

‘Keeping Up with Myself’ Ethnography of a Young Adult Woman in Post-Transitional Croatia

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ABSTRACT

This article employs an anthropology ‘at-home’ approach to discuss dimensions of social and cultural changes amongst women in post-transitional societies. By applying person-centred ethnography, we aim to provide rich insights into the socio-cultural context and individual development of a young woman in Croatia. We examine how a young woman reasons about what kind of a person she is and wants to become by comparing the different sets of basic values that she ascribes to her emancipatory efforts, with a focus on how she juxtaposes ‘traditional family roles’ and ‘feminist values’. The article thus describes how this woman (Jadranka) experiences life challenges and shapes social values in her everyday cultural settings.

KEYWORDS

intensive interviewing, person-centred ethnography, self-representation, social and gender roles, young adult woman, Croatia

This article introduces the experiences of a young woman from Zagreb, and examines her endeavours to lead a good (or ‘good enough’) life, balancing her personal goals and pursuits, dilemmas and expectations in the social context where she lives. She tries to achieve better life opportunities for herself and to reach satisfactory intimate relationships (Venkatesan 2016). Being free to choose what is appropriate or inappropriate for her, she describes and interprets a complex social space that includes different options for achieving personal goals. Her reflections on freedom of choice include questions relating to intimate relationships, education and life goals (Dole and Csordas 2003).

In this article, our analytical approach is inspired by Robert I. Levy’s (1992) person-centred ethnography, which focusses on a description of the long-lasting process of personal development (Clifford 1986; DeVault 1999; Parvez 2017). Such an approach to individual perspectives and to prioritising women’s voices motivated us to examine and helped us to understand the processes of social changes (Avishai et



al. 2012). While we are aware that applying a person-centred ethnographic approach over several years can face specific theoretical and methodological ambiguities, this approach offers opportunities to step away from one-dimensional options of presenting diverse phenomena (Van Santen 2014).

By introducing person-centred ethnography, Levy demonstrated how to carry out ethnographic and theoretical work in a way that brings together diverse concepts and analytical models (Hollan 2005). In this article, especially in the context of a discussion on values and gender, the research explores how certain experiences can be related to social context, but also how specific knowledge, ideas and ways of life are created, envisioned and shared (Fischer 2014; Harding 1991; Jackson 2013).

Person-centred ethnography aims to analyse subjective interpretations and meanings, taking into account non-verbal and other signs that reveal hidden values behind rationalisations and general knowledge (Holland and Throop 2011). According to Robert Levy and Douglas Hollan (1998), theoretical and empirical approaches to anthropological phenomena emphasise the psychological or socio-cultural dimensions of the relationship between the individual and society. Person-centred interviews therefore engage interlocutors as knowledgeable persons who can describe particular socio-cultural settings and understand their active position in the environment. By applying a person-centred approach, interviewees become an object of systematic enquiry in and of themselves (Levy and Hollan 1998). However, person-centred interviews are not always sufficient and are usually complemented with other methods and techniques. A complementary qualitative method can be ethnographic autobiography, which provides a 'temporal wholeness rather than isolating the individual from the flow of life' (Given 2008: 46). Michael Goddard (2008) defined autobiography as an account of the development of a self-conscious individual. He claims that the existence of the individual at its narrative core allows for reflections on the development of individualism (2008: 35) and that autobiographical texts are therefore a great source of material for analysis and critique of some of the fallacies of individualism. Both approaches are therefore applied to problematise conventional forms of social discourse and to clarify the relationship between 'the social construction of individuality' and its socio-cultural context.

By applying an ethnographic longitudinal approach in the specific context of Croatia, we were inspired by Danilo Mandić and Tamara

Pavasović Trošt, who claimed that research on youth in (Eastern) Europe tends to ‘neglect to take advantage of the nuance and depth’ of ethnography (2018: 6). We have therefore adopted the stance that research focussing on new young generations should include intensive interviewing and other qualitative tools to explore in detail the diverse indicators of inner cultural change. In many regards, the social sciences have used negative health indicators, such as teenage pregnancy, depression and substance abuse to address important issues related to the complex structure of youth social and cultural identity (Dole and Csordas 2003). However, it is a narrow perspective on negative social outcomes that often neglects the complete mosaic of values, norms and roles that constitute the identities of youth (Dole and Csordas 2003).

