As part of the research project, “Diasporic Matrilineal Narratives and Transnational Writing by Women in Post-Yugoslav Contexts,” supported by a Fulbright Visiting Scholar grant, the paper entitled “Sisters and solid foundations: reinventing alternative spaces in Courtney Angela Brkic’s *The First Rule of Swimming*” offers a feminist reading of dislocation and mediating spaces in the novel written by an American author of Croatian origin. What seems to define Brkic’s novel as a space of conflicting movable and solid foundations is an existential split in the main character’s motherline disrupted by a number of socio-historical circumstances in which immigration, exile, and transnational nomadism can be identified as potential ways out of political and personal confinements. Representing a segment of the larger project, the paper aims to illustrate and foreground the treatment of mother-daughter and sibling relations within broader transnational frameworks that can accommodate contemporary matrilineal fiction narratives, women’s (semi-)autobiographies, and writing from the (pacifist) maternal. Drawing on the ideas of Luce Irigaray, Azade Seyhan, and Rosi Braidotti, the paper explores survival strategies of exiles and nomadic mediators in relation to familiar and foreign geographies, addressing the issues of heritage and identity construction through challenging and subverting “solid foundations” of patriarchal tradition.
Resonating with Virginia Woolf’s often quoted and variously appropriated claim that as a woman she has no country yet her country is the whole world (Woolf, 1938: 109), Susan Strehle in her book on transnational women’s fiction sheds some light on the dynamics of tight interconnections between the confined spaces of home, homeland, and nation, supporting Qadri Ismail’s argument that “women cannot find home in nation” because “nationalism constructs women as subordinate to men” (Strehle, 2008: 7). Women’s self-definition and public expression are equally challenged by living within the strictly controlled borders of socially oppressive and totalitarian regimes that tend to perpetuate patriarchal denigration of women, reducing them to the society’s others. Dealing with the concepts of the traditional home deconstructed in the works of contemporary literature authored by Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, Arundhati Roy, and a few more transnational women writers originating from different parts of the world, Strehle advocates the increasingly emerging transnational trends in literature, arguing that “the borders separating English and American Literature from the literature of the rest of the world are relics of the imperial age” (Strehle, 4). The very claim, based on feminist and postcolonial perspectives, is becoming applicable in its loose variations in different transnational contexts, which can be observed in a number of studies and theoretical approaches that foreground women’s liberation from national confinements through the transitory activities of travel, migration, and exile. Drawing upon the ideas of transnational nomadism and a number of critical books on East European transnational writers,1 this paper attempts to offer a feminist matrilineal reading of dislocation and alternative spaces in Courtney Angela Brkic’s *The First Rule of Swimming* (2013), one of the not many (diasporic) novels written in English by a woman author living in the United States and originating from South East Europe.2

Looking back at the history of women’s travelling within patriarchal societies, one becomes increasingly aware that in the past the main journey in a woman’s life seemed to have consisted

