“We've got good members that aren't Croatian:” Boundary Processes and Collective Identity Construction in Croatian Ethnic Organizations in the United States

Abijah Ahern

Submitted to

Central European University

Nationalism Studies Program

Supervised by Dr. Ana Mijić

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Vienna, Austria

2025

Copyright Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my independent work. All sources and literature are properly cited and included in the bibliography. I hereby declare that no portion of text in this thesis has been submitted in support of another degree or qualification thereof, for any university or institute of learning.

Abstract

This research investigates boundary processes and collective identity construction in Croatian ethnic organizations in the United States. Using a qualitative approach that relies on in-depth semi-structured interviews with organizational members, this research documents the presence, maintenance and negotiation of both ethnic and non-ethnic symbolic and social boundaries in these organizations. The research examines processes of boundary shifting and blurring present in Croatian ethnic organizations in the United States, as well as investigating the external and internal factors that have contributed to these processes. Moving beyond traditional conceptions of long-distance nationalism in Croatian ethnic organizations, this work evaluates the extent to which diasporic claims, stances, and behaviors are or are not present in these organizations, and emphasizes the malleable nature of organizational ethnic boundaries. Through this organizational focus, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the performance and enactment of ethnic identity, particularly in the context of the United States. Key findings reveal variations in boundary processes and associated organizational identities related to historical context, generational shifts, and larger external social processes. Ultimately, this work argues for considering Croatian ethnic organizations in the United States as communities of practice whose boundaries have been shaped significantly by a dialectical process of assimilation and ethnic invention.

Keywords: ethnicity, organizations, immigration, assimilation, boundaries, diaspora, Croatia, the United States

Author's Declaration

I, the undersigned, Abijah Ahern, candidate for the MA degree in Nationalism Studies declare herewith that the present thesis titled ""We've got good members that aren't Croatian:" Boundary Processes and Collective Identity Construction in Croatian Ethnic Organizations in the United States" is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography.

I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the works of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright.

I also declare that no part of this thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution or higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 06 June 2025

Abijah Ahern

Acknowledgements

To begin, I would like to thank each of my participants for dedicating their time and energy to help me with this project, as well as Jobeth and Kate for helping to facilitate interviews. The openness and grace with which you approached this project made this research possible, and I sincerely hope that I have done your organizations justice. They are truly special places.

I wish to express my gratitude to and admiration for Dr. Ana Mijić, my supervisor. It was your courses that first showed me how to think like a sociologist, and your patience, wisdom, and insight as an advisor has been enormously valuable to me throughout the writing process.

Thank you to Maria, Borbala, and Tunde for all of the assistance you provided throughout my time at CEU. I know my path was not a linear one, and I sincerely appreciate all your efforts to help me complete my studies.

I wish to thank Omar, Gentian, Paolo and all my classmates at CEU for your camaraderie, and to extend a particular thank you to Melita and Cory for our time spent reading and discussing each other's work.

I wish to thank Jim for reminding me that the best thesis is a finished thesis, and Meredith for coming with me to the Neighborhood Museum and the Croatian Club and helping me ask the right questions. Finally, thank you to Juliette for all the big things and the little things you have done for me over the past eight months. I'm done, now it's your turn.

Table of Contents

Introduction

If one walks into the Croatian Club, a Croatian ethnic organization in the midwestern United States, its ethnic symbols will be immediately apparent. Painted above the stage is a huge Croatian flag, with "welcome" (*dobro nam došli*) written in Croatian. A second Croatian flag hangs above the slot machines in the corner. On the wall is an autographed picture of Toni Kukoć, the Croatian basketball player who played with Michael Jordan on the Chicago Bulls, alongside more controversial decorations: a map of Croatia that includes Bosnia and Herzegovina amongst its provinces, portraits of Stjepan Radić and Alojzije Stepinac, and a quote from Ante Pavelić: "Without the Independent State of Croatia, there is no life for Croats" (*Bez Nezavisne Države Hrvatske nema života za Hrvate*). From the space alone, it would be easy to view the Croatian Club as a textbook case of what Benedict Anderson (1992) influentially termed "long-distance nationalism," wherein individuals living outside of a particular homeland develop a highly salient sense of national identity and pride, often one that takes on more extreme political implications in terms of the construction of national historical myths and national destinies than that which is felt by those living within the borders of the nation itself. This interpretation would run parallel to the findings of Skrbiš (1999) in his sociological survey of Croatian- and Slovenian-Australians. Skrbiš noted that members of the ethnic organizations he studied often displayed a strong suspicion of outsiders, even co-ethnics who did not share the same temporal migration history or became involved with organizational activities only after the outset of the Croatian War of Independence.

At the Croatian Club, however, proven Croatian ancestry of any degree is not a requirement for membership. In fact, there are many members that are not Croatian at all, as well

as plenty of people who do not claim Croatian heritage that attend the fish fry, classic rock cover band shows, and polka nights the club offers weekly ("Irene," interview by author, April 3, 2025). The case of the Croatian Club presents an interesting dichotomy not present in Skrbiš' work or in much of the writing on long-distance nationalism: the phenomenon of an organization where the ethnic boundaries of membership and participation are distinctly malleable in a symbolic space which is presented in a highly ethnicized manner. The increased flexibility of ethnic boundaries may reflect, to some extent, the shift in the salience of ethnicity amongst 'white ethnic' Americans from a rigid, life-structuring and singular aspect of identity to one that is flexible, primarily symbolic, and multiple that was noted in the latter half of the 20th century by Gans (1979) and Waters (1990). However, much of this scholarship assumes that this shift in individual ethnic self-understanding corresponds to an increased disassociation from ethnic organizations, due to the associated temporal and material cost. Many South Slavic cultural and religious organizations still exist across the United States, however, and some continue to flourish. The continued existence and organizational strength of organizations like the Croatian Club and their lack of conformity to the traditional expectations for long-distance nationalism problematizes both our understandings of diasporic organizations as well as how ethnic identity is performed and enacted in the United States.

The Croatian Club on its own, however, is far from a paradigmatic case. Many ethnic organizations maintain stricter (or looser) informal and formal boundaries, take on different symbolic functions, and serve different sections of the community. This is particularly true in the Croatian case, where there has been significant immigration to the United States both in the Great European Wave of the beginning of the 20th century and in more recent history, in the form of a refugee population following the Yugoslav conflicts in addition to continued economic

migration (Dugandzic-Pasic 2010). This migration history allows for a great deal of variation in terms of time spent in the United States, the circumstances that led to migration, and experiences upon arrival. Therefore, this work seeks to function as both an attempt to rethink our understanding of the function of ethnicity in an organizational context as well as document the variety of ways Croatian culture and identity is carried out institutionally amongst communities living in the United States in particular.

This research seeks to contribute to the literature on ethnic identity in the United States in several aspects missing from the present scholarship. First, it will update and build upon the literature on European immigrant assimilation and acculturation in the United States, bringing the influential works in the area from the final decades of the 20th century into the present and analyzing their relevance today, as well as combining their insights with the boundaries approach that has come to inform much contemporary scholarship on ethnicity and migration. Secondly, this work will move beyond previous work on Croatian communities abroad, and particularly Croatian ethnic organizations, that assumes a unified diasporic purpose or stance, and rather will be open to organizational boundaries, symbols, and practices that fall outside of the diasporic lens, while still being conscious of moments of diasporic discourse. Finally, this work will treat ethnic organizations themselves as the object of analysis, as opposed to using them to make claims about the characteristics of larger populations defined by particular ethnic categorizations. Through addressing this gap in the research, this work will help to develop both a more cohesive understanding of the role organizations play in shaping individual and collective identities, particularly ethnic identities in diverse, pluralistic societies such as the United States.

In order to accomplish this task, this thesis asks the following question: How do boundary processes vary across Croatian ethnic organizations in the United States, including

boundaries that are not defined in terms of ethnicity, and what factors explain these variations? To further flesh out this overarching question, several sub-questions will be considered:

1. Which symbolic and social boundaries function internally and externally in these organizations?

2. What internal and external factors shape boundary processes?
3. To what extent do these organizations and/or their members advance diasporic claims or stances, and do diasporically-framed homeland issues play any role in how boundaries are constructed or shifted?

In order to answer these questions, I will use a qualitative research design that utilizes in-depth semi-structured interviews, which I then analyze using a mixture of thematic content analysis and a hermeneutical approach. The focus of this work will be on organizations that present the celebration and maintenance of Croatian heritage, culture, and/or language as either their sole function or as a primary function.

The first chapter will outline the relevant literature on the subject, tracing the specific research done on the Croatian population in the United States from the mid-20th century through to the wave of literature on the subject that accompanied Croatian independence and the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, before broadening in scope to evaluate literature that considers Croatians outside of Croatia through the lens of diaspora as well as important literature related to evolving understandings of ethnicity in the United States. The second chapter will outline my theoretical framework, wherein I clarify my theoretical understanding of the processes of assimilation and the invention of ethnicity in the context of migration, primarily working from Alba and Nee (2005), Nagel (2009), and Conzen et al. (1992). I then outline my adaptation of the

boundary literature, in particular utilizing Lamont and Molnár's (2002) formulation of the relationship between symbolic and social boundaries, Zolberg and Woon's (1999) model of boundary crossing, blurring, and shifting, and Alba's (2005) distinction between bright and blurred boundaries. In this chapter I will also outline my theoretical understanding of the function of organizations, in particular the work of Jenkins (2014) and De Fina (2007). The third chapter will outline my methodological approach, including explaining considerations and limitations particular to my case. The fourth chapter serves to contextualize my primary analysis through providing an historical overview of Croatian ethnic organizations in the United States, relying on archival research using local news coverage and organizational promotional materials. The fifth chapter is devoted to my analysis, which is broken down into subsections outlining boundary types and boundary processes that are evident in participants' responses, as well as discussing the presence and nonpresence of diasporic framing, stances, and activities in participants' responses. The seventh chapter is devoted to discussion and conclusions, wherein I outline causal mechanisms for the boundaries and boundary processes that emerged in my analysis, reflect on my findings generally, and outline the potential theoretical implications and wider applicability of my work.

Literature Review

The literature on the specific case of Croatian ethnic organizations of the United States is relatively sparse and eclectic, particularly in contemporary scholarship. There is a larger body of literature on Croatian ethnic communities abroad, as well as South Slavic ethnic communities more broadly, much of which is framed in the tradition of diaspora and the role of the diaspora in the conflicts of the 1990s. This chapter will outline both of these literatures, as well as expanding in scope to review relevant developments in how ethnicity and ethnic identity have been

conceptualized, both in a global theoretical context and in the more specific context of the United States.

Croatian Ethnic Organizations and Communities in the United States

Unlike the case of Italian, German, Jewish, and Irish Americans, each of whom have been the subject of significant historical and sociological literature (Nelli 1983; Alba 1981; Kazal 2004; Soyer 2018; Diner 2006; Hout and Goldstein 1994), in-depth works on Croatian American communities and organizations are relatively rare. In works concerning American immigration history broadly, Croatian Americans often receive little mention, and are often analyzed alongside, and under the umbrella of, the larger category of "Slavic" immigrants (Jones 1965; Dinnerstein and Reimers 1999). This comparative lack of attention is explainable by several factors. At various points since the first substantial immigration of Croatian speakers to the United States in the late 19th century, the number of immigrants has been proportionally significant, but numerically small. In Dalmatia, for example, between the years of 1890 and 1900, 5.36 percent of the entire population is estimated to have immigrated to the United States, but that 5.36 percent actually only consisted of approximately 32,000 people (Prpic 1971). Migration from the Italian peninsula to the United States in the same decade, by contrast, is estimated to encompass more than 300,000 individuals, with more than four million arriving in the United States by 1920 (Library of Congress 2025). Beyond their relatively smaller numbers, an additional reason for the lack of widespread specific scholarship concerns the fact that throughout much of the 19th and 20th centuries, Croatia did not exist as an independent state, either being incorporated into Austria-Hungary or Yugoslavia during the Kingdom and socialist periods.

Despite their relatively minor focus in immigration scholarship in the United States, there are trends in the scholarship related to Croatian immigration to the United States and Croatian American ethnic identity worth noting. In terms of comprehensive historical and ethnographic accounts, two mid-century sources are available. The first is George J. Prpic's (1971) *Croatian Immigrants in America*, which takes a historical approach, documenting the Croatian presence in the United States from the very early[1] date of 1526 through to the post-World War II period, and focusing especially on the immigration wave between 1890 and 1920. The second noteworthy source of this nature is Gerald Gilbert Govorchin's (1961) *Americans from Yugoslavia*, which covers Croatians in addition to immigrants from elsewhere in the former Yugoslavia. In comparison to Prpic, Govorchin takes a sociological approach, beginning his analysis with the 1890-1920 wave and devoting much of the book to demographic statistics, employment patterns, and cultural contributions. Despite their differences in focus, both Prpic and Govorchin devote significant time to ethnic organizations, with Govorchin devoting a chapter to the subject and Prpic placing particular emphasis on the Croatian Fraternal Union (CFU) and its affiliated lodges.

A second noteworthy strand of literature regarding Croatian-Americans and Croatian ethnic organizations in the United States emerged in the 1990s and 2000s, related to the Croatian War of Independence and the Yugoslav conflicts generally. The wave of lobbying and wartime aid initiatives increased the visibility of Croatian-American organizations considerably, as did the frequent invocation of 'the diaspora' by prominent wartime politicians in the newly independent ex-Yugoslav states. Studies framing ethnic organizations, and the Croatian population in America more generally, in diasporic terms began to emerge. One of the most

[1] And perhaps somewhat speculative.

widely read was Paul Hockenos' (2003) *Homeland Calling: Exile Patriotism and the Balkan Wars,* which outlined ex-Yugoslav diaspora politics in North America in the 1990s through case studies of Croats, Serbs, and Kosovar Albanians. Although the Croatian case study focuses on the Croatian diaspora in the Toronto area and Gojko Šušak[2] in particular, Hockenos also outlines Croatian organizations throughout the United States. Hockenos is a journalist, not an academic, and as such favors a more literary approach to the subject. While engaging, this approach also leads to large generalizations, such as the statement that "The myriad of postwar diaspora organizations shared one critical common denominator: pathological anticommunism" (Hockenos 2003, 10). Ultimately, Hockenos' work is most useful as a means to examine the most politically-engaged and radical segment of the Croatian diaspora in the United States, as well as the Croatian state's efforts to mobilize the diaspora politically and financially.

In terms of conventional academic work on the subject of the Croatian diaspora in the United States during the 1990s, two articles in particular are worth mentioning. The first is Djuric (2003), who conducted a discourse analysis on the CFU's official newspaper, *Zajednicar* (*The Fraternalist*), between the period of 1980-1995, examining how the publication became increasingly preoccupied with strengthening Croatian ethnic consciousness in the United States and with commenting on and, eventually, actively attempting to influence developments in Croatia itself. Amongst the factors Djuric notes as being important in this process are the issue of the Croatian language, both in terms of declining fluency amongst Croatian Americans and in terms of protecting Croatian official linguistic distinctiveness in Yugoslavia, as well as religion, with the newspaper slowly desecularizing its content over the course of the examined decade and a half. The outbreak of the war marks a turning point for Djuric, where the CFU made use of the

[2] Mississauga resident turned Croatian Minister of Defense.

increased ethnic awareness developed over the previous decade to garner material support for political and humanitarian efforts to aid Croatian independence. The second noteworthy article in this vein is Carter, who examines the reproduction of "essentialized notions of place and identity" amongst the diaspora, using Croatian Americans in the Pittsburgh area as a case study (2005, 54). Through a combination of interviews with people of Croatian heritage in Pittsburgh and his own analysis of *Zajednicar*, Carter argues that, in the context of the war, Croatian organizations became far more politicized and constructed a singular, essentialized vision of the Croatian state, with even theoretically apolitical events such as club picnics serving as examples of Billig's (1995) banal nationalism in the service of a unified vision of the Croatian homeland.

The increased focus on Croatian American communities and organizations following the 1990s is reflective of a renewed interest in Croatian communities abroad generally through a diasporic lens. Some scholars, such as Ragazzi (2009), focused primarily on how actors in the Croatian state instrumentalized the diaspora for domestic political purposes. Others took a more sociological, identity-focused approach. Winland, writing about Croatian Canadians, examines the ways in which different segments of the Croatian diaspora in Canada negotiated and came into conflict over different "notions of Croatian peoplehood" in the wake of Croatian independence on political, temporal, and generational grounds (1995, 3). Of particular note is Skrbiš (1999), whose book *Long-Distance Nationalism: Diasporas, Homelands and Identities* provides one of the most thorough analyses of Croatian ethnic organizations available in the literature. Drawing on 111 interviews conducted with first and second generation individuals of Croatian and Slovenian heritage in South Australia between the years of 1991-1994, Skrbiš makes the case that diasporic environments have the potential to foster a deeply salient sense of long-distance nationalism that, while committed to the nationalist project of the homeland,

reinterprets and resignifies the history and political struggles of the homeland in its own distinct way and oftentimes is transmitted across generations. According to Skrbiš, however, the salience and political potential of this long-distance nationalism is not a given, but rather is contingent on a variety of factors including the circumstances of dispersion and resettlement, the internal dynamics of the homeland, and localized organizational and even interpersonal contexts.