Over a three-year period, our ethnographic study allowed us to identify the ways in which a young woman adopts and follows her values and how she defines herself personally and collectively (Harding 1991). We are therefore interested in examining and understanding how a young woman reasons about what kind of a person she is and wants to become. The first aim of our research is to show the interconnection between her family’s social background and her interpretation of family roles, since she later echoes these interpretations in her experiences related to intimate relationships, education and the working environment. The second aim of our research is to analyse the young woman’s own views on independence and liberation. We do this by comparing the different sets of basic values that she ascribes to emancipatory efforts that juxtapose ‘traditional family values’ and ‘feminist values’. In this stage, we extend our focus on the more collective arenas of everyday life – her aspirations related to her career, education and peer relationships. We interrogate the process of self-representation by questioning the negotiations between personal and collective values (Dole and Csordas 2003: 358).

Gender, Values and Post-Transition

As a concept of human identity, gender is a cultural, social and analytical phenomenon that has different meanings and that is under continuous questioning (Verschuur et al. 2014). The concept of gender allows for a descriptive analysis of social roles and values, emphasising the relations between women and men, and identifying structural hierarchies in society. However, embracing different meanings and

notions under one concept has its limitations (Reysoo 2014). In order to avoid simplification of the gender perspective, we emphasise the importance of contextualisation in specific social and cultural situations (Reysoo 2014). We therefore approached our interlocutor as a member of a less researched group of young women currently located at a crossroads in their personal lives. Focussing on their intimate and social life, we present their views on cultural roles and also shed light on specific challenges faced in the context of Croatia as a society undergoing different changes (Avishai et al. 2012: 395).

Ronald Inglehart and Wayne Baker (2000) have showed how cultural and social indicators are strongly related to values, indicating that a 'broad syndrome of distinctive value orientations' are linked to specific socio-economic conditions. Inglehart and Baker (2000) argue that the cause of plurality in basic values is the consequence of 'situation-specific factors', primarily the influence of cultural heritage and tradition. The juxtaposition of personal and collective basic social values, or of traditional and new values, can lead in different directions and can create foundations for novel insights (e.g. Inglehart 2000; Inglehart and Baker 2000; Inglehart and Wezel 2005; Wilson 2005). From a Marxist anthropology perspective, gender includes norms, roles and values related to culturally conditioned activities of labour and reproduction. Thus, values are defined as socially specific by-products of the labour and the social functions in which individuals find themselves (Weiss 2011: 43).

Sociological research has indicated that there is a plurality and variability of values amongst youth in Croatia, especially regarding the topics of gender inequality and structural power abuse as consequences of transition processes (Ilišin et al. 2017). Youth in Croatia show the significant openness towards the importance of individual freedom that develops under the influence of the specific circumstances of a 'post-transitional' society (Ilišin et al. 2017). Regarding gender, 90.4 per cent of young people in Croatia consider gender equality important (Adamović and Maskalan 2017), even though they also hold negative stereotypes regarding gender roles. The explanation of this incongruity stems, on the one hand, from the fact that Croatia underwent both a war and a politico-economic transition, resulting in loss of security, job losses and uncertainty about the direction of modernisation. These factors contributed to further strengthening stereotyped gender roles, as manifested in the dominance of androcentric structures in the realms of business and the family (Tomić-Koludrović and Lončarić 2006). On the other hand,

the increased presence of women on the labour market, accompanied by a higher percentage of highly educated women compared to men, has made women more egalitarian and has accelerated their changing gender positions. Such a phenomenon is partly due to the legacy of socialism, whose influence is still widely recognised (although less strongly amongst the younger population).

From an anthropological perspective, examining social values in the context of social development inevitably involves the entanglement of the problematic concepts of 'traditional' values and 'non-traditional' (called 'new') values. Any interpretation of traditional or new values implies understanding and interpreting the multi-layered structure of reality. As Christopher Dole and Thomas Csordas (2003) describe, 'these terms are a prominent means of conceptualising and categorising the worlds in which people live and creatively function'. However, Inglehart (2000) uses a more structured concept of traditional and new values, emphasising that some categories of values such as affection, self-esteem and self-expression become new or modern ideal values, while low levels of tolerance for abortion, divorce, and homosexuality, male dominance in political and economic life, parental authority, and authoritarian family life are related to traditionalism. In their study, Inglehart and Baker show how indicators of traditional values relate to Croatian society, placing the country in the space between a 'historically communist' and a 'historically Catholic' community (2000: 35). New ideal values have been claimed to lead to the rise of social development, and they are positively related to humanistic values and to issues related to quality of life, including the advancement of human rights and women's rights (Hayes et al. 2000).