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2 Some of similarly categorizable diasporic novels or (semi)-autobiographical narratives by women that are also worth exploring in the light of mother-daughter dynamics and transnational nomadism are Nadja Tesich’s *Native Land* (1998) and *To Die in Chicago* (2010), Yelena Franklin’s *A Bowl of Sour Cherries* (1998) and *Piranha Times* (2008), and Natasa Radojcic-Kane’s *You Don’t Have to Live Here* (2005).
in her being transferred directly from the father, as her primary master, to a husband, as the secondary master, who claimed her as his child-bearer and material possession. In this one-way ticket scenario, there hardly existed a space for mother and daughter encounters, which has disrupted many matrilineal connections, making motherlines and female genealogies distorted and invisible. In her seminal *Sexes and Genealogies*, Luce Irigaray reminds the reader that “under the rule of patriarchy the girl is separated from her mother and from her family in general” in order to be “transplanted” or “collapsed” into the genealogy of a man who erases her previous identity and imposes a new one (Irigaray, 1993: 2), locking her within the dynamics of subject-object relations. Any sign of unrespecting the law of the father, such as “remain[ing] faithful to the laws relating to her mother,” would stigmatise women as societal outcasts who should be imprisoned and “condemned to a slow and lonely death.” (Irigaray, 2) Arguing that our societies and cultures “operate on the basis of an original matricide,” (11), Irigaray goes on to clarify the impact of deep-seated patriarchal norms on the perpetuation of almost unchanging mechanisms that tend to prevail in most of contemporary societies, threatening to eliminate women’s values and perspectives from the overall map of the human genealogy. Therefore, “if we are not to be accomplices in the murder of the mother,” Irigaray claims, “we also need to assert that there is a genealogy of women,” as there are histories of female family trees that contain certain women who “despite all the cultural obstacles, have made their mark upon history but all too often have been forgotten by us.” (19) This statement might suggest that there has always been an urgent need to retrieve and juxtapose the fragments of the female side of human traditions, as “genealogical authority belongs to man and to woman,” (Irigaray, 2000: 131) yet many women seem to deny their belonging to a plethora of motherlines. It can be argued that such denials, or at least an unawareness of them, are often traceable in the literary works written not only by men, which is almost a rule, but also in the works by certain women authors, who sometimes almost dramatically augment the importance of heterosexual romantic relationships to the detriment of their mother-daughter bonds, even when composing personal narratives and autobiographical prose.

Strong on the issues of home, migration and (in)voluntary displacement, *The First Rule of Swimming* does explore the main characters’ paternal heritage, but rather as a strategy of reclaiming the central motherline through mother-daughter conflict reconciliation and consequent self-realization of the female characters outside stifling patriarchal regimes. The unfixed state of
outsideness is mainly achieved through the central character’s voluntary displacement from a community immobilized by its own past and insensitive to its members’ differences and the need for growth. With a lot of family secrets unrevealed, her female ancestors brutalized and oppressed, and her own development suppressed, the travelling subject Jadranka makes her own departure decisions and becomes responsible for her own itineraries and creative expression. As it will be seen later in the paper, it is only through transcending the status quo of her national community that she can finally reclaim not only her earlier creative impulses, but also her access to the paternal line and a restored wholeness of her maternal heritage.

In the introduction to her *Writing Outside the Nation*, a study which discusses several diasporic narratives through the prism of transnational literature seen as the writing that operates outside the national canon, Azade Seyhan emphasises the significance of transnational writing for a more comprehensive understanding of new cultural identities in contemporary Europe within broader European and American literary contexts. Identifying diasporic literatures in host countries as transnational rather than minor, she recognizes not only their increasing presence alongside dominant national canons, but also their subjects’ needs for an alternative space / geography (Seyhan, 2001: 15), which through a creative distance enables translations of homeland memories into a self-understanding that consequently “requires a new interpretation of [the subject’s] relationship to the past” (Seyhan, 87). Suggesting that the writers of exile and migration easily “find the narrative and cultural coordinates to offer another version of their lands’ history” (20), a version that is unofficial yet authentic and therefore invaluable, Seyhan emphasizes the importance of exilic literary texts and their transformative potentials in relation to the past approached from a temporally distanced narrator’s point of view assumed in another land. Transnational writing can thus comprise exilic and migrant writing as the writing outside the nation, but can also include literary and critical texts that, as a state of mind, transcend national boundaries either to deconstruct their foundations, or to explore the dynamics of their reflection in broader international contexts. However, in order to comprehend transnational writing’s various strategies of outsideness, it seems necessary to acknowledge not only the differences between the two suggested transnational identities, that of the migrant and the exile, but also the transitory identity of the nomad based on a specific nomadic consciousness. In her influential elaboration of nomadic consciousness seen as “an epistemological and political imperative” for contemporary critical thought, Rosi Braidotti (1994: 2) reminds us that migrants and exiles have
their distinctive identities expressed through particular social positions conditioned by different economic or political circumstances. Whilst the lower social class migrant tends to remain economically disadvantaged in the host country as well, the exile’s social standing does not necessarily correspond to their political outsideness. On the other side, the nomadic subject is “usually beyond classification” and represents “a sort of classless unit” (Braidotti, 22) that lives in transition flirting with different kinds of identity only to abandon them for an open road of possibilities. Rarely settled and often on the move, the Braidottian nomad “is only passing through, (...) mak[ing] those necessary situated connections that can help her/him to survive,” although “s/he never takes on fully the limits of one national, fixed identity,” (33) since the new geographies of identity move between “boundaries of difference and borderlands of liminality,” and are therefore “polyvocal and often contradictory.” (Friedman 1998: 19)

