

# Migration from Yugoslavia via Germany back to Croatia?

## The Connection of Transnationalism and Return-Migration in Macro- and Micro-Perspective

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Since the beginning of the German-Yugoslav labour migration process from the late 1950s until the breakup of SFR Yugoslavia, the “final return” of labour migrants in the near future or “one day” was not only a constitutive part of many individual labour migration plans, but also a political paradigm shaping the respective labour migration policies and the bilateral coordination of German-Yugoslav labour migration. The temporariness of their stay in Germany was an assumption the recruiting country Germany and the sending one, Yugoslavia, as well as most labour migrants had been sharing for a while. For decades labour migration was commonly seen as a linear process that was supposed to end with the final return to the “one and only” homeland. But in the 1990s the socialist Yugoslav state collapsed and since then the Republics of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and later Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo had become independent states.

New citizenships were granted and passports issued by the new governments – not only for citizens living within the territorial borders of the new nation-states but also for fellow nationals living abroad.<sup>1</sup> New migration or diaspora policies have been formulated addressing not any more “Yugoslav workers temporarily employed abroad” and their families but rather co-nationals, who since the 1990s have been commonly perceived as national diasporas of the respective nation and nation-state. The fellow citizens abroad have been included in politics and discourse of national belonging and identity in the new origin states in transition. Emigrants became target groups in electoral campaigns of political parties and constituencies and ministries for diaspora/emigration have been established in order to integrate citizens living abroad into the political system of the new nation-state. Furthermore, the political engagement and financial contributions that migrants invested in homeland affairs were distinctive features of emerging nationalism and nation-state building in former Yugoslavia.<sup>2</sup>

This paper discusses the “return-paradigm” shaping migration policies with regard to the German-Yugoslav labour migration process and political transition in the 1990s focusing on Croatia. From a transnational point of view I will consider the notion of the “return plan” for labour migrants as a political and ideological “believe-system” on the macro level, which is, within the framework of the (labour) migration policies of the respective states, the FR Germany, the SFR Yugoslavia, and the successor state Republic of Croatia.

The presentation is mostly concerned with the former Croatian guestworkers generation and their descendents in Germany, who experienced the division of SFR Yugoslavia and the nation-state building process of the successor state Croatia. As a part of my research work in the ForMig-Project *Bavaria-Croatia Transnational: A Life-History Perspective on Social Transborder Networks of Migrants from Croatia in Bavaria* I have been conducting and analyzing life narratives of the first labour migration generation and their descendents, the “post-migration generation”<sup>3</sup> of people of Croatian origin. Both of them share a migration history but they are differently involved in the German-Yugoslav labour migration process, as their experiences are anchored differently in dimensions of time – the biographical and the historical one. To exemplify the significance of the “return idea” on the micro level focusing on generational differences, I present a case study of a Croatian family, who is living in Bavaria.

### The Political “Return Paradigm” Shaping German-Yugoslav Labour Migration Policies

To understand the political turnaround of the German-Yugoslav labour migration policies by the end of the 1960s it is important to recall that the Yugoslav communists’ attitude towards labour migration as well as the political bilateral relations between the FR Germany and Yugoslavia in the 1950s until 1968, were rather negative. In fact, until 1962, the ruling Communist Party under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito condemned labour migration as being illegal. Despite its ideological disapproval unemployment and labour emigration in Yugoslavia after World War II had been rising. People who had left socialist Yugoslavia for economic reasons were treated like enemies of the state, as their departure could not be accepted or justified as it contradicted sociopolitical norms.<sup>4</sup>

After the Yugoslav communists broke with the Soviet Union and thus had been suspended from the Cominform in 1948, they gradually adopted a new, more independent course towards socialism, which would be known as “Titoism”. By the mid 1960s the Yugoslav regime surprised the world again by opening its borders to unemployed citizens and legalizing migration to western industrial capitalist countries.<sup>5</sup>