Skrbiš devotes considerable time to the influence of ethnic, or as he terms it, diasporic organizations in his work, particularly the role that they play in establishing and maintaining symbolic boundaries on who qualifies as truly 'Croatian' and to what degree. Unsurprisingly, given the time period during which Skrbiš conducted his interviews, the direct impact of the Croatian declaration of independence and the conflict that accompanied it colors much of Skrbiš's work, as is the case for other diasporic-centered work mentioned so far. For an example of scholarly work with a focus on Croatian, or at least ex-Yugoslav, diaspora organizations, one can turn to Van Gorp and Smets, who document the function of such organizations comparatively for Serbian, Bosnian, and Croatian, and pan-Yugoslav organizations in The Netherlands, examining both the impact they have on identity construction as well as "their impact on physical, tangible togetherness among actual groups of people" (2015, 74-75). This approach is closest to my own focus, although the authors retain a diasporic framing which I seek to decenter, and do not give particular attention to boundary dynamics within the organizations that form the core of their studies. Additionally, there are distinctions between the Dutch and American cases in terms of how processes of ethnic, racial, and national boundaries are negotiated and maintained that differentiate the two studies.

On Community and Diaspora

A common thread through the renewed literature on Croatians abroad since the 1990s is the use of the theoretical lens of diaspora to describe the characteristics and processes present in Croatian organizations abroad and to describe the population more generally. Both Winland (1995) and Skrbiš (1999) purposefully elect to use the term diaspora over 'ethnic community' due to the latter's implication of internal homogeneity and coherency. Skrbiš in particular is critical of the term, arguing that much of the scholarship that utilizes it delineates rigid boundaries of ethnic communities via "primordial ethnic criteria with social, religious and other criteria being almost mechanically attached to ethnic classification," leading to both essentializing stereotypes and a "conflation between ethnic identity and the existence of ethnic communities as representations of these identities" that presumes all people with a particular ethnic background necessarily participate in an institutionally-mediated ethnic culture (1999, 61-62). Skrbiš prefers to operate from Safran's (1991, in Skrbiš 1999) broad definition of diaspora that encompasses virtually all immigrants of a particular background.

Although Skrbiš's critique of the term ethnic community is a cogent one, the term diaspora is not without its own problems. Khachig Tölölyan, in his influential article "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment," explicitly delineates between an "ethnic community," such as Italian Americans, and a diaspora, arguing that the former lacks a consistent "commitment to maintain connections with its homeland," and as such rarely crafts a firm agenda for political and/or cultural self-representation, either domestically or transnationally. Tölölyan goes on to acknowledge, however, that the lines between diaspora and ethnic community are often unclear, and that under certain circumstances portions of ethnic communities can take on a diasporic character (1996, 16-17). Building off of Tölölyan's work, Brubaker has argued for a

reevaluation of the term diaspora, reconceptualizing it as an "idiom, stance, or claim" that can be adopted by individuals or collectivities with a particular ethnic/national self-identification but is not necessarily shared by all of those that share that self-identification and that diasporic claims seek to speak for (2005, 12). In the example of Armenian Americans Brubaker uses to illustrate this point, he specifically suggests Gans' (1979) concept of *symbolic ethnicity* as a better means to describe the large majority of Armenian Americans who do not adopt actively diasporic stances but maintain some level of active ethnic self-identification.

Given the potentially problematic assumptions that are present in both the uses of ethnic community and diaspora, this work will strive to avoid using either term to uncritically refer to the entirety of the individuals who self-identify as Croatian or of Croatian heritage in a different area, understanding that they may or may not take part in shared, ethnically-framed cultural practices and may or may not envision themselves as part of a transnational community of kinship with a strong attachment to a particular homeland. This issue is mitigated by the fact that the particular focus of this study pertains exclusively to those who are actively involved in organizations defined in explicitly ethnic terms, which implies membership in a broader collectivity, at least to an extent. However, as will be demonstrated in this work, multiple sets of meanings and boundaries are negotiated within even these nominally ethnic organizations, and some official members do not claim Croatian heritage by blood or marriage. For this reason, this research will avoid relying on the ethnic lens that both ethnic community and diaspora imply, while still acknowledging the important role that ethnicity plays in terms of organizational boundaries, practices, and identity and taking note of moments where subjects frame themselves, their family, and/or their associates in the language of community or diaspora.

The "White Ethnic" In America: Generational Shifts in the Twentieth Century

The earliest substantial arrivals of Croatians in the United States formed a small part of the influx of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe and Ireland to the United States between roughly 1880 and 1930, collectively labeled by Portes and Rumbaut as "the Great European Wave" (2014, p. 2). This demographic change had a profound impact on American life in the 20th century. In the academic field, this demographic change would inspire major contributions from early American sociologists such as Jane Addams and Robert E. Park (Addams 1910; Park 1922). In the field of politics, it inspired phrases such as "a nation of immigrants" and "the melting pot" (Martin 2021, 1-2; Mounk 2022, 178-179). Early understandings of these groups[3] expected assimilation and the dissipation of ethnic identities amongst second-generation immigrants. A wave of literature followed, suggesting that despite relatively rapid acculturation or adaptation to American social norms, full assimilation lagged behind, leading to hybridized white ethnic identities that were bounded geographically in ethnic enclaves and institutionally through ethnic political and cultural organizations (Sanders 2002).

By the end of the 20th century, however, research began to suggest that the position of white ethnicity had changed. Socioeconomic upward mobility and increased suburbanization led to the decline of ethnic enclaves and a shift away from communally-reinforced ethnic identities, and towards individually-invoked ethnic identities defined by the selective adoption of ethnically-associated cultural signifiers, a trend that Herbert J. Gans (1979) labeled "symbolic ethnicity." Gans specifically considered participation in ethnic organizations as a central part of the dividing line between participation in an ethnic culture that structured social life to symbolic ethnicity, writing:

[3] Beyond those that relied on explicit prejudice and xenophobia.

> "perhaps the most important factor in the development of symbolic ethnicity was probably the awareness, which I think many second generation people had already reached, that neither the practice of ethnic culture nor participation in ethnic organizations were essential to being and feeling ethnic" (1979, 14).

An idea that Gans does not consider, however, is whether these generational shifts in terms of acculturation, which took the form of symbolic ethnicity in the case of many individuals, could in fact have an effect on the culture and practices of ethnic organizations themselves.[4]

Observing many of the same sociological trends as Gans but adopting a more quantitative approach, Richard Alba (1981) coined the term "the twilight of ethnicity" in his study of American Catholics of European ancestry to describe the significant shift that occurred in second generation immigrants towards mixed ancestry and/or intermarriage. Alba also found that the proportion of European-American Catholics who attended college was significantly higher, something he argued suggested upward economic mobility and a reduction in ethnic discrimination. Alba determined "a general decline in the importance of ethnic and religious boundaries for Catholics of European descent" (1981, 95). Alba did not go as far as to definitively suggest that European Catholic ethnic identity would disappear entirely, however, writing that the twilight of ethnicity is "a twilight that may never turn into night" suggesting some individuals will retain strong ethnic self-identifications and others will continue to express the thinner symbolic ethnicity documented by Gans (Alba 1981, 97).

[4] Gans also brings up the idea of distinct "Americanization cultures" that revolved around the shared experience immigration to America and adjustment to life in the new country, which he attributes to William Kornblum and argues are also susceptible to being supplanted by symbolic ethnicity. This is an interesting insight that could have applications to my cases, but I can't find the original source and Gans doesn't properly cite it.

Expanding on the work of Gans and Alba, Mary C. Waters (1990) found in her ethnographic research on suburbanized white American Roman Catholics that generations of intermarriage and the dissipation of mono-ethnically structured social lives left white Americans with ethnic "options," wherein they were able to exercise a large degree of agency over which parts of their heritage to emphasize as their ethnic identity, with their choices stemming from a variety of factors including genealogical knowledge, family structure, surname, and perceived physical and cultural characteristics. Waters based her findings off of 60 interviews conducted in suburbs outside of San Jose, California and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and although none of her interviewees identified themselves as Croatian, there were several respondents who identified as Slovenian or Serbian, including one matrilineally Serbian respondent who, despite stating that she thinks of herself as American due to her more traditionally Anglo-American surname, still attended Serbian events and felt, in those moments, that her "identity shift[ed] a bit" (Waters 1990, 70). This example suggests that even those who are involved with ethnicized cultural activities do not necessarily think of themselves as primarily belonging to that ethnicity. Waters' work supports understanding ethnic identity as being fluid and context-dependent.

In more recent scholarship, some scholars have argued that even the more reduced manifestation of ethnic identity documented by Gans, Alba, and Waters no longer holds true. Torkelson and Hartmann (2020), in their analysis of data collected from the American Mosaic Project, suggest that white ethnic identity claims have continued to decline dramatically. Where they do exist, according to the authors, their character has transformed from a "relatively innocent cultural practice, ornamental expression, or … rhetorical artifice animated by ideological color blindness" and has instead come to exhibit "a racialized tenor that may be more

about (the preservation of) whiteness itself" (Torkelson and Hartmann 2020, 3). The authors find a significant overall decline in whites claiming ethnic heritage and a correlation between the percentage of those identifying as white ethnic and claims of experiencing discrimination in relation to non-ethnic identifying whites. Respondents were also more likely to agree with the statement: "effort and hard work favors whites" (Torkelson and Hartmann 2020, 12-13). Despite these findings, there are potential critiques to be made of the authors on a methodological level. In particular, when determining whether or not to code an individual as white ethnic, the authors relied on positive responses to the question "Is there another ethnic category that you more closely identify with . . .?" (Torkelson and Hartmann 2020, 6). The use of the phrasing "more closely identify with" seems like it could easily filter out many people who do feel connected to one or multiple salient ethnic identities, but do not consider that identity to be primarily determinative in their life, such as the example of Waters' aforementioned Serbian American respondent. Additionally, the authors' claim that ethnic identity is now instrumentalized in a racialized manner in order to preserve white racial identity/advantage is a quite limited reading of their results. It seems very possible, for example, that a significant portion of the 8% of survey respondents who answered affirmatively to the question regarding ethnic identification could be first generation immigrants who plausibly have experienced discrimination based on linguistic or cultural difference, a possibility that the authors do not consider in the piece. Finally, although the salience of white ethnic identity does appear to continue to be on the decline, there are exceptions. Firstly, fairly significant European immigration has continued into the 21st century both in terms of refugees and economic migrants (Erickson 2020; Stabrowski 2014). Secondly, the continued persistence of ethnic enclaves amongst older white immigrant groups has been documented, even if their character and functions have changed in important ways (Smajda and Gerteis 2012).

Finally, of course, there is the persistence of ethnic organizations such as the ones that are the subject of this research.

The "White Ethnic" In America: Ethnicity and Race

This thesis will engage with the substantial literature on the relationship between the categories of race and ethnicity. Many critiques of Omi and Winant's (1994) formulation of race and processes of racialization argue that the categories of race and ethnicity cannot be easily separated; the emphasis on race as a distinct, cohesive, and universalizable social construction involves the application of dynamics unique to the United States to contexts where they do not fit as easily (Wimmer 2008; Brubaker 2009). Despite this critique, considering ethnicity and race to be distinct and simultaneously present in the case of white Americans, as well as considering the changing relationship between ethnic and racial identities for those who arrived in the Great European Wave, is helpful in understanding both the historical record and present racial and ethnic boundaries in the American context (Fox and Guglielmo 2012). Beyond concerns regarding structural privilege and marginalization that occurs on the level of racialization but not ethnicization, considering race and ethnicity as separate categories in the American context allows for theorization on the persistence of symbolic ethnicity and ethnic self-identification even after generations of acculturation and intermarriage. Specifically, although white racial identification structures opportunity and privilege, several authors suggest that, due to its hegemonic position in American society wherein whiteness is equated with normal or mainstream, white racial identity does not provide meaningful cultural practices, serving as an "empty signifier" that becomes intertwined with ethnic or localized cultural practices that serve to differentiate within whiteness (Kasinitz and Waters 2023, 103; Miller 2022; Levine-Rasky 2013).

In considering race and ethnicity as distinct, if deeply linked, identity categories in the United States context, it is helpful to return to Waters' concept of ethnic options. The core of Waters' book regards the flexibility and choice available to and utilized by white Americans in regards to their ethnic self-identification and how they conceptualize their heritage. These choices are significantly more constrained for those who are externally categorized as being outside the boundaries of whiteness, and come with political and material consequences far beyond the symbolic, as Waters herself emphasizes (1990, 156). For example, a mixed-race person who is visibly black but also has Italian heritage would face significant social scrutiny identifying themselves in ethnic, as opposed to racial, terms. In American social life, for the most part, ethnic identity is only optional to the extent that the options chosen do not transgress the more rigid boundaries of racial categories.

Theoretical Framework

Assimilation and The Invention of Ethnicity

In academic discourse, the term assimilation is often shorthand for an outdated set of policies aimed at the inflexible, often harshly enforced homogenization of immigrants to the mainstream society, as well as a similarly outdated set of scholarly assumptions about the processes immigrants underwent in a host society that implied unidirectional and total incorporation into an undifferentiated majority, in the American context often described as Anglo-conformity.[5] As Brubaker (2001) notes, such interpretations conceptualize the term in its

[5] It is important to acknowledge that assimilation is also the term used to describe the brutal set of forced homogenization policies carried out by the governments of the United States and Canada upon indigenous communities in North America, which were genocidal in effect and design. Although this work engages with assimilation as an analytical term rather than in the field of policy, and in relation to immigrants as opposed to indigenous people, it is impossible to fully delink the term from this troubled history.

transitive sense, meaning to absorb completely, a definition that implies an assimilated/unassimilated binary. In response to these critiques, several other approaches gained scholarly traction. Of particular relevance are the integration model, which emphasizes the acceptance of cultural difference without an emphasis on increasing similarity, as well as the transnationalism model, which seeks to reject methodological nationalism and consider patterns of migration beyond the processes present in a single host society. As Laubenthal (2023) notes, all three of these have potential uses in the scholarship, which are useful in explaining different case studies, or elucidating different information from the same case studies. In the case studies examined here, like the diasporic, there are transnational *moments*, and places where the transnational lens could be employed fruitfully, such as in interviewees' trips to the 'Old Country,' but such a focus would shift attention away from the key boundary processes this work is primarily concerned with, which are affected by transnational phenomena to greater or lesser extents but are largely rooted in national, or even sub-national dynamics. Integration, with its primary focus on changes within the host society, and particularly its focus on state policy, is also not the most useful frame through which to study the dynamics of interest in this case, which is predominantly focused on processes within organizations created and maintained by immigrants and their descendants.

As such, the best lens through which to study this case is assimilation, albeit not the homogenizing and essentializing definition of the term that has generated significant criticism. Ultimately, when used in its broad, intransitive sense, as the process of "becoming similar *in certain respects,*" assimilation remains a useful analytical tool, if not a useful policy instrument (Brubaker 2001, 534, emphasis in the original). Several authors, recognizing this, have attempted to salvage the term, using its critiques to expand its parameters and open it up to wider

interpretations. One primary change is a firm rejection of the idea of 'Anglo-conformity,' or a monolithic majority culture which determines the standards that immigrant populations must, and eventually do, adopt. For contemporary assimilation scholars, this rejection is not novel, but rather a return of the concept to its roots in The Chicago School theorists, who, writing in the context of a rapidly urbanizing, majority-immigrant city, saw "a diverse mainstream society in which people of different ethnic/racial origins and cultural heritages evolve a common culture that enables them to sustain a common national existence" (Alba and Nee 2005, 10). From the standpoint of a diverse mainstream, different understandings of assimilation become possible.

For Nagel, assimilation can be thought of as "a relational process of making sameness" (2009, 401). In this definition, the relational aspect is key, as it rejects the unidirectional focus that has characterized, or perhaps mischaracterized, previous understandings of assimilation. Alba and Nee (2003) also think of assimilation as multidirectional. Operating from the starting point of understanding ethnicity as "essentially a social boundary" that is embedded in actual or perceived social or cultural differences, and, importantly, arguing that "assimilation can take place on both sides of the social boundary," the authors define assimilation as the "decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences" (Alba and Nee 2003, 11). The authors clarify that the "decline" aspect of this definition does not imply a decline in either some sort of essentialist ethnic difference nor does it necessarily imply a decline in the number of people whose self-conception includes an ethnic category. Rather, decline in Alba and Nee's formulation refers to a decline in the *salience* of ethnicity, stating that "the occurrences for which [ethnicity] is relevant diminish in number and contract to fewer and fewer domains of social life" (2003, 11). Expanding on the multidirectional and relational aspects of these definitions, I contend that assimilation can be thought of as a *dialectical* process, where the interaction,

negotiation, and contestation of both a differentiated host society and a similarly differentiated ethnicized group (or at least a population that is externally categorized as a group) produces a 'same-ness' that takes the form of variated, hybridized individual and collective identities, including *organizational identities*.

The dialectic nature of this process is supported by Conzen et al. (1992), who advocate their own critique of assimilation theory in the concept of "the invention of ethnicity." Conzen and her co-authors posit that upon arrival in a host country, heterogenous immigrant groups that were divided on grounds of "regional origin, dialect, class, politics, and religion" contested and constructed an invented ethnic self-identification through the continual renegotiation of ethnic boundaries and the reinterpretation of pre-existing ethnic symbols in the new context of the host society (Conzen et al. 1992, 4-6). In many ways, the concept of 'the invention of ethnicity' can be thought of as a reformulation of Hobsbawm's (1983) concept of invented traditions and Smith's (1991) ethno-symbolist approach to fit the context of American immigrant history. The authors' critique of assimilation theory comes from a place of rejecting the concept's "passive, unconscious individualism" in favor of "a collective awareness and active decision-making" in terms of how they positioned what 'ethnicity' meant for them (Conzen et al. 1992, 5). Ultimately for Conzen and her coauthors, the "dialectical process" of ethnic invention and reinvention, contested both internally and externally, changes everyone, regardless of majority-minority positioning (Conzen et al. 1992, 31-32).

