

Zlatko Skrbis, *Long-distance Nationalism: Diasporas, Homelands and Identities*. (Research in Migration and Ethnic Relations Series). Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1999. 201 pp. + figures and tables, \$65.95 (cloth). ISBN: 1859726720.

“Australia,” states a Melbourne-based Greek diplomat quoted in this book, “is the first line of defence in the battle for Macedonia” (3). The explanation of this paradoxical comment, which flies in the face of traditional concepts of geography and national identity, is a fitting introduction to the issues tackled in this work. Professor Skrbis has written, in essence, a solid sociological case study of renowned scholar Benedict Anderson’s concept of “long-distance nationalism.” Anderson has asserted that two powerful phenomena in advanced capitalist societies, mass migration and mass communications, make long-distance nationalism possible; nowadays members of a national group can, after moving to other countries or even other continents, easily retain their sense of “Old World” identity and, more portentously, play “virtual” (or at least non-voting) but often important roles on their homeland’s political scene.

It is common nowadays to assert that global economic interdependence, electronic media, the ease of jet travel, the transformation of the citizens of nation-states into interchangeable consumers, and the demands of the global economy are working to reduce the general level of nationalism or ethnic attachment and the general effectiveness of state power in many parts of the world. But the recent rise of far-right “ethnicized” political forces in Europe, such as those led by Le Pen, Haider, and Zhirinovsky, reminds us that nationalism has retained its potency. The gap between the world’s rich and poor nations keeps widening, indicating that differentiation and stratification, with their myriad negative effects, are still alive and well. Likewise, long-distance nationalism, which is the political consciousness or involvement of emigrants across international borders, is a reminder that information technology is a double-edged sword. The Internet, for instance, can bring people from diverse backgrounds together in chat rooms, and it can put all kinds of information at people’s fingertips around the world, thereby aiding the growth of civil society at the international level. But it can also allow like-minded people from similar backgrounds (say, co-nationals in various countries) the same opportunities, thereby strengthening nationalism. The virtues of the Internet are available to any group. Today people use the Internet and cable television to obtain nearly instant information on events in other countries, and we are thus better informed and more emotionally aware of the rest of the world. But this sense of immediacy divorced from proximity also means that passions of people around the world can be more quickly inflamed or misdirected, and assistance in the form of propaganda or money can be quickly delivered to any cause whatsoever.

As a global phenomenon, long-distance nationalism has two important repercussions that make it worthy of study. In terms of domestic politics, this issue boils down to nation-states now having to

reckon with the non-responsible (in Anderson's term) political participation of often unrealistic co-nationals living outside their political borders; this participation can reach toxic levels or assume corrosive forms in the modalities of money for certain political figures, nationalist propaganda, and weapons, although it can be restricted to the more benign activities of lobbying and fund-raising for humanitarian undertakings. In terms of world economics and diplomacy, case studies such as Skrbis' add weight to the nascent scholarly consensus that nationalism is not about to disappear, despite the apparent erosion of the nation-state's sovereignty by ever stronger international organizations, multi-national corporations, and the communication and information resources of the Internet. Specifically, Skrbis sets himself the task here of studying the Slovene and Croat diaspora groups of Australia in the 1990s in the light of two questions: Do they interact with their respective homelands in similar ways? And, do the attitudes of these diaspora groups change from the first to the second generation?

Skrbis based this book on interviews with over one hundred people in Adelaide, Melbourne, and Sydney. Slovene and Croatian respondents had, naturally enough, a sizable amount of common ground. Both stressed the uniqueness and significance of their nation, expressed hope that their homelands would remain ethnically "pure," eschewed anti-Semitism, and noted the harassment suffered by the Catholic Church in ex-Yugoslavia. They also commented on the prevalence of gossip and pressures for social conformity in the emigre communities.

Significant differences included the following: Australian-Croatians were more likely to marry within their group, to pass their language on to their children, to support their homeland through participation in local branches of Croatian political parties (which even compete for an allowed "diaspora vote"), and to envision returning to Europe when their homeland is "liberated." The Slovenes, for their part, were less vehemently anti-Serb and were willing to use the term "Yugoslav" to refer to a category of citizenship rather than as an ethnically or politically charged epithet. Finally, Slovenes used the term *južnjak* ("southerner") to denote an undifferentiated collection of "others," or non-Slovenes, in the former Yugoslavia, while Croats vented their spleen very specifically at Serbs, Yugoslavs, and, to a lesser degree, Bosniacs.