Yugoslav sending- and German recruitment policy had interrelated aspects in economic and also political international relations. First of all, German immigration- and Yugoslav emigration-policy reacted to the needs of the international labour market. Since the German labour market had not been able to satisfy the huge demand for labour force, the German employers’ recruitment strategy for low-paid employees constantly reached beyond the state border. After recruiting workers from Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Turkey, Tunisia and Morocco, the German government signed its last recruitment agreement with Yugoslavia on 12 October 1968, ensuring that cheap labour from a socialist country would enter the FR Germany in huge numbers with legal status, social insurance and a temporary, non-immigrant status. Apart from economic reasons, political international relations between Germany and Yugoslavia stimulated the experiment with “temporary” labour transfers from a socialist into a western industrial country. Basically, the German government preferred recruitment agreements with states in amity. When Germany first applied the “Hallstein Doctrine” to Tito’s Yugoslavia in 1957, because of Tito’s recognition of the German Democratic Republic, all diplomatic relations ceased for the next eleven years until 1968. It was not until 1966 when the new “Ostpolitik” of foreign minister Willy Brandt required an improvement of relations with non-aligned Yugoslavia by negotiating a recruitment agreement,<sup>6</sup> which was long desired by the Yugoslav government. Based on the principle of “change through rapprochement”, the German government reestablished diplomatic relations with SFR Yugoslavia in January 1968 and signed the recruitment agreement just a few months later in October. The reinterpretation and liberalization of labour migration by political decision makers enabled the Yugoslav government and administration to organize, control, and legally protect the complete act of migration.

The former ideological disapproval of emigration was not seriously called into question by the new liberal labour migration stance of the regime of the Yugoslav “workers-state” as the international return-paradigm of European labour migration recruitment era (1950s to 1973/74) gave the Yugoslav labour emigration the mark of temporariness. Henceforth, labour migration was communicated as a supporting measure of an economic consolidation of the Yugoslav self-managing system. In fact, the legalization of labour migration was introduced in 1962 with an amnesty-law that allowed the visits and returns of thousands of economic refugees, who had left Yugoslavia since 1945, apart from political enemies such as “collaborators, spies and war criminals”.<sup>7</sup> Until 1973 the Yugoslav state focused on the increase of labour migration, whereas since the recruitment ban of the West European countries in 1973/74 the focus of Yugoslav labour migration policy started to shift to reintegration measures for returning migrants. In fact, since 1973 the Yugoslav state had to deal with an increasing number of returnees.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless the remigration trend on the long run was modest and had a downward orientation until the breakup of Yugoslavia, as the Yugoslav labour market had never been able to offer work to those thousands of people “working abroad temporarily”.

With the end of the recruitment and sending migration policy, Yugoslav authorities started to consider emigration more critically, and in political discussions negative aspects of enduring emigration were stressed. The League of the Communist Party reassessed labour migration as a problem for national safety and social development.<sup>9</sup> The Yugoslav state underlined the responsibility of its political social forces for the return of the migrants by issuing regulations, social agreements and measure catalogues including regional development plans, the possibility of buying a workplace with foreign exchange, tax benefits for self-employed, premiums, and tax politics tailored to the particular needs of returnees.<sup>10</sup> Another prominent but unsuccessful initiative of the Yugoslav remigration policy was the formation of “returnee companies” or “foreign-exchange enterprises” that had been founded with the financial aid of labour migrants from abroad in regions usually with a high unemployment and emigration rate.<sup>11</sup>

To keep up or to establish transnational bonds between Yugoslavia and “its” labour migrants, the government passed a series of resolutions to reinforce self-management of Yugoslav social clubs abroad. In addition to that, especially trained teaching staff was sent abroad to give supplementary mother tongue instructions to the labour migrants’ children.

The political goals of this transnational engagement of the Yugoslav state in Germany was to protect and develop the national and cultural identity of Yugoslav citizens abroad in order to prevent them from total assimilation, to keep labour migrants away from the political influence of political exiles and to foster their willingness for repatriation and prepare their reintegration into the Yugoslav society.

Keeping up transnational ties of labour migrants was also financially paying off for Tito's Yugoslavia since labour migration as a mass phenomenon had occurred. The economic significance of remittances which helped to alleviate poverty and pay for imports mostly from Germany was an incentive for both, the Yugoslav and German policymakers, to foster temporary emigration and to promote the attachment of labour migrants to their home country. In this respect, the Yugoslav transfer of workers not only affected the German and Yugoslav domestic economy, but also improved external trade between the two states.