Overall, 'invented ethnicity' is a convincing concept, although it is possible that Conzen and her co-authors put too much emphasis on agency over structure. The process of assimilation and incorporation is not solely a process of strategically and consciously acceding and affirming different ethnic self-definitions and symbols. It is also a process of forgetting and relearning, and

of emotion. In an environment where one is a minority, one cannot always control which aspects of the outside society slip into speech, action, and practice, nor can one fully control the emotional or cognitive responses to the loss or threat to an aspect of their identity. It is perhaps here where the neo-assimilationist perspectives outlined above can be useful, as in all of their concessions to critics, they never concede full primacy to agency. Ultimately, it is my contention that the organizations that serve as my case studies can be viewed as products of multidirectional, dialectical processes of active ethnic invention and passive assimilation, and that the ways in which their boundaries and identities have been shaped by this process are the subject of my analysis.

Boundaries

Boundaries are an integral part of determining and maintaining group identity. Any process of determining how individuals or groups classify themselves and others, how they determine 'us' and 'them,' as well as how they differentiate between types or degrees of 'us-es' and 'thems' necessarily involves creating cognitive distinctions, and often symbolic and social distinctions as well. Boundaries fulfill this role, and as such are inherently transactional, needing to be maintained only in interactions that cross them and constantly reshaped in a dialectical relationship between self and other (Barth 1969; Jenkins 2008). Boundaries can also determine the consequences of these distinctions, socially and materially. Importantly, boundaries, particularly group boundaries, are rarely, if ever, static. Boundaries themselves change, as do individuals' and groups' positions in relation to them. Therefore, any work examining boundaries must first determine which boundaries are relevant and outline which boundary characteristics and processes are relevant to the subject of study.

In the case of this work, the primary, although not the only, boundaries of note are ethnic boundaries. There is a longstanding tradition of utilizing a boundaries approach to study ethnicity and ethnic difference, stemming from the work of Barth (1969), who was the first scholar to fully develop an approach to ethnic differences that revolved around processes of categorization as opposed to primordial differences in nature or culture. The boundaries approach has come to deeply influence many scholars of ethnicity, race, and nationalism, including several who have already been mentioned in this work (see: Skrbiš 1999; Alba and Nee 2003; Conzen et al. 1992; Wimmer 2008; Brubaker 2009). The work of Jon Smajda and Joseph Gerteis in Boston's North End, an historic Italian-American ethnic enclave, is of particular note, as the authors specifically advocate a boundaries approach to the study of white ethnicity in its supposed 'twilight' period, writing "rather than ask whether ethnicity is simply declining as communities change, this perspective allows us to ask instead how boundaries are disrupted or reconfigured in that process" (2012, 621). As the authors point out, however, oftentimes ethnic boundaries are not the only ones of note. In their case, changes in the salience and functions of the North End's ethnic boundaries have been spurred significantly by boundaries of class and residence, once strongly overlapping with ethnicity but no longer coinciding with nearly the same strength. In alignment with Smajda and Gerteis (2012), a driving aim of this work is to uncover what boundaries are relevant in addition to, in conjunction with, or instead of ethnic boundaries in these institutions.

To build a typology of boundaries and associated boundary processes for this work, I begin by following Lamont and Molnár (2002) in establishing a difference between *symbolic boundaries*, or the distinctions individuals and groups use to interpret and contest the meaning of the world around them and cultivate feelings of solidarity and group membership, and *social boundaries*, or the objectified boundaries that determine the unequal distribution of material and

status resources and govern acceptable patterns of association. Many of the organizations studied in this research display both symbolic boundaries, in the form of who they consider to be Croatians, club members, or other relevant categorical insiders, and also social boundaries, in terms of who is allowed to attain organizational membership, participate in certain events, and attain certain positions.

An additional useful distinction between boundaries is the difference between *bright* and *blurred* boundaries. I take this distinction from Alba, who defines bright boundaries as those that have "no ambiguity in the location of individuals with respect to it" and blurred boundaries as those where "for some set of individuals . . . location with respect to the boundary is indeterminate or ambiguous," and therefore " individuals are seen as simultaneously members of the groups on both sides of the boundary or that sometimes they appear to be members of one and at other times members of the other" (2005, 24-25). Although Alba formulates these boundaries in relation to the assimilation of ethnic minorities into wider society, I believe this same distinction can be made in terms of individuals' or groups' relationship to ethnic and/or immigrant organizations themselves. This definition of bright and blurred boundaries can help elucidate several boundary processes outlined by Zolberg and Woon (1999), who delineate between boundary *crossing*, boundary *blurring*, and boundary *shifting*. Individual boundary *crossing* involves newcomers gaining insider status through "acquiring some of the attributes of the host identity" (Zolberg and Woon 1999, 8).[6] Individual boundary *crossing* of the core ethnic boundary that defines these organizations is unlikely, given the boundary's reliance on heritage. Boundary *blurring* involves "the tolerance of multiple memberships and an overlapping of collective identities hitherto thought to be separate and mutually exclusive" (Zolberg and Woon

[6] Zolberg and Woon's original formulation regards immigrants in relation to a host country, however I believe their model retains its usefulness for my case.

1999, 8). Boundary blurring is a common feature of many of the analyzed case studies, to varying degrees. Finally, there is boundary *shifting*, wherein "the line differentiating members from nonmembers is relocated, either in the direction of inclusion or exclusion" (Zolberg and Woon 1999, 9). Boundary shifting also appears to have occurred in several of the analyzed case studies in the direction of inclusion. This is particularly true if one relies on Wimmer's (2013) refinement of this latter category into boundary *shifting*, which describes situations where the meaning or content of the ethnic boundary itself changes, and boundary *expansion* or *contraction*, when the category merely changes to encompass more or fewer individuals or groups.

Organizations

As collectivities that are clearly bounded by a common identity, organizations provide one of the most clear-cut cases of group-ness, unlike ethnicity itself, which often does not conform to these standards, as Brubaker (2004) thoroughly established. With that being said, it is important to clarify several aspects of how identity generally, and ethnic identity in particular, functions in an organizational context. In his book *Social Identity*, which devotes a chapter to the subject of organizational identity, Richard Jenkins defines organizations as "bounded networks of people – distinguished as members from non-members – following co-ordinated procedures: doing things together in interrelated and institutionalised ways" (2008, 169). Two key aspects of organizations are present in this definition. First, there is the inherent *boundary of membership*. Jenkins delineates between organizations where membership is a 'given' and those where membership is not a given and, if voluntary, must be earned or sought (Jenkins 2008, 171). The ethnic organizations studied in this research fall into the second category. Importantly, however, for these organizations official membership is not the only means by which someone can

participate, at least in part, in organizational activities and practices. Therefore, the boundary of membership, while important, is not a boundary that overrides all others. The second key aspect of organizations present in Jenkins' definition is the existence of *co-ordinated procedures.* This can mean many things depending on the organizational context, but in the case of ethnic organizations, many of these procedures revolve around shared cultural activities and rituals as well as social activities. The content of the shared practice of ethnic organizations such as these has led De Fina, analyzing an Italian-American traditional card playing club, to label them as communities of practice, or "group[s] defined by the existence of a joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and a shared repertoire of resources" (2007, 378). Viewing these organizations through this lens allows one, De Fina argues, to analyze "the association between socially relevant traits and activities constructed as central to the life of the community" (2007, 378). Using this insight, this work seeks to analyze organizational events, activities, and rituals to examine the ways in which collective identities, and the boundaries that are maintained or relaxed to maintain them, are enacted and reinforced through organizational practice.

In sum, the theoretical underpinnings of this research revolve around an understanding of multi-directional, dialectical processes of assimilation and ethnic invention, which can be expressed individually, but also organizationally. These processes help to determine the manner in which boundaries, ethnic and non-ethnic, symbolic and social, are brightened, blurred and shifted in ethnic organizations. These boundaries are carried out socially in processes of membership, and reinforced symbolically through the practices that define organizational identity.

Methodology

This thesis will employ a qualitative methodological approach that consists of conducting long-form biographical interviews with members of and participants in organizations that focus on Croatian culture and heritage in America, either entirely or *as a substantial aspect of their broader overall presentation*. This final clarification is important, as broadening my focus to organizations that have either included other ethnic identifications as part of their presentation from the time of their founding or have come to include other ethnic identifications over time allows me to capture several boundary dynamics and processes that would not have been directly visible if I limited myself to exclusively Croatian organizations. The bulk of these interviews have been analyzed using a qualitative thematic content analysis approach that emphasizes the use of thematic coding to search for patterns between and within interviews (Ayres 2008). For particular key passages or moments, however, an objective hermeneutical approach has been used, in order to reconstruct structures of meaning through the analysis of the expressive forms–*how* an utterance is said, as opposed to what is said–within the social text that is the biographical interview (Silkenbeumer and Wernet 2011). In order to apply this analytical approach, I follow Franzmann's (2022) methodological guidelines regarding objective hermeneutics, and take particular note of his rules of totality, literalness, and sequentiality.

Sample

Before discussing the actual sample itself for both my primary and secondary methodologies, it is worth taking a moment to clarify the process of how organizations were discovered and contacted. I uncovered organizations using an online search, with the exception of two organizations of which I was previously aware. Additionally, I originally planned to

incorporate Serbian, Bosnian, and Yugoslav-identified organizations into my analysis. Through searching for these organizations, however, I discovered that unlike in the case of Croatian organizations, the majority of Bosnian and Serbian organizations in the United States I was able to find were of a primarily religious nature, with very little presence of cultural organizations, heritage organizations, and mutual benefit societies that were not explicitly tied to religious institutions. Additionally, I received a much higher response rate from Croatian cultural organizations than religious organizations tied to any ethnic identification or the limited number of Serbian and Bosnian cultural organizations I was able to find. Therefore, I made the decision to narrow my focus to Croatian, or at least partially Croatian, organizations that were not directly tied to religious institutions.

After compiling a list of relevant organizations, I set about contacting the organizations via email and phone. In this initial contact, I explained my academic background and my basic research interests. I also explained the basic logistics of the interview process. It was through this contact I met all of my interviewees except for one, "Irene," whom I met through an informal visit to the Joliet Croatian Club last summer. In the end, I was able to meet with members of five organizations. In total, this resulted in six interviews.

After digitally receiving a signed information and consent form from the interviewee, I conducted the interviews remotely using Microsoft Teams except in the interview with Irene, which was conducted via phone. Interviews ranged between 30 minutes and 1 hour, and were structured in a modified biographical format, where each participant was asked to describe their life's story and place particular emphasis on the role the organization they were affiliated with had in it, as well as a series of intrinsic and extrinsic follow up questions. All interviews were transcribed via Microsoft Teams' transcription service, with the exception of the interview with

the "Irene" which was transcribed via Apple voice memos' transcription function. From this initial transcription, interviews were processed, coded, and analyzed. The names of all interviewees and the organizations that they are affiliated with were replaced with pseudonyms in order to ensure participant anonymity.

Context

In this chapter, a brief historical overview of Croatian ethnic organizations in the United States will be provided. As there are no scholarly works that comprehensively document Croatian ethnic organizations in the United States, this chapter will rely on archival research as well as information drawn from organizations' current websites. As a thematic content analysis was used to code and sort data for this chapter with the research questions in mind, it can also be viewed as a secondary analysis that frames the primary analysis drawn from interviews. This chapter will outline the historical trajectory of Croatian ethnic organizations in the United States, and will be broken into periodized subsections, covering the time between the foundation of the earliest ethnic organizations in the second half of the 19th century to the present day.

The Founding Period: 1850-1945

This periodization was chosen as it covers the dates between the earliest documented Croatian American ethnic organizations, which date to the mid-19th century, and the end of the Second World War, which brought about the dissolution of the fascist-aligned Independent State of Croatia ("*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska,*" or NDH) and the beginning of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and subsequently led to a significant wave of political emigres coming to the United States whose activities will be covered in-depth in the next section. In this initial

period, several common themes emerge. Firstly, although the majority of relevant organizations encountered during this time period identify themselves as Croatian, it is far from a uniform naming convention. Some organizations opted for regional names, specifically "Istrian" and "Dalmatian" (*Fort Bragg Advocate and News,* 1910; Antonovich and Vuletich, 1916). There were also organizations that used broader ethnic categories that encompassed Croatian members alongside other South Slavic groups, such as "Slavonic" and "Jugo-Slav" (*The San Francisco Examiner,* 1878; *The Oregonian,* 1919). This variety in naming conventions suggests that, at a time period where the Balkan Peninsula's ethnic and political borders were often in flux, "Croatian" had not cemented itself as an ethnic category with bright boundaries in every case.[7]

A related observable dynamic during this time period is frequent instances of Croatian organizations associating themselves with other ethnic societies. Before the dissolution of Austria-Hungary, this association was often with societies representing Austria or other Austro-Hungarian subjects (*The San Francisco Examiner,* 1887; *Harrisburg Daily Independent,* 1903). There were also instances of Croatian organizations associating with Italian and Russian organizations (*The Daily News,* 1903; *The San Francisco Examiner,* 1878). Finally, Croatian organizations also associated with organizations representing other South Slavic ethnicities (*Harrisburg Telegraph,* 1915). This pattern of frequent cross-ethnic collaboration suggests that the immigrants involved in these organizations did not always operate exclusively in brightly bounded ethnic enclaves but rather maintained relationships with other recent immigrants, particularly those from parts of Europe which had cultural, geographic, and political overlap.

[7] This is particularly true when one considers that many people who could claim Croatian identity were potentially involved in Austrian organizations, at least until the First World War, given Croatia's status as a subject kingdom in Austria-Hungary.

Despite these examples of inter-ethnic collaboration, however, another common theme during this time period is the active financial support of the Croatian homeland in times of conflict. The first time this became evident in my archival research was during the anti-Magyarization protests of 1903, where Croatian organizations in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania united to send funds to the widows and children of men who died in the protests (*Harrisburg Daily Independent,* 1903). During World War One, as Croatia pushed for independence from Austria-Hungary, many Croatian organizations in the United States took an interest in the cause, providing financial assistance through contributions to the war fund drives of the United States (*The Anaconda Standard,* 1918). Finally, in the Second World War, several Croatian organizations in San Francisco contributed funds to civilian relief efforts in Yugoslavia, alongside Serbian groups, despite the NDH's antagonism towards Serbs (*The San Francisco Examiner,* 1941). In relation to the NDH, there is no mention of Croatian organizations in the United States openly supporting the state, financially or otherwise, a fact that is unsurprising given the United States' position on the opposite side of the conflict. In fact, upon the outbreak of the war, a large group of Croatian organizations in the United States publicly affirmed their loyalty to the United States in a letter addressed to President Franklin Roosevelt (*The Escanaba Daily Press,* 1941). As these examples demonstrate, however, Croatian organizations were generally deeply diasporically invested in the welfare of their home country during times of conflict in this period.

Some final noteworthy trends during this period regard the nature of Croatian organizations internally. Firstly, membership obligations appear to have been quite strict in many cases, including one example where an organization imposed fines on non-attendance of members at obligatory meetings (*The San Francisco Examiner,* 1904). Secondly, organizational

boundaries fluctuated significantly, as mergers of smaller organizations occurred and larger umbrella organizations began to appear (*Pittsburgh Post,* 1917; *Oklahoma State Register,* 1917). Overall, this time period is one of growth for Croatian American organizations, and it coincides with the largest period of Croatian immigration to the United States.

The Consolidation Period: 1946-1989

This demarcation represents the time between the end of the Second World War, when new Croatian organizations were established by political emigres, and the beginning of the Croatian War of Independence and the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Several, at times contradictory, trends emerged during this period. Firstly, there are examples of new Croatian organizations, likely those formed by post-World War II emigres, adopting practices identifiable as expressions of diasporic nationalism. One particular hotspot was Cleveland, Ohio. In the Cleveland area, several organizations celebrated Croatian Independence Day on April 10th, the date of the establishment of the NDH, and invited a "Father Louis Ivandich" (*The Cleveland Press,* 1964). Father Louis Ivandich was the Anglicized name of Ljudevit "Lujo" Ivandić, a Franciscan professor of theology during the fascist period who helped Andrija Artuković, a prominent NDH politician and Minister of the Interior in Ante Pavelić's cabinet, escape Yugoslavia into Ireland (Kennedy 2014). This strong diasporic nationalism continued in the Cleveland area into the 1970s, as evidenced by an article written about violence occurring at the matches of a local Croatian American soccer team that included a quote from a player stating, "We are a people without a country. You have to understand that first" (Day 1976, 9). These examples provide evidence of a new strand of Croatian American organizations that demonstrated a high level of diasporic nationalism and anti-Yugoslavism.

This degree of diasporic activation towards the cause of an independent Croatia was not universal, or even the norm, amongst Croatian American organizations at this time, however. Many organizations' relationship with Yugoslavia was less antagonistic. In the wake of World War II, for example, members of the Slavonic Hall in Tacoma, Washington sent relief packages to the country (Felker 1976). The CFU, perhaps the largest umbrella organization for Croatian Americans in the United States, regularly organized trips to Yugoslavia for its membership as early as the 1950s (Grasha and Bella 1959). Frank Borich, the president of the National Croatian Association, was even subject to an immigration hearing where the United States federal government attempted to deport him on the grounds of alleged connections to the Yugoslav Communist Party during the height of McCarthyism (*The Indiana Gazette,* August 19, 1950). As these examples demonstrate, Croatian organizations were far from a monolith in terms of their conceptualization of the homeland and where their diasporic efforts were concentrated.

Even as fairly strong conceptions of and relationships to the homeland persisted and took on new forms in some instances, Croatian organizations increasingly turned their focus to the United States. During this time period Croatian organizational involvement with local and state politics becomes increasingly visible, with Croatian American organizations endorsing and holding rallies for both Democratic and Republican candidates (*The Edwardsville Intelligencer,* 1946; *The Sacramento Bee,* 1951; *Wilkes–Barre Times Leader,* 1951; *The Herald-News* 1953). Organizational cultural practices also began to more closely reflect mainstream American traditions during this time period, including visits from Santa Claus and a "Western Nite" at an organization in California where members dressed as cowboys (*The Sacramento Bee,* 1947; *News-Pilot,* 1988). Overall, there is a noticeable trend towards assimilation during this period within many organizations.

