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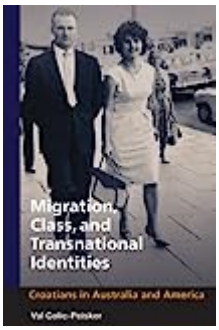

Val Colic-Peisker. *Migration, Class and Transnational Identities: Croatians in Australia and America.* Studies of World Migrations Series. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008. xii + 252 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-03360-5.

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Croatian Immigrants in Australia: Class versus Ethnicity as Factors in Identity

Val Colic-Peisker's ethnography of Croatian immigrants in the Australian city of Perth sets itself the brave task of dampening migration scholars' fascination with ethnicity and calling attention to class as the determinant of migrants' transnational experiences. This is the third monograph on Croatians in Australia to be published in twelve years, but the first to take this line. Colic-Peisker's study was preceded by Dona Kolar-Panov's *Video, War and the Diasporic Imagination* (1997) and Zlatko SkrbiÅ¡'s *Long Distance Nationalism: Diasporas, Homelands, and Identities* (1999), both of which focused on the diasporic transnationalism through which migrants stayed in touch with and provided material support for the homeland during the post-Yugoslav conflict, that is to say, (from their perspective) Croatia's war of independence.

Although the book's title implies a full-scale comparison of the Australian and American (or rather U.S.) experiences of Croatian migrants' acculturation, Australia far outweighs the United States when it comes to the content of the book. Observations about the relative status of migrants, in particular "white ethnics," a term used by the author, in Australia and the United States recur every so often, and there is a brief comparison of Croatian cultural and political organization in the two states (pp. 82-83). For the most part, however, the book represents an anthropological and sociological study of an Australian community, and is all the stronger for it. Colic-Peisker engages with Australian sociological debates about multiculturalism and assimilation, hints at how changes in Australian immigration policy structured the profile of Croatian migration to this particular host-land, and grounds her findings in her interviews with forty working-class and middle-class Croatians negotiating the workplaces and sprawling suburbs of Perth.

Colic-Peisker situates herself within academic debates on migration by attempting to bridge what she refers to as the "old" migration studies (the sociological study of how migrants interact with their host country) and the "new" migration studies' paradigm of transnationalism–the contacts migrants retain with their homelands amid flows of cultural products, material goods, information, capital, and people (p. 6). The typ-

ical "ethnic transnationalism" of activities across state borders that "nurtures territorial, ethnic, and national attachments," she argues, aptly describes the diasporic migrants of Kolar-Panov and SkrbiÅ¡ (working-class migrants from poor backgrounds in rural Dalmatia who arrived in Australia during the 1950s and 1960s), yet does not account for the identities of a second group of Croatian migrants that Colic-Peisker encountered. These were young professionals who moved from Croatia to Australia in the 1980s and 1990s, who situated themselves instead within a cosmopolitan framework based "on a deterritorial, acquired (and therefore changeable and transferable) professional identification" (p. 212). The core of the working-class cohort's identity, Colic-Peisker finds, was ethnicity and their town, village, or island of origin, whereas education and profession was the core of identity for the younger middle-class cohort. The former "see their social position determined purely by ethnicity, by being 'strangers' in Australia," while the latter "recognize their class as well as ethnic position and navigate their life chances on the labor market accordingly," for example, making use abroad of their privilege as white Australians (p. 18). The two cohorts of migrants had little in common and rarely encountered each other socially. The working-class group constructed "the emotional cement of the ethnic community" through nostalgic practices, such as folk music and dance, card games, religious belief, and attendance at the local Croatian club (p. 98). None of these activities appealed to the young professionals, who rejected the stereotypes of "low occupation status, broken English, and ethnonationalism," which had become attached to Croatians in Australia (p. 167). They constructed their identity instead around access to a global professional milieu to which their qualifications–and their hard-won proficiency in the English language–entitled them. Migrating to Australia facilitated and corroborated their membership of this elite. While "a collectivistic ethnic-ascribed identity is a central axis for the working-class cohort" of Croatians, "the identity axis of the middle-class cohort is professionally achieved, individualistic, and secular.... The professional core of identity of the younger cohort became (even more) globally validated and Westernized through life and work in Australia" (p. 169).