Summing up, Germany as the recruiting state and Yugoslavia as the sending one shared the common assumption of the temporary nature of labour migration and the political return-call, which justified their workers' transfer in public, but lacked a sustainable economic foundation, because "temporary workers were being recruited to meet permanent labour demand", as Stephen Castles puts it.<sup>12</sup> The short-sighted economic interests that demand and foster labour migration on a temporary basis are obvious: the recruiting country counts on low integration costs and the sending country benefits from the remittances as the materialized form of connections maintained with the homeland.

### Terminology of Inclusion and Exclusion of Migrants with regard to the German-Yugoslav Labour Migration Process

The political interest of communicating labour migration as a working stay for the time being, which is supposed to end with the "final return", was of high ideological importance, which is reflected in the labour migration terminology used by the Yugoslav authorities. The term "Radnik na privremenom radu u inozemstvu" (worker who is temporarily working abroad) was commonly used by Yugoslav officials for labour migrants with the possessive pronoun – "our" workers working abroad temporarily – suggesting that the Yugoslav worker abroad was still an "organic part" of the working class of Yugoslavia. By giving the emigrated population a collective name, the government pressed its claim on the citizens abroad, emphasizing that their labour migration was temporary and that the party attached great importance to their return. The ideological legitimation in stressing labour migrants' belonging to the Yugoslav society implied that their status in the western countries and their final return was not a private matter but one concerning the whole socialist society.<sup>13</sup> It also distinguished labour migrants semantically from political dissidents or exiles.

On the other hand, the Yugoslav return paradigm shaping labour migration policy matched with the guideline of German migration policy that Germany – despite the massive labour immigration – should not turn into an immigration country. Consequently, in public and political discourse the foreign labour migrants were not perceived as permanent settlers in their new homeland Germany, rather, their assumed return to their country of origin was not questioned for decades. Workers from Yugoslavia were functionally labeled as "Yugoslav employees" by German ministerial bureaucracy, whereas in public the term *Gastarbeiter*<sup>14</sup> was common, which emphasized their status as welcomed guests who were expected to work hard and leave when their (wo)manpower was no longer needed. Following this guideline of not being an immigrant country, German policymakers formed a policy for foreigners, which concentrated on the one hand on the integration of migrants and their families, but on the other hand supported their willingness and preparedness for repatriation.

Even if the direct repatriation measures, such as repatriation grants<sup>15</sup> for labour migrants were of less benefit, the labour migrants were given clear signals that their return-plans to their homeland was fully supported by the host-country, which cooperated institutionally with the Yugoslav state to foster the migrants repatriation. E.g., Yugoslav labour migrants had the possibility to attend professional trainings organized by Yugoslav trade schools in Germany to facilitate their reintegration to the Yugoslav labour market. Furthermore, their children were offered additional or even, as in the Bavarian case, full time national Yugoslav classes to keep them capable of returning to Yugoslavia. In addition to that, migrants could

take advantage of official advisory service in case they intended to return to their country of origin.<sup>16</sup>

Apart from direct or legal repatriation facilities, there were also indirect ones such as giving preference to German citizens when filling vacancies, hindering family reunification as well as xenophobic attitudes of some politicians and parts of society.<sup>17</sup> Altogether, as Schmidt-Fink puts it, the German return policy without a coherent integration policy until the end of the 1990s must have created a picture to migrants of not being welcome in Germany in the long run.<sup>18</sup> The political refusal to integrate the foreign workers on a long term basis, worked in favor of the Yugoslav government's aim to keep the labour migrants loyal and attached to their "homeland", be it for economic or political reasons.

### From *Gastarbeiters* to "Diaspora-Croats": Political Transition and Changing Migration Policies with a Focus on Return Policy in Croatia during the 1990s

The societies of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Croatia, as well as the other republics of the former socialist Yugoslavia had been experiencing sustained demographic transitions due to the mass movement of people searching labour in the industrial center of Western Europe since the 1960s. In the medium and long run the "temporary labour migration" from Yugoslavia to Germany turned into immigration and the status of labour migrants changed from "temporary foreign labourers" to legal residents with permanent residence permits. Rights and protections for foreigners in Germany, which were granted by the German courts, counteracted the political aversions to permanent immigration of foreigners.<sup>19</sup> In fact, in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it became apparent that the German economy has become increasingly dependent on the labour of the former and new coming migrants; the last being more diverse in culture and social characteristics than the former labour migrants of the 1960s.<sup>20</sup>

The temporary character of labour migration turned out to be an illusion for many migrants and a political myth for the German and Yugoslav societies. The Yugoslav economy never recovered and the debt crisis worsened resulting in the economic collapse in the late 1980s. With the economic downfall and the proceeding political disintegration of the Yugoslav state in the 1980s the return paradigm concerning labour migration was more and more questioned by politicians and Yugoslav migration researchers.

