

The Topos of Australia in Contemporary Serbian Language Writing of First-Generation Serbian Migrants to Australia

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Abstract: Focusing on contemporary writing of first-generation Serbian migrants to Australia who write in the Serbian language, this paper addresses two distinct albeit related issues which arise from different meanings of the term *topos*. Australia, as represented in Serbian migrant writing, is firstly discussed as “a place”—both as a particular physical space or geographical location and as a place of the mind. Various literary conventions are then identified – such as the prevalence of a particular genre, motifs or figures of speech—and their implications further analysed in terms of their pertinence to the perception of Australia in the creative writing of first-generation Serbian migrant writers who write in Serbian. As a particular physical space, Australia is unmistakably situated by way of the North-South binary opposition, with the “Southern Sky” becoming a commonplace (*topos*) of Serbian migrant literature. Also, it is a place surrounded by the South Seas which serves to “drown all hopes.” Thus Australia as a place of the mind emerges as one of loneliness, solitude, isolation and suffering. The elegy, with its *topos* of comparison of the past and present, proves to be the dominant genre in the poetry which laments the loss of homeland, youth, friends, and love. An invocation of nature (as expounded by Ernst Robert Curtius in his *European Literatures and the Latin Middle Ages*) is deployed with the *topoi* such as the autumn-spring binary or the metaphors and poetic images of grey clouds, cobwebs, lost bees, cold skies, foreign flowers, marooned ships and lost anchors. Strikingly, the homeland is imagined as a loving mother whereas Australia, by implication, becomes a cruel foster parent whose actions of “taming” (i.e. assimilating) have to be resisted, making Serbs along with the Greeks and Italians “slow assimilators” as observed by Donald Horne in *The Lucky Country*.

Keywords: Serbian, migrant writing, Australia, *topos*

Defining the key concepts and the corpus of the study

Meaning “a place” or a “common place” in Greek, the term *topos* (pl. *topoi*) was studied under the rubric of *topica*, which was initially part of the fields of rhetoric and logic. Sometimes the word is also taken to mean a “topic” or a “line of argument,” which accords with Aristotle’s treatment of *topoi* in *Rhetoric*, where he sees them as principles of a dialectical or rhetorical nature and divides them into particular and general topics (Aune 476). In *Rhetoric* he lists three types of *topoi* which apply to all three genres: the topic of possible/impossible, the topic of lesser/greater and the topic of universal/particular (Živković et. al 817). However, it is in *Topica* that he lists and defines 28 *topoi* or topics, which represent “generative patterns of thought or methods of analysis” (C. R. Miller qtd. in Aune 476). For instance, the topic of induction is explained by way of example; one has to use multiple examples to establish a general principle. However, Aristotle’s line of thought, along with other ancient Greek philosophers, contributed more to the development of abstract logical conceptions and structures of argument whereas Latin rhetoricians were the ones who gave a more practical meaning to the notion of *topos* (or *locus* in Latin) and practical use in terms of ready-made clichés which can be learned in school and subsequently used in speeches and debates (Živković et. al 817). There lies the root of the influence which the

concept of topos came to exert on both the skills of oration and writing of literature in general. Translated from the abstract to the practical, topoi can be understood as repositories of ideas and motives which are at the disposal to every orator or a man of letters; they are aids towards composing (primarily) orations and (by extension) written texts. As put by Quintilian, topoi are “storehouses of trains of thought” (qtd. in Curtis 70).

Focusing on the field of literary studies, the definition found in *The Literary Encyclopedia* makes the distinction between topoi which refer to physical places, in both general and particular senses, and those which refer to places of the mind. Furthermore, in literary studies the term has come to denote, as pointed out in *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature* (1123) “a conventional literary or rhetorical theme such as the quest or the family” and it can also refer to “conventions, tropes, figures of speech, typical motifs, poetic images, stylistic devices, similes, clichés, and patterns of thought and expressions” (Živković et. al 817). Consequently, focusing on contemporary writing of first-generation Serbian migrants to Australia who write in the Serbian language, this paper addresses two distinct albeit related issues which arise from different meanings of the term topos.¹ Australia, as represented in Serbian migrant writing, is firstly discussed as “a place”—both as a particular physical space or geographical location and as a place of the mind. Various literary conventions then are identified—such as the prevalence of a particular genre, motifs or figures of speech—and their implications further analysed in terms of their pertinence to the perception of Australia in the creative writing of Serbian migrant writers.

It is also useful at this point to clearly define what is meant in this paper by the term “first-generation Serbian migrant writers” in Australia. It is crucial to understand that they are writers of Serbian nationality which migrated to Australia from any of the former republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), that is, Serbian migrants from Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and to a lesser extent from Slovenia and Macedonia.² The writers included in this study came to Australia either as part of the economic wave of migration from the SFRY in the 1970s and 1980s or part of the refugee wave of the mid and late 1990s, following the civil wars in the former SFRY³ and NATO bombing raids on Serbia in 1999, or, finally, part of another economic wave of migration from Serbia which started with the new millennium and is ongoing. They were or have been members of former or current Serbian literary associations, societies and art clubs; their work is written in the Serbian language and published either in Serbia by Serbian publishing houses or by literary associations as part of collections. In some cases, authors resorted to self-publication.⁴

¹ For examples of works in the English language by Serbian migrants see “Literary Orphans and Literary Mutants—Migrant Writers in Australia: the Serbian Example” in the forthcoming issue of *Transcultural Studies* 1 (2017).