The contrast between these two migrant cohorts underpins the book. Colic-Peisker begins by introducing readers to the migrants' homeland, Croatia, and offering an overview of Croatian sociological theories on "how rural culture was co-opted into the socialist worldview" (p. 41). Here, she seeks to understand the "intersection of traditional, modern and 'socialist' values," as well as the generational value shift of late socialism, which she expects to have shaped her informants' values (p. 37). She draws on Ronald Inglehart's theory of the "culture shift" in advanced industrial society (*Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* [1990]) as an explanation for the differences between her two cohorts. She shows that a generation brought up in material security, like the young professionals who were born during Yugoslavia's economically successful 1950s and 1960s, is likely to develop "postmaterialist" rather than "materialist" values; therefore, this group "seeks goals beyond the purely material, such as freedom, self-expression, quality of life, and self-actualization" (p. 53). Two further chapters follow this orientation in the sociology of the sending country: one short piece on the global context of migration (more than half of which is actually taken up by a history of Croatian emigration) and a longer overview of multiculturalism and egalitarianism in Australia. The kernel of the book is contained in chapters 4 and 5, which discuss the different experiences of the two cohorts, illustrated by a number of biographical narratives. What would in many other cases be the headline story of a study of Croatian migration–the concept of the Croatian diaspora and nationalist sociability and activism–does not appear here until chapters 6 and 7. By this point in the book, the author has contextualized well her analysis of the migrants' social practices, their investment in their homes and gardens (not that "investment" is the right word to describe the attitudes of a group that, in contrast to the host society, cherished the use value rather than exchange value of their homes), and their working lives. A quantitative values survey among Croatian migrants takes up the last chapter, before a conclusion that attempts to refine the concepts of transnationalism and diaspora in light of the author's research findings.

Colic-Peisker first encountered a number of her informants, and indeed first reflected on the differences between the two groups of migrants, when she started working as a public service interpreter soon after her own arrival in Australia–an experience which suggests that, to paraphrase the Shakespearean adage, some are born to ethnography, some achieve ethnography, and some have ethnography thrust upon them. Colic-Peisker counted herself among the cohort of young professionals from Croatia (those whose ability in English unlocked the possibility of acculturation) when she began to visit the schools, hospitals, courts, and police stations of Perth–"What a bonanza for a sociologist!" indeed–and to meet older, working-class Croatians who had built up and re-

mained in their own ethnic networks (p. 3). "Their stories also revealed to me that their migration experience was very different from the experience of recently arrived Croatians, including my own," Colic-Peisker explains (p. 3). "I felt a little guilty, as if I was hiding my true identity from my interlocutors, a curious social scientist as well as a recent migrant 'disguised' as an interpreter. With the force of fate, this job that I had never planned to do led me toward a formal research project exploring identities in transnational context" (p. 3). The bulk of Colic-Peisker's reflection on her insider position is contained in a separate essay that she published in an edited collection, but her status as a co-national is inseparable from her ethnographic reflections here.[1] In particular, her understanding of the norm of hospitality in working-class Croatian homes seemed to overcome her informants' frequent suspicion of social research: "A visitor who refuses the offered food and drink defines herself as an outsider and, therefore, implicitly, cannot be trusted.... The ritual of hospitality also empowers the hosts, as the visitor accepts socializing on their terms" (p. 27). Accepting gifts from her informants' gardens (the site where people with repetitive manual jobs could keep up "a sense of being a complete person" and "show off one's skills" by growing fruit and vegetables, sometimes even keeping poultry) likewise contributed to the rapport and avoided the embarrassment of refusal (p. 103). Once, when Colic-Peisker asked for a white tea at a women's fundraising event, the coffee-drinking women from the neighborhood's working-class Croatian community "recognized this was an 'English way' ... and, implicitly, my choice was seen as un-Croatian" (p. 200).