In previous studies on values in Croatia, the term 'transition' is the main term that defines the transformation of Croatian society; it is a concept that encompasses changes to both dominant social and cultural values (Hann and Dunn 1996). Having in mind the devastating political, social and economic outcomes of the collapse of socialism in ex-Yugoslavia and in the region, Srećko Horvat and Igor Štiks (2012) described transition as a directionless process without strategic goals to a prosperous and tolerant society. In the literature, transition incorporates the process of turning the former socialist states into liberal democracies and free-market economies. In Croatia, like in many post-socialist countries, human and gender rights, social and working conditions, social power abuse and personal goals are prominent domains of the questioning and negotiating of dominant values, which are the two key indicators of transitional achievements or failures.

Meet Jadranka

The methodology that provided the ethnographic data for this study requires explication. One of the authors met Jadranka¹ while conducting a post-doctoral pilot study on youth and stress amongst Croatian secondary school students. Jadranka was interviewed for the first time in February 2014, and was later invited to participate in longitudinal in-depth interviews until September 2017. At the beginning, she was an 18-year-old student at a grammar school in Zagreb. In the second phase, she was a 20-year-old student at Zagreb University. In the third phase, she worked in a small private firm established and owned by her colleague. In this last phase, Jadranka was an early-stage make-up artist; she was 22 years old, and her small firm operated in the cosmetics and beauty industry.

Developed as an independent research study, one of the authors kept in contact with Jadranka after the initial interview in February 2014, and interviewed her approximately twice a year.² We were in continual communication during these three years, sharing text messages and posts via social networks. Our communication varied in frequency, depending on her interest and willingness to communicate. In general, Jadranka was eager to share her thoughts and experiences in everyday life. She claimed that she was always inspired to engage in conversation. All the interviews were focussed on Jadranka's life changes and challenges regarding her family setting, intimate relationships, education and employment.³ Jadranka is currently 23 years old and still lives and works in Zagreb.

In the Croatian transitional context, various urban spaces are increasingly becoming monuments of specific and accelerating changes, reflecting for instance the consequences of the systematic economic collapse of industrial zones or historical sites from the socialist era (Čapo and Gulin Zrnić 2013). Jadranka grew up in a nice residential neighbourhood in the wider centre of Zagreb, the capital city of Croatia. The neighbourhood in question was popular during the socialist era, both in terms of space and identity: it was a peaceful area for middle-class and upper-middle-class families. However, the popular belief is that it was where the politicians of the former state's government lived; much like today, the area is inhabited by the members of the Croatian political elite. The neighbourhood comprises mostly family houses with middle-sized gardens, or small apartment buildings situated in a peaceful green belt for a comfortable family life. The places where the residents of this neighbourhood would meet

used to be (and still are) in the nearby shops and the streets during their regular communal activities and shopping as their children attended the nearby schools or played in the nearby parks.

Over the last few decades, after the formal end of the socialist period, and at the beginning of the 1990s, several changes typical to transitional societies occurred in the city centre and the wider city area of Zagreb, such as illegal construction, oversized buildings and the neglect of cultural heritage and green areas (Čapo and Gulin Zrnić 2013). However, the above-mentioned Zagreb neighbourhood remained a symbol of quality dwelling from an urbanistic perspective (despite having slightly degraded in quality), without any significant compromising of human–urban harmony and nature. The perception of its quality is complemented by extremely high prices for either renting or buying property.

However, like many other cities in the post-transition countries of Southeast Europe, Zagreb is a typical hybrid of contrasting phenomena. The consequences of the transition are visible in the devastation of community areas and in the rise of social and economic inequalities (Čapo and Gulin Zrnić 2013). Jadranka notices such discrepancies of social status in the urban space in which she lives, stating that ‘such things ... should not exist in Europe’. She also emphasises that the quality of life of many people has been devastated:

Next to my school, old people live in derelict houses ... everything is somehow dilapidated, falling apart ... so that some grow vegetables in their small city gardens just to survive, just to have something to eat.