Nevertheless, after the break-up of the League of the Communist Party and the Yugoslav state in 1991, the political reconnection of emigrated citizens and their integration into the concepts of society and nation remained to be distinct features of migration policy in the successor states. While politicians discussed the new contours of the nation and the borders of the nation-state, new political agendas also implied that the emigrant communities in western countries could be part of that nation, too.<sup>21</sup> Since the 1990s, researchers started focusing on the involvement of former Yugoslav migrants in nationalism and the phenomenon of Diaspora. Political analysts, anthropologists, ethnologists, and historians have paid particular attention to the emigrated co-nationals of Croatia and their relations to their country of origin. In the epilogue of *Die Erfindung der Nation*, Benedict Anderson emphasizes that Croatian emigrants in Germany, Austria, North America, and Australia supported the break-up of Yugoslavia, acting like nationalists from afar by collecting money and munitions on a large scale.<sup>22</sup> He argues that these emigrants had a certain picture of Croatia in their minds, yet they had no intention to return and live there again.<sup>23</sup>

Instead I argue that in the German-Croatian case there is evidence that the migrants' "plan to return" still existed during the break-up of Yugoslavia, as it had structured their transnational life since the beginning of their immigration and during decades of long-term residence in Germany. I think it is important to consider, when we analyze the transnationalism of migrants from former Yugoslavia, that their transnational practice with regard to the "homeland" is not static but dynamic, depending on their biographical and historical time, social surrounding and transnational networks. Further, migrants should not be essentialized – even if they share Croatia as their origin country, they do not form a homogenous group whose members act the same way, no reason in which country they live: the migrants' dynamic transnational practice that makes them sometimes visible as a Diaspora with political influence depends highly on migration concepts and policies of political authorities in the residence and origin country.

In this respect long-distance nationalism should be rather understood as a two-way process between the migrants and the origin society, and the migrants and the residence society. The international press, the Internet, and cheap airline tickets enable the policymakers from the home country to reach their voters or supporters in their new residence countries as well. Not only can migrants or their communities act as nationalists from a long distance, the sending society and its policymakers can also raise claims on the emigrated citizens and try to evoke their loyalty by all possible means, even overstepping their state borders if necessary.

Here I briefly discuss “long distance nationalism” as one political form of transnationalism that was exercised by politicians in Croatia focusing on Croatian labour migrants living abroad in the first decade of political transition. In the Republic of Croatia the first political party that detected the financial potential of the emigrants was the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), the first ruling party (April 1990–January 2000) under the leadership of President Franjo Tuđman. Tuđman and other HDZ politicians, such as the later president Stipe Mesić, frequently travelled abroad and gathered supporters along with large financial contributions in Croatian emigrant communities. Party branches in 16 US cities were built overnight, only a few months after the foundation of the party in Croatia in 1989.<sup>24</sup> The first HDZ branch in Germany was founded in September 1989 in Bruchsal, Baden-Württemberg; more branches followed in 90 more cities.

The new political interpretation of the history of migration of Croats living abroad gave up the ideological dichotomy of political and labour migrants, subsuming all migrants of Croatian origin under the heading “national diaspora” or *iseljenišтво* (emigration). The exiles, who had been stigmatized as class enemies for decades during Yugoslav times, were receiving public attention and were treated as saviors or prophets of the national Croatian dream of independence and democracy.<sup>25</sup> In general, the new Croatian authorities considered emigration a demographic problem – mainly seen as a source of loss for which the Communist regime and its extensive emigration policy against the Croatian people were made responsible. Even if in political discourse the premise of temporariness of the labour migrants’ stay was revealed to be a political myth, the political idea of a final return of Croats living abroad was not called into question but rather given priority to national migration policy. As early as 1989, the presidency in Zagreb called for legal and political guarantees and a safe return home for all Croatian emigrants, no matter what their political orientation or belonging was.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the unification of the home nation with its expatriates was a main electoral issue of Tuđman’s party and the HDZ expanded its election campaign to the USA, Canada and other Western European countries. The strategy of political mobilization was tied to the “vision of return”, as the new government imagined the Croatian emigrants as a divided part of the nation.<sup>27</sup> After the outbreak of the war in Croatia in 1991, the homeland was calling more frequently and intensely.

