

## **Mothers and Sons in Croatian Songs**

When friends give me parenting advice, often in the form of “here’s what I did when ...” or “my parents would always ...,” I hear an internal voice saying “yes, but.” I am now able to complete my sentence of rebuttal: “yes, but I’m a Croatian mother.” I am a second-generation Canadian of Croatian heritage, born in 1941 and coming into adulthood in a period of great flux in women’s roles. I am a feminist, a partner and a parent, the mother of a 20-year old son who is on the cusp of adulthood, having just moved into an apartment with a friend.

His major reason for moving out is that I meddle: I ask too many questions, I am overly helpful, and I nag – about his room, his late hours, the importance of being responsible. You name it, I can nag about it! I recognize that the repetition of reminders and requests can be overdone and serve to irritate rather than facilitate appropriate behavior. Yet, as will be argued later, mother’s nagging may be an expression of love and concern for her son’s welfare rather than simply an insensitive, ineffectual admonishment, as suggested by the unfortunate stereotype of the nagging mother. I regret that at times I am not meeting my son’s expectations regarding mothering, but he knows that I care. His Dad is also very much a support for our son, but is more relaxed about his comings and goings. At times our voices are raised in conflict, but I have no question of the strength of the loving bond between us.

The intensity of the mother-child bond is no secret. I particularly like Andrea Schluter’s (1994) comments:

Perhaps this mother love should not be compared to the love of a partner but should even be called something different. It is a biological love, and embraces an unconditional and an eternal nature that no other love can claim. (A20)

The intensity of the mother-son relationship within a Croatian-Canadian or United States immigrant context intrigues me. What is the source or basis for this intensity? Further, how does one weave several strands into one's parenting style, in particular, Croatian cultural norms, my socialization into young womanhood in Southern Ontario in the late 1950s, my professional knowledge and skills as a social worker and professor, and feminism, an ideological perspective closely linked to my personal and professional roles? The purpose of this article is to examine aspects of the relationships of Croatian mothers and sons, in particular, when the sons have left the homeland—*stari kraj*. Given that there are a goodly number of folk and more recent songs about Croatian mothers and sons, I have chosen this lens in order to gain insight into the dynamics of these relationships. As Croatians are a highly musical and expressive people, especially loving to sing, I believe their songs will reveal what is truly important to them.<sup>1</sup> The outcome of this exploration will be a greater understanding of the dilemmas experienced by Croatian mothers and sons as well as a contribution to the scarce literature on the Croatian immigrant experience in Canada and the United States.

## Method

The first set of ten folk songs consists of words and/or words and music that have been popular in the United States and likely Canada since the 1930s and possibly earlier. An additional three songs touch on the mother-daughter relationship. The source, a musician of Croatian nationality had sung and played in a tamburitza orchestra in the United States since his youth. While I do not have information on the origins of the songs, the content of three suggests that they were written by emigrants to the United States whereas the other seven songs may have been written in Croatia. The ten songs all could have been sung by Croatian men, most of whom came to Canada and the United States in the waves of immigration during the early 1900s as single men (Rasporich 1982). They lived mostly *na boort*, in boarding houses run by Croatian women who cooked and washed for them. Their lives as steel workers, miners and labourers of all types were, in a word, hard. To sing and party with their countrymen was one of the few times when they could believe that truly this was a “better life” or it would be if they could only stay healthy, work hard, and the times were good.

The second set of sixteen songs are not, strictly speaking, folk songs that have been handed down through an oral tradition and sung by the “common people.” They are songs currently popular in Croatia and in North America, provided by two sources, one born in Croatia and the other in Canada, a second generation Canadian of Croatian descent. Both of these individuals have had considerable experience in offering a weekly Croatian radio show, much of which involves music. Eleven of the songs focus on the mother-son relationship, from the perspective of the son. Another addresses the mother-son relationship, but in the voice of a mother. Two could be sung by either a son

or daughter, and two are sung by daughters and deal with aspects of the mother-daughter relationship. Many of these songs have been hits in Croatia within the past 15 to 20 years. Words and audiotapes of the songs were provided.

