point, the son's family, that is his wife and young child, lived with my informant and his wife. That continued for three or four years. In the meantime, the son built himself a house close to the family home, and eventually his wife and child moved there. Later, the wife went to join her husband in Austria, leaving the child with his grandparents. He was ten years old when the conflicts of the 1990s began, which finally led to the decision to take the child to be with his parents, and in fact, they all stayed in Austria. The family home is now a place where they spend part of their holidays, in their "native land."

Among the reasons for migration, some informants mentioned specific inheritance patterns. Some men were forced to migrate as they had no property of their own and were not expecting to receive a portion of their parents' property, i.e. oldest sons. In some cases, the parents were unable to help them build houses in which to start their own households, so the situation prompted them to leave. So after separating from his father and brothers (he was the oldest) an informant from Boderišće (Brčko) decided to leave for Germany. This is how he described his experience. "We were all together for three years, my wife and I had one child, and what can I tell you – it was all very normal and simple for me. Why wait around? All I could have done was have more children. It was customary for the youngest brother to stay at home, and I had two younger brothers – they stayed, and I left. All I could do was leave."

I would like to emphasize that the process of family division was not only a feature of the early 20th century, nor was it always prompted by labor migration among the population. Complex family divisions took place earlier as well. I noted that in the life cycles of some of my informants, families had undergone two or three divisions. Just after one informant was born, his uncles decided to move out, and that was in the mid-1920s. Twenty years later, he and his five brothers decided to separate. Each went to live in his own house, and he stayed with his parents. When he decided to go to Germany, he set up a temporarily extended family, in which his married sons and their families lived together. When the last son finally moved out, my informant was already ready to retire, and he was the only one to return, while his sons stayed in Germany and Austria, where they had already started their own families.

An informant from Donji Vukšić (Brčko) told me how his family divided in the 1960s. At that time, there were too many people in the household, so the logical thing to do in terms of space was to divide. Something similar happened to an informant from Donji Zovik (Brčko), who separated from his family in 1958. He had two younger brothers and a sister, and was the first to leave, as the eldest, knowing he needed to make room for the others. As he explained, his other brothers also wanted to marry, so he moved out to give them more room in the parental home. He was helped to build another house. In fact, he and his father built it together.

## Conclusion

This research showed that the decision to migrate was to a large extent taken at the family level, that is, it was both the decision of the individual, the consequences of which were agreed by the family. The material I collected pointed to the conclusion that migration has become a traditional pattern of behavior for the second generation of migrants in this area studied. My study of the effect of migration on family households in the villages of Brčko District shows that labor migration undeniably initiated changes in the structure and form of the family, as well as in interfamilial relations, relationships between men and women, and parents and children, in attitudes towards property, and its division. Temporary labor migration intensified divisions in family communities, since the need for individualism was much stronger than for family cohesion. At the same time, labor migration contributed to family welfare and individual security, which was its main purpose.

The migrations that began in the 1960s continued in the 1970s, when most of the men took their wives with them. Migration which was at first meant to be temporary became permanent when the family was reunited as a result of the men bringing their wives and children to their host country. As I have shown, this changed the model of the temporarily separated family in the areas covered by the study.

Still, the family remained an important identity 'marker', used as a means of identifying a person both within and outside his or her community. Thus, I agree with Hannes Grandits when he states that the family must be observed within a specific cultural and historical context (Grandits 2010). While the family is a safe place for its members, place where traditions and values are upheld, among other things, it is also subject to change.

After the war in the early 1990s and intensive migration, family structures changed primarily because elderly people returned, whereas their children, who had started their own families, remained in the countries in which they took refuge during the war. Most informants now live in nuclear families consisting only of parents, while their children live in separate households, or in Western European or other countries, and have no intention of returning.

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<sup>1</sup> Brčko District is situated in the norther part of territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina and as a independent administrative unite of local self goverment it was founded in 2000. Town Brčko is the seat of the Brčko District.

<sup>2</sup> The initial research started in May 2010 in the Usora area, and continued in August 2012 in the Brčko District. My resarch in Usora region was focused on the family but not in the context of migrations so I decided to exclude it from this paper (for the results of that research see more in Birt 2011). Research was conducted in the villages of Štrepci, Gornji Zovik, Donji Zovik, Boće, Boderište, Omerbegovača, Donji Rahić, Ulice, Ulović, Vukšić Donji, Vukšić Gornji, Laništa, Skakava Donja, Prijedor, Skakva Gornja, Maoča, Bosanska Bijela, Dubrave and Hrgovi Donji. From 1994 till 2000 this villages formed most of the municipality of Ravne Brčko. The municipality of Ravne Brčko ceased to exist with the establissement of the Brčko District.

<sup>3</sup> For additional information about the project, the scope of the research, and other colleagues involved, see the introductions to two published monographs (Katić 2011, 2014; Birt 2011, 2014). Up to now, two monographs have been published that synthesise the ethnographic material acquired during intensive field research conducted by fifteen scholars writing on various subjects

<sup>4</sup> Due to restrictions within the project, and according to an agreement with the project coordinator, we concentrated our research within the Croatian communities in these areas.

<sup>5</sup> The aim of these migrants was to stay temporarily in the countries to which they migrated, however the effects of economic, social and political changes, particularly the war in the early 1990s, meant that for many, migration became permanent. However, it is necessary to look at the individual life stories of those who even today, as second-generation migrants, still intend one day to return to their native areas in retirement. The first generation of such migrants returned at the end of their working lives to the homes which they rebuilt following the war.

<sup>6</sup> *Gastarbeiter* (from the German – guest worker) is a term for a labor migrant used during the new migration wave of the later 20th century. For centuries people have migrated from South East Europe to other European countries and the Americas.

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