The final trend that is noteworthy during this period is the beginnings of decline in terms of membership and overall strength amongst some older Croatian American organizations. As early as 1954, an article in the CFU's official newspaper, *Zajedničar,* states, "Often in our dutiful rounds of paying the last respects to a deceased member, you hear the living members bemoan the shrinking lodge roster and the fate of the Croatian Fraternal Union" (Braidic 1954, 10). An article regarding the Slavonian Lodge in Tacoma discusses how, despite still being operational, many organizational practices that had once been integral to the organization's identity, such as mutual benefit programs and theater productions in Serbo-Croatian, had ceased (Kellogg 1979). By the 1980s, as white ethnic suburbanization had accelerated, one article described how Croatian organizations and other ethnic organizations in Cleveland, Ohio were attempting to relocate to the suburbs in order to stay afloat, as buildings in the city itself were drawing smaller and smaller numbers (Miller 1986). By the end of the 20th century, many organizations did not find themselves in the same position of organizational strength they had occupied in decades past.

The Independence Period: 1990-2000

If many Croatian American organizations had been experiencing a decline in both the salience of diasporically-oriented ethnicity and organizational strength overall through much of the last half of the 20th century, the events of the 1990s in Croatia served to catalyze diasporic organizational identities, revitalizing many existing Croatian American organizations and encouraging the founding of new ones. An early example can be seen in 1989 with the response to the detention of Zeljko Skalicki, a Croatian-born naturalized United States citizen who had lived in Northeast Ohio since 1968, by Yugoslav authorities on the charge of deserting the army

before he emigrated. Upon his return to the United States following four days of detention, a large crowd greeted Skalicki at the Cleveland airport, including members of several local Croatian American organizations and representatives of the newly established Cleveland chapter of the Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatski Demokratska Zajednica*), the political party of Franjo Tudjman (Miller 1990). The level of diasporic political activation that is present in the Skalicki case is representative of the changes that the following decade would bring in the landscape of Croatian ethnic organizations in the United States.

Croatian American organizations responded to the conflict in the homeland and its aftermath in several ways. In contrast to the stagnant pre-war period, new organizations were founded at the local and national levels throughout the 1990s (Coffey 1994; National Federation of Croatian Americans Cultural Foundation 2025). Some pre-existing organizations, including some with origins in the late 19th century, saw an influx of new members in the form of refugees from the Croatian conflict, although I was unable to find evidence that this was particularly widespread (*Peninsula Daily News*, 1994).

Additionally, the war had an effect on organizational practices. Many organizations provided humanitarian assistance to Croatia through activities such as blood drives, the donation of medical supplies, and fundraisers for Croatian charities (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 1991; Eisner 1993; Littlejohn 1991; Mansur 1996). Croatian organizations attempted to influence American diplomatic policy towards the country through holding rallies and lobbying politicians (*York Sunday Post*, 1991; Sword 1992). Organizational representatives wrote opinion editorials criticizing newspaper articles they perceived to be mischaracterizing Croatian history and the contemporary state of the Yugoslav conflicts (Macecevic 1991; Bevanda 1991). When four Chicago residents were caught attempting to smuggle weapons to Croatia in 1991, one member

of a local Croatian organization defended the smugglers, stating, “they knew that if a war breaks out, we’re going to get butchered by the Serbian army,” although in the same article a member of a different organization emphasized that the men “were acting independently” of any mainstream Croatian American organizations (*The Times*, 1991, 8). Through all of these strategies, what is apparent is a high level of investment with issues in Croatia itself, a fact that suggests the renewed salience of a diasporic ethnic identity amongst many members of Croatian American organizations.

The war in Croatia also brought renegotiation and hardening of organizational ethnic boundaries. A prime example of this occurred in San Pedro, California, which is home to a significant Croatian-American and specifically Dalmatian-American community. The oldest ethnic organization in the community was established in 1935 as the Yugoslav Club (Govorchin 1961). The original Croatian community in San Pedro responsible for forming the Yugoslav club was supplemented by a later group that arrived following the Second World War. The older group and many of their descendants did not refer to themselves, or their club, as Croatian. Rather, they identified as “Slavs” and identified their club as “the Yugoslav Club.” The new arrivals, who considered themselves to be staunch Croats, rejected the name, and started a rival club, The Croatian-American Club (Murphy and Fiore 1992). As the war gained momentum, however, the environment of the Yugoslav Club changed. Many residents of San Pedro who had formerly identified as “Slavs” were coming to the reject the label, with *The Los Angeles Times* describing how “the annual Croatian picnic is said to have swelled,” and “newspapers that once listed the deceased as born in Yugoslavia now say born in Croatia.” In mid-1992, the Yugoslav Club changed its name to the Dalmatian Club (ibid).

This decision was not universally well-received. San Pedro resident Lisa Simich wrote, in a letter to the editor of the local paper, the *News-Pilot*, that Vince Trudnich, president of the Dalmatian Club, "needs to live by his description of the club as being apolitical." She wrote that she would be willing to accept a change away from "Yugoslav," but only to something like "Slav-American Club" that continued to represent "all the ethnic regions of the old country" (Simich 1992). Through the rest of the war, the Dalmatian Club largely returned to its primarily apolitical nature, albeit with a new name, primarily sponsoring cultural events such as Tamburitzan concerts (*News-Pilot* 1995). The Croatian American Club, on the other hand, remained highly political. On the fifth anniversary of Croatian independence, the Croatian American Club took out a large ad in the *News-Pilot* celebrating the anniversary, taking time to specifically "congratulate the Croatian people for their superb military achievement of liberating Western Slavonia" and also "remembering the treacherous slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Croatian soldiers and civilians" at Bleiburg (Croatian American Club 1995, 4). The San Pedro case demonstrates the ways in which Croatian American organizations' different articulations of ethnic boundaries, often closely tied to the particular time and circumstance of initial immigration, came together during the Croatian War of Independence, if only for a time.

The Modern Period: 2000-2025

As Croatian American organizations move into the 21st century, it becomes clear that much of the organizational rejuvenation and hardening of ethnic boundaries that defined the 1990s did not generally establish a new norm. One notable aspect of this period is a decline in the volume and variety of Croatian ethnic organizations that receive press coverage. This suggests that many organizations have significantly scaled back their activities, or at least that

their activities are not considered relevant enough to warrant press coverage. When Croatian American organizations are considered newsworthy, it is sometimes for their longevity, with several organizations staying operational for over one hundred years. These articles provide useful insights into how these organizations' present differs from their past. An article about the centennial celebration of the Slavonian American Benevolent Society in Tacoma, Washington takes a nostalgic tone, quoting members in their 80s describing long-deceased colleagues and defunct cultural practices such as funeral parades, before ending with a member describing how they still sometimes play pool on a table purchased in 1936, "just like the good old days" (Ripp 2001, 21). An article on the centennial of the Croatian Sons Lodge in Merrillville, Indiana describes a robust organization with more than 1,400 active members, but a timeline in the article demonstrates that this large size is due to several mergers over the past century, including two since 1990, suggesting the organization has enveloped several smaller lodges that could no longer operate independently (Zloza 2007). These cases demonstrate the ways in which some of the oldest Croatian ethnic organizations in the United States have scaled back and consolidated over the years.

Sometimes, Croatian American organizations were mentioned in local papers in the context of their closure or potential closure. One article discusses the potential willingness of Biloxi, Mississippi's Slavonian Society to sell their building in order to make way for a casino, for example (Wilemon 2005). Another highlights the opening of a new nightclub in Lima, Ohio, that was purchased from "the dwindling Croatian society" in the area. The nightclub owner describes the society as "a bunch of older guys who really didn't have the wherewithal to maintain it anymore and were very frustrated that they couldn't get anyone younger to take it over" (Singer 2003). A video from the *The Moline Dispatch* and *The Rock Island Argus*

documents the closure of Moline, Illinois' Croatian Crest Club, with founding member Carol Simatovich stating, "it cost so much money to even open the door." Member Jack Modunic, visibly emotional, states, "I don't know what the hell I'm gonna do. I've wasted half my life here" (*QCOnline,* 2015). These examples demonstrate how the pressures of an aging membership, changing neighborhoods, and financial pressures have proven to be too great for some organizations to withstand.

Despite these pressures, many organizations have found ways to sustain themselves into the present. Marlene Luketich-Kochis of St. George's Croatian Home in Cokeburg, Pennsylvania, states in an interview with *The Daily American,* "Our desire to continue preserving our culture ... it's just something that hasn't died" (Beveridge 2002, 68). There is evidence that some traditional cultural practices, such as *tambura* dancing and gathering for Croatian national soccer team games, continue to draw large multi-generational crowds that include both older and younger people as well as both first generation Croatian immigrants and those whose families have lived in the United States for multiple generations (Kadilak 2024; Goodwin 2018). Many contemporary practices, however, have seemingly little to do with Croatian ethnic identity, such as jazz festivals, Cinco de Mayo celebrations, and chili cook-offs (Nelson 2004; American Croatian Club 2025; Croatian Club CFU Lodge146 2025). Clearly, the shift in cultural practices away from exclusively those that reinforced Croatian ethnic identity through ethnic tradition that was already observable in the post-World War II years has only become more entrenched.

Finally, when examining Croatian American organizations today, it is worth looking at their membership itself. By the 21st century, something that becomes evident in obituaries of deceased members is an increasing number of members in Croatian American ethnic

organizations who simultaneously held memberships in organizations representing different ethnic identities, including German, Lithuanian, Polish, Hungarian, and Slovenian American organizations (*The Plain Dealer* 2021; *Omaha World Herald* 2000; *The Akron Beacon Journal* 2021; *Herald News* 2022). This increase in membership in multiple organizations devoted to different ethnicities suggests that many people who prioritize ethnic voluntary associations in the present do not practice mono-ethnic exclusivity in terms of membership. This could be due to identifying with multiple ethnic identities in terms of their heritage and relationships, which would fit with Alba (1985) and Waters' (1999) observations regarding increased intermarriage and mixed heritage. An alternative explanation could be that these members value these ethnic organizations for reasons outside of the reinforcement of an ethnic identity. Of course, these explanatory factors are not mutually exclusive, and both could be true for different people.

It is also useful to examine the criteria for membership in contemporary Croatian American organizations, which are helpful in illuminating the salience of organizational ethnic boundaries. To this end, I examined organizations' websites to determine whether they enforced ethnic exclusivity through explicitly requiring members to have Croatian ancestry or be the spouse of someone who does.[8] Out of the seventeen organizations I was able to find that listed membership requirements on their website, I classified thirteen as having *open* membership, meaning that they either actively emphasized that anyone could join, regardless of heritage, or they had no listed requirements related to ethnicity. I classified four as having *closed or partially closed* membership, with a specific requirement of Croatian heritage to obtain either full membership or membership of any kind. These results demonstrate that, in terms of codified

[8] For a full list of the organizations analyzed here, see appendix.

social boundaries, ethnic identity is often not taken into account in present day Croatian American ethnic organizations.

Overall, Croatian ethnic organizations in the United States have evolved in several ways over the course of the past 175 years. From their beginnings in the mid-19th century through their expansion in the early 20th, they carved out a place in American life alongside, and often in collaboration with, other ethnic communities and organizations and invented ethnic identities that included, but were not limited to, those that corresponded to the national idea of Croatia, at the same time as they took an active interest in events in their homeland. Following the Second World War, these organizations, as well as new ones founded by those who fled Yugoslavia following the collapse of the NDH, maintained some diasporic ties while becoming increasingly embedded into American cultural and political life, and began to show signs of declining membership and organizational strength in the face of increasing suburbanization and other changes in American society. The Croatian War of Independence in the 1990s revitalized many of these organizations and hardened their Croatian ethnic symbolic boundaries as they engaged in strenuous efforts to support the Croatian cause. However, this period was short-lived, as by the 2000s many organizations were increasingly struggling to stay financially solvent and communally relevant, resulting in the closure of some. However, many organizations remain intact to this day, albeit with organizational practices and boundaries of membership that have become less ethnicized than in the past.

Analysis

A brief biography of each of the six interviewees will be provided here to contextualize their responses and the organizations they are affiliated with. Both interviewees' names and the

organizations that they are affiliated with have been anonymized to the greatest extent possible without compromising the analysis.

Carl is a man in his 70s. He was born and raised on the west coast, and is of solely Croatian ancestry. He is a third generation Croatian American, with his maternal and paternal grandparents both immigrating to the United States from Dalmatia. Carl holds a leadership position in **The Illyric Lodge,** an organization with predominantly Croatian membership that operates a Croatian cultural center in its home city. The Illyric Lodge has been active since the 19th century, although the Croatian center was not opened until the mid-20th century.

Matthew is a man in his 20s. He was born and raised in California, and is from a Croatian-American family. He is a fourth generation Croatian American. Matthew is a member of **The Illyric Lodge,** and his family have been members for several generations.

Irene is a woman in her 80s. She is from a large midwestern city, but has spent much of her life living in the suburbs. Irene does not have Croatian ancestry, but is a member of **The Croatian Club,** a Croatian American organization with a headquarters that has a bar, kitchen, and stage for ceremonies and musical performances. The Croatian Club was founded in the mid-20th century.

Gordon is a man in his 70s. He was born and raised in an historic Croatian ethnic enclave in a mid-sized midwestern city, but has since moved to a different part of the city. Gordon is of solely Croatian ancestry. He is third generation Croatian-American, and his grandparents immigrated to the United States from Gorski Kotar and Slavonia. Gordon holds a leadership position at **The**

Neighborhood Museum, a museum and cultural center located in the area where he grew up. The Neighborhood Museum was founded in the late 20th century, and initially was primarily focused on Croatia and Croatian Americans before coming to encompass other ethnic cultures. The Neighborhood Museum showcases several displays related to traditions from various ethnicities. Some, including the Croatian display, are permanent, whereas others are only used for the holidays.

Pete is a man in his 60s. He grew up in a small midwestern city, where he still lives. Pete does not have Croatian ancestry, but is of Montenegrin descent on his father's side. Pete is second generation Montenegrin American. Pete holds a leadership position at **The Slavic Society**, an organization founded in the mid-20th century, and was founded to preserve and celebrate the culture and heritage of all the constituent republics of Yugoslavia. In recent years, the organization has expanded its focus to include Bulgaria.

Tamara is a woman in her 40s. She was born in the Dalmatian region of Croatia. She immigrated to the United States in the 2000s, and settled in a large northeastern city. In the 2010s, she became involved with **The Language School,** where she now holds a leadership position. The Language School is primarily devoted to teaching the Croatian language to children of Croatian descent in the United States. Tamara also holds a position on the national level in relation to Croatian language education.

Boundaries Beyond Ethnicity

Something that quickly became clear over the course of the analysis is that both *external* and *internal* boundaries were relevant and negotiated in these organizations. In this context, *external* boundaries refer to those that delineate organizational members, or at least organizational participants, from non-members or non-participants. *Internal* boundaries, on the other hand, involve the boundaries that delineated between different subgroups of organizational members. Sometimes, this internal differentiation was related to tangible differences in organizational roles. Elsewhere, however, these boundaries were articulated by interviewees more symbolically, used to explain different relationships to and levels of involvement in organizations through the use of identification categories. Several identity categories emerged throughout the interview process that were meaningful to organizational purpose and boundaries, both externally and internally. The primary identity category of note, given the nature of the organizations analyzed is, of course, ethnicity. However, there are several identity categories outside of ethnicity that operate within these organizations and shape their practices and collective identities. In particular, boundaries related to religion, race, and age came up frequently in participants' responses, and will be outlined in further depth.

Religion

Religious belief, and more specifically Christianity, was a common thread among the interviews. However, the salience of religious boundaries in the organizations itself varied. Religious affiliation did not emerge as a bright social boundary in the responses of any of the participants, with none of them suggesting that a particular religious affiliation or degree of

religious belief was a necessity for membership or participation in organizational practices. However, religion did appear in some of the organizations as a symbolic boundary.

Religion as a symbolic boundary was clearly evident in the responses from participants affiliated with the Illyric Lodge. Carl, who had previously served as the organization's chaplain, described the Illyric Lodge as "a Christian organization," and pointed out that the organization had a dedicated plot of land at a Catholic cemetery. However, Carl's responses also suggested that the salience of religion at the organization had declined over his lifetime. Carl stated that growing up the organization was affiliated with a "Croatian [or] Yugoslav" Catholic church. When discussing its relationship to the Illyric Lodge, Carl states, "it still has- it had, it had a Croatian priest there that serviced our Society." Later on in the same response, Carl states, "we perform- We used to perform a service at all the funerals. Now, not so much" ("Carl," interview by author, April 17, 2025). Of particular note in these responses is the manner in which Carl begins these statements regarding religion in the present tense before correcting himself to use the past tense, something which shows how Carl delineates between a past iteration of the Illyric Lodge's organizational identity that involved more entrenched religious practices and brighter religious boundaries and a present identity where religion has far less salience. A common emphasis by Carl in his account of the Illyric Lodge across topics is its decline, and the waning importance of religion clearly contributes to this theme.

Matthew, the other participant from The Illyric Lodge, similarly identified religion as a symbolic boundary in the organization, stating, "I would assume everyone is religious in the club. I would assume so because usually that's, that's kind of how immigrants, those immigrants were." ("Matthew," interview by author, April 19, 2025). For Matthew, being religious is a definitional characteristic of the larger symbolic category of the "immigrant," in this case

specifically referring to the European immigrants that came to the United States around the turn of the 20th century. Therefore, religion is important as a symbolic boundary for Matthew only as it relates to the more substantial symbolic boundary of one's status in relation to a particular construction of the immigrant. Additionally, like Carl, Matthew also notes a lack of religious practices present in the organization, despite his understanding of the commonality of religious belief amongst members, noting that religion is "not really talked about as a main focus outside of a prayer, you know, before the meal" (ibid). Despite the presence of religion as an implicit symbolic boundary in the Illyric Lodge, religious identity is not strongly reinforced as part of the organization's functions as a community of practice.