Jadranka thus implies that this is not a part of a newly proclaimed political strategy for sustainable urban agriculture, which often emerges as a political goal, but it is rather an indicator of growing social poverty in the post-transition context, with many struggling to survive. Regarding her family relations, Jadranka first described her father, who is the owner of a small construction company, as the only breadwinner and the head of the family. She sees him as strict and emotional, but also as reluctant to express his emotions. She also perceives him as a just person, as someone who makes the most important decisions and as someone who is truly dependable and supportive in difficult situations in life. In her descriptions, she uses terms that describe ‘a traditional man’ who is also deeply protective of the female family members: ‘My dad is ... he is very strict and very emotional, but he will never show it. Very rarely. But he loves me so much and if something really bad happens, my dad will always be the first to

help'. When describing her father, Jadranka also refers to his cultural and geographical origins as a Dalmatian, that is, as someone from the Croatian coastal region of Dalmatia, which is associated with 'holding traditional views' regarding the social and cultural roles of the family. Extending her father's moral principles, Jadranka defines her family as being honest and exemplary. In that respect, the father's image is further complemented by Jadranka's critical stance towards the current corrupt neoliberal entrepreneurial and political post-transitional climate, which is characterised by the destruction of everything that had been considered as moral. Jadranka contrasts her father's diligent work with the corruption and greed of the political elites in Croatia, and emphasises her father's sacrifice for his family, whose welfare he places before any of his interests: 'My family believes that, in this country today, they would rather not live surrounded with various expensive things, than be afraid that my dad will end up in prison'. Jadranka also claims that her father gave her the opportunity to learn and gain knowledge about diligence and morality:

I learnt this from the example of my dad, who achieved absolutely everything, from starting as just a labourer, to becoming an electrician and to where he is now. He did it all by himself, no murky dealings or anything like that ... But I know he was doing absolutely everything he could to feed his family and then a good opportunity came for him to start his own company.

During our meetings and conversations in the first interviewing phase, Jadranka emphasised how important it was for her to follow his example and to create the preconditions for her own future precisely through his moral values. According to his example, Jadranka considered the main cultural values required for a good life to be humility, modesty and dedication.

Jadranka additionally enriches the image of her family with descriptions of her mother, whose role in the family is in the private and more intimate domain as a housewife. She especially refers to her mother's emotional side and her dedication to the well-being of the family (DeVault 1999). Her dedication is even seen by Jadranka through the sacrifice of 'giving up her independence' and becoming supportive to her husband and three daughters. Jadranka is the youngest daughter in the family. Her mother, as 'a traditional mother', is focussed on childcare and the upbringing of the children during their educational process, and she supports her daughters in all the challenges they face. Her mother is the bearer of emotional support, who is gentle and sensitive and also acts as the children's friend. She is both a confidant and

an adviser. Jadranka also points to a level of identification between Jadranka and her mother and to various connections in their points of view: 'My mum ... quite often sees her younger self in me'. In all the difficult moments, her mother offers emotional support: 'More often than not, I would rather go to my mum if I had a problem than to a friend'. She describes the relationship between herself and her mother as moral, honest and open.

Jadranka views the role of mother and father as two strongly contrasting and strictly defined categories. This is evident when she describes the parents of her close friends, who she claims have 'switched roles'. Jadranka says that her friend's father plays the role of mother by providing emotional instead of financial support:

Karoline's father is emotionally dedicated to the family by supporting Karoline in her dilemmas and doubts as my mother does. Her mother is like my father, supportive but emotionally 'distant'. And I teach her some things her mum never told her, and my mum did tell me ... because her mum and dad somehow switched roles.

Jadranka has no dilemmas concerning the importance and emotional value of the family. She herself expects to raise a family with more than one child, which would have a similar structure to hers. Emotional fulfilment and security are what connects her roles as a young woman to traditional perspectives on family: 'Family is the first and most important priority in one's life'.

On the descriptive level, Jadranka portrays her family using classical symbols of togetherness and family bonding. For example, she emphasises the importance of time spent together as a family during Sunday lunches, at Christmas or during the holidays: 'We have all these kinds of traditional things that a family is supposed to do together, and we do them together'. Jadranka also sees the personal importance of religion: 'To me, religion is personally quite important, because ... I was raised that way'. At the same time, however, under the influence of her mother she avoids formal religious behaviour such as attending mass or confessing:

Mum told me she doesn't trust priests and that she doesn't go to church to confess because she thinks she has a direct connection with God and she doesn't need some intermediary to whom she could confess her sins, so that he would confess them to God.