² In addition to what today is the territory of the Republic of Serbia, historically the Serbs have lived in territories covered by the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918-1929), the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929-1939), the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (1945-1963), the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1963-1991), the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1992-2003), and Serbia and Montenegro (2003-2006). The aforementioned countries included the territories of what today are the Republics of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia, so that Serbian migrants to Australia might have come from any of territories of these republics.

³ “The civil wars” here includes: War in Slovenia (1991), War in Croatia (1991-1995), and War in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995).

⁴ For the waves of migration from the former Yugoslav republics into Australia see Slavko Vejinović, “Srpske seobe / Serbian Migrations,” Dušan and Marko Lopušina, *Ilustrovana istorija srpske dijaspore* and *Srbi u Australiji*, Vladimir Grečić, “Srbi u prekookeanskim zemljama” and Ian Castles, “Multicultural Australia.” The

In the former Yugoslavia these writers fell under the rubric of writers in the diaspora and policies and institutions were introduced to support their work as well as to strengthen both cultural and economic ties between Yugoslavia and its diaspora. However, the civil wars of the 1990s and subsequent economic and cultural sanctions imposed on Serbia put an end to any support from Serbia during that period, leaving these writers in the diaspora to their own means and devices, and a narrow scope of readership who could read and understand their writings in Serbian. Their situation has improved since the beginning of the twenty-first century, with the Association of Serbian Writers opening its membership to writers in the diaspora and the Home Association of Serbian Emigrants Abroad facilitating the writers' visits to Serbia, publication of their work and participation in literary colonies, conferences and gatherings.

In Australia these writers have variously being referred to as “migrant writers,” “multicultural writers” and “ethnic minority writers.” Sneja Gunew identifies different implications of each of these terms, where “migrant writing” is best used to refer to first-generation migrants who are writing about the experience of migration, “multicultural writers” often indicates the “second and third generation with intimate links to linguistic and literary traditions other than those deriving from England and Ireland” (Gunew, *Framing Marginality* 7), and finds the term “ethnic minority literatures” useful “because it implies that there is always an ethnic majority literature” (Gunew, *Framing Marginality* 12). She concludes that “each term signals the alterity of various writings produced in Australia but perceived as “other” than the Anglo-Celtic norm” (Gunew, *Framing Marginality* 3). In other words, however nuanced the three terms appear to be, one must not fail to perceive that they have a common denominator – that of marginality and otherness. However one chooses to call it—migrant writing, multicultural writing or ethnic writing—it is never part of the centre or the mainstream.

However, being acknowledged by Serbia as writers in the diaspora or by Australia as migrant writers does not automatically signal their full acceptance and appreciation of their work on an equal footing and of equal literary merit to the work of Serbian writers in Serbia or Australian writers in Australia. In neither country are they introduced into the curriculum nor is their work a subject of any significant literary criticism. The wider readership and literary scholars in Serbia fail to see in their work a window into another culture delivered to them in their own language (rather than by means of translation), and rather than being curious about how the Serbian language adapts to the new environment they are quick to frown upon the language of migrants as ossified, obsolete and influenced by English. In Australia, their work is not even accessible to a wider readership or literary scholars because it is written in Serbian and therefore limited to a small circle of those within the Serbian community who are interested in literature. This paper is written with the aim of offering a sample of their writing to readers in English and presenting prevailing themes and perspectives of Australia in their writing.

The material is contemporary insofar as it includes works published in the period from 1996 to 2010. Having conducted an extensive survey of into the publications of Serbian migrant writers in Australia, it has been established that the dominant genre is that of poetry, and relying on that finding this study focuses on poetical works by examining collections of

biographies of the writers are found in the listed individual or general collections of poetry and in Milena Milanović, ed. *Biografski leksikon – Srpski pisci u rasejanju 1914–2014* [Biographical Lexicon – Serbian Writers in Diaspora 1914–2014].

poetry by individual authors as well as general collections of poetry.⁵ The collections of poetry by individual authors are *Bumerang ne prašta* (*A Boomerang does not Forgive*, 2002) by Vojislav Derić (b. 1938; migrated in 1998), *Ispod južnog neba* (*Under the Southern Sky*, 2000) by Vida Simić Maljković (b. 1943; migrated in 1970), *Zemlja skrivena iza mora* (*The Land Hidden Behind the Sea*, 2003) by Toda Matić Medić (b. 1945; migrated in 1970), *Vinograd* (*The Vineyard*, 2002) by Lara Jakica (b. 1979; migrated in 1996) and *Napušteno nebo* (*The Deserted Sky*, 2010) by Mario Stoimenovski (b. 1982; migrated in 2009). General collections of poetry comprise those published by the Literary Society Zora – Melbourne, which was active from 1994 to 1999, boasting the membership of almost every Serbian writer at the time in Australia, and the four collections included in this study, consisting of contributions from almost every Serbian migrant with literary propensities in the late 1990s. The collections are: *Poezija literarnog udruženja 'Zora' Melburn – 1* (*Poetry of the Literary Society Zora Melbourne*, 1996), including 25 authors, 123 poems and 2 prose pieces; *Izabrane pesme: Zora 1: Prvi književni konkurs 'Zora 95'* (*Selected Poems: Zora – 1: The first literary competition 'Zora 95'*, 1997), including 23 authors and 105 poems; *Izabrane pesme: Zora 2: Drugi književni konkurs 'Zora 96'* (*Selected Poems: Zora – 2: The second literary competition 'Zora 96'*, 1998), including 35 authors and 73 poems; and *Izabrane pesme: Zora 3: Treći književni konkurs 'Zora 97'* (*Selected Poems: Zora – 3: The third literary competition 'Zora 97'*, 1999), including 38 authors and 78 poems.