After translating each song, I noted my immediate reactions to the content. There were at least three more readings of each song and a more systematic identification of the themes of the songs. By the third reading, I also listened to the audiotapes, noting my sense of the nature of the feelings conveyed by the musical rendering.

I also consulted literature that addressed the mother-son relationship or the mother's role within the Croatian context. The literature in the English language was modest, but in one instance, was a classic study and provided considerable insight into the background of some of the Croatian mothers whose sons had departed for North America prior to World War II.

### Findings

In presenting the findings, I cannot comment on the population of songs from which these have been selected. I asked my sources to locate as many songs as they knew that addressed the mother-son relationship. All songs examined do so. A few additional songs were provided by all sources that focus on mothers from a daughter's perspective or which could be sung by either daughters or sons. However, my findings derive primarily from the songs that are from the sons' vantage point and the few that express how mothers feel.

### Folk songs from pre-World War II

The older songs fell into three categories in terms of their dominant emphasis.

#### *1. Songs of unhappiness*

These were, at least, four songs of misery and general unhappiness with one's lot in life, whether it was one's lack of good fortune in love or in enduring the relentless struggle to survive in the new world where newcomers soon discovered that the streets were not paved in gold. Thus, in "Dear Mother, What are You Doing?" our young fellow sings:

*Ej* dear mother, what are you doing, what are you doing  
That the young woman doesn't marry me, doesn't marry me?  
*Ej joj joj* – kasha and beans  
Salted turnips and corn meal mush—that's my life!

Mother responds by telling him to wait until autumn and he asserts that he will find himself a young woman, with raven eyes, a blonde, fair-haired one. But the reality of his life is in the refrain: "*ej joj joj* (words of wailing) kasha and beans, salted turnips and corn meal mush." These were the ordinary foods of the people, whether they were in Croatian villages or working in the steel mills.

Was there an escape into the happy state of family life, having a pretty wife and being your own master? There is a hint that somehow mother is to blame, that she hasn't come through as she might have in Croatia by arranging a marriage with a suitable young woman.

There is a stronger sense of blame in another song of outright misery entitled "Mother, Mother." In this song, the man's love relationship does not work out and he bids goodbye to love. Tomorrow his heart will cry and his dreams will die. Then the refrain that reflects the essence of his state of being:

Damned be my fate,  
My misfortunes are my destiny.  
O mother, mother, why did you bear me  
When I don't have any luck!

He finds no solace in the tavern though he drinks until dawn, with an old gypsy drowsing beside him, playing on the tambura, undoubtedly songs of melancholy.

Well, mother did give birth to him. And stopped there, according to the third song of unhappiness:

"My Mother has only one." In this song, not only does she just have one offspring, in his view it would be better if she had none. Thus he effaces himself as a source of joy for his mother. Why? Because everything he earns, presumably in the new world, he spends foolishly and sends nothing home to her. When a husband or a son left a wife or mother, her status in the village was diminished, but if either sent her letters and money, then she could regain her position as someone with worth. She had someone out there who cared and who would either come back or send for her. Usually, sons would send money or goods if these could be received without a horrendous customs duty. This son declares that he loves his mother but he loves his partying life more, his "becarku." It is as if he sees her—his mother, his mother, old and grey, but his social life sweetly beckons him. The strain and pull is evident:

My mother, my mother  
Scolds and abuses me, but the bachelor life  
Extends its hot lips.  
And he concludes, this lost soul:  
I'll grieve and I'll grieve (the loss of)  
My father and mother, but I can't get over,  
But I can't get over the fiery carousing life.