Although the categories of migrants and exiles may have their particular and rather stereotypical literary representations, it can be argued that most of contemporary transnational writing houses subjects and narrators that transcend the above-mentioned categories by adopting certain nomadic qualities necessary for challenging their fixed identities. By claiming that the migrant identity can be easily “cast upon” a subject within historically contradictory European contexts, Braidotti herself resists such identification by “choos[ing] to become a nomad,” or a subject who is in transit “and yet sufficiently anchored to a historical position to accept responsibilities and therefore make [her]self accountable for it.” (Braidotti, 10) Constructed through the workings of nomadic thinking as a minority position and nomadism as an active practice, nomadic subjects become increasingly present in contemporary prose written by East European women authors who experience the burden or pleasure of their migrant heritage that is either “cast upon” them or willingly embraced and explored, or both. In most cases it is all of the personal and group experiences/histories combined together and temporarily left for new possibilities that help define nomadic writing as transnational. The new possibilities reside in literary texts serving as platforms for nomadic maps and map-(re)making, which altogether enables detachment from strictly national and patriarchal spaces, offering alternative geographies, “shifting landscapes of [one’s] singularity” (Braidotti, 17), and the “third home[s]”
as “non-localized imagined space[s] of revision and ambivalence.”

Whether the authors of East-European diasporic narratives are perceived as migrants, exiles, or nomads, their increasing emergence as writers in their host countries seems to be insufficiently recognized and underrepresented in critical and theoretical writings. In a recently published collection of essays on East European women’s stories of migration in the new millennium, the editors rightly observe that “in spite of the magnitude of the recent flow of women’s migration from Eastern Europe to Western countries, the social, cultural and political phenomena it has entailed have been mostly understudied.” (Alexandru et al, 2014: 9) In an attempt to cover the wide gap between the emergence of (non-)fictional narratives of dislocation/relocation pertaining to East European migrant experiences and their critical exploration and representation, the book contains essays that adopt transnationalism as their theoretical framework while discussing the works of established authors such as Dubravka Ugrešić, Slavenka Drakulić, and Vesna Goldsworthy, presupposing “the capacity of migrant narratives or of narratives about migrants to project alternative, imaginary spaces” that comprise social, political, and cultural issues at the intersection between homeland and host communities. (Alexandru et al, 12)

Transnational narratives based on post-Yugoslav migrant experiences, particularly those published in the first decade of the 21st century, regardless of being written in the Balkans or in a third country, are perhaps the least investigated fictional or non-fictional stories within East European contexts. Mediating between the current position of the narrator and particular historical moments through the appropriation of fragmented memory, the post-Yugoslav writing of dislocation can be partly viewed as Deleuzian “literature of becoming” intensified by Braidotti’s “nomadic consciousness”, especially in reference to women as literary subjects who embark on restoring their motherlines and matrilineal heritage as a potent way of multiple self-identification. According to Braidotti, “nomadic consciousness consists in not taking any kind of identity as permanent” and fixed, (Braidotti, 33) since the nomadic identity is made of “transitions, successive shifts and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity.” Detaching from phallogocentric concepts of identity, the nomadic subject “is not altogether devoid of unity” as her or his movements present cohesive patterns “engendered by repetitions,