The Topos of Australia in Serbian Migrant Writing

1. Australia as a Physical Place

As a physical place, Australia is predominantly experienced in terms of the northern-southern hemisphere binary, where the motifs of the sky and the sea serve to provide a further focus on particular location and contribute to the expression of the size. The poems detailing her emotional life of a migrant in Australia are brought together in the collection titled *Under the Southern Sky* by Vida Simić Maljković, but the title poem (5) does not describe what she sees under the wide and vast southern sky as much as what she misses – landscapes and seasons of her native, northern sky. Toda Matić Medić describes Australia as “An Island in the South Sea” (31) while she uses the topos of the night which triggers both the dreams of home and dreams of success in the new country: “My homeland’s heart / Is beating in my soul. / I paint with endlessness / The coral reef / While I am pursuing my dreams / On this big island / In the South Sea.” Similarly, Ratko Vujović is torn by the conflicting feelings of overwhelming sadness and pain of leaving home and the hopeful dreams of success in the new country in the south. In “Farewell” he equals himself to a bird which flies south towards warmer climates in search of a new life and happiness (Čampara 143). In his “The South Land,” Mario Stoimenovski expounds on the binary, imagining the hemispheres as reflections in the mirror allowing him, who is in Australia, and his loved one, who is in Serbia, to “ride a bike / with their feet kissing in love” (69). Furthermore, “[his] left is [his] right,” “the water sinks in the opposite direction” and “[he] is all upside down” (69).

As can be seen from the quoted examples, the experience of the location of Australia in the southern hemisphere is virtually indivisible from its experience as a distant island, a place surrounded by water and hidden from the rest of the world. Being separated by water from the rest of the world invites commonplace metaphors of the migrant as “an anchorless galley ... buried beneath the waves of the sea of hope” (Simić Maljković 5) and their life as “the ship ... drowned by the force of the heavy oceans” (Simić Maljković 25). On a more positive

⁵ For the purpose of this paper all verses are translated into English by the author.

note, the poet experiences herself as “a white ship” which is sailing to a land where the poet receives God’s blessing “through the blue eyes of distant oceans” and is presented with “a gift of a dress made of the sea” (Matić Medić 27). Furthermore, Australia is “like a magic flower / on the water of happiness” ... “kissed by the coasts / caressed by the waves” (Marčok, *Zora 1* 16), a place where “the ocean meets the sky / surrounded by the sea / in the shape of a world’s paradise” (Marčok, *Zora 1* 135). Implied in the sea journey is the topos of Australia as a remote place, “a faraway land” (Čampara 127; Marčok, *Zora 1* 49), “a land at the end of the world” (Čampara 180), to which one arrives after a long journey which usually took up to 30 days on a ship—a time to both reflect on the reasons for leaving and fortify hopes of a better future filled with joy and wealth in the new sun-drenched country. On the other hand, the topos of distance underscores those poems which dwell on the unlikeliness of return and reunion with one’s family and friends (Čampara 124, 127). Those poems are usually written like letters to friends and family in which aging poets whose heart is suffocated by the distance (Marčok, *Zora 3* 29) express their sadness of being “separated [by such] vast distances” contrasted with the former closeness and physical proximity of the homeland (Marčok, *Zora 2* 13).

Most of all, Australia is seen through a superimposed lens of homeland images, experiences and knowledge of the world, which results in descriptions of Australia by means of comparisons and contrasts, chiefly by stressing differences from the country of origin. The most curious difference and the most quoted one which emerges from the poems is the inversion of day and night and the seasons, leaving the impression that the poets in their mind never left the homeland and that they try to live by the northern calendar. Most poets, like Slavko Šparovac Černi in his “A Grim Ballad about the ‘Promised Land,’” see it as a perversion of nature that “you are wet in the sun, and dry in the rain” that “the sun sets in the day, and rises at night” that “you do not know which season you are in / because in mid-summer ice-cold rain pours / and in winter the sun scorches like in the Gobi desert” (Čampara 168-170). However, poets of the younger generation are merely nostalgically observing the fact of nature without passing any judgements. Lara Jakica describes her new homeland to her friend in Belgrade and says that “for example, it is not snowing here in / December” (52). Mario Stoimenovski misses his beloved one, who is the centre of his universe, and since she is in the northern hemisphere that is his reference point, too, so that “the Sun’s halo is emerging to you / while turning its back to me” ... “I am woken up by cockatoos. / It is the morning / of our tomorrow” (69). Indeed, poets like Vojislav Derić in his “The Fifth Continent” mocks those who see Australia as an upside down perversion of nature by calling them “malicious snobs” (59).