Regardless of her adopted moral and religious values, Jadranka emphasises in the interviews that she has adopted her mother's view, which according to Jadranka break traditional faith practices:

And then I thought about it: she didn't tell me I have to think the same way [as her]. When I started thinking about it, I realised that I very much agree with her attitude. She gave me her opinion and I accepted it entirely.

Jadranka's perspective is critical of prominent ecclesiastical authorities. Amongst other things, she criticises certain practices of the clergy in Croatia, such as getting rich and often being mentioned in the media: 'In my opinion, these should be the people [priests] dedicated to their calling, not the people who look to gain profit and so on'. She also reflects on the systematic hypocrisy of the many members of Croatian transition society who claim to advocate traditional Catholic values: 'But there are also families who pray for everything, but in everyday life don't stick to God's commandments. For me, that is all hypocrisy'.

Regarding how these religious views influence Jadranka's relationship with older members of her family, such as her grandmother and grandfather (who are, in Jadranka's view, the bearers of 'traditional values'), Jadranka says the following: 'In my case, [when I stay with them in the country] I have to lie to my gran and grandad that I did go to church so as to make them happy'. Regardless of the fact that she acknowledges some traditional values, Jadranka is not 'traditional enough' according to her older family members. Jadranka cites her grandmother, who tells her that she must go to church more often: 'Gran always says: "How come I've never seen you at church?"'

It is important to highlight that Jadranka's family values are not shaped by conservative political ideology or by religious education in the Croatian educational system. In our interviews, Jadranka's interpretations of gender roles and values are predominantly limited to the family sphere. Outside this sphere, Jadranka negotiates and questions these roles, along with the moral and value dimensions of the rigid family framework.

Jadranka Collectively

Following Jadranka's views, her beliefs, her values, we ask Jadranka about her attitudes towards changing social values, and Jadranka does not hesitate to define herself as 'a feminist': 'And that, so to speak, feminist side I have, slightly in that direction, makes me want to fight for women's rights'. She criticises certain institutions and

non-governmental organisations as entities trying ‘to take control over women’s bodies’. For example, she criticises a pro-life organisation named ‘In the Name of the Family’ (*U ime obitelji*), which has been highly prominent in Croatia for the past few years in advocating against abortion: ‘I am somehow bothered by this and the primitiveness that is connected with religion and the fact that the Church meddles with everything, abortion too, and all that is popular at the moment’.

Analysing her attitudes, we can observe how Jadranka openly criticises racism, homophobia and xenophobia, and insists on finding a partner who shares the same cultural values. When a call was made for a referendum to change the Croatian Constitution in order to limit the definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman, Jadranka expressed her disapproval and criticism of those who do not accept or even hate people who are seen as different. She openly criticises intolerant views in the following way:

I know that you can hate someone who beats you, but to hate someone who is different and who did nothing to directly hurt you, to hate a whole group of people ... I have no idea how many people there are in Croatia and in the world who are different than you and your primitive attitudes. I don’t think that is healthy, and it affects people in a really bad way.

Moreover, advocating and building inclusive and open cultural values towards everyone – men, women and minorities – is defined by Jadranka as necessary for the functioning of her intimate relationships and for establishing her future family:

I find it very unattractive when men say they don’t like gays; it evokes in me a very bad image concerning a possible relationship. I would like my child to learn that everyone deserves equal values and it doesn’t matter if you’re black, East Asian, gay, female or male.

During the interviews, while discussing examples of her friends and family, Jadranka became aware of differences in the upbringing of men and women, and of the limitations that are imposed to them. She describes disappointments from her romantic experiences through which she raises her awareness of the inferior position of women in society. Jadranka emphasises the importance of building her own identity as one that is based in values of freedom and tolerance:

And now I finally realised that, in any given moment, no man has the right to tell you that you can’t or are not allowed to do something. If a

guy came up to me and said I couldn't go out, I would laugh in his face. I would not take him seriously one bit.