Religious boundaries also play a role for Gordon and the organization he is affiliated with, the Neighborhood Museum, one that is reflected much more substantially in organizational practices and symbols. In the Museum's ethnicities rooms, religious items and symbols are common, particularly around Christmas and Easter, the two Christian holidays that the organization devotes special effort to decorating for. The Neighborhood Museum also has a room specifically devoted to several items used by Pope John Paul II in his visits to the city, a fact Gordon specifically emphasized the importance of, stating, "the museum is proud to, to show those [items] and [the room] is very, very important." For Gordon, the presence of religion is necessary in order to authentically reflect the cultures that are represented in the rooms: "in a lot of the Eastern European cultures and as exemplified in all the different rooms we have, religion is important" ("Gordon," interview by author, May 14, 2025). Similarly to Matthew, Gordon articulates religious symbolic boundaries as an integral part of a larger cultural identity that his organization embodies, in his case the ethnic cultures of Eastern Europe.

In contrast to the Illyric Lodge and the Neighborhood Museum, Irene states that religion "does not play a role there at all" in relation to the Croatian Club, despite her own professed Catholic faith ("Irene," interview by author, April 3, 2025). Similarly, for Tamara, although many of the schools she is trying to integrate into the national network are operated by priests, the Language School itself is a largely secular organization ("Tamara," interview by author, April 22, 2025). These results suggest that although religion is sometimes a symbolic boundary that delineates organizational belonging from the external world, it is not universally so, and often where religious boundaries do exist, they serve as a method to support a larger identity construction that is integral to organizational boundaries.

Race

Importantly, status as part of a racialized group was never invoked in the interviews as a disqualification from organizational membership or participation, and thus was never expressed as a bright social boundary. Despite this, racial boundaries did operate in several subtle ways in participants' responses in relation to both the organization itself and American society at large. The only respondent to directly describe his organization's membership using a racial category was Pete, in response to a question about if the Slavic Society fit into a particular American identity or experience:

> "I think we fit, more than some people because we're white and we're Christian, most of us. Probably we fit in better, and, you know, most of my Slavic brothers tend to be bulky kind of folk, you know. And so in that sense, that, that fits into more of Americana. But, um, You know, maybe as opposed to if I was in a Filipino club or something, I don't know, you know, might be different. So we we we probably fit in only better only because . . . just because of what we look like." ("Pete," interview by author, April 3, 2025).

There are several interesting aspects to this response. Firstly, Pete defines the Slavic Society as mostly white and Christian, which establishes a racial and religious symbolic boundary in terms of organizational membership, although clearly not one which is bright enough to be impermeable. Secondly, much like Matthew and Gordon, Pete invokes a religious boundary in conjunction with a different symbolic boundary, in this case race. Thirdly, the Slavic Society's definitional racial and religious attributes, along with Pete's generalized understanding of Slavic men as "bulky" and therefore more able to fit into a classical or traditional understanding of the cultural attributes of American masculinity, allow the organization to be more easily included within the symbolic and social boundaries of the American mainstream than the ethnic organizations of Filipinos and, presumably, other racialized people. This response clearly demonstrates that for Pete, ethnic and racial boundaries operate separately and simultaneously in American society, with the Slavic Society representing an ethnicized white identity, but a white identity nonetheless.

Using the organizations and their associated immigrant heritage as a vehicle to make broader points regarding racial boundaries in the United States was not unique to Pete's responses. Both Irene and Carl do the same, in their case comparing the older European immigrant waves that many organizational members trace their heritage to with contemporary immigration to the United States from Latin America. At one point in the interview, Irene discusses the pride ethnically Croatian members of the Croatian Club, even those that are "only a quarter Croatian," express in their heritage, which she describes as "a wonderful feature" of the organization. She follows up this statement by describing how European ethnic cultural pride has become less salient as the people of the Chicago area have become "not just one nationality, like it used to be" as a result of intermarriage and the decline of ethnic enclaves. Immediately

following this point, Irene states, “now we have a lot of people that are Latin influence, so Mexicans, primarily, people have come from Mexico” before stating the following:

> “And of course, we have the problem that there's a lot of immigrants here that came here illegally. And that's a big problem for America right now, I think, The United States. It’s that people can come different ways than they did years ago. Years ago when they came from Europe, they had to be on a ship and now they just- and I’ve never been to the Rio Grande river to see really, out of pictures, I've never gotten down that far in Texas to be on the Rio Grande, to see how deep the water is and would I chance walking across the Rio Grande? I don't know. If I was so desperate, like many of those people are, maybe I would take that chance” (“Irene,” interview by author, April 3, 2025).

Here, Irene clearly delineates between older European immigration that is unproblematic, and in fact even worthy of celebration in organizations such as the Croatian Club, and what she sees as newer, illegal and problematic migration from Latin America. The distinction that Irene constructs here is reflective of a larger dichotomy in how immigrants are conceived of in American racial boundaries, wherein European immigrants are constructed as ethnically different, but not as racial outsiders, whereas Latin American immigrants are subject to an ever-present assumption of illegality and therefore non-belonging, as outlined by Sáenz and Douglas (2015). In this response from Irene, she initially uses the example of Croatian immigrants, and European immigrants more broadly, to position Latin American immigrants as racial outsiders, before second-guessing that construction through attempting to relate to their experience.

Whereas Irene uses the immigrant heritage of the Croatian Club to construct Latin American immigrants as racial outsiders, at least initially, Carl uses the experience of his family’s immigrant history to express understanding and solidarity with the Latin American immigrants that now live in the same neighborhood as the Lodge’s cultural club and regularly rent out the building for quinceañeras, stating,

> “I always feel for, for the immigrants, you know, the Latins and stuff, because I know, 'cause That's what my grand- my grandfather was a dishwasher. My grandmother cleaned other people's

houses. And that's what they're doing now. So I've got nothing against them and I am good. They got this place to do that." ("Carl," interview by author, April 17, 2025).

Here, Carl constructs his own family and contemporary immigrants as part of the same group, or at least part of groups with meaningful commonalities, and uses those similarities to justify the use of the organization's space by Latin American immigrants, signaling a partial shift in organizational boundaries. As the examples of Irene and Carl's responses show, Croatian-American organizations and the immigrant heritage they celebrate can be used by organizational members to both reinforce and refute larger racial boundaries in American society.

It is worth noting that both the responses of Irene and Carl came in the context of describing demographic change in the areas surrounding their respective organizations. A similar phenomenon was articulated by Gordon in relation to the area surrounding the Neighborhood Museum, who describes the change thusly:

> "the population has changed too, With . . . Of, of course you know, like a lot of cities. And the, the rejuvenation with one immigrant group leaving as another will will come back in. So in Kansas City, there's a large Hispanic population. There, there's also the black Americans that, you know, are in the area too. So it's, it's more of a mixed, I would say area now, and mixed heritage" ("Gordon," interview by author, May 14, 2025).

Considering that elsewhere in the interview Gordon devotes significant time to discussing the variety of different European ethnic groups that historically settled in or near the area surrounding the Neighborhood Museum, the fact that it is only in this response where he uses the term "mixed" is noteworthy, in that it shows a clear cognitive delineation between ethnic and racial categories. Belonging to a different racial category, however, does not exclude one from participation in the Neighborhood Museum's organizational practices, as in recent years an active effort has been made to incorporate Christmas displays from the black and Latino communities in the neighborhood. In relation to the inclusion of these displays, Gordon states, "we feel we want to be a welcoming, you know, community. And, we're trying to learn how to

incorporate all that, you know, and, and to be more, I would say, dynamic rather than stagnant" ("Gordon," interview by author, May 14, 2025). Clearly, there is an active effort towards boundary blurring in the Neighborhood Museum. However, these racial boundaries remain faintly intact, as is evidenced by the fact that despite their greater level of incorporation, neither the black nor Latino communities have established a permanent display, an organizational practice which only applies to European ethnic immigrant communities in the area at the present time.

Age

Age emerged in all of the respondents' statements on their organizations as a salient symbolic boundary, although it was almost always one that respondents did not see as beneficial to maintaining organizational coherence, but rather as a point of concern, particularly in relation to the future. Age was brought up in relation to organizational decline in several cases. Pete, for example, states in relation to the Slavic Society, "this is gallows humor now that, you know, we're, we're just getting smaller and smaller. So, um . . . I don't know what the end result will be of that, but we're all getting older. It's harder to do, it's harder to do the kolo, some of the dances, which are technically harder" ("Pete," interview by author, April 3, 2025). In this statement Pete applies an age category, "older," to the Slavic Society, and simultaneously links this category to concerns over the organization's future sustainability and ability to carry out the practices that reinforce collective identity, such as dancing kolos. Carl expresses very similar concerns in relation to the Illyric Lodge. In one particularly noteworthy response, Carl states,

> "what we have is a small core group of people that keep the organization together. And the organization has become, over the, you know, over the past thirty years or so centered around the building, the [Croatian cultural center]. And we've had, you know, certain people that, that have run that and were able to, to put on festivals and things. But everybody's reaching a certain age now that, that it's starting to dwindle away." ("Carl," interview by author, April 17, 2025).

In this response, Carl establishes an internal symbolic boundary in the Illyric Lodge, namely a particular sub-group of members that are particularly integral to maintaining the organization's vital functions, particularly those that center around the organization's building. He then attributes a particular definitional age category to the group, implying that they are predominantly older, and states that this increasing age is contributing to a decline in the organization's ability to carry out identity-reinforcing practices such as festivals, as well as the practical processes that are essential to keep the building operational. Later on in the interview, Carl contrasts what he sees as the aging nature his own organization's membership with what he witnessed at a recent event he attended at a different Croatian organization in a nearby city that involved a youth kolo dance troupe:

> "You know, they've got the kids doing it and they got the dancers. And when you, you know, when they do stuff like that, these kids bond because they're, you know, they're dancing together for five or six or seven or eight and 10 years and then they want their children to do it. We've never, we've never really had that in our society. We've had a, we had a group of singers, but they've all aged out and nobody was there to take their place. See what our society is [is] kind of aging out. It's pretty hanging on" ("Carl," interview by author, April 17, 2025).

Here, Carl uses ages as a contrasting marker of the Illyric Lodge's collective identity from other Croatian organizations in the surrounding area, but not a positive one. Rather, he points to the inability of his own organization to effectively cultivate multi-generational retention as a threat to future organizational sustainability.

Carl's understanding of the age profile of the Illyric Lodge is shared by the other respondent who is a member, Matthew. Matthew is relatively young, and sees himself as an exception to the organization's norms, stating, "It's definitely primarily old, older people. There's only a couple people like me and my sisters there. Yeah, most, most of the members are my parents and grandparents' age." Despite the relative rarity of young people like himself amongst

the Illyric Lodge membership, Matthew does note the organization's efforts to "[make] sure that, you know, the young [Illyric Lodge] kids succeed," expressing gratitude for the scholarship money he received from the organization as well as the overall interest the organization takes in the young members it does have ("Matthew," interview by author, April 19, 2025). However, Matthew shares Carl's concerns over the continued viability of the organization if its current age demographics remain the same, stating,

> "I'm just thinking out loud here. When my dad, you know, becomes the position where my grandpa's in right now. Like, as like the, as in this board Member, when my dad is there, then where are all the Members going to be? Because it's just, obviously me, my two sisters and maybe 1, 2, 3, 4 other people there in, in their 20s or early 30s. So I, I really don't know. I really don't know." ("Matthew," interview by author, April 19, 2025).

As this quotation demonstrates, Matthew sees the organization's current symbolic boundaries in terms of age as a potential problem for the future. This concern is shared by Carl in the Illyric Lodge and Pete in the Slavic Society, demonstrating that age is an increasingly salient symbolic boundary in many Croatian American organizations that many members see as a problem or threat rather than as a point of pride.

In the case of the Neighborhood Museum, age clearly emerged as a potential boundary, but one that the organization's leadership, including Gordon, have actively been trying to disrupt. In Gordon's opinion, the natural continuity of organizational commitment in the Neighborhood Museum and other ethnic organizations in the area was disrupted by the closure of several neighborhood schools that were affiliated with ethnic churches, something that has led to an older organizational identity that the Neighborhood Museum is actively trying to counteract: "I would say [we are] probably more of the, an older age group, but we're trying to get more younger individuals. And, and we've discussed this. The fact that there, there isn't a school anymore. I think the school really brings a lot of people together just naturally, with children and

the parents." In order to evolve and find new ways of attracting younger individuals, the Neighborhood Museum has added two "young people" to their board to "find what their interests [are]" ("Gordon," interview by author, May 14, 2025). Even with these changes, at least one of Gordon's responses suggests that there remains a level of internal organizational boundaries based around age:

> "the majority of [organizational members] are I, I would say older individuals from [their] 50s to [their] 70s, because we have original connections. But we are also finding slowly, the interest in younger individuals. Perhaps a lot of the decorators that come. Because we have, I guess I'd say we have several sets" ("Gordon," interview by author, May 14, 2025).

In this response it is possible to see how Gordon cognitively delineates between different organizational sub-groups, or "sets," based on age and associated levels of interest in particular organizational practices, specifically between the majority of older members who have familial connections to the organization or grew up in the neighborhood when it still functioned as a traditional ethnic enclave and younger members who have come in from outside or grew up after processes of dispersal had taken effect in the neighborhood. This delineation suggests that although the Neighborhood Museum has taken endeavors to break down external boundaries based on age, these boundaries persist, at least to an extent, internally.

Internal boundaries relating to age also emerged as a theme of Irene's description of the Croatian Club. The organizational practices that Irene focused on most extensively in her responses were the weekly dance nights with live music hosted by the club on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Irene separates the Sunday dances, which involve polka bands, from the Friday and Saturday dances, which involve "rock 'n roll" groups. Irene, who usually only attends the Sunday dances, invokes age categories to describe a separation between the polka crowd and the rock 'n roll crowd. In relation to the Sunday polka nights, she states,

> "polka is dying out as a, as a dance, as a music, because the next generation, they don't do the polka. My children' age, you know, 50s and 60s. They don't dance polka. So that whole genre of people is dwindling out, whether it's Slovenian polka, Croatian polka, Polish polka, whatever polka it is, it's all dwindling out. They don't have people to go anymore to dance. So because of that, people still want music and they would like polka music, but there are just so few polka bands anymore that play, you know. They've kind of dwindled off, too, because of the age. So I see that, for me even, it is not nearly as attended on Sunday as it used to be." ("Irene," interview by author, April 3, 2025).

In relation to the rock 'n roll nights on Fridays and Saturdays, on the other hand, Irene paints a different picture:

> "I think that the Croatian Club has a lot of people that come on Friday and Saturday, particularly in the evenings, because of the music that's played there. There's a band that plays in, in this area, [*respondent refers to a local band*] and I went there once because my cousin and his lady friend were there. You could barely get in the door. It was so packed. So many people. I mean, we don't have anything like that on Sunday. And that's why they let the people in for free on those, on Friday and Saturday, because that brings in the younger group of people" (ibid).

In these responses, Irene establishes a strong internal organizational boundary that largely operates around age. In relation to the dynamics that are present on the polka nights, much of Irene's language regarding the increasing age of participants, as well as how participants have "dwindled off" echoes the responses of Carl, Matthew, and Pete regarding age and organizational decline. In relation to Fridays and Saturdays, however, Irene's impression is that a highly active and comparatively youthful community is present, one that shows no signs of decline. In viewing these two responses and the age-related internal boundaries they establish, it is important to note that the more actively ethnicized, although not necessarily exclusively Croatian, practice of polka dancing is what is declining at the Croatian Club in Irene's view, whereas the less immediately ethnicized practice of rock 'n roll is more well-attended and attended by younger people. This suggests a relatively high degree of assimilation, as well a shift in organizational boundaries and identity away from ethnicity.

Much like Gordon and Irene, Tamara invokes age as something of an internal symbolic boundary in relation to the Language School, although in her case, it is also intimately connected with a boundary relating to the time of immigration. Fairly early on in the interview, Tamara establishes a generational taxonomy in her description of the Croatian community in her city, particularly those involved in the Language School:

> "In the school there are three generations that meet. First, first one that came during Yugoslavia, and these people are in [their] 80s or 90s, and they have usually been connected to college or came here for that reason, and they will visit our school sometimes during our potlucks. The generation that started the school is the one that came during the war. So around '95. And I feel like I'm the representative of the third generations, where it's mostly young professionals that came here" ("Tamara," interview by author, April 22, 2025).

Here, Tamara's generational classification serves to delineate between different waves of immigration, each of which has a different relationship to and impact on the Language School. For Tamara, it is the oldest of these three generations that has the least intensive relationship with the Language School, despite their support of the school's activities: "I think [the] older generation is supportive. I know there was like, financially**,** they tried to support. There were some donations. But they don't show up as much in potlucks, and I haven't had a lot of, other than like 'hi, how are you,' conversations." Additionally, Tamara specifically notes the lack of involvement by the descendants of this generation in Language School activities, stating, "they come to the community, but it's really interesting. I know they have children and grandchildren, but they rarely come" ("Tamara," interview by author, April 22, 2025). In contrast to the general theme of participants' discussions of age in other organizations, it is not young people that the Language School struggles to fully engage with, but rather people from the older immigration waves and their children and grandchildren. This suggests a disconnect between organizations like the Language School, that largely attract first generation members, and the other

organizations analyzed in this work, whose memberships are largely composed of second-, third-, fourth-, or later generation Croatian Americans.