As befits an ex-interpreter, Colic-Peisker makes language an important part of her ethnography. What distinguishes the two migrant cohorts, besides class and values, is their competence in English: the older working-class group came to Australia when English instruction for migrants were few and far between, acquired a limited vocabulary through work, and used Croatian at home and among friends. The younger professionals could not have entered the country under the Australian immigration regulations of the time without some proficiency in English and had to refine their skills further on arrival in order to succeed in the professional fields to which they aspired. Their high aspirations sometimes led to frustration that they had not lost their foreign accent even though the accent seemed not to have caused them any practical difficulties. The older working-class migrants' relative lack of English, in contrast, put them at a disadvantage in several regards: they could not negotiate with bosses (except ethnic entrepreneurs) or take part in a union, they missed out on the promotions that skilled laborers could ordinarily look forward to as they got older, they were at higher risk of industrial injury if they did not understand safety instructions (this problem was compounded by a norm of masculine gender identity in which strenuous physical labor in order to feed one's family garnered respect), and they had to rely on ethnic media sources rather than the Australian mainstream media for information about the wider world. The Croatian ethnic community, like the communities of Italians or Greeks, provided enough services to fulfill the needs its members could not fulfill in general Australian society. In contrast, younger professionals could not join their desired stratum of "skilled itinerants who search for opportunities across the globe" unless they did speak English (p. 87). English-language skills, Colic-Peisker argues, have thus become "the basis for class distinction in non-English-speaking countries" and, indeed, a basis for societies' perceptions of immigrants as higher or lower status (p. 87). The commonsense idea of language as an ethnic marker is also complicated by the Croatian-Australian case. Colic-Peisker observes that "it is hard to say without hesitation that the two cohorts speak the same language," since the older working-class migrants spoke the distinctive dialect(s) of Dalmatia and its islands (p. 166). The urban professionals spoke standard Croatian instead, and "language differences sometimes reach the point of mutual incomprehension," with Colic-Peisker the interpreter more than once having to switch into the Dalmatian dialect in order to be understood (p. 166).

Colic-Peisker's observations about English point to one somewhat under-theorized aspect of the book: the role and power of the state in structuring the immigrant experience. As a new interpreter, she had expected to meet members of the same migrant cohort as herself on her assignments; yet she met only the older cohort, and realized eventually that this was a result of the Australian immigration reforms of the 1980s, which imposed a points test on prospective migrants that required both labor skills and English proficiency. Through these restrictions, the state narrowed down the pool of potential migrants and structured the future migrant cohorts in advance. However, the immigration procedure, and indeed migrants' interactions with the state's agents and institutions in general, are rarely mentioned, as significant a part of the migrants' experiences as they may well be (moreover, as a public service interpreter the author would have witnessed many such interactions herself). Chapter 3, on the hostland, would have been one

obvious place to discuss the impact of state power, yet most of the chapter is, in fact, concerned with social attitudes (multiculturalism and "ethnic food," the Australian myth of egalitarianism, "white ethnics," English and social mobility, and the social geography of Perth). These are an important feature of the host society but, by themselves, are insufficient to explain the state's immigration regime. The four-page history of Australian immigration policy that opens the chapter could have been greatly expanded: in particular, a historical account of the creation and development of Australia's stringent, much-imitated points-based system for immigration would have provided readers with a greater understanding of the political background to the ethnography. One is also left to wonder about immigrants of the same age as the young professionals who came to Australia in different circumstances, such as refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Perhaps so few Bosnian Croats qualified to enter Australia that their impact on the Croatian community was trivial; if so, we are not told even that, although we do know that "some ethnic Croats from Bosnia, who came as refugees in the 1990s" started going to the Croatian clubs in Perth but could not connect with the Dalmatian dialects and pastimes that dominated there (p. 172). The picture of contemporary migration is more complicated than a dichotomy between low-skilled economic migration to the rich West after World War II and highly skilled transnational migrant flows in the 1980s and 1990s, as Colic-Peisker acknowledges when she mentions U.S. "illegals" and "the difficult migration of (post)modern-day helots" late in the book (p. 217). Including low-skilled young migrants, or simply explaining that there were none to include, would have expanded the study by giving both a synchronic and a diachronic perspective on Colic-Peisker's key factor of class.