And what can mother do with all of this wanton behaviour? In the last song of misery, "Mother is Cursing Me," there is not much recourse. In the first verse, or stage of life, mother is railing against her son for once again staying out until dawn, asking how long will he continue, where is it leading? She bemoans

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her fate in terms of what she has brought forth into the world. He responds by telling her not to weep or to stir up her sorrows; he'll shape up, he still has time. In the second verse, or stage of young married life, his wife greets him in the morning upon his arrival home, with a Bible in her hand. Like his mother before him, she berates him as a hard-drinking scoundrel, a rake. He dismisses her wild woman's talk and proclaims that he will rehabilitate himself, he still has time. In the third verse, the children cry that he is drinking more than he should. This hurts him—that the children should be trying to send “smarts” to him, the father. But he asserts:

Give it up children. You'll be better,  
And I'll drink according to my wishes.

It would have been difficult for the men to acknowledge their faults directly, but in song they could, and in company with other men, with whom they sang these songs in drinking places or the Croatian Hall or “Dom.” In a way, they even acknowledged that they were the authors of their own misfortunes to their wives and children who likely felt unable to make any changes in their husband's and father's lifestyle.

I am not suggesting that all male immigrants during the earlier waves of immigration to Canada and the United States lived dissolute lives, but likely many could identify, in some degree, with the words and sentiments. I know that my father never forgot that he had to borrow money from a family friend in Croatia to pay for his passage to Canada in 1925; his own father, living and working in Pittsburgh for years, had no savings, but there was always time and money for song and drink.

## *2 .Role of mother*

The second category of songs pertains to mother's role. One aspect has already been identified in the song, “My Mother has Only One,” namely, to scold and to remonstrate with her son about his foolish, self-destructive behaviour, which is causing grief to him and his family. This function is highlighted in “My Mother Curses Me,” not only in the title but in the first verse when the mother scolds her son for partying until dawn. The task of the mother to shape her son's behaviour into more appropriate ways is also prominent in the song, “I'm Hiccuping.” Our hero is struck by the hiccups; then he exclaims that his mother is thinking of him, asking where is he from dawn to dark? He acknowledges that he is having a good time with the “girls” and he tells his mother not to scold him, whereas she complains that she has been scolding for three years now. The unidimensionality of the mother's role is evident: she is charged to shape her son into more mature ways, but she seems to have only one technique at hand—her nagging which only angers and tires her, and frustrates her son, who doesn't seem to change his ways.

A more comprehensive delineation of the mother's role is found in the

song, “Mother.” She rocks the cradle and sings a quiet song, acknowledging that the sleeping angel is part of her. She is there for him in early childhood when there are various childhood ills: she is on guard, day and night, listening, with her heart full of woes (for unspecified reasons). When her little flower begins to go farther afield into the big world, she will take out of her own mouth so that he does not go hungry, or be lacking in whatever. And when he grows up as all do, and leaves with a partner, mother hugs him but is bursting with wounds. The song concludes with a blessing for all mothers—an acknowledgment of the encompassing nature of their caring, throughout their lives and throughout all the stages of their son’s development. Only later, perhaps when the sons have their own families, do they openly thank their mothers and show some understanding of her sacrifices.

Mothers aren’t asking a lot in these songs: only that their adult sons give up their rakish ways and act responsibly, that is, take care of themselves and then meet their other obligations to wives and children. In this sense, mothers are simply affirming traditional values about the importance of the welfare of the family. With respect to sons, mothers are to keep their lads on the straight and narrow, presumably with support from others in their community. With respect to young women, as presented in at least three of the other songs, the mother also acts to affirm traditional values of morality: the mother is to guard against her daughter being taken advantage of sexually, sometimes to the daughter’s dismay. How well mothers succeed is uncertain as daughters show themselves to be strong-willed, but at least two songs end with the daughter safely promised in marriage.