Ethnic Boundary Processes

In the following subsection, I will evaluate when and how each of the boundary processes outlined in my theoretical framework, namely, bright boundaries, boundary crossing, boundary blurring, and boundary shifting, were reflected in participants' responses. Primarily, I will focus on how these processes occurred in relation to ethnic boundaries, as the analyzed organizations were selected for their nominal ethnic focus. However, as the previous subsection has made apparent, ethnic boundaries are not the only boundaries that operate within these organizations, and often ethnicity operates in conjunction with other identity categories. As such non-ethnic boundaries remain relevant in describing organizational boundary processes in relation to ethnicity.

Bright Boundaries

First and foremost, none of the respondents stated that their organizations currently imposed a bright social boundary that established Croatian, Slavonic, or South Slavic heritage as a necessary criterion for membership. However, bright boundaries, ethnic and otherwise, did appear in participants' responses in a few ways. The closest any participant came to outlining a bright mono-ethnic social boundary in their response was Irene, who described the membership process at the Croatian Club thusly:

> "Well, first of all, in order to become a member, you have to fill out paperwork. And the first thing they ask [is] are you Croatian or not? And if you're not Croatian, you have to find two people who are members of the club and, I understand, I think they have to be Croatians. It's been a while since we filled out our paperwork. And then there's a yearly

> fee to be, to stay a member. And every year they have, around the holidays, they have a party for members only" ("Irene," interview by author, April 3, 2025).

In Irene's description of the membership application process, a bright ethnic boundary is visible, albeit one that is enforced indirectly. Specifically, this bright boundary is evident in the differentiated process of membership applications for applicants that do and do not identify as having Croatian heritage. If one does state that they have Croatian heritage the membership process is streamlined, whereas if they do not, as was the case for Irene herself, then they require the sponsorship of two members who are Croatian. The membership process as Irene describes it would then qualify as not only a bright boundary, but a bright *social* boundary, as it has active ramifications on the ease of access to membership and the benefits that membership provides.

Interestingly, however, it is worth noting that the current membership process as described on the Croatian Club's website does not match with Irene's description, but instead states that all potential new members must be sponsored by three current members, and following successful sponsorship all new membership applications are voted on by the Croatian Club's board of directors ("Croatian Club" website 2025). The membership requirements as outlined on the website make no reference to either a differentiated process between members that do or do not claim Croatian heritage, and also do not state that the three sponsoring members have to be of any particular ethnic background. This discrepancy between Irene's description and the description on the Croatian Club's website could be a result of Irene misremembering or misinterpreting the membership process, but it is also possible that organizational membership procedures have changed in a manner which no longer enforces even the indirect bright ethnic boundary.

In relation to the Illyric Lodge, neither Matthew nor Carl described a bright social boundary in relation to membership or participation. In Matthew's conception of the

organization, however, a relatively bright symbolic boundary was present, one that he considered to be self-enforcing:

> "So from what I know, everyone in the club is from, like, an [Illyric] descent in some way. And then, in terms of being in touch with it–I'm just speaking from my own experience again–I've seen a couple members join while at those meetings I've been at, and I think if you want to join a Croatian club, like [The Illyric Lodge], you are already at a certain level where you are in touch with your heritage or you want to be in touch with your heritage" ("Matthew," interview by author, April 19, 2025).

Here, Matthew demonstrates an understanding of the Illyric Lodge's symbolic boundaries that is bright and mono-ethnic, and clearly sees the type of person who would join an organization like the Illyric Lodge to be someone who both considers themselves to be part of the relevant ethnic category and also is invested in reinforcing that identity through organizational practices. There are no ethnic criteria for membership in the Illyric Lodge, a fact that was confirmed by Carl (interview by author, April 17, 2025). Despite this, Matthew cannot think of anyone involved with the organization that does not fit into the particular ethnic category that is in the organization's name, nor does he think that someone outside of that ethnic boundary would want to become a member of the organization.

Like Matthew, Carl identifies a bright boundary in the Illyric Lodge, but it is one that is historical rather than contemporary. Carl outlines the following history of the organization in relation to its ethnic boundaries, particularly those related to the inclusion or exclusion of non-Croatian South Slavs:

> "We've got good members that aren't Croatian. It wasn't just exclusively Croatian, it was Slavic. It was open to all males of . . . I mean when the, with the club, when it started in [founding date], I don't know, It might have been still, it wasn't even Yugoslavia yet. It was still Austria-Hungary, you know, and so it wasn't, it wasn't strictly Croatian. It was Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian, anybody of that [background] and they all spoke the same language. So it was basically, it was that. Most of the people now, put their heritage back to the Dalmatian coast. So it turned into, like, exclusive, like Croatian, and then, you know, then there's the, you know, the uppity Croatians. You know what I mean? That wanted to be called, you know, then it got changed to the Croatian cultural center. But the

> name of the society is the [Illyric Lodge] . . . meaning all of us." ("Carl," interview by author, April 17, 2025).

In this statement Carl emphasizes the original, more expansive boundaries that defined the organization at its founding date, before modern conceptions of ethnic identity in the Balkans were fully realized through nation-states. He also, however, references a demand from "uppity Croatians" within the organization to contract and brighten ethnic boundaries, something that echoes the internal conflict within other organizations in times of greater antagonism between Croats and their neighbors. However, it is also clear from this response that Carl wishes to emphasize the more expansive understanding of organizational ethnic boundaries in the present.

In the Neighborhood Museum, external boundaries have shifted significantly, to the point where Croatian heritage is no longer integral to the organization's identity, at least not exclusively. Internally, however, the organization does maintain bright boundaries in relation to some of its organizational practices. Although many different ethnic groups are included in the museum's displays, they are all separately segmented and, in Gordon's understanding, put together exclusively by those who claim the specific heritage of the room they are decorating:

> "I always tell people that the items in the rooms belong to those particular countries. So the Russian-American room, because there was a Russian church, they belong- those items and the design are from the Russian Americans. The, the Polish Americans, St. Joseph Church, that is their room and they choose. So they choose how to decorate it for the off-season [and] when they use it for Easter, as well as for Christmas. And, you know, so we have [a] Ukrainian room, Slovenian room, Lithuanian room. So all those" ("Gordon," interview by author, May 14, 2025).

Clearly, bright ethnic boundaries are still present in the Neighborhood Museum, but they operate internally. As Gordon's references to Russian and Polish churches demonstrate as well, at least some of the Neighborhood Museum's ethnicities rooms are associated with older, and in some cases now defunct, more exclusive ethnic religious organizations.

Finally, bright boundaries were also present in some of Tamara's responses, although they did not appear in her descriptions of the Language School but rather in experiences she has had in her role working with Croatian schools at the national level. In relation to some of the older schools she has reached out to, Tamara states that they "each function as their own entity with their own culture" and are "reluctant to cooperate" with national outreach efforts ("Tamara," interview by author, April 22, 2025). In Tamara's response a bright boundary is identifiable, but one that functions very differently than those described in relation to the other organizations. Whereas the other examples of bright boundaries revolve around limiting membership to those that have a relationship to a particular ethnicity, Tamara's case involves Croatian American organizations' active reluctance to collaborate with a national program devoted to teaching the Croatian language, one that has the active support of the Croatian state. This suggests that for some of the organizations Tamara has attempted to work with, ethnic kinship alone is not enough to overcome localized bright organizational boundaries.

Boundary blurring

Despite some instances of intact bright ethnic boundaries in the organizations analyzed, overall participants' responses revealed significantly blurred boundaries. Perhaps the most obvious case of an organization where ethnic boundaries are blurred is in the Croatian Club, where the participant herself, Irene, did not identify as Croatian or South Slavic at all, instead describing her heritage as "supposedly German, Irish and my mother always said a little French Canadian Indian" ("Irene," interview by author, April 3, 2025). Despite her lack of Croatian heritage, Irene feels fully accepted at the Croatian Club, stating that her and her husband, who also does not claim Croatian heritage,

> "meet a lot of nice people, many of them are not Croatians, but many of them, of course, are. At one point it was strictly for members only, but like I say, as time went on and people were not all just Croatian because of intermarriage with other nationalities, there were a lot of people there that, just like us, had no Croatian background at all" ("Irene," interview by author, April 3, 2025).

In this response, Irene not only suggests that the ethnic boundaries of the Croatian Club are blurred, but describes the blurring process occurring over time, as well as providing her reasoning for this process, namely, intermarriage.

Not only does Irene describe the membership of the Croatian Club in ethnically-blurred terms, she describes organizational practices as blurred as well. In relation to the polkas played on Sunday, she states,

> "Now I have learned that there's many different types of polka. You might have a German polka, you might have a Slovenian polka, you might have a Croatian polka, you might have a Polish polka, so I don't know what kind of polka we do, but I call it the [*surname*] polka because that's our last name" ("Irene," interview by author, April 3, 2025).

If ethnic boundaries surrounding cultural practices in the Croatian Club were brighter, it is likely that Irene would exclusively refer to, and perhaps have exclusively been exposed to Croatian polkas at the Croatian Club. However, her response makes it clear that ethnic exclusivity is not present in organizational practices such as polka music. Overall, Irene's responses make it clear that in many respects, ethnic boundaries at the Croatian Club are blurred to a significant extent.

Much like Irene, Pete also describes the Slavic Society's membership in terms that suggest ethnic boundaries are blurred in the organization, even beyond the organization's multi-ethnic South Slavic identities of primary interest. In relation to the organization's membership, he states,

> "So we have some people in our club who are not even Slavic at all. I mean, we had a couple Germans. We've had Americans, Polish, uh, just flat-out Americans. So I mean, we don't, we don't restrict you. Anyone can join the [Slavic Society]. That's fine with us" ("Pete," interview by author, April 3, 2025).

Clearly, the Slavic Society does not enforce bright ethnic social boundaries, even if the majority of the membership may claim South Slavic heritage. Pete himself, despite his Montenegrin background, has also participated in different ethnic organizations in his city, specifically the German clubs. It is clear that in Pete's area, ethnic organizational boundaries are far from strict. This is possibly partially a result of the area's history, as Pete describes how many European immigrants to his city in earlier decades were "redlined" into a particular area, stating that "whether you were German, Czech, Lithuanian, whatever you were, you kind of were in this, in this block, that you found yourself in" (ibid). In this environment, it is not hard to see how over time, ethnic boundaries have become blurred.

In terms of the Illyric Society, a major instance of boundary blurring was when the club removed the requirement of Slavic heritage from their membership criteria, as well as making the decision to allow women as members, in the mid-1970s, roughly coinciding with the opening of the Illyric Society's Croatian cultural center. In his interview, Carl confirmed that this change was a practical one as much as anything:

> "It's called a liquor license. You wanna, you wanna be an exclusive Club? Your liquor license is $75,000 a year. If you want to let everybody in, it's cheap. That's, that's basically why they opened it- well, they opened it up, you know, for spouses too, but basically it was a liquor license for the, for the new building" ("Carl," interview by author, April 17, 2025).

In this case, the purpose of blurring a once bright social boundary was in large part a practical one, a pragmatic financial decision more than one taken to reflect a change in the organizational identity of the Lodge. However, as Carl mentions, the decision also allowed the Illyric Lodge to incorporate spouses of members that did not necessarily come from Croatian heritage, which likely reflects increasing levels of ethnic intermarriage.

Boundary blurring is also present in the Neighborhood Museum, particularly in the manner in which Gordon, in his role as a museum tour guide, emphasizes similarity in the ethnic exhibits, even if they are segregated: “And when I go through the other rooms I try to tell the individuals to notice what is the dress. A lot of the dress, like, especially in the Slavic countries will appear, you know, similar.” In summing up the rooms, Gordon states that there are “unifying” aspects across the objects in the rooms and the shared immigrant experiences they represent, leading him to consider each room “similar but different” (“Gordon,” interview by author, May 14, 2025). Through finding commonalities between the rooms while still considering them separately, Gordon’s approach to tours establishes a blurred ethnic boundary, but one that is still intact. However, these blurred ethnic boundaries are indicative of larger shifts in organizational identity.

Boundary shifting

There is evidence of boundary shifting in some of the organizations analyzed, both in terms of boundary expansion, drawing upon Zolberg and Woon’s (1999) understanding of the term, as well as an outright decentering of ethnic boundaries, aligning with Wimmer’s (2013) articulation of the term. In terms of boundary expansion, one of the most visible cases has occurred in the Slavic Society. Originally, the society only sought to represent the culture and heritage of the South Slavic countries that made up the former Yugoslavia, but as Pete notes, that has changed: “It's South Slavic and we include the Bulgarians. That came on, kind of, in the last, I don't know, 15 years or something like that” (“Pete,” interview by author, April 3, 2025). In a clear-cut case of boundary expansion, the Slavic Society reconfigured its ethnic boundaries to encompass an ethnic identity that shared many cultural, geographical, and linguistic

characteristics of the ethnic identities already represented in the organization but had not yet been included.

In the case of the Neighborhood Museum, it is possible to see boundary shifting both in terms of the expansion of ethnic boundaries and in terms of what can be viewed as at least a partial decentering of ethnicity in the organization's identity. Boundary expansion has occurred through the increasing inclusion of more ethnic identities in the representation of the rooms themselves. News coverage of the Neighborhood Museum from around the time of its founding suggests a more limited ethnic scope, including a picture of the museum's original sign with a Croatian crest on it and statements referring to it as a Slavic museum ("Neighborhood Museum" article 1989a; "Neighborhood Museum" article 1989b). However, as Gordon's responses demonstrate, the museum has expanded its ethnic boundaries to include displays from non-Croatian and even non-Slavic ethnic categories. For example, in one response Gordon describes the process through which the museum obtained a selection of Irish objects to add to its collection:

> "Just really one block up from the [Neighborhood Museum] is a church called [St. Patrick's] and it was the Irish, it's one of the Irish churches. It closed. And actually the Police Department took it over as, as a police athletic league. Everything of- actually a lot of things of religious value and interest, actually they, they donated and we have in our chapel at the museum" ("Gordon," interview by author, May 14, 2025).

This response reveals the process of ethnic boundary expansion at the Neighborhood Museum in practice. The Neighborhood Museum is open to serving as a place where ethnic organizations that may have initially fallen outside of the Neighborhood Museum's scope of belonging can relocate their cultural artifacts if necessary. This process also suggests that ethnic boundaries within the neighborhood itself are not particularly bright, as both the traditionally Croatian and Slavic-oriented museum and the Irish church do not appear to have had any qualms about

accepting and donating the items respectively. Ethnic boundary expansion at the Neighborhood Museum is not limited to just the displays, either. In relation to another organizational practice, the classes put on by volunteers in traditional ethnic crafts and foods that Gordon claims have become quite popular, Gordon states, “A lady of, you know, Polish descent, she does the pierogi. We’ll have some Croatian ladies, They’ll do a sarma. And well strudel, I mean that could be, I mean German. Or Slavic too. But they- so, so it's multi-ethnicity” (“Gordon,” interview by author, May 14, 2025). Here too, it is possible to see a shift in the Neighborhood Museum’s ethnic boundaries towards ethnic inclusion, with Gordon specifically emphasizing the multi-ethnic nature of the organization.

Beyond just expansion of ethnic boundaries, several of Gordon’s responses suggest that organizational identity in the Neighborhood Museum may have shifted to mean something beyond ethnic categories. In response to a question regarding if there is anything that ties all the museum’s ethnic displays together, Gordon states, “Well, I have to say the process that brought everything together was that the museum really celebrates the immigrants that came to [home city],” before providing an overview of the local history that emphasizes the various populations that have inhabited the area, starting from indigenous people and moving to describe “various waves of immigrants” including an older Northern European wave and the relatively more recent South Slavic wave. Gordon ends his response by highlighting a particular organizational practice that emphasizes this immigrant history:

> “when they made the Hall of Immigrants it was to allow- so if a family has a picture of their ancestors, you can have a picture on there. But they have to be that first immigrant. So I did find, like for example, my grandmother and grandfather and a picture of their, the family. So, eventually I hope that, well, I will have that on the wall. But you know, you had- so in other words, I couldn't put my picture on there, I couldn't put my father because they were first and second generation [sic]. It was to show the original families that came over. And, and I think that gives a humanizing feel. Because just going through a museum and you see an object, but then you see, OK, gosh, these were people. They're

> real. They were real people. And this is what they looked like. And you know, you can appreciate their, I think the struggles that they must have had, you know, in coming over" ("Gordon," interview by author, May 14, 2025).

In the Neighborhood Museum's Hall of Immigrants, and in Gordon's response more generally, the organizational identity that is being expressed does not appear to be tied to a particular and exclusive ethnic group, or even a collection of particular ethnic groups. Rather, the shared identity appears to be immigrants and their descendants, regardless of ethnic background. In the Hall of Immigrants a bright boundary is evident, but it is not an ethnic one. Rather, whether or not one can participate is based upon whether they have the knowledge of and access to their family's immigrant heritage. Interestingly, Gordon's account of the area's history in this response does not mention its contemporary black and Latino populations, and it is unclear whether any of them have ancestors displayed in the Hall of Immigrants, so it is possible at least a faint racial boundary is operational here in terms of Gordon and the Neighborhood Museum's conception of immigrant belonging. Overall, however, Gordon's response suggests that it is immigrant heritage that matters, not immigrant heritage in association with a particular ethnic category.

A boundary shift away from an ethnic organizational identity can also be observed in Irene's responses in relation to the Croatian Club. In describing the motivations of club members and those that participate in organizational activities, she states,

> "Some people think of the Croatian Club as only ethnic. Some people think of the Croatian Club, that's my understanding, as going, following some band, that's mostly what I know about it. And some people, you know, they use it as a bar. They go there to meet up with their friends during the day if they're retired" ("Irene," interview by author, April 3, 2025).