An example that further supports these views is Jadranka's unwillingness to move from her hometown for a romantic partner, since she has already started a new job and began building her career. She builds awareness of her individual power: 'I realised to what extent we women are in fact powerful', and she calls for an open resistance to traditional gender roles and social limitations. This is when Jadranka opposes the dominant view of women's primary role as wives and mothers, and instead advocates for breaking off with tradition and having the right to choose:

And that women should understand how powerful they are and how much we don't have to stay home and give birth to children if we don't want to. I want to have children of my own, but there are women who don't want to, and this is something that can be imposed on them, as in: 'You have to stay home, clean the kitchen and have children'.

After entering a stable intimate relationship, Jadranka became increasingly critical of gender roles, making references to her 'feminist side'. She claims that most of her girlfriends who are the same age as her have the goal to get married as soon as possible: 'They tried to marry as soon as possible and have children'. She sees them as the bearers of traditional values whose 'priority in life is to establish a traditional model of family'.

Jadranka describes the injustice of her mother's dependent position with regard to her father's material means. Although she calls it an agreement ('my mum agreed with my dad that she would stop working and stay at home to look after the children, and he would work'), Jadranka defines her mother in the following manner, especially in the later conversations: 'My mum is 63 years old and has no money of her own'. Furthermore, she describes how her mother finds ways to earn something independently of the father: 'Nowadays, we are renting apartments, so she takes that money for some of her own needs, but it's very difficult when you're sixty something and you have to ask your husband for money'.

Jadranka's Self-Representation

During the interviews held in the subsequent stage of Jadranka's life, when she tries to find a job after dropping out of university, we evidence that she tries to balance and negotiate with many different

models in the process of establishing and creating her own opportunities. During the earlier interviews, Jadranka had emphasised education as an inevitable strategy in realising her life goals, which corresponds with the dominant strategies of young women in Croatian society:

And I want a lot from life; my sisters also graduated from university, which is taken for granted in our family, so I wouldn't want to be the only one who didn't. There is no need for that.

However, contrary to her own expectations, Jadranka left university soon after enrolment and decided to find a job. She is currently employed in the beauty industry':

I left university, became a stylist, and had a few more schools to go to, a few more courses. I became a nail care specialist. Now I'm in this beauty world, starting to work in a salon. I've already started in fact.

In Croatia, women graduate from universities to a greater extent than men (Galić 2006), and in this respect Jadranka is different than most her schoolmates. In her own words, Jadranka chose 'the more difficult path'. She justified the feeling of unease after abandoning her studies by referring to her wish to find fulfilment, but also to the fact that her parents do not have university degrees either. She claims that they did not insist on claiming that completing university would necessarily result in her having a better and more successful life. Higher education is no longer the ideal, as it was before.

Jadranka's deviation from the norm was negatively perceived by her former partner: 'He had that attitude: "Nothing, you're nothing without a diploma". He claimed that this [working in the beauty industry] was not a job at all'. This was the main reason they finally broke off their relationship. As Jadranka defines it in the later interviews, her former partner had 'a prestigious jobs list', comprising male-dominated occupations related to elites. According to him, 'you are nothing if you are not a medical doctor, university professor, lawyer, judge or dentist. Female professions, like beautician, are rarely on a prestigious job list today. No matter how much money you have'.

While building her new life, Jadranka advocated a self-fulfilment approach: 'I know loads of people and loads of girls who do everything to appeal to others'. She sees her own future in building a career as an entrepreneur:

I don't have the need to explore a little, but to find a job. . . . I don't have to be overjoyed with that specific work, because not many people

are, but I wouldn't want to do a job I hate. I want to achieve everything on my own.

Indeed, Jadranka believes that she is entirely in control of her life, and that everything she does in life emerges from her own personality and self-realisation: 'I realised that absolutely everything comes from me; I project everything that is my own, whether I will have a good or a bad life'.

The experience and freedom to take her life and responsibility into her own hands are the imperatives in her life. She by no means wants to be dependent on men, or allow a man she is in an intimate relationship with to control her:

There are no situations when I have to call him all the time or that he gets angry with me and that we are arguing for two days, as it used to happen before if I forgot to call after a night out.

The question that we always posed at the end of each interview was related to the greatest value that she learnt or experienced in her life. Jadranka said the following at the end:

That I must never lose myself. Because I am me. I am a normal and realistic person. Some girls, and there are many of them, older ones and younger ones, lose themselves entirely. They lose their identity and start adopting the other side's point of view.