### *3. Songs of return to the homeland*

The third and final category, songs of longing and return, has only one selection from the older songs.<sup>2</sup> In the song “Mother, Dear Mother,” the son tells his mother that he is thinking of her and his heart knows that without her, he is lost. He anticipates her joy when he returns: she will escape the status of being alone. He looks forward to the moment when they can both smile and laugh. With some anxiety, he implores her, mother dear mother, to wait for him. In other words, please don’t die. Probably the yearning in this song was almost universal for these male immigrants, most of whom never returned. Many comforted themselves for years with the idea that they would return. The fantasy was important to keep alive. Else why would one put up with the toil of everyday life! A sub-theme in at least four of the older songs is that there is no escaping one’s destiny. Whatever one’s fate is, so be it – whether it is to be without fortune, to not find a suitable marriage partner, to be hardworking but poor, or to be caught up in the bachelor’s life. Who can get away from what has been predestined? Perhaps this was a belief that helped one accept what seemed too difficult to change. One could feel melancholy but one was not alone. There were others and together they found some solace. Singing together was a great pastime, whether it was in one’s own home with friends or with the other men

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in the Croatian Hall or at the picnics in the *suma* or woods.<sup>3</sup> That was when one felt “at home” again, even in this new land.

### **Popular songs of the 1980s to present**

The second set of songs have been popular within the past 20 years, both in Croatia and abroad. They include nine that would be sung by sons, two by mothers, four by sons or daughters, and one by a daughter. Five of the songs fall into the category identified as songs of longing and return: another four may be categorized as sad or unhappy songs, either about the separation or more generally, about life. Three fall into a category of gratitude and appreciation of the mother. Two songs have a political emphasis, and one is about the mother’s role.

#### *1. Songs of return to the homeland*

The songs of return, the wished for realization of a dream, are similar to the earlier song of return. One is entitled “Return” and it could have been sung in any era of immigration. Its language, like that of several of the more recent songs, is poetic:

Night is descending and snow is falling,  
My cry is lost beneath the mountain.

But the mixed sentiments of joy and anxiety are the same: the man senses that his mother is dozing, the fire is out. He tells her to open the door to her son: “I am returning to your home.” The night is quiet and no one awaits him. Is it too late?

In “To You, Mother, My Thoughts Fly,” the son’s thoughts fly across the fields and mountains. From afar, the one and only son sends his greetings. Fate has separated them and he wonders if he will ever see her again. He won’t ever forget her, her gentle eyes, her dear hands that nurtured and raised him. In “Tears of My Mother,” a son tells his mother how he remembers her words and he curses the fate that separates them. Now he doesn’t have his one and only mother any more. He damns those who took her and asks who will pay for her tears. There is clearly anger directed at those who are responsible. Similarly, in “Mother” the son curses the poverty that has cast Croatians around the world. He asks the faraway star to lead him back to the doorstep where his mother waits. He asks that the door be opened to the son: “there is only one home.” He, like others, implores her to keep the home fires lit:

The hearth is too dear  
Tend it, mother  
For it is our destiny.

Two songs in the this category have the same title, “Write to Me, Mother.”

One son sees himself as the only one awake in the city: he asks his mother to write, to ask him to return. He asserts that she will never know how he suffers. In a play on words, he asks her to write about his *kraj*, his region or homeland. But no one will know of his unending sorrow—*beskrajnu tugu*. Only the stars know. In the other song, the son asks his mother to write to him of the Adriatic Sea:

With each wave  
I sit up on it.

He wants to see the old laurel, smell the pines, hear about the boats that arrive, the neighbours ... He wants her to write about everything, for her words nourish his heart and soul.

There is an additional song of return sung by a mother. Simply titled, "Son, Return," it is an impassioned plea by a mother to her son not to let the distance separate them, nor the waves to carry him to a foreign sea. Return, she implores him, when all are thinking that he will never return; return because of those who love him, on our blue sea. She tells him to return to his most dear country where his mother and his heaven await him.