In Irene's understanding, the Croatian Club means different things to different people, and a desire to perform and reinforce ethnic identity is only one of those potential meanings. Irene's

personal motivation for membership is not primarily ethnically-motivated, either. Early on in the interview, she states that her and her husband "go to the Croatian Club now every Sunday because we're trying to keep polka music alive in by having it at the Croatian Club," expressing an interest in the preservation of a particular cultural practice but not a particular ethnic identity ("Irene," interview by author, April 3, 2025). Later on, she describes the atmosphere at the Croatian Club in the following way:

> "[it's] so friendly and family-like because people enjoy each other with their families, but they're also making new friends with other people that are not necessarily Croatian or Slovenian. They could be all different nationalities. I've never really asked people their nationalities that much" ("Irene," interview by author, April 3, 2025).

In this description of the club and her interactions while present in it, Irene emphasizes a "family-like" atmosphere while simultaneously deemphasizing the importance of ethnicity. It is clear that exposure to Croatian or Slovenian ethnic culture is not Irene's primary reason for participating at the Croatian Club. Rather, what the club means to Irene is a place where she can experience a vibrant social atmosphere and participate in community life. For members like Irene, then, as well as some non-members who are still involved with the Croatian Club, ethnic boundaries do not matter at all in terms of what they value about the organization, and it is not a primarily ethnic identity that is being celebrated and reinforced.

Diaspora and Returns to the Homeland

Given the trend in the literature to describe Croatian ethnic organizations in diasporic terms, I specifically looked for instances where my respondents framed organizational purpose or their own motivations for organizational attendance in a diasporic manner. However, I found very little evidence of diasporic framing in my analysis. Gordon, Irene, and Matthew, from the

Neighborhood Museum, Croatian Club, and Illyric Society respectively, did not speak of political events in Croatia at all, nor did they make any statements suggesting that they consider themselves to be a part of a larger, transnational dispersal of the Croatian people. They also did not make any reference to diasporic remittances or involvement with political or social projects in Croatia. This is perhaps least noteworthy in the case of Irene, who does not claim Croatian heritage and, as outlined above, does not consider ethnicity as the primary motivation for her involvement in the Croatian Club. This lack of diasporic thinking, however, applies with equal validity to the case of Gordon and Matthew, both of whom do possess Croatian ancestry and claim Croatian heritage.

Carl does bring up diasporic action in relation to the Illyric Lodge, but it is only in the context of wondering why the organization was not more actively involved with issues in the home country, particularly in regards to the Croatian War of Independence in the 1990s. In relation to the organization's activities during the war, Carl states,

> "You know, we never sent, like, relief stuff back to the old country. You know what I mean? We didn't have- you know, the war's going on, what can we do to help? And we were never involved or anything like that. I guess that could be part of my fault too, but it was just not the way they, they did it" ("Carl," interview by author, April 17, 2025).

In this statement, Carl speaks somewhat regretfully about the Illyric Lodge's lack of diasporic involvement during the war, something he attributes to the decisions and perhaps the internal culture of the organizational leadership at the time. Carl does not, however, portray himself as particularly diasporically invested either, rather taking on a share of the blame. Carl does express a sense of diasporic obligation in this statement, but not one that was strong enough then or is strong enough now to actually spur political or financial action.

In comparison to the aforementioned participants, Pete does demonstrate a description of his family's history and an engagement with the former Yugoslav region's current political

situation that is more resonant with diasporic narratives and stances. Pete began the interview, after being asked to describe his life's story, by stating, "I'm an immigrant's son. My father escaped from Yugoslavia in 1951 in a rowboat with three other guys across the Adriatic to escape communism. Tito's communism." Later on in the interview, Pete would describe his father's experience in detail, demonstrating a level of specificity in relation to political events in the former Yugoslavia that is unique amongst participants' responses, including utilizing specific terms in Serbo-Croatian. Statements such as "my father fell on the side of non-communists which were Chetniks or Royalists or however you want to say that," and "one of the *Skojevaci*[9] turned around and saw my father smiling and ever since then, that particular guy, who was actually a relative, had it after my dad" are exemplary of this point ("Pete," interview by author, April 3, 2025). Pete also frequently uses emotionally-charged language to describe his family's history, as the following statement demonstrates:

> "I remember my father, who is still alive, He's 95 now, telling me that his grandfather, who was born in 1870-something, was told by the government, the Communist government, that the land was no longer his. He cried. He saw his grandfather actually cry. That was a memorable moment for him, when the communist government said the land is no longer yours. That's, that's, to a farmer, that's just like, you know, pretty crushing" ("Pete," interview by author, April 3, 2025).

This in-depth connection of Pete's family's experience in the old country with political upheaval and personal trauma was unique amongst the participants, and suggests a different, more diasporically-oriented relationship. Pete also was the respondent who focused the most on ongoing political events in the ex-Yugoslav countries in his responses, specifically citing student protests in Serbia:

> "The spirituality of Montenegrins and Serbs is really off the chart in terms of, compared to us Americans. And I, I guess I have one foot in one place and one in the other. But you take for example what's going on in Serbia today, where the students are marching

[9] Communist youth.

> against autocracy. I don't see that in our country and I wish, I wish I did" ("Pete," interview by author, April 3, 2025).

Pete's investment in current political developments in Serbia, his favorable comparison of Montenegrins and Serbs to Americans, and his framing of his own identity as having "one foot in one place and one in the other," all suggest a more actively diasporic outlook than was present for many of the other participants. It is worth noting, in seeking an explanatory factor for this relatively more diasporic self-positioning, that Pete is the only participant who is a second-generation immigrant.

Interestingly, however, despite his personal diasporic tendencies, Pete does not describe the Slavic Society in the language of diaspora. For example, Pete describes traveling to Montenegro every year to visit friends and family. When asked if this is a common occurrence at the Slavic Society, however, Pete states,

> "I would say at least a couple, two or three or more people go on trips to the old country for sure. But I think as the crowd gets younger—I'm in my mid 60s—I think as the younger crowd comes on, and there's not so many of them anymore, they become more Americanized, you know?" ("Pete," interview by author, April 3, 2025)

By stating that only a small number of people at the Slavic Society travel frequently to the "old country," and by attributing this to "Americanization," Pete clearly sees his own relationship with Montenegro as somewhat exceptional in the organization.

Amongst interview participants overall, however, returns to the "old country," which for the majority of participants was Croatia, were a common thread. Carl, Matthew, and Gordon all described visiting Croatia, as did Irene, despite her lack of Croatian heritage. The frequency and content of these trips varied amongst participants, however. Carl described two trips to Croatia, and much of his description centered around family. He recounts meeting his paternal and maternal family and describes both meetings as a "love fest," specifically highlighting the bond

between his father and one of his mother's family members, both of whom were World War II veterans, as well as between himself and one of his cousins. On Carl's second trip to Croatia, which occurred 40 years later, he describes tracking down and reuniting with the same family member he bonded with on the first trip, stating that "it was like I left a week ago" ("Carl," interview by author, April 17, 2025). For Carl, then, the most important personal connection to Croatia elucidated from his responses was his familial connections, which remain intact despite significant temporal and geographical distance.

Gordon also brought up family when recounting his experiences in Croatia, describing attending the "multi-day affair" that was his cousin's daughter's wedding. Gordon did not emphasize family to the same extent as Carl, however, and instead remarked on how the country has changed in recent years:

> "It was amazing to me how, I guess now, as being part of the European Union. One, it's, it's gotten more expensive [laughs]. Two, the, the, I mean still it's a beautiful area and, and you know the roads that are, are, gosh, are so up to date and modern. I mean it's still, I mean a beautiful area to see" ("Gordon," interview by author, May 14, 2025).

Gordon's response demonstrates a familiarity with changes in Croatia's society and economy, as well as an appreciation for the country's natural beauty, but overall does not demonstrate the same emphasis on personal relationships and kinship that is evident in the responses of Pete and Carl.

Matthew has only traveled to Croatia once, although he does consider that trip a memorable experience. He traveled with his extended family first to Zagreb, which he describes as "very Eastern European" and "kind of dilapidated" and thusly his "least favorite part" of the trip. Upon leaving Zagreb and traveling to Dalmatia, however, Matthew describes his visit as "the most unimaginable experience" where he "learned a lot," specifically recounting his visits to

Diocletian's Palace and the salt mines of Ston ("Matthew," interview by author, April 19, 2025). Matthew's overall takeaway from the trip was the following:

> "I think if I had to, you know, pick like one word, it's, like, rooted. My one word to describe the trip. Because it's just, it's just so much easier for me- and this goes for literally anything in life you can learn about a subject. You can learn this and that whatever. But once you're there. And once you see it with your own eyes and and feel it, and once you're walking through it, you kind of, you kind of understand it in a way, more." ("Matthew," interview by author, April 19, 2025).

As is evident from this description, and particularly the choice of the word "rooted" to describe his experience, visiting Croatia for Matthew served to meaningfully reinforce his sense of ethnic identity. Importantly, Matthew never describes his experiences with the Illyric Lodge in the same manner as his trip to Croatia. In relation to the Illyric Lodge, Matthew emphasizes the organization's position within its local context, stating that he can "feel the history in it" as he observes the pictures on the walls and describing "the community aspect" as one of the most important functions of the organization for him personally ("Matthew," interview by author, April 19, 2025). Although clearly Matthew values the Illyric Lodge and considers it important, nothing about these responses suggests it holds the same weight in determining his own connections to Croatia as the trip he took with his family. Instead, Matthew's responses suggest that the importance of the Illyric Lodge stems from its history and value to the local community it serves.

Out of all the respondents, Irene placed the least importance on her trip to Croatia. She visited Croatia once, on a multi-country trip to Europe with her husband, and her visit to Croatia came about when the friends they were staying with in Slovenia took them across the border "just to say that we had been there." On their trip, they visited the sea, where Irene describes the following experience: "I had not a clue that it was gonna be salt water and I went 'blehhh' when I got the salt water in my mouth. And that was actually the Adriatic Sea that I jumped into but I

didn't know that at the time" ("Irene," interview by author, April 3, 2025). Given this response, visiting Croatia clearly does not hold the same emotional significance for Irene as it does for the other participants, and it also holds less significance than one would expect for a member of a Croatian ethnic organization. This response further emphasizes, then, that affirmations of ethnic identity may not always be the only functions that Croatian ethnic organizations perform for their members in the contemporary United States.

Overall, none of the organizations discussed above engaged in significant diasporic positioning or activity, and members also seldom expressed themselves in diasporic terms besides Pete. One notable exception to this overall trend was the frequency of trips to Croatia, although these trips held different degrees and kinds of significance for different respondents, with Pete and Matthew describing their experiences in more conventionally diasporic terms, Carl and Gordon emphasizing family and natural beauty, respectively, without drawing significant diasporic connections, and Irene describing her trip much more superficially. Overall, this result suggests that, in the modern United States, diaspora cannot be taken as a given in relation to Croatian ethnic organizations, and possibly ethnic organizations as a whole.

A Diasporic Counter-Example: The Language School

In contrast to the other organizations analyzed in this work, there is a strong case for considering Tamara's organization, the Language School, as well as her organizational role, to be diasporic. For one thing, in addition to her role in the Language School, Tamara is also an active Croatian state appointee, with a role in helping to build connections between various Croatian language schools in the United States as well as connections between the schools and the Croatian state. She states that she is in "constant like monthly conversation" with officials in

Croatia, who have been making an active effort in recent years to cultivate more robust and interconnected language schools in the United States. Tamara states that, in her understanding, the Croatian state experienced "a big disappointment" after independence, when "they all thought, 'Oh, now we have our state. Everything is taken care of. We, like everything is going to be OK,' but nothing came in place" ("Tamara," interview by author, April 22, 2025). This response demonstrates that, in Tamara's understanding, the government of the newly independent Croatia did not find building a diasporic network in the United States from the homeland to be as simple as expected, at least in the case of language schools.

Tamara's national level position came about as a result of her active efforts to connect herself and the Language School with the larger Croatian community in her area. Initially, she faced some hesitance on the part of some older community members when she suggested requesting Croatian state funding as in the past "they had this idea that we are the one from America [and] should be supporting Croatia, not that we should be asking [for] money from Croatia. So that was one moment in time where I thought, huh? You know, they come from a different place" ("Tamara," interview by author, April 22, 2025).

As previously mentioned in this analysis, Tamara has continued to face some hesitance in terms of building a diasporic network of schools in the United States due to what she describes as the different localized "cultures" and "personalities" of each of the schools, something she contrasts with the way Croatian language education operates elsewhere in the world:

> "[the] US has run, schools are run differently than anywhere else in the world. Croatian schools, Croatian schools in Canada or Germany or Switzerland, they're all paid teachers from [the] state of Croatia [that] are coming, or their school days are integrated" ("Tamara," interview by author, April 22, 2025).

In this response, Tamara makes the observation that the United States is unique in terms of the low level of Croatian state involvement and coordination between different organizations, at

least in the case of educational organizations, suggesting a lower level of diasporic engagement and less well-developed transnational networks, something that would track with much of the findings of this analysis in relation to the other organizations participants are affiliated with.

In addition to the greater level of diasporic activation that is present in the Language School's organizational philosophy and relationships, the organization also differs from the others analyzed in this work in several key respects. Firstly, the organization almost exclusively involves first-generation Croatian immigrants and their children. Additionally, many of the parents involved with the school are in relationships where one partner is American and the other is Croatian, as opposed to older and multi-generational but still entirely Croatian families such as Carl's and Gordon's. Finally, of course, there is a difference in the Language School's organizational type, as it is an educational institution and therefore by its very nature involves children, a major difference from the aging demographics that are visible in many of the other organizations mentioned.

Despite these differences, however, the Language School has faced similar concerns about its future viability in the past to those expressed by Carl, Pete, and others: "But every year we're like, 'oh my gosh, is there going to be enough people to come back to [Language School] or not.' Like every fall we would be like, 'we'll see what happens and who comes.'" However, Tamara feels confident that these concerns have been alleviated for the next "4-5 years," as a result of her revised approach to handling the school, one that has prioritized "community building and introducing people and trying to engage parents into activities," including through events such as regular potlucks ("Tamara," interview by author, April 22, 2025). These statements from Tamara provide an interesting contrast to the other organizations analyzed in this work. Whereas the latter are relatively long-established communities of practice that have

attempted to shift their organizational identities, with greater or lesser degrees of success, to stay afloat in contemporary social and cultural conditions, the Language School is a relatively recent organization that is actively forging a new ethnic community of practice, one that shares an identity categorization with the older organizations but seems to have little overlap with them overall.

Discussion and Conclusion

Overall, my results demonstrate that there is considerable variation in terms of boundary types and processes operating externally and internally across different organizations, as well as how the meaning and function of those organizations are understood by members. Religious, racial, age, and, of course, ethnic boundaries all emerged as salient in my results, but they did not manifest uniformly across every organization. Religion was an important symbolic boundary in some organizations, but that boundary was not reinforced evenly across them, and in some cases religious boundaries did not appear to matter at all. Similarly, symbolic boundaries of race were invoked in some, but not all, conceptions of organizational membership. Additionally, organizational history was used as a medium to position racialized immigrants both inside and outside of American social boundaries. Age emerged as a salient, if unwanted, definitional characteristic of many of the organizations in participants' responses, but for other participants, age was not conceptualized as uniform and actually formed the basis of a meaningful internal organizational boundary. Finally, participants' responses demonstrated that ethnic boundaries had different levels of salience across different organizations and that there are different interpretations of the expansiveness of ethnic categories within organizations.

Despite these similarities, there were also some common threads that cut through most or all of the organizations. In particular, organizational ethnic boundary blurring was widespread. In

many cases, participants' responses also suggested boundary shifts, including shifts that suggest that organizational identity no longer centers ethnic identity. Instead, organizational identity has come to represent a shared immigrant heritage, as is the case for the Neighborhood Museum, or a social gathering place for a particular community regardless of claimed ethnicity, as is the case for the Croatian Club. Importantly, organizational meaning, though constrained by a constellation of collective written and unwritten rules, practices, and representations, is not fixed. As such, organizational symbolic boundaries can be configured differently by different people. Participants' responses do reflect organizational boundaries, but they also reflect individual interpretations of those boundaries, with personal emphases. Clearly, however, in the understandings of some of my participants, the reinforcement of particular ethnic boundaries was not the core of organizational purpose.

In explaining the causes for the presence of blurring and shifting in organizational boundaries that was demonstrated in my results, I wish to return to the concepts of assimilation and ethnic invention. All of the organizations I analyzed, with the partial exception of the Language School, have had to reckon with the dynamics described by Gans (1979), Alba (1985), and Waters (1999), namely suburbanization, socioeconomic upward mobility, increasingly multiethnic heritage, and an overall decline in ethnicity as a life-structuring identity category. These dynamics have had a significant effect on Croatian ethnic organizations in the United States, leading to a steady blurring of ethnic boundaries as ethnic organizations and their surrounding communities have come to reflect one another more closely through a dialectical process of assimilation. In some cases, in response to the financial and member retention pressures that have resulted from contemporary conditions, Croatian American ethnic

organizations have shifted their ethnic boundaries through active processes of ethnic reinvention, reshaping organizational practices in ways that deemphasize particularistic ethnic identities.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given this reorientation away from brightly bounded ethnic collective identity, diasporic positioning and behavior was rare in the majority of the organizations analyzed, and when diaspora did come up in participants' responses, it often was disconnected from their experiences in the organizations themselves. A notable exception to this is Tamara, a first-generation Croatian immigrant, and the Language School, which actively sought to build a diasporic network with assistance from the Croatian state. However, these efforts have encountered difficulties reaching organizations with older, more established and multigenerational membership bases–descriptors that match the other participants' organizations very well. This disconnect is an organizational boundary in and of itself, and suggests that particular localized communities are more central to the identity and practices of many Croatian American organizations than a transnational ethnic diaspora.