The study also reveals that there was no cooperation between the Slovene and Croat diaspora organizations. The Slovenes also generally included the Croats in the *južnjak* designation, which carried connotations of laziness and violence. Observers of the current dismal state of relations between Slovenia and Croatia—remarkably strained by border and economic issues—will note that both groups' attitudes and stereotypes discussed in this book continue to have their parallels in Europe.

Skrbis admirably fulfills his responsibility to account for the Slovene-Croatian differences in attitude. The facts that Slovenia had no state tradition of independence (especially not during World War II) and

that many of Slovenia's most politically active and anti-communist emigrants went to Argentina and not to Australia go a long way towards explaining the Australian-Slovene political stances. Other attitudes can be traced to the small size of the Slovene community there and, perhaps, to the members' focus on individual economic advancement. He also provides a telling analysis of the different levels of actual involvement of members of the two groups in homeland politics.

The only real flaw in this book is its lack of an index. It is also not the author's fault, though it is mysterious, why the British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data at the front of the volume classifies Skrbis' work as a study of Serbs (but not Slovenes) in Australia. Naturally, some interesting follow-up questions to Skrbis' interviews also present themselves. For instance, how do findings on the groups in Australia compare with studies on Slovene and Croat groups elsewhere? And what are we to make of the absence, in Slovene clubs, of maps indicating Slovene *irredenta*? Granted, Croats in the 1990s were far more active in trying to redeem their "lost territories" in Bosnia-Herzegovina than Slovenes were with northeastern Italy or the Austrian state of Carinthia, but is this absence of irredentism a particular attribute of Australian-Slovenes or is it shared by Slovenes in Slovenia? But these questions are just food for thought, not criticisms of the book, which is, this reviewer is happy to report, well written and well larded with colorful anecdotes as well as empirical evidence. Academics and students at the college level and above will get the most out of this work, which is clearly written and obviously has readers' comprehension (rather than their awe or mystification, as is too often the case in academic works with a high theoretical quotient) in mind.

As important as long-distance nationalism appears to be, readers should be aware that the other side in today's evolving debate over the future of nationalism has not been silenced. Many current studies stress the achievements and potential of international organizations such as the European Union; some even suggest that in the face of increased ethnic warfare or "balkanization," ever more countries will seek security by transferring some of their sovereignty to economic and political supra-national regimes. Might not this somewhat Hobbesian expectation, wonders this reviewer, be accentuated in the post-September 11 world as the United States grows ever more willing to use unilateral and pre-emptive force against perceived threats around the world?

Simply put, Skrbis's most fundamental finding is that Australian-Slovenes are *less* influenced by "ethno-national discourses" (183) than are Australian-Croatians. This means, in turn, that these diaspora Slovenes are less attached to negative stereotypes of their former fellow Yugoslavs, that they more modestly assess the historical importance of their newly independent homeland, and that they do not transmit their nationalist attitudes as effectively to subsequent generations. In other words, the Slovenes seem less nationalistic than the Croats.

Put into a broader perspective, one nevertheless sees from both of these groups that long-distance nationalism is real. Anyone who traveled through Austria, Italy, or ex-Yugoslavia during the early 1990s likely met young men and women from South America, North America, or Australia who were going to Slovenia, Croatia, or Serbia (sometimes for the first time) to help or to fight for their “people”; on the basis of such experiences, it is easy to intuit that Skrbis and Anderson are on to something important here. The findings of the author’s interviews will themselves not surprise many people. The associations are familiar, from Croats’ “justifying” their Ustaša state to the Slovenes’ taking refuge in their diligence and frugality (and sometimes noting about the Croats that “[t]he noise that they produce is in their blood” (127). But the most exciting conclusion would seem to be not so much “what” the diaspora groups believe as it is “that” they believe these things at all from a prosperous, democratic, anglophone society thousands of miles away. Skrbis thereby offers substantial support to the thesis on the persistence of nationalism in the era of globalization.

John K. Cox, Wheeling Jesuit University