Referring to Australia as “the fifth continent” is in itself a phrase used by many a poet, such as Stojan Stanković (Čampara 180), Carinka Jović (Čampara 197) or Rada Gousteris (Marčok, *Zora 2*, 28) to mention just a few. It is the continent of “exotic fauna ... tropical flora” (Simić Maljković 5), of skipping kangaroos and happy joeys protected in their mothers’ pouches (Čampara 180). Derić (59-60) takes time and does not spare his verses to list the incomparable wildlife including the platypus, kangaroo, koala, echidna, kookaburra and wombat as well as the unique topography, such as the Great Barrier Reef, Great Dividing Range, and Ayers Rock (Uluru). He admires the place of “unique colouring” where the sky at sunset turns into “a pillow of a thousand colours.” His “Melbourne” is an ode to a refuge from the “world’s barbarism” offering “a glass of peace,” “a drop of cheerfulness,” “an accord of friendship” (58). The streets and attractions of Melbourne and Victoria greet the poet’s beloved one from Stoimenovski’s verses: “a bush is waving to her from the intersection of / Lemon and Woodend Road,” “a wombat is cuddling up to her / from Cleland

Park,” “the rails of Flinders Street / smile at her” and “the locomotive fireman waves at her / when resting his hand” (69-70). These poems seem to be driven by the same urge which the first Europeans had when they landed in Australia—to describe what they see to those at home. The fifth continent, furthermore, appears to be a place of perpetual summer where love is to be found in a sunny country of dazzling sandy beaches (Matić Medić 27). Carinka Jović describes life “under this shiny, warm sun” (Čampara 197) while Toda Matić Medić is enjoying “the rays of Australian sun” (63) “which is caressing her with its gentle fingers” (27). However, Australia is also described as a land of nature’s extremes, the scorching sun and terrifying bushfires in the dry season (Matić Medić 28) or excessive rain in the wet season, which at the same time has a phoenix-like, regenerative effect (Matić Medić 32).

The appreciation of the time-honoured myths of western civilisation leads the poets to the appreciation of the indigenous inhabitants of Australia and their mythology, on the one hand, and the acknowledgment of the continent’s history of violent encounter of the settlers/inlanders with the Aborigines, on the other. Vera Aleksandrić puts it poignantly in her poem “Australia,” saying that “its hands are dark / and heavy / with the history of kangaroos and koalas / and the broken branches / of the Aborigines” (Marčok, *Zora I* 16). As a contrast and in an attempt at optimism, Matić Medić’s poem of the same title ends up being somewhat contradictory while combining the account of the continent’s history with social commentary: “Captain Cook discovered it / and populated it with white people. / Aborigines have no right / to be in our city. / From Hobart to Darwin / everyone has the same rights, / it is a land of happiness / where no one can fail” (Marčok, *Zora I* 134). Mario Stoimenovski weaves Australian history into his longing for his beloved one, whom he bestows with admirable qualities of correcting history’s wrongs: “You have colonised the colony. / You have freed the descendants of the convicts. / With your lullaby, you have resurrected / Aborigines into the Dreamtime. / You have bought the land with your smile” (70).

2. Australia as a Place of the Mind

The predominant experience of living in Australia in the poetry of first-generation Serbian migrants is that of loneliness and isolation which result from the separation from family and friends. The image of “faded photo albums” embodies both temporal and physical distance of the poet from her family and friends as she asks herself “how many dear faces / my eyes will not rest upon / and how many will they not recognise at all?” (Simić Maljković 14); “there is no mother or father / or faithful friend / to knock at the door / of my broken spirit” (Simić Maljković 32) as the poet’s cry resounds in the darkness of a lonely night. There is no greater comfort than that which comes from familiar people, language, customs or nature, and poets try to seek solace in writing letters to their friends and family, an attempt to relieve the burden of loneliness, use their mother tongue and invoke homeland settings. In his “A Poem to the Children” Živorad Jovanović (Čampara 54) laments the lot of the so-called guest workers, those who work in a foreign country on a temporary basis. Leaving home for work in a faraway Australia is described by Jovanović as emotionally difficult and potentially disruptive of the closeness of the family circle because it brings separation of grandparents from grandchildren and parents from children. His poem is about economic migrants who left their families for foreign lands in order to try to earn some money and send it back. They grow old without seeing their own children grow up and without seeing their grandchildren except in photographs. Similarly, Rada Velimirović Gousteris writes “A Letter to the Family” (Čampara 124) to battle the loneliness she feels in the foreign land and fills the letter with contrasts of her present isolation with the memories of the past days which she spent with her relatives. Along the similar lines, to express inconsolable loneliness in a country where one is

new and does not know anybody, Vida Simić Maljković uses the image of a person walking through a cemetery in the foreign land where “mounds of earth ... namelessly bulge” (14).