This work certainly has its limitations. I was working from a fairly small sample, and one that prioritized breadth over depth, with only one or two participants from each organization. Future research could benefit from engaging with a larger member pool from a single organization in order to better capture the diversity of perceptions and expressions of boundaries and identities. Additionally, future research with a more ethnographic focus, observing organizational practices or even just conducting interviews in physical organizational space, could better capture the complex relationship between organizational environment, practices, and symbols. Finally, as the majority of respondents held an organizational leadership role of some kind, and all held formal membership, this research may not fully capture the full range of internal perspectives on organizational boundaries and identity.

This research has aimed to contribute to scholarly understandings of ethnic collective identity in the United States and beyond through using an organizational focus to bring together and expand upon the literature on white ethnic assimilation in the United States and diasporically-framed literature on Croatians outside of Croatia, and even with these limitations, it opens up new directions for continued academic engagement with these approaches. Further work on non-Croatian ethnic organizations in the United States could test the limits of this research's generalizability, as these results have valuable comparative potential. Additionally, future work on Croatian ethnic organizational boundaries outside the United States could provide similarly fruitful comparisons. In general, this case demonstrates the value of research into ethnic organizations, not just for what it can tell us about the organizations themselves but also for broader questions related to the construction, maintenance, and performance of collective identities, ethnic and otherwise.

Appendix

Open and Closed Ethnic Organizational Membership Coding Results

Open Ethnic Membership
Association of Croatian-American Professionals (National)
Croatian American Club (San Pedro, California)
Croatian American Cultural Center Kralj Tomislav (Deerfield Beach, FL)
Croatian American Society (Belle Chasse, Louisiana)
Croatian Club (Buffalo, New York)
Croatian Club of Tampa Bay (Tampa Bay, Florida)
Croatian Cultural Club (Joliet, Illinois)
Dalmatian-American Club (San Pedro, California)
Lone Star Croatian Club (Houston, Texas)
National Federation of Croatian Americans Cultural Foundation (National)
Slavonic Mutual and Benevolent Society (San Francisco, California)
South Slavic Club of Dayton (Dayton, Ohio)
Strawberry Hill Museum and Cultural Center (Kansas City, Kansas)

Closed or Partially Closed Ethnic Membership
All-Slavonic American Association (Fresno, California)
American Croatian Club (Lorain, Ohio)
Croatian American Cultural Center (Sacramento, California)
Slavonian American Benevolent Society (Tacoma, Washington)

Works Cited

Addams, Jane. *Twenty Years at Hull-House, with Autobiographical Notes*. New York: Macmillan, 1910.

Alba, Richard. "Bright vs. Blurred Boundaries: Second-Generation Assimilation and Exclusion in France, Germany, and the United States." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 20–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/0141987042000280003.

Alba, Richard. *Italian Americans: Into the Twilight of Ethnicity*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1985.

Alba, Richard, and Victor Nee. *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.

Alter, Peter T. "Mexicans and Serbs in Southeast Chicago: Racial group formation during the twentieth century." *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 94, no. 4 (2001): 403-419.

American Croatian Club, "Chili Cook-Off." *Facebook,* January 26, 2025.

Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. *Long-Distance Nationalism: World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics*. Amsterdam: Centre for Asian Studies Amsterdam, 1992.

Antonovich, Joe and Tony Vuletich, "Notice," *The Duluth News Tribune,* Sep. 9, 1916, Accessed via Newspapers.com

Barth, Fredrik. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference.* Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969.

Beck, Bob. "San Pedrans spring up all over," *News-Pilot,* June 24, 1992, Accessed via Newspapers.com

Bevanda, Joseph. "Pro-Serbian bias cited," *The Plain Dealer,* August 24, 1991. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Beveridge, Scott. "Small-town Croatian dancers making history in Cokeburg," *The Daily American* November 9, 2002. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Beyerlein, Tom and Mary McCarty. "Daytonians send best wishes," *Dayton Daily News*, November 1, 1995, Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Billig, Michael. *Banal Nationalism*. London: SAGE Publications, 1995.

"Blood Drives," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* November 19, 1991. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Braidic, Frank. "Too Many Younger People Still Don't Appreciate True Greatness Of Society," *Zajedničar (The Fraternalist),* Sep. 1, 1954. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Brubaker, Rogers. "Ethnicity, race, and nationalism." *Annual Review of Sociology* 35, no. 1 (2009): 21-42.

Brubaker, Rogers. *Ethnicity Without Groups*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Brubaker, Rogers. "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/0141987042000289997

Brubaker, Rogers. "The Return of Assimilation? Changing Perspectives on Immigration and Its Sequels in France, Germany, and the United States." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24, no. 4 (2001): 531–548. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870120049770.

Carter, Sean. "The Geopolitics of Diaspora." *Area* 37, no. 1 (2005): 54–63. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4762.2005.00601.x.

"Chicago Croatians say alleged arms deal understandable," *The Times (Hammond, Indiana),* August 15, 1991. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Coffey, Laura T. “Her life story is a tale of war, communism,” *Tampa Bay Times,* September 12, 1991. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Conzen, Kathleen Neils, David A. Gerber, Ewa Morawska, George E. Pozzetta, and Rudolph J. Vecoli. “The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A.” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12, no. 1 (1992): 3–41. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27501011.

“County: Recognize Croatia,” *News-Pilot,* February 2, 1992, Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Croatian Club CFU Lodge146, “Cinco de Mayo.” *Facebook,* March 23, 2025.

“Croatian Club” website. Accessed May 28, 2025.

“Croatians Rally for Homeland,” *York Sunday News,* December 8, 1991. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

“Croats to Meet in Javor Home,” *Pittsburgh Post,* Jan. 26, 1917. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Croatian American Club, “Happy Fifth Anniversary of Independence,” *News-Pilot,* May 27, 1995, Accessed via Newspapers.com.

“Croatians Gathering From All Parts of Country For Big Celebration by St. Lawrence Society; Pa-rade, Banquet and Entertainment Are Features,” *Harrisburg Telegraph*, Feb. 9, 1915. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Day, Chuck. “A Soccer Saga: It’s far more than a game for champs Croatians,” *The Cleveland Press,* October 27, 1976. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

De Fina, Anna. "Code-switching and the Construction of Ethnic Identity in a Community of Practice," *Language in Society* 36, no. 3 (2007): 371-392. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404507070182.

“Decided to Have a Big Celebration,” *Fort Bragg Advocate and News,* May 25, 1910, Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Diner, Hasia R. *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Dinnerstein, Leonard, and David M. Reimers. *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration*. 4th ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Djuric, Ivana. "The Croatian Diaspora in North America: Identity, Ethnic Solidarity, and the Formation of a 'Transnational National Community'." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 17, no. 1 (2003): 113–130. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1025393027724.

Eisner, BJ. “Religious pilgrims will take more than faith,” *Quad City Times,* April 9, 1993. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Erickson, Jennifer. *Race-ing Fargo: How the North Dakota City Became a ‘White’ Space*. Fargo, ND: North Dakota State University Press, 2019.

Felker, Helen. “Slavonian Hall Celebrates 75 Years,” *The News Tribune* (Tacoma, Washington), April 18, 1976. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Fox, Cybelle, and Thomas A. Guglielmo. "Defining America’s racial boundaries: Blacks, Mexicans, and European immigrants, 1890–1945." *American Journal of Sociology* 118, no. 2 (2012): 327-379.

Franzmann, Andreas. "The Method of Sequence Analysis within the Framework of Objective Hermeneutics – Origins and Exemplification." *Gesprächsforschung – Online-Zeitschrift zur verbalen Interaktion* 23 (2022): 167–189. http://www.gespraechsforschung-ozs.de.

Gans, Herbert J. "Symbolic ethnicity: The future of ethnic groups and cultures in America." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2, no. 1 (1979): 1-20.

Goodwin, Shaun, "Small bar in KCK hosts generations of fans of Croatia's soccer team," *The Kansas City Star,* July 8, 2018. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Govorchin, Gerald Gilbert. *Americans from Yugoslavia.* Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1961.

Grasha, Michael and Joseph Bella. "Eight Have Won Campaign Grand Prize Award of 1960 Visit To Yugoslavia," *Zajedničar (The Fraternalist),* April 1, 1959.

"Hall to be Dedicated this Evening," *Harrisburg Daily Independent,* Feb 23, 1903. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Hickox, Katie and Stacey Evers. "5,000 chant 'free Croatia' at Capitol," *The Plain Dealer,* July 27th, 1991. Accessed via Newspapers.com

Hout, Michael and Joshua R. Goldstein, "How 4.5 Million Irish Immigrants Became 40 Million Irish Americans: Demographic and Subjective Aspects of the Ethnic Composition of White Americans," *American Sociological Review* 59, no. 1 (1994): 64–82. https://doi.org/10.2307/2096133.

"Italians in the Dance," *The Daily News*, Dec. 28, 1903. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Jenkins, Richard. *Rethinking Ethnicity.* 2nd ed. London: SAGE Publications, 2008.

Jenkins, Richard. *Social Identity.* 3rd ed. London: Routledge, 2014.

Joliet Croatian Cultural Club. "Home." Accessed April 8, 2025. https://croatianculturalclub.com.

Jones, Maldwyn Allen. *American Immigration*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965.

Kadilak, Karen. "Tambura Across Generations," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* July 28, 2024. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Kasinitz, Philip, and Mary C. Waters. "Becoming white or becoming mainstream?: defining the endpoint of assimilation." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50, no. 1 (2024): 95-113.

Kazal, Russell A. *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Kellogg, Caroline. "Slavonian Hall Added Color to Old Town," *The News Tribune (Tacoma),* Nov 11, 1979.

Kennedy, Michael. "'A Deed Agreeable to God': Andrija Artuković and Croat Ustaše Connections with Ireland." *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 25 (2014): 187–201. https://doi.org/10.3318/isia.2014.25.17.

Kepple, David E. "War doesn't threaten local Yugoslav club," *Dayton Daily News,* February 21, 1993, Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Kline, Benjamin. "History may speak loudest," *Dayton Daily News,* October 19, 1995, Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Lamont, Michèle, and Virág Molnár. "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences." *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (2002): 167–195. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.28.110601.141107.

Laubenthal, Barbara. "Introduction: Assimilation, Integration or Transnationalism? An Overview of Theories of Migrant Incorporation." *International Migration* 61, no. 1 (2023): 84–91. https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.13118.

Levine-Rasky, Cynthia. *Whiteness Fractured*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013.

Library of Congress. “The Great Arrival.” *Italian Americans: The Immigrant Experience*. Accessed May 3, 2025. https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/italian/the-great-arrival/#:~:text=In%20the%201880s%2C%20they%20numbered,the%20nation's%20foreign%2Dborn%20population.

Littlejohn, Donna. “Yugoslav club collecting aid,” *News-Pilot*, September 27, 1991, Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Macecevic, Michelle A. “Yugoslavia comments,” *The Plain Dealer*, July 22, 1991. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Mansur, Michael. “Area festivals celebrate cultures, help charities,” *The Kansas City Star*, Sep. 8, 1996. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

“Meeting Tonight Paves Way for Campaign,” *The San Francisco Examiner*, Apr. 9, 1941. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

“Memorials,” *The Akron Beacon Journal*, March 7, 2021. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Miller, Paula K. "Hegemonic whiteness: Expanding and operationalizing the conceptual framework." *Sociology Compass* 16, no. 4 (2022): 1-18.

Miller, William F. “Croatians welcome home ‘hero’,” *The Plain Dealer*, August 7, 1990. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Mounk, Yascha. *The Great Experiment: Why Diverse Democracies Fall Apart and How They Can Endure*. New York: Penguin Press, 2022.

“Municipal Resolution,” *The San Francisco Examiner*, Sep. 9, 1916. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Murphy Dean E. and Faye Fiore. “Southland Serbs, Croats Reignite Hatreds,” *The Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 1992. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Nagel, Caroline R. "Rethinking Geographies of Assimilation." *The Professional Geographer* 61, no. 3 (2009): 400–407. https://doi.org/10.1080/00330120902941753.

National Federation of Croatian Americans Cultural Foundation. Accessed June 1, 2025. https://nfcacf.org.

“National Head to be Speaker,” *The Escanaba Daily Press*, July 23, 1941. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

“Natives of Countries Freed Give to War Aid,” *The Anaconda Standard*, Nov. 19, 1918. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

“Neighborhood Museum” article, February 22, 1989. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

“Neighborhood Museum” article, June 4, 1989. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Nelli, Humbert S. *From Immigrants to Ethnics: The Italian Americans*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Nelson, Rick. “New Old Town festival features jazz, vino,” *The News Tribune*, February 6, 2004.

“Obituaries,” *Herald News*, March 2, 2022. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

“Obituaries,” *Omaha World Herald*, October 25, 2000. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

“Obituaries” *The Plain Dealer*, October 1, 2021. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s.* 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 1994.

"Other Events," *The Cleveland Press*, April 10, 1964. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Park, Robert E. *The Immigrant Press and Its Control.* New York: Harper & Brothers, 1922.

Portes, Alejandro, and Rubén G. Rumbaut. *Immigrant America: A Portrait*. 4th ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.

Prpic, George J. *The Croatian Immigrants in America*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1971.

QCOnline. *Croatian Crest Club's Final Fish Fry*. YouTube video, 3:39. Posted April 4, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXFgduAMZ7Y.

Ragazzi, Francesco. "The Croatian 'Diaspora Politics' of the 1990s: Nationalism Unbound?" In *Transnational Societies, Transterritorial Politics: Migrations from the (Post)Yugoslav Area*, edited by Ulf Brunnbauer, 145–167. Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2009.

Ripp, Bart. "Slavonian Society celebrates 100 years at home in Tacoma," *The News Tribune*, April 6, 2001. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Sáenz, Rogelio, and Karen Manges Douglas. "A Call for the Racialization of Immigration Studies: On the Transition of Ethnic Immigrants to Racialized Immigrants." *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1, no. 1 (2015): 166–180. https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649214559287.

Sanders, Jimy M. "Ethnic boundaries and identity in plural societies." *Annual Review of Sociology* 28, no. 1 (2002): 327-357.

Saric, Maria."Yugoslav oppression," *The Plain Dealer*, September 10, 1990. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

"SIBS Notice," *The San Francisco Examiner*, June 15, 1904. Accessed via Newspapers.com/

Silkenbeumer, Leoni, and Andreas Wernet. "Biographische Identität und Objektive Hermeneutik: Methodologische Überlegungen zum narrativen Interview." *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 12, no. 3 (2011). https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-12.3.1744.

Simich, Lisa. "SP club's name should include all ethnic regions," *News-Pilot*, June 2, 1992, Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Skrbiš, Zlatko. *Long-Distance Nationalism: Diasporas, Homelands and Identities*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999.

"Slavonian Club Gives Sadloch Endorsement," *The Herald-News*, Oct. 20, 1953. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

"Slavonian Club Meeting," *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, Oct. 17, 1951.

"SLAVONIC IMB Society," *The San Francisco Examiner*, Aug 13, 1887.

Smajda, Jon, and Joseph Gerteis. "Ethnic Community and Ethnic Boundaries in a "Sauce-Scented Neighborhood"" *Sociological Forum*, vol. 27, no. 3 (2012): 617-640.

Smith, Anthony D. *National Identity*. London: Penguin Books, 1991.

Soyer, Daniel. *Jewish Immigrant Associations and American Identity in New York, 1880–1939: Jewish Landsmanshaftn in American Culture*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2018.

"SP Workers Form Club For Culjis," *The Sacramento Bee*, Nov. 1, 1951. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Stabrowski, Filip. "New-build gentrification and the everyday displacement of Polish immigrant tenants in Greenpoint, Brooklyn." *Antipode* 46, no. 3 (2014): 794-815.

"Sweep to M'Kinley," *The Edwardsville Intelligencer*, Apr. 12, 1946. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Sword, Doug. “McCloskey lists only his salary in report,” *Evansville Courier and Press*, June 12, 1992. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

“Tamburitzen concert Jan. 27,” *News-Pilot*, January 20, 1995. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

“Time is Short for His Reply,” *The Indiana Gazette*, Aug. 19, 1950.

“The Croatians are Loyal,” *Oklahoma State Register*, May 17, 1917. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Tölölyan, Khachig. "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 5, no. 1 (1996): 3–36. https://doi.org/10.3138/diaspora.5.1.3.

Torkelson, Jason, and Douglas Hartmann. "The racialization of ethnicity: The new face of White ethnicity in postmillennial America." *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 6, no. 3 (2020): 302-318.

“U.S. Citizenship Urged,” *The Oregonian*, Feb. 5, 1919. Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Van Gorp, Jasmijn, and Kevin Smets. "Diaspora Organizations, Imagined Communities and the Versatility of Diaspora: The Case of Former Yugoslav Organizations in the Netherlands." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 18, no. 1 (2015): 70–85. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549414557803.

Waters, Mary C. *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

Wilemon, Tom. “Can another casino be squeezed into Point Cadet?” *Sun Herald*, June 23, 2005.

Wimmer, Andreas. *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Wimmer, Andreas. "The making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries: A multilevel process theory." *American Journal of Sociology* 113, no. 4 (2008): 970-1022.

Winland, Daphne N. “We Are Now an Actual Nation: The Impact of National Independence on the Croatian Diaspora in Canada.” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 4, no. 1 (1995): 3–29. https://doi.org/10.3138/diaspora.4.1.3.

“Yugoslav American Club announces 2 scholarships,” *News-Pilot*, October 12, 1991, Accessed via Newspapers.com.

“Yugoslav club plans Western Nite,” *News-Pilot*, April 28, 1988, Accessed via Newspapers.com.

“Yugoslav club women hold fall fashion show,” *News-Pilot*, October 20, 1988, Accessed via Newspapers.com.

Zloza, Marlene A. “Group lauds 100 years of fellowship,” *The Times*, Aug 20, 2007.

Zolberg, Aristide R., and Long Litt Woon. "Why Islam is Like Spanish: Cultural Incorporation in Europe and the United States." *Politics & Society* 27, no. 1 (1999): 5–38. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329299027001002