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3 In her essay on the new concept of home in transnational diaspora, Anastasia Stefanidou introduces the term *third home*, which as a space of “creative tension and cultural alienation” represents “a constitutive feature of the new diasporic imagination.” (Marçais at al, 2002: 226)
cyclical moves, [and] rhythmical displacement.” (22) Illustrating those patterns through the appropriation of Deleuzian *rhizome* that, according to her represents “a nonphallogocentric way of thinking” which is “secret, lateral, spreading, as opposed to the visible, vertical ramifications of Western trees of knowledge”, Braidotti claims that the rhizome “stands for a nomadic political ontology” providing “movable foundations for a post-humanist view of subjectivity.”(23)

What partly defines Courtney Angela Brkic's novel *The First Rule of Swimming* as a space of seemingly conflicting movable and solid foundations is an existential split in the main character’s motherline disrupted by a number of socio-historical circumstances in which exile, immigration, or nomadism can be identified as a way out of political and personal confinements. Set on Rosmarina, an imaginary Croatian island and in the city of New York in different time periods, *The First Rule of Swimming* spans three generations of Croatian islanders who either stay at home or move to the United States. Focused on two complementary female characters, Jadranka and Magdalena, whose sisterly bond might signal the Braidottian “potential for positive renaming” (Braidotti, 8), the novel houses a number of strong matrilineal attachments gradually modified through the intervention of Jadranka’s evolving subversiveness. Marked as significantly different from most of her relatives in appearance and mentality that borders on unsettling restlessness, and almost diametrically opposite to her rather conventional schoolteacherish sister Magdalena, Jadranka serves both as a distorted mirror of her female counterparts and a challenging catalyst of social change. Her pronounced relational and nomadic traits are evident from the outset of the novel, and mostly through spatial juxtapositions of existing and potential dwelling places at home and abroad. Reflecting upon her sister’s complacency in her territorial rootedness, Jadranka empathizes with Magdalena’s determined and consistent nature, yet she neither subscribes to her particular way of homeliness nor does she identify with the traditional perception of womanhood on Rosmarina, where women are expected to embrace their wife-and-mother roles at an early age. On the contrary, she shuns domesticity at all costs and is amused by Magdalena’s sleeping “in the same whitewashed room…. they had once shared” as revisiting it years later resembles entering “a film being shot about their childhood.”(Brkic, 2013: 22) When Jadranka in her late twenties accepts her cousin’s generous offer to move to her New York third-floor studio “precisely because [she] was not sure of her place in the world” and because in the confining Rosmarina surroundings “nobody had yet demonstrated a viable alternative for how to live” (Brkic, 21), Magdalena fails to understand her sister’s readiness to leave several spacious rooms
on their picturesque island for a tiny empty flat in America. Perceiving New York as a city “brimm[ing] more with pandemonium than opportunity” (165), she becomes even more agitated by Jadranka’s unpredictable behaviour, particularly when she learns about her disappearance.

Their differences aside, Magdalena and Jadranka can boast a very affirmative sisterly bond that resists disheartening external circumstances and subsequent separations. Communicating in a secret language during some of their major childhood crises induced by their stepfather’s violent disposition, they developed a closeness that was often exclusive and therefore mysterious to other family members. The early exclusivity of their connection has marked their adult relations as fairly dyadic, which additionally problematizes already persistent tensions in their interactions with mother. Interestingly, unlike most of contemporary motherline narratives that tend to foreground mother-daughter dynamics through grouping female predecessors, descendants, and non-biological mother figures around a primary parent-child dyad, matrilineal features in this novel are initially embodied in the intense bond between siblings, and only through their inevitable separation and consequent reconstruction of the family’s past do they manage to recognize their long-neglected mother as part of the most relevant triadic relationship in their matrilineal network.