### *2. Songs of unhappiness*

The second category involves melancholy songs about aspects of mother-son relationships. In "Something for Goodnight," the son wishes or even, bemoans the fact that his mother didn't do everything she could to see him off: she could have kissed him, stroked him with her lips, said goodnight. He, the little boy, wonders how can he tell her what hurts him? He repeats what she might have done, so that he might have peace, not his troubled sleep. In another, entitled "Mother," the son is desolate as he faces his mother's death. He recalls the last time that she called him, when she breathed her last, and he cries and cries the whole night. He never fully understood what a mother was; earlier he had seen the world with different eyes than now, when he is in pain. In "Old Mother," the son asks his mother to listen to his song, for he has no tears to cry out his woes: "It hurts, it hurts, for tonight the soul dies." He emphasizes that he, her only son, will be suffering tonight.

### *3. Songs of gratitude*

There are three songs of gratitude and appreciation to the mother. "Thank You, Mother" is all encompassing. The son returns after many years to his mother and wants to know everything: how she sleeps, does she worry about the same things? He thanks her for everything she gave him, and the sun, his existence, the tears on her pillow, his good luck. He assures her that every night he dreamed of her and wanted to kiss her face and grey hair. And now, it may be too late: the torch may die.

The other two songs could be sung by either men or women. In "To You,



Mother,” there is a recognition of all the waiting that a mother does, the worrying, the following with her eyes of hundreds of trains, the lights she has lit, and the tears. And in “A Thousand Songs to Mother,” the mother, as usual, waits alone. The same depth of appreciation is found in “Happy Mother’s Day,” a song in which the adult child recognizes that it wasn’t always easy for the mother, but she managed to provide a carefree, joyful childhood for her children. And when they return as adults to the same house where they grew up, everything about it is the best, because of the mother and what she gave them. These same sentiments are echoed in the song of thanks by a daughter to her mother, “Mother, Thank You.”

#### *4. Role of mother*

The mother’s role is directly addressed in only one song: “Mother,” which could be sung by either a son or daughter. Essentially, the mother is in spirit with the adult child in a land or home that is a wasteland, where no one knows him or her. Mother is the only source of comfort and the adult child asks the mother to watch over the sleeper, undoubtedly as she did when the child was frightened at night by a bad dream. The role of the mother in keeping the home a stable and welcoming place is recognized in several other songs. She is also the source of information about all that is newsworthy and pertinent to the faraway son. And she stands for the loved land or sea that is “home,” for in one breath, the singer yearns for mother and the terrain or sea he left behind.

#### *5. Political songs*

Finally, there is a category of political songs. One is entitled “Croatian Mother.” She is likened to a mother hawk who won’t let anyone take her children. The son responds that a Croatian mother gave birth to him and Croatia raised him: “A Croat he was, and will be.” The mother gives her children a chance to fly free, but she will protect them. The sons affirm their allegiance: “Zivjela Hrvatska (Long live Croatia)!” The other song, “My Son,” is a timeless one of all mothers who wait for their sons who are in battle. The old mother waits on her doorstep; she waits for her one and only, dear sweet son, She is sad and prays every day for him; yet she is proud of him, for he is willing to sacrifice his life. She knows that Croatia will survive while there are sons like hers.

### **Discussion**

What do we learn from these songs about Croatian mothers and sons that span nearly a century? First, mothers and sons find themselves in a loving relationship that transcends barriers of time, distance, troubles, wars, and the oppressive and alienating conditions of survival in Canada and the United States in years when only the strong and fortunate could eke out a living. Second, mothers and sons both yearn for each other; this is not a one-sided love. The intensity of the bond is undoubtedly intensified by the separation due to

the son's leaving. We also learn that sons will stray, whether it is in Croatia, much to the dismay of mothers, wives and children, or in the new world where they were not alone in their carousing. There is a bone-headedness to the sons' insistence in the earlier songs to stay committed to their bachelor life, despite its self-defeating nature. And there is a profound depth to the sorrow experienced by mothers and sons who were separated.

By maintaining their yearning for each other, mothers and sons could comfort themselves by believing in reunion. Thus, each was strengthened to deal with life's travails. The picture that emerges is that of mothers as lifelines for their distant sons. The mothers, themselves, seemed to experience many troubles but these are their secret woes. Sharing, perhaps, would have been shameful for these women, and avoidance of shame or *sramota* is very important for Croatsians.