Jadranka is therefore emphasising that she no longer learns only from her parents or her friends' parents; rather, she learns from herself and from her own experience. In this sense, Jadranka's aim is to achieve her dreams and self-fulfilment without being hindered by strict boundaries of traditional family values and norms, but rather by adapting such values and norms in her own manner.

Conclusion

For everyone living in a society such as Croatia, the concept of changing times is almost a permanent condition and an everyday narrative. Many even use such 'changing times' as a convenient excuse or as being to blame for their various misfortunes and personal challenges. The fundamental forces that influence changes on a collective level are predominantly defined as being political, economic or socio-cultural in nature, but the consequences of those forces at the personal level are usually hidden in subjective interpretations (e.g. Prica and

Škorić 2011; Schäuble 2014). Therefore, ethnography focussed on a young woman fills a gap in the anthropological literature on gender in post-transition, and brings a valuable new angle to the interpretation of cultural change.

Person-centred approaches complemented with ‘anthropology of/at home’ enable us to describe interviewees’ personal experiences of culture, community and values in general through their personal reflective interpretations (Lavolette 2020). Anthropologists note that scholars often explain a global picture from ‘a helicopter with a pair of binoculars’, but fail to see the ‘nooks and crannies’ in which people fight for their existence (Eriksen 2016: 3). The main goal is to discuss different histories and approaches in studying culture in order to shed a light on issues related to hidden practices in specific socio-cultural and political contexts worldwide (e.g. Barrera-González et al. 2017; Watson 1999). Andrés Berrera-González and colleagues (2017) also insist on the necessary plurality of diverse European traditions, aiming to create a new perspective in ‘European anthropology’.

Taking into account Jadranka’s different periods of life, we compare the landscape of her basic social values that support her points of view and self-representation. As a young woman in nowadays Croatia, Jadranka appears at first glance to embrace very different world views at the same time. She primarily notices and critically discusses social inequalities and the consequences of the transition process in the Croatian economy, such as the devastating spatial changes in her neighbourhood. She is aware of both family and social values, and both plays and interacts with these values. She uses dominant patterns of values and cultural symbols from a repository related to proclaimed traditional gender roles. In her family, the father is the breadwinner and the head of the family, the grandparents are religious, and the mother is dedicated to her other daughters and her husband. In her early life, she only adopts traditional gender roles, and no emancipatory aspects. This aspect comes later. In her social interactions within the community, Jadranka is empathetic, and articulates values that she explicitly categorises as feminist values. Her interpretation of feminism strongly supports independence and the struggle for a new, emancipatory way of life.

Her life challenges so far have included studying at university, the establishment of an intimate relationship with a partner with whom she is in love, and finding a job. These situations can be seen as ‘social crossroads’, and these enable us to discover Jadranka’s values and points of view in specific contextualising circumstances. The main question that we ask is whether the values that she demonstrates are

typical for the transitional or post-transitional set of values in Croatian society or whether these are different stages of her personal development related to becoming independent and mature. We are aware that Jadranka 'lives, works, loves, dreams, struggles and survives' (Avishai et al. 2012: 395) in a world that is increasingly interconnected and changeable, and in order to understand the ways in which values are internalised, we have to understand and explore the ways in which she struggles with specific incongruities. Although, Jadranka describes her family using many of the symbols denoting the traditional family, it is evident that Jadranka never considers her parents, family members or friends as 'backward', conservative or controversial compared to her own values. Nor does she try to fill the gaps between different sets of her values: we find that Jadranka shapes her model of cultural values by keeping both sets of values together. Jadranka uses both these sets of values in demonstrating her self-representation and maturity, which is framed by her aspirations for independence.

Inglehart's theory of value change in modern societies has become one of the most influential approaches in present-day social sciences, although the theoretical model is not quite compatible with a multi-layered qualitative approach (Haller 2002). Max Haller (2002) emphasised the advantages evident in its focus on the same subject, the fact that it is a coherent theoretical concept, and its need for an empirical database that is unique in its size and scope. The findings and conclusions prove the importance of culture and values in general, and religion in particular, as continuous important elements of modern societies. The critiques of this model are guided by an approach that focusses on a distinction between universal values and the concrete value orientations of people and the situational and institutional embedding of values. Therefore, it is considered that an ethnographic approach within the framework of the deterministic model such as Inglehart's theory of value change is not appropriate. However, Jadranka merges the defined set of values that Inglehart and Baker (2000: 35) placed at two different sides of the scale, such as traditional versus modern, or even Catholic vs. communist'.