The sisters’ early estrangement from Ana Babić, their mother, signifies a rupture in their biological motherline that can be attributed to Ana’s outsider position in the small island’s community. Namely, due to her own complicated past burdened with the suspicious death of her first husband and other family secrets, she considers it appropriate to leave Rosmarina and find employment in nearby Split, the town perhaps intentionally chosen for its name4 by the author writing in English to symbolize and accentuate Ana’s and most other women’s unenviable psychophysical conditions in the oppressive, male-dominated society. Paradoxically enough, the split between Ana’s past and present, followed by her maternal detachment, appears to be firmly embodied in her two daughters, denoting their infrequent mother-daughter encounters as “awkward occasions that were like visits from a stranger,” (9) who was often moody and quick to criticize. When the mother-as-stranger settled down in Split with her second husband, she

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4 It may be interesting to note that the novel accommodates personal names and names of places that have symbolical meanings, and most of them are linguistically and otherwise related to the motif of sea (more in Croatian): Moric family, Jadranka (Jadransko more – The Adriatic Sea), uncle Marin, Rosmarina, grandfather Luka (luka meaning harbour), etc.
suggested that Magdalena and Jadranka live with them, which later proved as a wrong move, as the sisters’ one-year stay in their mother’s new household “effectively ended all their fantasies of maternal affection.”(58) However, the family’s dysfunctionality rested not that much on Ana’s moodiness and her new partner’s inability to assume the role of a “good-natured father figure” but, shockingly, on his frequent bouts of aggressiveness that resulted in domestic violence. Apart from beating Ana, he would attack her daughters, too, and on one occasion he even “broke Magdalena’s hand by shoving her into a wall.”(59)

The incident of child abuse that rendered Magdalena’s broken bone impossible to heal properly was only a tip of the iceberg in Ana’s history of being victimized, particularly if we observe her and her relatives’ positions and roles within wider domestic and social contexts. Central to this claim is the abovementioned existential split embodied in her daughters as a major reflection of the sacrifice she had to make in order to protect her brother Marin, who had been unjustly arrested by the Yugoslav secret police and kept imprisoned for three years on the notorious Barren Island. Marin’s becoming a political prisoner by chance during the “communism with a human face” (109) and soon after the mysterious death of his brother-in-law, made him deeply aware of the threats that awaited him on return to his native island. Though released, he was marked as an agitator “attempting to subvert the country’s social order” (145), and was under a constant surveillance from the police. Before his immigration to America, he continued keeping a low profile, but as some of the local people kept disappearing overnight, one of them being Ana’s first husband whose death had been reported as suicide, Ana was blackmailed into having sex with the police chief, who ordered her to “stick with him and [he would] keep [her] brother safe.” (242) When it soon became clear that Ana’s mute sacrifice was not enough to protect Marin from further imprisonments or even elimination, she warned him of a possible arrest, and he escaped from Rosmarina, along with several other relatives.

Ana’s being torn between enduring the system’s degrading brutality for the sake of her brother’s safety and the same brother’s utter disgust at her alleged promiscuity only confirm her outcast position that is further complicated by the fact that her daughters do not share the same father. The existential split later embodied in the two sisters whose fathers have been locked in the victim-victimizer dynamics seems to have robbed Ana of her spontaneous motherly closeness, particularly in relation to Jadranka. It can be discerned both through Ana’s evasive
behavior and the confession that her own mother made to her granddaughter Magdalena, claiming that “there was a time when [Ana] loved Rosmarina” and being “a good mother, too… [s]he used to rock you and sing to you.” (69) What apparently tarnished the primary mother-daughter bond, distancing Ana from Magdalena, was the birth and growing up of Jadranka, “the bastard child who unraveled the entire world” (28) and whose origin was for some time a well-kept family secret.

The conventional good-wife-and-mother image maintained by grandmother Ružica’s generation tended to comply with patriarchal favouring of women’s social immobility and confinement to the domestic sphere. In such a restrictive atmosphere that also affected younger women, any sign of female emancipation and their changing place of residence were frowned upon by the island’s inhabitants. Although Magdalena seems to have retained some of the values that tie her strongly to Rosmarina and her homeland, both Ana and her other daughter step outside the traditional confinement; the former trying to suppress her past, the latter wishing to reinvent herself. But while at one point they appear to have lost touch with each other, there is another mother-daughter connection, that of their immigrated cousin Katarina and her mother Nona Vinka who, living far away, keep stretching their common motherlines in some other yet similarly nomadic directions that may create a more elaborate picture of nonphallogocentric movable foundations.