The existence of a Croatian diaspora appeared as both – a blessing and a curse. While the new government of the Republic of Croatia and the war-torn society benefited from high amounts of remittances and humanitarian aid sent by the migrants, the politicians rhetorically lamented the division of the “national corpus” and the demographic loss due to emigration. Repatriation of migrants of Croatian origin and their descendents was seen as a national goal to improve the inflow of human and economic capital but concrete measures for fostering and regulating repatriation were missing, as Saša Božić points out.<sup>28</sup>

To recapitulate, the return paradigm that shaped the Yugoslav sending and the German recruiting labour migration policy for decades even took effect on the new migration policy of the successor states targeting on co-nationals living abroad, as the Croatian example shows. In the Yugoslav workers’ state the belief system of a “final return” of the labour migrants served to overcome the ideological contradiction of being both – a socialist and an emigration country for labourers. Correspondingly, in Germany the return paradigm served policy makers to keep the myth alive that Germany is not turning into an “immigration-country”, because political mainstream parties mentally had been visualizing Germany as a “homeland” only for ethnic Germans until officially proven otherwise in 2001 by the Süßmuth Commission Report to the German Government that stressed the immigrant and multicultural character of German society in present and future. And even the ideology of Croatian nationalism in the first decade after independence, imagining one “national corpus” of all ethnic Croats, could not abide the division between the “homeland” and its “diaspora”, without the idea of the final return of its co-ethnics, because it still affirmed the assumption of social and national belonging of migrants to the ancestral homeland or nation.

Since the beginning of the new millennium, German politicians have been acknowledging more and more the immigrant character of German society. In Croatia the recurrent dispute of political parties to include or exclude migrants from elections has been accompanied by the migrants' realization that the origin state more and more has abdicated its responsibility for their fortune. In all, the return paradigm specifying the migration policy of the residence and origin state with regard to the former labour migrants and their descendents of Croatian origin has been given up in both states. Instead, international migration policy guidelines are followed, which emphasize the importance of border-crossing, transnational social networks of migrants.

### The Relevance and Rationale of "Return" in Life Stories of Former Labour Migrants and their Descendents of Croatian Origin in Germany

The idea of a final return of labour migrants was not just a subject of political discourse in the respective countries. Rather research has shown that the plans, concrete return visits or even the visions of return are constituents of transnational practices of migrants. Sonja Haug points out that return migration decisions are determined primarily by social capital and individual aspects such as full-time employment, age or family networks.<sup>29</sup> Jasna Čapo Žmegač found out in her longitudinal studies about transnational relations of former labour migrants from Croatia in Munich that the lifelong return plans fostered transnational practices and even bi-local family constructions.<sup>30</sup> She stresses that the decision-making of migrants regarding return is a long-lasting and complex process, "containing both elements of, on the one hand, naturalizing return as well as romanticizing the homeland and, on the other hand, the pragmatic weighing of opportunities" in the country of envisaged return in relation to those offered in the country of residence.<sup>31</sup>

Still little is known about the connection of transnational practice and the preparation for return as a family strategy. How does transnationalism targeting on return influence family life and vice versa? What are the considerations about return migration of the respective family member, how do they evaluate the significance of the "question of return" for their lives? And does the "question of return" with regard to the former *Gastarbeiter* generation also affect lives and transnational practices of their descendents, the "post migration generation"?

As part of my ongoing research work I have collected twenty-five life stories of former labour migrants and the post-migration generation so far. My research interest is to find out what relevance and rationale my interlocutors with a German-Yugoslav-Croatian migration history attach to their transnational practices in their life narratives. The biographic narrative interview as my principal research instrument encourages the interlocutors to structure their life narratives with minimal or even without interference from my side. With regard to the topic of return migration, it is important to mention that I am not asking whether or not my interlocutors will return one day or not, rather I am trying to figure out, what relevance they attach to the idea or plan of "return" to Croatia in their life stories, if they do so. Furthermore, I try to understand how different generations "read" their transnational practice, maybe in connection to the question of return, or, with regard to the post migration generation, the "relocation to an acknowledged homeland",<sup>32</sup> while telling me their life stories. It is to be noted that even if all of my interlocutors have a permanent residence permit or some of them even German citizenship, the question of return or relocations between Germany and Croatia appeared as a recurring topic that was embedded within the narrative.