It is fair to conclude that Croatian mothers in the homeland, or in North America, occupied a revered position, although their advice might sometimes be disregarded by their errant sons. One could always tell one's troubles to mother, as nothing could sway her love. Fathers, on the other hand, have been known as disciplinarians. In Croatian songs, they have received little attention. One of the sources of the current set of songs noted that it is always difficult to find songs for the radio program on Father's Day.

The religious context within Croatia provides a base for the intensity of the mother-child relationship and for the worshipful attitude of children toward their mothers. During the years of Communism in the former Yugoslavia, from 1945 to 1989, the Catholic Church in Croatia was not prominent, but neither was it outlawed. After the fall of the Communist leadership, Catholicism emerged reinvigorated and with it, worship of Mary as the mother of God, the Blessed Virgin. The Blessed Virgin was long revered, in prayers and pilgrimages to her well-known church, Marija Bistrica. And many local and foreign visitors are drawn to Medjugorje, a shrine honouring the sighting of Mary.

Political songs affirming Croatian national identity were suppressed during the Communist era but gained prominence during the period of Serbian aggression and occupation of nearly one-third of Croatian territory, 1991-95. The alliance between mother and Croatia, both highly valued entities, undoubtedly served to strengthen the resolve of its people in establishing their independence as a country.

Despite Croatsians' reverence for the mother, Croatia has been highly patriarchal in its gender roles and family configurations (St. Erlich, 1966). Yet the mother is seen as pivotal with respect to promoting cherished values and child rearing. Thus, St. Erlich, in her study of 300 Yugoslav villages (1937-1941) writes:

In all the regions investigated, we observed particular love and tenderness toward the mother. Here we are not thinking of the mother's attitude toward the children—tenderness in this relation-

ship is universal—but a special tenderness of the children toward the mother. The mother occupied a central position in all her children's deeply felt emotions as a sort of protectress. In love songs about the yearning of a young man for a girl, or the longing of a girl for a boy of her choice, behind the loved person, we find the mother. We constantly hear the words, “ask mother,” “tell mother,” “mother will not let me,” “mother likes you.” (St. Erlich, 1966: 94)

St. Erlich explains this markedly affectionate attitude, which is very congruent with the findings from the old songs, in terms of the patriarchal arrangements: the mother is never high in status, and thus, has no need to be aloof or to maintain her authority with the children. She could just give unhindered expression to her affection. Our more cynical and modern mentality suggests that she runs the risk of being a doormat or virtual slave to her children. Certainly, this is a viewpoint I have heard in many Croatian circles regarding how mothers and grandmothers act and are expected to act, in particular, toward the son. Croatian children joke that mothers would cut the food up on your plate in order to encourage you to eat it, food being a major medium for the expression of love (and control, the children would echo).

St. Erlich (1966) also suggests that there were dilemmas in the mother-child relationship, indeed, within every mother-child tie, a seed of tragedy. Why? Because the mother is vulnerable, loving her children so much without any defense against animosity or alienation on their part. And in her study, many of the troubles that did develop pertained to the son's finding a wife, and mother becoming mother-in-law and a threat to the young woman who has entered the household.

Alliances of mothers with their children against the fathers were not uncommon in this study, with some regions of the former Yugoslavia reporting this finding more often than others. A more consistent finding pertained to the mother-daughter relationship: St. Erlich found that “in all regions, there was a great bond between mother and daughter” (1966: 98). There is a suggestion that in pastoral and some other regions with a “tribal culture,” the mother-son tie is closer. Was it the “heroic tradition which in the mother's feelings created greater concern for her sons?” (1966: 98). It could be that the departure of the sons to Canada and the United States amplified the feelings of the mother and son, and her concerns. A case of absence makes the heart grow even fonder!