By discussing how the transformation of Jadranka's values occurred, it is possible to see a space of individual creativity in which different sets of opposed values are reframed but also defined. For Jadranka, both feminism and traditionalism (which she describes as opposites) are distant value categories. However, she defines her values by describing her own life experience. She knows what is good, beautiful, important, and valuable in both categories by using expressions that she

learnt. However, if we examine what kind of experience expands her positions, we notice the importance of her personal emotional engagement in her own choices. Her experience in intimate relationships highlights the many contradictions, rationalisations and unspoken issues. Although her father was a remote figure that avoided engaging with emotions in everyday life, he is not a distant figure for her. Her mother is dedicated to her family, but Jadranka realises that she suffered because she was not in a position to fulfil her own professional ambitions. Nevertheless, there is no strong evidence in the interviews that the contradictions in their family roles indicate open conflicts and emotional turmoil. By emphasising her goal to run a small business in the cosmetics and beauty industry as a business woman, Jadranka therefore indicates her redefinition of future social roles.

As a part of a young generation, Jadranka is faced with existential difficulties, and she needs family financial support to reach her education and training goals. Therefore, her decision indicates that her family accepts and understands her current orientation. At the same time, she has transformed the paradigm of the two-dimensional construction of values, and produces contradictory life strategies while she struggles to redefine her future choices. We therefore claim that, in the current Croatian social and cultural context, young people like Jadranka have not only been deeply engaged in processes of change, but they are simultaneously affected by those very changes and are overwhelmed with different values that can lead them (and society in general) in different directions.

The approaches in the anthropology of 'home / away from home' aim to describe how people perceive and interpret their own values, choices, actions and roles while taking into account changing social circumstances over a longer period of time (Lavolette 2020). Therefore, in this article we aimed to discuss how to deal with hidden and dominant values, norms or world views that are of important significance for all fieldworkers doing research at different social levels. In the same vein, the study of cultural values offers the way to ethnographically enquire not just into the origins of cultural change, but also into the future development of modern societies (Lal and Luker 2008).

In this study, Jadranka shows her interpretation and visions of how a woman who is born and raised in a patriarchal society where values and norms are defined by dominant criteria can become a creative person with her own life trajectory. Moreover, she is a woman fascinated by the family as a traditional social institution, but at the same time a great believer in the power of women to redefine their position by embracing new social roles. When she describes her friends and their

proclaimed values, she underlines that the strong turn to patriarchy happened recently. Moreover, Jadranka's interpretations of traditional and feminist world views in Croatian society can be seen in the observations about new conservative activism in the post-transitional context. Therefore, Jadranka's open criticism of cultural values indicates many uncertain steps that young women have to take nowadays to achieve better life opportunities in the future. In doing so and by describing her own personal experience in an autobiographical/ethnographical form, she has enabled us to perceive and compare different free associations. We believe that the final discussion on her values on the basis of autobiography and/or a person-centered approach – two of several life-history genres represented in anthropology – points to the important aspects of social development. In that case, we better understand not only the development of specific anthropological phenomena in the study of current cultural values and change in post-transition societies, but also the various methodological challenges of contemporary anthropology.

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Notes

1. To protect the anonymity of the interviews, the name of our interlocutor in this article has been substituted with the fictive name 'Jadranka'. We also converted the names of the places related to her personal space.

2. One of the questions about family settings and relationships was: ‘According to your opinion, what makes a good family?’ An example of a question about working environment is: ‘What would be an ideal job for you, and what would be your ideal position at work?’ Sub-questions were always directed at only one domain, for example: ‘What kind of family would you like to have in the future?’ or ‘What would it be like to have an ideal job in the future?’ We usually talked in her free time after classes when she was at school and university or after work when she found a job.
3. The analysis of the data was conducted through keywords, dominant codes, similar topics and researchers’ explanations, which enabled the comparison of fieldwork notes and records with the related ethnographic literature. We, the interviewers, shared our impressions and had open discussions after each interview. We also continually shared field notes and previously made conclusions.

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