Loneliness and isolation are coupled with the feelings of sorrow, sadness and weariness which are suggested by images and descriptions such as “a burden of rainy clouds ... weary imagination ... weary dreams” (Simić Maljković 6), “the moon in sorrow / enshrouds persecuted happiness” (Simić Maljković 40), “dense grey clouds” (Simić Maljković 42), “woven by a weary life / funereal wreaths / invite the smell of death” (Simić Maljković 57) or “the ship wrecked on the reefs of sorrow” (Simić Maljković 58). Furthermore, in Vera Aleksandrić’s poem “A Letter” (Čampara 32), the weary hand has no strength left to finish the letter about the mental anguish which the person experiences in a foreign country, where the truth about how it is to live in a foreign country is bitter and as heavy as lead. Her “Tangle of Sorrows” (Marčok, *Zora 1* 15) expresses the sorrow of every migrant who has to endure the loss of social status and recognisable qualifications, which reduces one to being the “the slave of a foreign slave.” Ljubica Tintor’s grief for leaving the homeland is “as large as the sea / and larger than the largest mountain” (Čampara 76). “The heart is tired,” proclaims Slavko Šparovac Černi, “tortured by the foreign land” (Marčok, *Zora 2* 170), and Vera Aleksandrić concludes that “Australia is a place / where the world’s miserable / gather / hoping to / heal their nerves / while their painful cries / are carried across the land by kookaburras” (Marčok, *Zora 1* 17). The settings of these sombre poems of dark mood is appropriately gloomy as they are either nocturnal or autumnal, which is sometimes indicated in their very titles such as “The Night Dilemma,” “A Sleepless Night,” “In the Dead of Night” (Simić Maljković 20, 34, 57) or expressed in the verses such as “deadly silence,” “lonely night” (Simić Maljković 57), “in a cold autumn night / clouds swollen with tears” (Simić Maljković 42).

Weighed down by the feelings of lonesome isolation and inconsolable sadness, feeling marooned on a faraway island in the distant sea, the poets feel trapped and imprisoned in a place from which there is no escape. Australia, in a sense, becomes a place of no return. The feelings of being incapacitated, entangled, lost and imprisoned are expressed by the images such as “the wind” which “has lost its way / in the forest without paths” or the poet who “feels powerless / while being entangled in cobwebs” (Simić Maljković 6), rendered “a powerless prey” (Simić Maljković 56). Not only is life in Australia experienced as a physical prison encapsulating their bodies and preventing them from returning home but it is depicted as “a prison for the soul” (Marčok, *Zora 2*, 145) as Stojan Stanković sees it as a place which “suffocates the heart” in the words of Simo Bursać (Marčok, *Zora 3* 29). Along the same lines, for Slavko Šparovac Černi, Australia is a place where one’s being is “rotting away” (Čampara 164), leaving the impression that the lives migrants lead in a foreign land is more like lives in death than real life, which is in turn poignantly reflected in the image of “the sparkles eyes” (Čampara 166). The only possibility of escaping from prison and returning home presents itself in dreams, which is frequently indicated in the titles of poems such as “I often Dream about my Birth Place” (Marčok, *Zora 2*, 145), “A Dream” (Čampara 175), “Dreams” (Jakica 6) or “I Dream about those Moments” of return to the homeland (Jakica 88).

Plucked from their homeland, both those who landed in Australia as refugees and those who came as economic migrants, the poets express the feeling of deracination. The most commonly used device to convey the sense of uprootedness is the metaphor of the migrant as a lost bee, a migratory bird, a bird that is lost its flock or an orphan. Vida Simić Maljković (10) titles her poem “The Lost Bee” and laments that “the mother bee is not there to gather

her swarm / to build a new hive in the foreign place.” Migrants are also perceived as “motherless orphans” (Čampara 84) or birds that have either lost or left their flock (Čampara 127; Marčok, *Zora 1* 49-50, Marčok, *Zora 2* 28) with the implication that migrants either lost their families or left them behind. Sometimes poems end on a positive note of birds finding a new flock in the new country, but the memories of their family in the homeland and sorrow for being separated still remains (Marčok, *Zora 2* 28). The most frequent image used to describe the path of migrants is that of migratory birds in general and the swallow in particular (Čampara 124, 196; Marčok, *Zora 1* 45). In “A Letter to the Family” Rada Velimirović Gousteris (Čampara 124) likens herself to the swallow but thinks that the swallow, unlike herself, has the advantage of knowing that it will be back in spring while in “The Swallow” she tells of the bird which has made a new nest in the new place far away from home, and expresses her gratitude for the new flock for accepting her (Marčok, *Zora 1* 45).

Despite settling down in the new place and making a new nest, in spite of the feelings of gratitude towards the new country and its people for accepting them, the poems of the first generation of migrants picture Australia as an unwelcoming foreign place where they do not belong. The sense of not belonging is most effectively expressed with such adjectives as “cold” and “foreign.” In “Once You...,” Vida Simić Maljković (12) states that migrants live under the “cold sky,” tortured by doubt under the “foreign sky,” unable to find joy or comfort for their “aching souls” in the fragrance of the “foreign flowers.” For Rada Gousteris in her memories of the birth village, the Australian sun, usually experienced as scorching, paradoxically, is not “as warm as the sun of the homeland” (Marčok, *Zora 1* 46). Migrants only find peace when the memory of the homeland gradually drifts into oblivion. The “foreign country is an empty nest of promises” (Simić Maljković 55), and Slavko Šparovac Černi in his “A Grim Ballad about the ‘Promised Land’” (Čampara 168-171) describes Australia as a country which “does not give you a warm motherly look” and “your brother gives you a wild, hateful look / ready to bury a knife into your ribs,” “people are as cold as icebergs,” “the days are so foreign and grey.” Most of all, the migrant is stripped of dignity and identity, forever remaining “a nameless foreigner” (Čampara 170). Coming from villages and townships of the Balkans, where everyone knew their names, they do not feel any connection with big Australian cities which they experience as “great human ant-hills” (Marčok, *Zora 3* 6) or “human bee-hives” (Jakica 50) where they do not feel at home, which turns Australia into an unwelcoming place of sorrow, suffering, defeat and disappointment.