It would be useful to consider how this Croatian adulation of the mother compares with other immigrant groups. Additionally, one could explore Margolis' argument that understanding why mothers have been put on a pedestal necessitates taking into account the larger social and economic context, for example, the demise of the self-contained household economy, the isolation of the living unit, and the segregation of the home from the workplace (Margolis, 1993).

## **Conclusion**

It is not surprising to find so many songs affirming Croatians' sense of commitment to their homeland. Although nationalistic feelings were inflamed by politicians for political purposes during the Balkan Wars of the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia, Croatians, for centuries, despite the period of Communist rule, have had a strong and positive sense of their identity as a people.

What have I, as a feminist and Croatian mother, learned from this investigation of Croatian songs? First, there are some incongruities in the Croatian mothering ideologies as depicted in these songs and feminist ideals for self-development: how can one be so self-sacrificing and yet make a major commitment to one's own pursuits? Can one be so absorbed in the mother-son (or mother-daughter) relationship without losing one's own sense of self?

Second, children born to immigrant parents occupy an enormously important position in the family: they are the reason for the parents' sacrifices and the source of their joy. And the extended family is usually not present. Hence, the bond between parents and children is very strong and parents are ever watchful over their children.

Third, to what extent do Croatian boys and young men in North America grow up with an image of women as persons in their own right? If and when they hear their mother's reminders, are they ready to dismiss them, only later to realize the validity of their mother's case, often when it is too late to make amends? Do they expect mothers to be self-sacrificing and if so, how does this expectation influence their own relationships with female partners? St. Erlich (1966) also explored whether Croatian mothers and sons had difficulty in developing or maintaining satisfying intimate relationships with husbands and partners and found considerable variation in the alliances of the mother, that is, with husband, son or daughter.

A final incongruity, especially for a second generation Canadian or American mother, is between the "doing for" aspect of the Croatian mothering style delineated above and feminist ideals of self-determination. I believe that Croatian sons of the earlier waves of immigrants received considerable catering. The "doing for" easily gives way to a control scenario in which mothers may feel it is very appropriate to stay very involved throughout their son's lives, until death, maybe even later. The idea of separation, propounded by earlier psychologists, is definitely not central to the Croatian dynamics between mothers and sons. Croatian mothers do, however, set expectations and sons respond, for the rewards of pleasing mother are great! Of course, there are other rewards for doing well at school and work, but it is almost universal for Croatian children to want to please their parents all their lives. For some mothers, however, a major technique for shaping the son's behaviour has been through scolding and reminding, not the most respectful or effective of intervention approaches, as sons will attest.<sup>4</sup>

There is some hope, I believe, in finding a balance between giving all to one's children and giving to oneself. The two need not be so separate. With

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awareness, a mother can temper her inclination to be so involved as to interfere with the son's emotional and social growth. Finally, with discussion and review, mothers and sons can work their way through the more difficult spots in parent-child relationships. With luck, they can listen to the songs together and even sing.

*I am very grateful to Joseph Valentich who provided the folk songs and Dunja Lukatela and Ida Poropat who provided the more recent songs. Their information and feedback was very helpful, although I take responsibility for all the content and analysis*

<sup>1</sup>While conducting the research for this paper, I found the following reassuring quotation in the *Zajednicar* editorial of May 10, 1995, p. 2: "Country and western singers sing about their wives and girlfriends, their dogs, their four-wheeler, their motorcycle, etc., rock 'n roll and popular crooners sing ballads about their present and lost loves, but Croatians sing more about their mothers and the Blessed Mother than any other attraction" (2).

<sup>2</sup>My sense is that there are likely more songs yet to be found that would fall into this category. Further, some of the recent songs may, in effect, be versions of the older folk songs. This is a matter for future exploration.

<sup>3</sup>Women also sang in Canada and the United States, but I have a stronger recall of more men singing at social events. Another matter for investigation!

<sup>4</sup>Nonetheless, mothers' words may be effective: Brian Brennan (1999) notes that 22 years after his mother's death, her voice still sounds in his head.

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