On her arrival to America, Jadranka finds herself wedged between ambitious and hedonistic Katarina / Katherine, who owns a gallery “where amorphous sculptures copulate on various surfaces” (22) and intensely homesick and demented Vinka, who has surrounded herself with lots of items from Rosmarina, “spending most of her time conversing with her dead sisters” (18). While Katarina prefers living in the present, rather undistracted by her mother’s regressive states, it is Nona Vinka, “an adroit time traveler”, who gradually unveils to Jadranka some key moments from the family’s history. During those reminiscing encounters, and in order to fit and savour her great-aunt’s lucid delusions that unearth long-forgotten stories needed for her self-reinvention, Jadranka often assumes a role of a woman from Vinka’s past, be it a sister or a friend of hers, or even her own mother. Sensing Vinka’s deep-rooted yearning for the geography left behind some thirty years ago, the younger woman finds their leafing through an old family album very soothing and empowering. (26) On those and other occasions throughout the novel, we learn not
only of the terrible sufferings Vinka had to undergo in the past, but are also acquainted with the prolonged immigrational seclusion and passivity she has had to take upon herself as a woman traditionally raised within the constraints of patriarchy. In her own outsider position of a housewife who has continued to sacrifice her life exclusively for the betterment of her husband and children even in America as the land of many opportunities and new identities, Vinka has become imprisoned both within the walls of a single building and within the scopes of her native dialect and broken English. On the other hand, her husband seems to be more socially active than ever before thanks to his “political gatherings, his protests and causes,”(218) which points at two almost sharply contrasted ways of living within the same household, where the old patriarchal order of family matters seems to be losing its original power.

Unlike Nona Vinka who still lacks agency, finding it hard to express herself outside the boundaries of her family past, her daughter Katarina experiences much more personal and artistic freedom even in her marriage. However, it is both Katarina and Nona Vinka who in their triad with newly emigrated Jadranka provide her with insights and knowledge needed for her future reinvention. Jadranka’s attachment to her American cousin begins in her childhood, when Katarina would present her with candies, books in English, and drawing crayons during her visits to Rosmarina. (84) It is the drawing crayons that attracted most attention as they stimulated Jadranka’s high artistic abilities, providing her with an easy and safe way of expressing herself in many difficult situations. Thus, when keeping silent or using a secret sign language to communicate with Magdalena in the presence of their mother’s abusive second husband, she would “draw taunting children’s faces,” and “when Nikola went on benders, she drew pictures of the sisters flying high above the city or huddled together in a room with earthen walls.” (65) Here it is obvious that the artistic representation of emotional closeness between sisters serves as a means of resistance against the girls’ oppressive environment. In her drawing process, in which elaborate shapes and other startling details appear to fly off page without much premeditation (94), Jadranka seems to be creating multiple alternative spaces with the ease and determination of someone traveling distances in the face of constrictive social geography. Yet, while her flow of expression tends to be inventive of new forms of freedom in her early childhood, it is the rigid requirements of the Art Academy in her home country that force her to drop out and consider other possibilities. With Jadranka drawing “uniformly featureless” faces of men that are yet to be inscribed due to her unresolved heritage issues and the professors “prattl[ing] endlessly about
solid foundations”, thus “stamping out any hint of innovation” (201), there was a burning need to reconstruct herself within and without dyadic relations with her mother and sister. While Magdalena, not much familiar with art, would always recognize Jadranka’s “use of color and brushstrokes”, identifying them with “her sister’s voice” (189), Ana disregards her daughter’s works, burning Jadranka’s remaining sketches upon her departure to America in order to “eradicate all traces of her” (66):

“It took her hours, her Jadranka the most prolific of artists, but as it grew dark the task became easier; she could no longer see what she was burning: the faces of her parents, self-portraits, and – always and everywhere – Magdalena.” (238)