As remarked by Slavko Šparovac Černi in his introduction to *Zora 3* (Marčok, *Zora 3* 5-6), most Serbian migrants who came to Australia did not have a university education, but came straight from fields and factories, and their Australian hosts saw in them the labour potential of their wide backs and strong arms and muscles. Working long shifts in blue-collar jobs, the migrants mostly saw the exploitative nature of the “promised land,” a theme that proves to be the major thread of thought running through the verses of Černi’s ironic “A Grim Ballad about the ‘Promised Land.’” Australia is depicted as a place of exploitation and materialism which destroys migrants’ dreams of a better future; it is a land which makes them prematurely old because of hard work. Australia is “a promised land ... a fairy land ... a land of milk and honey” where people “cheer to mister dollar ... wide backs are in demand, muscles measured by kilograms ... you are always tired ... your route is always factory-home-bed / you sleep while your eyes are open, your eyes are open while you sleep ... our boys look like old men here” (Čampara 168-171). Andrej Gustav Marčok also poses the question of “whom do we give our youth to?” (Čampara 16). Šparovac Černi further remarks on how “for twelve years he had to quench his teeth / and bury his pride in the foreign world”

(Čampara 164). Mileva Bursać addresses her deceased mother whom she would have liked to have had the chance to see before she died and tell her about “how [she] slaved away / and lost her health” in the foreign land (Čampara 84) while Simo Bursać addresses the moon with the same complaint of being “a living slave ... in the foreign country” (Marčok, *Zora* 2 18). Lara Jakica also feels enslaved and in her “A Step toward Freedom” asks “how long one must wait / and suffer humbly / how many years, miles / and steps?” to freedom (35). Not necessarily blaming it on the foreign country and calling her poem “Life,” Carinka Jović reflects on the reasons for migration, which she admits lie in the wish to better one’s life and earn secure existence, but by the time one “buys a house, and has enough money / old age takes all pleasure from it” (Marčok, *Zora* 3 87).

Australia portrayed as a place of mental and physical anguish is, however, contrasted with the view of Australia as a refuge, a place of opportunity which stimulates exploration, offers a new beginning and enables one to follow one’s dreams. Rada Gousteris does not fail to stress that Australia is a distant country where she mostly feels sad and homesick, but in the same breath and verse she calls Australia her second home, the country which “accepted her into its lap” (127). The fifth continent is the place where migrants come to find happiness, and while Gousteris admits that it might not be the perfect happiness they encounter in the new country she comments that perhaps it should not be measured but accepted and enjoyed (Marčok, *Zora* 2, 28). In the poems of Carinka Jović, Australia emerges as a place of regeneration and healing, after which a new beginning can take place. In “Under Another Sky” she devotes several stanzas to depict the painful goodbye she had to say to her family and to her dead child, whose grave she leaves behind, but the ending of the poem deploys the metaphor of making a new nest and thanking god for the gift of another baby girl who is born as “the new morning dawns under the foreign sky” (Čampara 197). Rather than being unwelcoming “the foreign sky” is a sign of hope and a promise of happiness regained. In his “The Fifth Continent” (59-60) Vojislav Derić paints a picture of an old tired man, suntanned and sweaty, but unlike the disappointed and withered labourers of other poets, Derić’s labourer is content and “wisely enjoys the wealth / of silence of the fifth continent,” suggesting that this man reaps the fruit of his hard labour. Moreover, it suggests that Australia is a product of hard labour; it offers fertile fields for those who want to plant their seeds after the destruction of their homeland. Having in mind that Derić is one of the oldest poets whose poetry is analysed in this paper, and that he came to Australia when he was sixty years old, the most powerful message of his poetry is perhaps that it is never too late for a new start. In the words of Lara Jakica, a poet of the younger generation, “it is never too late / for a vineyard / and the first vine” (111).

A dash of optimism is as rare in the poetry of Serbian migrants in Australia as an invigorating breeze is in a dry season of scorching Australian sun. Consequently the elegy, lamenting the loss of homeland, youth, friends, and love, with its topos of a range of juxtapositions is the dominant form of their poetry. The juxtaposition of the past and the present permeates almost every poem. The past is represented through descriptions of life poets had in the homeland with their family and friends. That life is now firmly anchored in their memories, embellished by their imagination, while they carry the homeland in their hearts. Contrary to the homeland, Australia is the place of the here and now, where migrants try to chase up their dreams. Frequently, the life in the homeland refers to poets’ childhood and youth, so that the yearning for the homeland takes the form of the lament over the lost youth. In her “I Used to...” (29), Vida Simić Maljković, aging in the land of immigration, remembers her youthful love in the days when she was a “red spring flower” in the homeland. The past is another country, the one where the poet cannot return; it is the place where her memories, childhood and youth