Although this study is rooted in Australian realities (so much so that it is hard to understand what "America" is doing in the title at all), it is still of some interest to anthropologists of Europe. One of the major debates in the anthropology of former Yugoslavia is the so-called rural-urban divide: the issue had been raised well before the fall of Yugoslavia, and was translated during the post-Yugoslav wars into an account of the war that associated the countryside with backwardness, war, and nationalism, and the city with progress, cosmopolitanism, and peace. One could argue that the consequences and constructions of Croatia's rural-urban divide (or rather, former Yugoslavia's rural-urban divide, since the phenomenon went well beyond Croatia) are played out in migrants' social practices half the world away. Colic-Peisker introduces the origins of this discourse by discussing the Ã©migrÃ© Croatian sociologist Dinko TomaÅ¡iÄ's idea of "Dinaric culture," the source of many an urban stereotype of the backward peasant.[2] Yet she does not take the opportunity to pursue the afterlife of his theory into the present day: a rich vein of Croatian ethnology that shows how rural social practices were transformed by (and commented on) the modernization policies of socialism, and a contemporary interest by both insiders and outsiders in the relative significance of ethnicity in the post-Yugoslav successor states, both go unmined. Colic-Peisker's observation that the cosmopolitanism of her young professionals "is an attribute of those who do not feel that ethnic and national belonging determine their identity" recalls the work of Stef Jansen on young city-dwellers in mid-1990s Croatia and Serbia (*Antinacionalizam: etnografija otpora u Beogradu i Zagrebu* [2005]), who rejected the dominant nationalist discourse that ethnicity should be the primary determinant of everyone's identity (p. 11). Jansen conducted his fieldwork in Zagreb and Belgrade between 1996 and 1998; his informants might well have belonged to the same age cohort and shared the same social background as Colic-Peisker's. There is similarly more to be said on the different concepts of kinship and care among the cohorts. "Global care chains" and the tensions they entail are an emerging topic of interest in migration studies, but the topic rarely comes up in this account, besides the problem that Australian-born children of Croatian migrants sometimes do not share the Croatian ethic of personally caring for an elderly parent.[3]

The major value of the study, however, is as a reminder that there is more to migration studies, and to post-Yugoslav studies, than the fashionable (and sometimes necessary) topic of ethnicity. While considering the differences among migratory cohorts produced by class (and by state immigration policy), we are invited to reflect on what would happen if class, rather than ethnicity, were to (again?) become the focus of our scholarly enquiry.

Notes

[1]. Val Colic-Peisker, "Representing One's Own 'Ethnic Community': The Experience of an Awkward Insider," in *Anthropologists in the Field: Cases in Participant Observation*, ed. Lynne Hume and Jane Mulcock (New York and West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2004), 82-94.

[2]. See Dinko TomaÅ¡iÄ, "The Structure of Balkan Society," *DruÅ¡tvena istraÅ¾ivanja* 2, no. 6 (1993), 939-

948. As cited by Colic-Peisker, this is a reprint of TomaÅ¡iÄ's original article from 1946.

[3]. On "global care chains," see, e.g., Julie Vullnetari and Russell King, " 'Does Your Granny Eat Grass?' On Mass Migration, Care Drain and the Fate of Older People in Rural Albania," *Global Networks* 8, no. 2 (2000): 139-171.