In the following pages I will exemplify briefly, with the help of three life stories of persons who form a family, how the "question of return" influenced my interviewees' individual and family transnational practice and vice versa. The case study is a family of Croatian origin: the parents who came to Germany as former labour migrants from Yugoslavia/Croatia and their adult daughter who was born in Germany in 1980. I interviewed separately the father, Tomislav, the mother, Klara, and their daughter, Tina, and asked them to tell me their life stories. All three of them migrated from the northern part of Germany to Bavaria and settled in the city R. Tina was the first one who moved to Bavaria in 2000. She had decided to enroll at a university in the city R., not at least to live closer to Croatia, as she said. Some years later, when Tomislav got retired, the parents pulled up stakes in a small town in Westphalia after an over 30-year-long stay and also moved to the Bavarian city R. Tomislav came to Germany

in the seventies as a classical “guestworker”. He was recruited by a company for which his brother had been working. He met his future wife, Klara, who came to Germany in 1974, in a Croatian Catholic community. They married and raised two children. Soon they started to build a house in the home village of the husband, in Zagorje, in the northern part of Croatia, with the aim to return one day, as Tomislav said. Thirty-one years later Tomislav and his wife moved to Bavaria and fulfilled, as he said, the “short term objective” of his re-migration towards home, to Zagorje.

Telling me his life story, which Tomislav had neatly written down on pieces of paper and which he read to me, he presented his act of migration to Germany as a sort of plan he has been pursuing from the beginning of his migration as a young man in his twenties until now, as a retired person. On the one hand, he perceives his stay in Germany even with a permanent residence as insecure, on the other hand he stresses that the insecure situation in communist Yugoslavia had prevented him from return earlier.

Our life in Germany was targeted on two goals. To build (a house) as far as possible, in our homeland, because we have been thinking of returning – you never know – and on the other hand to educate our children.

Tomislav’s migration to Bavaria fulfills the function of an interstition in his final return plan. In the medium term his “remigration half way” to the south of Germany seems to work out. The spatial proximity of Bavaria and Croatia makes his transnational life easier to organize – now they can travel more frequently and take better care of their house in Zagorje. If all goes to plan, in some three to five years, when his wife will get retired too, Tomislav wants to remigrate to Croatia.

In Tomislav’s life story the return perspective structured family life from its beginning. Also he reads the movement of his adult daughter to Bavaria as part of his return-migration plan, as he interprets it a sort of stimulus and preparation for his and his wife’s migration to Bavaria and in the long term to Croatia. Further he stressed that due to the spatial proximity between Bavaria and Croatia it will be easier for him and his wife after their return “home” to keep the contact to their children. Since he moved to Bavaria, Tomislav feels closer to home. Nevertheless, he views his life in the city R. as interstition.

This case shows that Bavaria’s geographical proximity to Croatia and easy transport connection foster travels back and forth between Germany and Croatia in the older age. Keeping a permanent residence in Germany by “remigrating half way” minimizes the risk of a final remigration, which would mean the loss of the residence permit for Germany. It also secures the rights to social benefits of the German welfare system that are getting even more important in the older age.

The return process in Tomislav’s case is fashioned throughout his life course by several transnational practices, such as remitting, building a house, political engagement and travelling frequently home. Tomislav’s plan, as he calls it several times, will be fulfilled with the return to his home village one day, but his feeling of being uprooted will remain, even in the homeland. He closed his life story with the following conclusion:

We have to admit, that we, the older-aged, who had gone from home, often have the feeling that we are not grounded. Means, we were not integrated neither here in Germany nor in our homeland. We are strangers for good, Amen.

Even if his wife Klara also mentions the return plan of her and her husband, enhanced in the last part of her life story, “return” is not the common thread through the life story like in her husband’s case. Klara explains her motive for the transnational practice of building a house in Croatia not by pointing out her own wish to return one day. Further is she referring to the insecurity of her stay in Germany.

