

## REVIEWS

**Marjan Drnovšek, ed.** *Historical and Cultural Perspectives on Slovenian Migration*. Ljubljana: ZRC Publishing, 2007. 204 pp., €13.50 [= \$21.24] (paper). ISBN: 9789612540432.

Slovenia “sealed its borders almost hermetically after the [Second World] War,” writes historian and ethnologist Marjan Drnovšek in this new volume of essays (31). However, since 1991 the isolationist attitude has disappeared and the academic community throughout the world has benefited greatly now that Slovenia has come into its own as a historical and political reality.

The seven studies comprising this new collection provide ample corroboration of Slovenia’s recent self-assertion as a country that is open and engaged, and furthermore a country with a place in today’s world, a place and position earned through years of struggles and interference by outside forces. All seven essays, despite their thematic differences, study Slovenia from a shared global perspective. If an author can write a literary work offering a personal world view, a personal *weltanschauung*, then this small volume does the same for the nation that is Slovenia. Furthermore, it does so straightforwardly, warts and all. For such a young state, this attitude is remarkably mature.

For example, the opening essay touches what may well be the heart of the Slovene people, their strong Roman Catholicism. In this essay, titled “The Attitudes of the State and the Catholic Church towards Slovenian Emigration,” volume editor Marjan Drnovšek outlines how the Church shaped the Slovene population’s perception of the various departures of its compatriots. He begins in the nineteenth century and proceeds by

distinguishing three periods of emigration (before 1918, followed by 1918–41, and finally 1945–91). He describes the subtle—and sometimes not so subtle—influence of Church policy affecting those that left Slovenia. He outlines the efforts of Slovene clergy to maintain a presence in the various countries where Slovenes settled through a practical orientation in their pastoral work. He juxtaposes early American experiences, particularly those of Bishop Baraga, with later ones, and includes migrations to France, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, all of which changed how the Church organized and was organized by Slovene expatriates. Drnovšek also points to the fear that in each of these new homelands the practice of the faith might decrease among emigrants. Nor does he gloss over the incompatibility of state and church, of communism and religion, under the Yugoslav regime. He also suggests that a more commanding influence over the Slovene people, both emigrants and not, was exerted by their culture. His simple example of the Avsenik Quintet, who would draw Catholic supporters to a pro-Yugoslav club whereas political events would not, clearly illustrates his point.

Both religion and politics were promoted by Slovenia's intellectuals, who are the focus of the next essay by Irena Gantar Godina: "Slovenian Intellectuals: Atypical Emigrants in Atypical Destinations." She refers to them as "atypical emigrants"—that is, their departure was a temporary one, and they almost always returned to their homeland. First and foremost among these were the students that left to study in other European countries. Godina details how in the 1800s the Slovene academic community was largely formed from the outside: in Vienna, in Graz, later Prague, and also in Croatia, Poland, and Russia. She also discusses the issue of blatant national stereotyping and anti-Semitism that developed in this intellectual group as it sought a place among other Slavic nations and in the Germanized environment of the Habsburg Monarchy. Her research indicates that it was not until after 1918, when Slovenes at long last received the opportunity to study at their own universities, that they could assert their own creativity, their own culture, and their own economic activity.

Janja Žitnik's essay, "Slovenian Émigré Literature: Ignored, Forgotten, and Rediscovered," looks at the emigration experience through literature. She presents an excellent defense of her theory of how literature envisages the Slovene émigré. Her diachronic overview of the authors of Slovene origin that have written from abroad is admirably thorough; furthermore, it is illustrative of the struggles and contradictions that problematize all émigré literature. She takes the risk of assessing the literary production of Slovenes writing from abroad in terms of what she calls "quality" (67), which initially lacks a clear definition or critical paradigm. Later, however, she clarifies this: quality does not encompass degrees of nostalgia (a trap that many other émigré literatures have fallen into in order

to attract a reading public from among their co-nationals), nor is quality determined in terms of language (here she points to Louis Adamič, 1898–1951, who wrote exclusively in English). In fact, she remains firm in her assertion that the Slovene language remains vital despite the fact that Slovene authors may use other languages (81). Nor does she assign quality in terms of the division between old (pre-WWII) and new (post-WWII) literatures. Instead, quality resides in that émigré literature that becomes “an important part of Slovenian national literature, enriching it with new literary experiences, creative impulses, themes, and aspects. Émigré literature explores not only the nation’s collective cultural and social life, but also the fate of the individual and his or her intimate experience of the world” (82).