abide; it is the place of happiness where the poet spent “the spring of her life” (Čampara 37). Now she is old and cannot return either to her youth or her homeland. Similarly, for Žirovad Jovanović (Marčok, *Zora* 2 59), Stojan Stanković (Marčok, *Zora* 2 145), Branka Čulibrk Novaković (Marčok *Zora* 3 175), and for many others, the past is where their youth and happiness reside and where their present old age prevents them from returning, except with the help of their imagination and memories: “the painful howling of the wind / brings me back somewhere / where my foot / has not stepped / for a long while. / Into the early dawn / of my youth” (Marčok *Zora* 3 175). For Ljubica Tintor, the physical return to the landscapes of the past is literally impossible because her village in the homeland was destroyed in the civil war of the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia. Not unlike the eponymous wanderer of the Anglo-Saxon elegy, she stresses the irrevocability of her plight, “never more my village / never more those wonderful gatherings” and wants to commit to memory all those dear people, animals and things—the villagers, her white goat, the beautiful field, the vines, the grapes, her tomcat Toma, her house—which she will never see again because they no longer exist (Čampara 76-77). Memories of the past and coping with reality is also the theme of Lara Jakica’s poetry, which she clearly indicates by titling one section of her book *Escape*, where “Fear” (3) deals with the life in the past and an escape from reality.

The common denominator of the poets’ longing for persons, things and situations of the past is nostalgia for the homeland. Homesickness takes many forms in the poetry of first-generation Serbian migrants in Australia, such as longing to see the childhood landscapes, to hear the sound of the mother tongue or the shepherd’s song. Andrej Gustav Marčok, for instance, titles his poem “Nostalgia” and invokes the landscape by naming the flowers, describing the seasons and activities which are usually associated with each season and are performed by people in the countryside. The poem concludes a reflection of the healing power of poetry: “And so day in day out life goes on over there / with sweat, songs and traditional customs / while I as a poet, every evening / in the foreign land use my verses to lessen the grip of nostalgia” (Marčok, *Zora* 2 94-95). Lara Jakica finds poetry similarly curative in its “gentle touches” whereas nostalgia for the homeland is an insidious force which attacks from behind and “drives a lance right through your heart [and shoots] a cannon into your head” (83). However, nostalgia for the homeland is most powerfully expressed in the poets’ last wish—to have their bones laid to rest back in the homeland. Simo Bursać (Čampara 155) is “tortured by his thoughts / and pulled by his desire ... not to leave the bones / in the foreign world.” So, he leaves for the homeland, looking forward to a whole list of things he will enjoy there, from food to landscapes to fragrances. Not leaving one’s bones in the foreign country appears as the leitmotif in the poetry of Slavko Šparovac Černi, as he is being “suffocated” by nostalgia while the images of the homeland in his dream blur into those of his crying mother (Čampara 162). Rada Gousteris opens her “Yearning for the Homeland” with the following verses: “When I die and am gone / and with writing I am done / carry me across the oceans / and bury me at the heart of the Balkans” (Marčok, *Zora* 1 51). If she cannot return while she is still alive, she pleads for her bones to be taken back to her birth place. “Oh, I will Come Back to You” by Radivoje Brkić dreams about the return to the sky, rivers and hills of his home country, and to the embrace of the mother, whose image overlaps with that of the mother country in his last wish for his bones to be embraced by his native soil (Marčok, *Zora* 3, 19).

The images of the mother and the motherland become indistinguishable in those poems in which poets long for the mother’s embrace and the mother is pining away for her children in the distant foreign land (Čampara 55, 156-157, 162-163, 174; Marčok, *Zora* 3 13, 143) and likewise in the poems which describe tears of sorrow upon their separation (Čampara 147,

196-197; Marčok, *Zora* 2 133; Marčok, *Zora* 3 20-21) or tears of joy upon their (imagined) reunion (Čampara 166-167; Marčok, *Zora* 3 19). Furthermore, the mother and the motherland coincide in letters written to one's mother (Simić Maljković 19; Čampara 87, 98-99; Marčok, *Zora* 3 144) as well as in the memories of the mother and expressions of gratitude for bringing her children up and nourishing them (Simić Maljković 30-31). While in certain poems it may take the form of a subtle suggestion, in others, like Delivoje Delić Brada's poem "To You," the verses leave no doubt that the mother and the motherland are one and the same: "Happy birthday to you / our dear mother / our country" (Čampara 49). The identification of the mother with motherland is also pronounced in the poetry of the refugee poets, where the lament for the homeland destroyed by war becomes a lament for the dying or dead mother while refugees are portrayed as the consequential orphans (Čampara 84). If the homeland is identified with the mother, then Australia, by extension, features in the migrant poetry as a stepmother or a foster parent. In that role Australia is seen, on the one hand, as cruel, coldly exploiting, calculating and self-interested (a proverbial fairy-tale evil stepmother) (Simić Maljković 5, 47, 55; Čampara 76-77, 84, 164-165, 168-169; Marčok, *Zora* 1 134-135; Marčok, *Zora* 2 145; Marčok, *Zora* 3 102), generous, caring, protective and nourishing, on the other (Derić 58, 59-60; Matić Medić 27; Čampara 127; 196-197; Marčok, *Zora* 1 16-17, 45, 49-50, 207; Marčok, *Zora* 2 28). Borrowing Judith Wright's insightful perception about early Australian poetry, it can be stated that Australia's "double aspect" permeates the poetry of Serbian migrant writers in their experience of the land as both a hateful malevolent stepmother whose actions of "taming" (i.e. assimilating) have to be resisted—accounting for the verses of triumphant defiance such as "neither the exotic fauna, nor tropical / flora have managed to tame me" (Simić Maljković 5)—and a stepmother who actually allows "the reality of newness and freedom" (Wright xi), unknown, impossible to achieve or even forbidden in the motherland—accounting for the verses of ecstatic praise such as "It is a promised land / the future to us all. / You always give us warmth, / You are our second mother, / You have given us all you had / And you want to protect us" (Marčok, *Zora* 1 134).