We have worked a lot, to earn some money, because we haven’t felt so secure in Germany, because we felt that maybe, any moment, we would have to go home. With the purpose to build something, for the future, a security in former Yugoslavia. And so we saved money and built, because we got the visa just for a limited time only. And we were terrified because of that; we couldn’t get an unlimited (stay-permit) in those days. And therefore we have invested all our money down there (in Croatia).

The preparation for return is in Klara’s case a securing strategy rather than a self-determined ambition. The same reasoning of her transnational practice connected to the question of

return was applied when she described the education of her children and her efforts to teach her daughters the Croatian language.

To teach our children the language was of high importance to us, because you never know what will happen. Just look what happened in Yugoslavia. Who would have thought that such a war would occur? It can happen again, anytime, even now. Do you know the history, what happened here in Germany, when they, the Jews... There had been couples, he was German and she was Jewish. She was brought to Dachau, to the death camp. He stayed alive, but she was killed. And if something like this will happen again, she (Klara's daughter) can find her way, she can flee and come to Croatia.

Klara's transnational practices are not, as in her husband's case, primarily targeted on return, moreover they are represented in her life story as a security strategy for the whole family in case of ethnic prosecution or war she had indirectly experienced during the wars in Yugoslavia and which she considers as a possible scenario for society in Germany, because of its history.

Her main objective to move to Bavaria, where the daughter took up her studies, was the reunification of the family. Unlike her husband, she perceives herself as integrated into the German society. Return to the country of origin is not the closure of her migration cycle; moreover, she aims to continue her transnational life after return. It is important to her to maintain ties to Germany, because of her daughters and due to the better health care. Klara's feelings with regard to the return perspective and her husband's plan are ambivalent. On the one hand, she feels more at home in Germany; on the other hand, she would like to enjoy life in her house in the beautiful Croatian landscape, as she said.

I never felt as a stranger here in Germany, well, maybe a bit, but I always felt at ease. Here I get by better than in Croatia. If we go back home one day, we will always keep a room, we will always keep the connection. Our life was here – in Germany. We have lived here. And we built down there (in Croatia). Who knows, if the circumstances had been different, if they had given us a permanent residence, if this security had been given to us before, when we were young, maybe we would have bought something (a house) here and we would live on here.

To sum up, by telling me her life story, Klara wanted me to know that her transnational practice emerged because of her insecure legal status as a "guestworker" in the beginning of her stay as a labour migrant in Germany and her feeling of insecurity due to ethnic difference. In the process of remembering and narrating she is making sense of her transnational practices in the past for her present life situation by referring to political and legal obstacles in Germany that hindered her permanent settlement. The political discourse of "temporariness" and "return" but also national or ethnic belonging is embedded in her life narrative as a rationale of her transnational practice targeting on remigration. Unlike her husband, who presented himself as the active protagonist in the context of his return plan, Klara mainly justifies her transnational life experiences and return perspective, which makes her seem more passive and less self-determined when it comes to the question of return.

As mentioned before, Tomislav's and Klara's daughter Tina is a student at university. Tina's schooling and education as well as the movement from Northern Germany to Bavaria due to her studies make up the largest parts of her life narration. She raised the subject of return migration for the first time, when she referred to her childhood. Tina remembered that the indefinite return plans of her parents weighed heavily on her during childhood, because she was wondering how and when to tell her friends that she will leave them.

Her transnational activities as a child, apart from the holidays in the family house and visits of relatives, grew more intense when war broke out in Croatia in the beginning of the 1990s. Then Tina's family started to visit the Croatian Catholic community more frequently. During the wartime, Croatia appeared to Tina no longer solely as the place of the family's house, kinship and holidays, but as a place of war and fear. Her whole family engaged in humanitarian aid and Tina participated regularly in the parish of the Croatian catholic mission. Her family's transnationalism broadened from the regional, local space to the national space. Tina remembered her transnational engagement as a 12-year-old child that was not only directed towards the relatives and the war-torn society in her parental homeland but also to her immediate social surrounding in Germany with teary eyes:

It was horrible, because we were really young and we saw many exhibitions, were we saw many many dead people. Many hurt people, we heard many bad stories, and



for us it was real. [...] It was horrible. Also to clear things up when my friends stood in front of me and said: “Well, I like Serbs too.” And then they looked at me, as if I would hate them for that. Though I never had a problem with Serbs, because I always knew some, and because in Germany we had a lot of contacts with Serbs due to the Yugoslav school, we played together and it was never a problem. I always had to defend myself in front of my German friends. Who am I? Do I like Serbs? Don’t I like Serbs? And yes, it was horrible. And always those comments, mostly from adults: “Before I really enjoyed my holidays there, but now, what are you doing there?” So, along the lines of, me making responsible for that.