The essay “Slovenian Immigrant Artists and Art Production in Buenos Aires: From Local (Ethnic) to National and Transnational Art Worlds” by Kristina Toplak focuses on artists, giving the reader an overview of artistic endeavors in Buenos Aires, and specifically of art pieces that present and valorize the émigré experience there. Toplak insists that personal experience is not the sole source of artistic value; it must also be national and global, and it must consider alterations and transfigurations in identity. Slovene émigrés have lived in Buenos Aires since the 1870s; since then, much energy has gone into avoiding integration into the larger social superstructure. In effect, a diaspora has appeared. Toplak refers to this as a “‘self-sufficient’ community” (97) inhabiting a socio-political environment perceived as “a country where everything is wrong” (99). By this, the diaspora means a country that does not espouse its own values, its own habits. Toplak writes of artists “torn between Argentina and Slovenia,” emphasizing this split in her use of pseudonyms to describe the people mentioned in her article. The intransigence of identity that she indicates seems to have undergone some modifications since 1991, and she optimistically envisages that “Slovenians in Argentina [have] started to connect more intensely with Slovenia and some other European countries, but primarily with the environment in which they [live]” (105). Behind her carefully considered observations, we find the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, whose concern for cultural capital and explanation of how it informs social groups finds a valid illustration in Toplak’s descriptions. Toplak looks forward to “a transnational identity, transnational connections, and transnational social activities” (106), all reminiscent of Marshall McLuhan’s “global village,” or Umberto Eco’s invitation to open ourselves to the “Other.”

Mirjam Milharčič Hladnik’s essay, “Historical and Narrative Perspective of Slovenian Women Migrants’ Experiences: Social Networking, Gender Priorities and Questions Of Identity,” also addresses the diasporic experience of Slovene emigrants with a focus on the preservation of ethnic identity within the “melting pot” policy of the United States. I am writing from Canada, where the multicultural mosaic is openly

encouraged and has explicitly been part of the political picture since 1971, when Canada became the first nation in the world to accept multiculturalism as an official policy. Yet Milharčič Hladnik address problems and experiences common to all émigrés (at this point I will begin to call them *immigrants* to signal the change to a new identity). Preserving cultural heritage is not as specific to women in Canada as Milharčič Hladnik has found in her extensive American experience of collecting immigration stories, conversations, and interviews. In addition to being a delight to read, this essay is of fundamental importance to immigration and diaspora studies. It repeats a lesson that we have already read in Drnovšek's work—namely that polkas and, as we will see later, *bureks*, often determine a culture to a far greater extent than politics, religion, or any other of the overarching typologies. Milharčič Hladnik is absolutely right in her assessment of second- and third-generation Slovenes in North America, where “very few speak the language of their ancestors, but they value their ethnic origin and tradition” (122). She does not ask the question that Janja Žitnik posed in her essay on literature: Can you be Slovene without the Slovene language? Žitnik answers in the affirmative, pointing to Louis Adamič, Vladimir Kos, and Rose Mary Prosen as models because all of them write in other languages. On the other hand, Milharčič Hladnik indicates that perhaps the most poignant national “identifier” today is actually that personal self-identification born through the reality of our wired, globalized world. One of her interviewees says simply, following Marshall McLuhan's prescience, “My homeland is my laptop and my purse” (128). One of my students put it somewhat differently in a recent conversation, claiming that the world is so small today that he needed, wanted, and used all three of his passports, depending on where he traveled. Milharčič Hladnik's essay ends with a look forward to hyphenated identities in Europe. Many countries of the EU are already grappling with this issue; Italy and France, for example, wear this dilemma on their sleeves. Can Slovenia be far behind?

Marina Lukšič Hacin continues this very conversation in her essay “To Think and Live Multiculturalisms in Various Migration Contexts of European Union Member States.” By tracing the diachronic development of the EEC, and then the EU, Lukšič Hacin focuses on the migrant—more specifically, the “temporary guest worker”—and on how the naturalization policies of various EU countries condition everyday life for migrants. She discusses the effect of the Schengen Agreement on employment policies including quotas. She points to the pressing need for new non-discriminatory regulations that recognize multicultural realities, and she calls for an examination of xenophobic attitudes that often arise when large diasporic groups move from place to place. Such a review must encompass the divergent concepts of civilization, society, and culture. In her call for biocentric awareness, which recognizes that humans are but one form of

culture, she echoes the fundamental work of Michel Serres on the world as object. Her analysis moves beyond the issue of the Slovene immigrant/migrant/émigré and proposes important theoretical perspectives for future considerations of multiculturalism.

Yet, how many migrants will be able to stop and consider such an abstract point of view? The struggle to establish self-identity, a place for family, and a way of acceptance is an everyday battle, a daily preoccupation. How appropriate therefore that this anthology recognizes precisely this in its closing essay: “Burek, nein danke! The Story of an Immigrant Dish and a Nationalist Discourse.” The concept of immigrant food, here represented by the *burek*, is much more than sustenance; it provides a metaphorical framework signifying all that an immigrant is and does. In the words of the essayist, Jernej Mlekuž, it becomes a *meta-burek*. He correctly states that eating or not eating *burek* becomes a political act in much the same way that the Italo-Somali writer Igiaba Scego presents sausages in her short story “Salsicce”—even at the level of children, there is an awareness of a cultural transgression vs. cultural acceptance through foods, as shown in the Canadian story *The Sandwich* and in the American story *Watch Out for the Chicken Feet in Your Soup*. Tracing the history of the *burek*, he calls on poststructuralist and postmodern theorists Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Edward Said as the theoretical apparatus for his observations. Even in the name itself, *burek*, there exists a linguistic politicization. This is true of all national foods: translators of literary works inevitably find the task of translating names of food hardest of all. To “Other” (to use Edward Said’s idea) a nation through its food is the easiest way of ostracizing, discriminating, and demeaning. As Mlekuž rightly contends, it can be done by anyone; it is not just the result of the “media machinery” (191). His call for the invention of a transnational “*euroburek*” becomes a fascinating consideration in light of the many European foods that have recently taken on an isolation of prestige, under the guise of authenticity (for example, champagne, tokai wines, pizza margherita; the list gets longer almost daily).

The essays in this volume will inform, provoke, and please. Each one provides an extensive bibliography for the reader. This book will be of interest not only to those that would like to know more about Slovenia, but those that desire to know more about Slovenia’s place in the globalized world today.

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**Evald Flisar, ed.** *From the Heart of Europe: Anthology of Contemporary Slovenian Writing*. Guilderland, NY and Norman, OK: Texture Press, 2007. 217 pp., \$14.95 (paper). ISBN-10: 097120618X, ISBN-13: 978-0971206182.

The anthology *From the Heart of Europe* contains modern Slovene short narrative prose as well as excerpts from Vlado Žabot's novel *Sukub* (The Succubus, 2003) and Feri Lainšček's collection *Misljice: deset pravljic* (Small Thoughts: Ten Fairytales, 2000).<sup>1</sup> Both the collection's title and the foreword by Matej Bogataj titled "Contemporary Slovenian Literature: A Cohabitation, in Principle, of Styles and Generations" demonstrate the work's additional intention to present Slovene culture and history to American readers, place Slovene literature in a European context, and offer some basic information on Slovene history from sixth-century Carantania to the present (with particular emphasis on the attainment of independence in 1991). Throughout their history, the Slovenes were closely connected with the development of language and literature; it is therefore fitting that Bogataj's preface pays close attention to Slovene mythology and literature,

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<sup>1</sup> In the foreword to this collection, which is filled with folk motifs, the author explains: "Because of the special creative process that allowed me various approaches to infinite layers of fairytale tradition, I have named these fairytales *mislice* [small thoughts]."