Although Ana consciously embarks on purging her past traumas through severing connections with her younger daughter, and consequently with her first-born, too, she fails to burn the bridges that will eventually lead to the resolution of family conflicts, mending the precious ties of her immediate motherline. Namely, the major twist in her emotions occurs soon after Jadranka’s being reported missing and Magdalena’s flight to New York, and it is only seven months later that she “follow[s] in both her daughters’ footsteps and pack[s] her own suitcase for America.” (238) Meanwhile, Jadranka wages her own battles and in trying to find a job, locate her uncle Marin and then leave him for Shelter Island only to get involved in an illegal activity against her will, she ends up injured, but equally purged. Roaming the nearby forest and marking it with her own creations that resemble fairy houses and long winding snakes, Jadranka spontaneously leaves the recognizable traces as signposts to her lost performative body that soon materializes on a nomadic path of her constant personal transformations.

While Shelter Island initially promises a safe and peaceful zone for Jadranka’s introspective isolation during which she produces an authentic painting of the Rosmarina house, sending it to Marin along with the phone number of his parents, it also denotes her near-death experience and, finally, the intersection between primary mother-daughter drama and reunion with her mother and sister. Before the final triadic reconciliation, there are powerful scenes of Ana’s rapprochement with her brother (276-7), her tentative reconnection with Magdalena, and an instinctive rummaging through the woods in search for Jadranka. Whereas Ana firmly believes her stray daughter is still alive, spotting various hand-made configurations as she moves further “untangling the brambles of the bush”, Magdalena “decide[s] that nature ha[s] left them there by chance.” (307-8) However, Jadranka’s movable work of art that stretches across new lands does
lead to her isolated, unpossessed territory on which mother and her daughters now recognize one another through a grand catharsis.

Although the novel focuses on matrilineal connections that for certain reasons tend to be glossed over even in some writings by feminist women, it also addresses the complexities of the main character’s paternal heritage and how it affects not only the daughter’s relationship with the mother and other female relatives, but also her decision to travel, change places and positions. Through her constant movement and transformations, Jadranka reinvents her alternatives spaces by facing the primary space of the stigmatized “bastard child” from a geographically detached “yet [historically] anchored” nomadic position. The position of “a classless unit” with a traceable past, gained along with her (artistic) self-definition and agency, finally enables the mediating position of a transnational subject. It is perhaps best observable in the last chapters of *The First Rule of Swimming*, in which the main character redresses both maternal and paternal sides of her heritage that is being preserved through memories of learning and becoming. Remembering to “stay afloat”, which is indeed the first rule of swimming emphasized by her philosophical and well-intentioned grandfather Luka, and refusing to be drowned in the image her past community constructed and imposed on her, Jadranka, now settled in her mobility, faces the issues of her origin through nomadic dislocation and from an historical distance. Her position of a transnational mediator is additionally validated through a regular communication with her Rosmarina-residing sister and the sister’s little son, who is symbolically named after the late grandfather as a tribute to all pacifist male figures trapped within patriarchy. Rosi Briadotti’s claim that the “nomadic politics is a matter of bonding, of coalitions, of interconnections” (Braidotti, 35), in which “identity is retrospective” so that “nomadic cartographies need to be redrafted constantly” is thus further illustrated by Jadranka’s mediating position as a nomad who, having “a sharpened sense of territory but no possessiveness about it,”(36) chooses to make her foundations less rigid by exploring the ways of self-reinvention both in America, where she resumes studying art, and on her native island, where her transhistorical sketches sent to her nephew promise to inscribe themselves into the minds of new generations.

At the end of the novel, it becomes clear that the motherline scenario does not quite reflect a conventional female individuation journey represented through a daughter’s search for her mother, in which the mother is initially negated, then recognized and finally met through
identification and potential reconciliation. Although Jadranka reunites with her mother, she does it only after her mother sets on a long journey to find her instead. The somehow reverse and nonlinear trajectory of a woman’s conflict resolution path, on which there is a coexistence of split sibling characters, different geographies and time periods, along with restored female narratives of loss and migrancy, appears to serve as a strategy of both preserving and challenging solid and movable motherlines within and without patriarchally structured societies.

References:


