

Reviews

Val Colic-Peisker. 2004. *Split Lives: Croatian Australian Stories*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press. ISBN: 1920731083, 300 pp.

Migration may be one of the most common social processes, but there remains much about it that goes unmentioned and unexamined. The human drama associated with migration gives the process its distinct pathos, yet all too often it occupies the margins. While migrant stories are often quite mundane, linked to personal ambition, new challenges, hope or even a sense of adventure, they can also be heartbreaking and tragic. Either way, they are worth telling, preserving and reflecting upon.

This is not a book that dissects the migration experience in a rigorous, scientific way and it does not directly elucidate on structural or otherwise patterns of migration from Croatia. Rather, it is a by-product of a PhD that involved extensive ethnographic fieldwork with Croatians in Western Australia. While the original research for the thesis has since appeared in numerous publications in Australia and internationally, this volume contains migrant stories that would otherwise be forgotten or discarded.

This collection of stories will shed some light on our understanding of the ways in which political events, war, poverty, patriarchal culture and economic crisis – a potent mix of ‘push’ factors – are mapped onto human experience. Just as one cannot understand nationalism without appreciating the way in which ethnic collectivities can be mobilised, so one can hardly be expected to understand the migration experience without delving into the complexities of factors that lead to, and accompany, the migration journey. It is a well-established wisdom that migration does not begin with the act of departure from the homeland, nor does it stop with settlement.

In this volume, a short introduction that provides a brief outline of Croatian history, with a particular focus on the post-Second World War experience, is followed by life stories of eight Croatian migrants to Australia. The stories are narrated in the first person and provide a dynamic account of the trials and tribulations of migration. The book does not homogenise the Croatian migration experience but constructs Croatian migration as something inherently diverse. Indeed, what is particularly useful about the selection of

these stories is that the migration experiences they represent vary greatly: the migrants come from different regions, arrived under different circumstances, and with different ambitions and levels of education. Yet, they all arrived against the backdrop of social change that, in the last half century or more, resulted in changes in state boundaries, political regimes, disrupted communities and socio-economic conditions.

Each story in this volume is implicitly linked to a specific set of considerations, such as class, gender, transnational family, or economic opportunity. Jo, for example, was a young conscript when the Second World War came to an end and he ended up as a political refugee, arriving in Australia during the height of the post-war immigration boom in 1949. He was heavily involved in Croatian community activities and organizations, and actively worked towards Croatian independence. He paid his first visit to his homeland in 1989, after four decades of exile. His story is rather typical of Croatian post-Second World War refugees who arrived in Australia during the 1940s and 1950s.

Danica, on the other hand, was an accidental migrant. She moved to Australia due to twin pressures: opportunities presented to her by her Croatian-Australian relatives, and her parental fears associated with the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. Surely, the reasoning went, migration to a distant land is a better choice than an uncertain future in the homeland. Perhaps, but neither Danica nor her parents knew that she was a part of her Australian relatives' marriage plans; plans that ended in violence and court proceedings by her adopted family who demanded reimbursement of her travel costs to Australia. Danica's story is one of patriarchal gender arrangements, transnational family connections and match-making; all against the background of political turbulence in the homeland.

Finally, there is a story of Vlado, an engineer from Zagreb. He and his new wife decided to migrate after experiencing disillusionment with the state of Yugoslavia and calculating that it would take them 200 years to repay the mortgage. Upon arrival, he was almost instantaneously transformed from an engineer into a qualified broom operator – a demotion that only took a short while to reverse. What is interesting about Vlado's story is that his outlook on life in Australia differed greatly from the earlier immigrants, and his capacity to integrate into the new environment was facilitated by his education and more cosmopolitan outlook, a legacy of his urban upbringing and education.

This is a collection of stories by ordinary Croatian migrants caught in the more or less extraordinary dramas of our times. One might read this book as simply a collection of *migrant stories*. Somebody else may see it as a series of stories of *Croatian migrants*. Both readings are correct but what is important is that these stories help us understand and appreciate the dramatic impact that political, historical and economic factors have had on their lives. After reading the book, the reader will be in no position to disagree with the author's statement that people usually don't 'emigrate from Croatia out of boredom' (p. 19).

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Homero Freitas de Andrade, *O diabo solto em Moscou: a vida de Mikhail Bulgakov; Prosa autobiográfica*, São Paulo: Editoria da Universidade de São Paulo, 2002, 584 pp. ISBN 8531406110.

It is not often that books on Russian literature from Latin America impinge upon the consciousness of Slavists in other parts of the world. This may be simply because they are few and far between, or perhaps because those that are written do not cross the language barrier. The present life of Bulgakov will be of interest to specialists in twentieth-century Russian literature, though the fact that it is in Portuguese may have a certain deterrent effect. The author is a Russianist and a translator, known for his Portuguese versions of stories by Babel. This book is based on his 1994 doctoral dissertation from the University of São Paulo.

The first part, 'A Vida do Senhor Bulgakov', some 270 pages in length, is, as the title indicates, a biography, and includes a list of personalities and a 12-page bibliography. The genesis of Bulgakov's works is described, and, if there is little by way of literary analysis, this may be justified by the intended focus on 'life' rather than 'works'. A readable and fairly detailed chronological account is given of Bulgakov's career, based on well-known Russian sources. This means that Marietta Chudakova's splendid *Zhizneopisanie* has pride of place in the footnotes, along with the collection *Vospominaniia o Mikhaile Bulgakove*, assembled by E. S. Bulgakova and S. Liandres (Moscow 1988). It is notable that the range of sources utilized is a good deal narrower than it