In the beginning of Tina’s adolescence the negotiation of her collective belonging emerged with the experiences of war and the politics of belonging in the parental homeland combined with the ethnization and othering processes in her immediate social surrounding in Germany.

After Tina had moved to Bavaria to live on her own as a student, her transnational linkages to Croatia weakened, the contacts to relatives have become rare. Furthermore, she is not active in any organization of a Croatian (ethnic) community and only occasionally she visits the Croatian Catholic mass. But still she feels strongly attached to the northern Croatian region of Zagorje and the region where she grew up in Germany. She said she would prefer to have a “Zagorje-Westphalian” passport, which would make her a citizen of the Croatian region, where her parents grew up, and the German region Westphalia, where she was raised. Tina concludes with some thoughts on her transnational practices she envisages for her future. It is important to her to spend some time in Croatia as a young person; she would also like to work there in order to improve her language abilities:

And, well, when I finish university and somebody would ask me: Where do you want to work, in Northern Croatia or in Berlin? With regard to the geographical distance it would be the same for me.

Unlike her parents she does not envisage a return for good to Croatia, but still a migration to her ancestral land comes into question. Her relocation to Croatia would have the purpose to improve her Croatian language abilities and professional experience that she wants to undertake strategically at different stages of her life cycle. But Tina’s plans for relocation to Croatia are indefinite and ingredients of her mainly emotional transnationalism. They are driven by the idea of improving language abilities and by a longing for intensified cultural ties to the parental homeland.

To recapitulate, the question of return or relocation to Croatia for labour migrants and their descendents still matters. These days, when a multitude of former labour migrants from Croatia retires, the question of their return to the country of origin is still bothering families with German-Yugoslav-Croatian migration history. Although the quantity of remigration of labour migrants is difficult to estimate validly on the basis of official statistics of the FR Germany as well as Yugoslav and Croatian statistics,<sup>33</sup> empirical studies about migration and remigration of former labour migrants from Germany to Croatia confirm that remigration or commuter migration is often taking place when the retirement age of the former labour migrants is reached. Tomislav’s and Klara’s internal movement from the north to the south of Germany as well as their transnational practices throughout the life course exemplify that the idea of return even structures the lives of the ones who actually are commonly perceived as permanent residents. The life experiences of migration and transnationalism targeting on return do not belong only to those who left the country as migrants but also take effect on their descendents as the question of return is one concerning the whole family. Tina’s considerations about a stay in the ancestral land demonstrate that the “post-migration” generations’ return or the relocation to the parental country of origin is more an episode of “transnational sojourning”, as Ley and Kobashi define it<sup>34</sup> – their transnationalism has mainly the aim of improving cultural capital by using social capital deriving from transnational family networks. Nevertheless, it got evident in the life stories of the respective family members that each of them develops a different strategy to deal with the option of return or relocation to the country of origin. The different perceptions of transnationalism connected to the return or relocation option in the life narrative also refer to the changing political discourse of remigration and national belonging in the time elapsed, and depend on the biographical and historical time in which the person is anchored.

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### Notes

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- 13 Cf. Mesić 1991, p. 20.
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- 15 From 1983 to 1984 every jobless foreigner was given a repatriation grant of 10,500 DM plus 1,500 DM for every repatriating child from the German state. Cf. Frey, Martin: Direkte und indirekte Rückkehrförderung seitens der Aufnahmeländer. Überblick. In: Körner, Heiko/Mehrländer, Ursula (eds.): *Die „neue“ Ausländerpolitik in Europa. Erfahrungen in den Aufnahme- und Entsendeländern*. Bonn: Neue Gesellschaft 1986, pp. 15-63, here p. 19.
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- 17 Frey 1986, p. 28.
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- 23 Ibid., p. 212 (cf. fn. 9).
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- 27 Cf. Novinščak 2008, p. 141.
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