Conclusion

First-generation Serbian migrant writers in Australia are amateur writers who write poetry (and to a lesser extent fiction) in their native tongue primarily as an expression of their nostalgia for the homeland. It is not surprising, therefore, that much of their poetry is patriotic and contains memories of their youth or childhood in the distant homeland, their first love, the farewell to the family and friends, and longed-for return to the homeland. Despite the "dismissive response that migrant writing 'simply' deals with nostalgia, that its mode is elegiac" (Gunew, "Home and Away" 36), this essay argues that migrant writing is a valuable addition to the body of writing about the experience of Australia insofar as it represents "the depiction of Australia as a particular kind of culture which is subjected to various interpretations from external (other cultural) vantage points" (Gunew, "Home and Away" 42). In other words, woven into nostalgia for the homeland is "the construct of Australia from somewhere else" (Gunew, "Home and Away" 42). For economic migrants it is not so much a place to live as it is a place to work while for refugees it is a place where they have had to remake a second home. Both economic migrants and refugees experience Australia as an unfamiliar place while home turns into a state of mind and an object of longing. Nostalgia then becomes "a longing for [the familiar]" and "perhaps the only cure and a temporary relief of the symptoms of homesickness can be found in aesthetic therapy" (Boym 253), that is, writing.

Even though nostalgia for the homeland implies a focus on the past, both economic migrants and refugees came to Australia with their eyes fixed on a more prosperous future for their children if not themselves. Amongst the wave of economic migrants who came to Australia in the early 1970s hoping to secure a better future for their children were the parents of Alec Patrić, who won the 2016 Miles Franklin award with his debut novel *Black Rock White City*. The novel is a literary gem insofar as it demonstrates the capacities of Australian literature as multicultural and transnational literature with writers of various backgrounds channelling their multiple literary heritage into a unique vision of Australia. The confluence of Yugoslav, Serbian, European and Australian literature and culture, the novel is primarily about Australia and different responses to it by its varied inhabitants. More pertinently to this paper, the novel follows a married couple who are Serbian refugees from Bosnia and their attempts in Australia to cope with the trauma of war and loss of their children. Their stories yet again reflect the two mentioned migrant responses to life in Australia. The wife, Suzana, although focused on the past and the homeland, uses her memories to build upon them creatively and starts writing a novel while the husband, Jovan, engages with the new life superficially but remains creatively and emotionally paralysed.

Furthermore, most migrants feel that the new country appreciates only what they can accomplish with their raw physical strength and out of resentment of this reduction of their being to mere muscle power, writing emerges as a relief and a demonstration of the spiritual striving and mental engagement. It is also a connection with the mother tongue, other expatriates and the landscapes of the homeland. On the other hand, they are eager to express in their poetry the impressions and experiences of life in the new land—Australia. The first encounter with the land proves to be of the sensory nature and results in physical descriptions of what they can see, hear, smell, touch or taste. Interestingly, the topos of invocation of nature (sky, seas, animals, etc.) as explained by Curtius (92-97) serves the key rhetorical purpose in both memories of the homeland and descriptions of the new land. The invocation of nature in patriotic verses serves the purpose of sharing in the mourning of the speaker while the invocation of nature in depictions of the land of immigration serves the dual purpose of resentful estrangement and inquisitive admiration. In their patriotic poems, the poets take the reader back to the banks of the river of their youth, to the green pastures and meadows of fragrant flowers, to the countryside ringing with birdsong, to the fields at the time of harvest, to the village or the town, mourning the loss of it all. The poems which invoke Australian nature tend to either emphasise how foreign and unwelcoming it feels to them or to marvel at the unseen wonders and express enthusiasm for and appreciation of the new.

The responses to the landscape translate the poets' overall experience of life in Australia so that Australia is perceived either as a place where poets suffer in loneliness and isolation, imprisoned and exploited in the remote land, uprooted and cut off from the native land, or as a place of fresh opportunities, new beginnings, a generous refuge from the turmoils and destruction taking place in the homeland. The homeland is reality in the language of their poems; it lives insofar as they remember it and preserve it in their verses. Australia is reality in which they live, but also reality which allows them to have their memories of the homeland and pursue their dreams of the future. Majority of them find it very difficult to let go of the past, which makes the Serbs, along with the Greeks and Italians, "slow assimilators" as Donald Horne observed in *The Lucky Country* (86-87). On the other hand, poets like Vojislav Derić and Lara Jakica admire the courage to look into the future, accept the inevitability of change, adaptation and transformation. The attitude is perhaps most poetically formulated by Jakica (110), who is looking at the photograph of a water mill and imagining

what it is like to be a tiny droplet of water in that thundering flow: “And that drop of water was stronger than me / it disappeared with thunder and boom, and I with song / and brandy, crying.” It is important to remember the past, but it is more important to continue living. It is a sentiment well enshrined in the title of Jakica’s collection of poetry—*The Vineyard*. While it is an elegiac mourning of the loss of the homeland, family and friends, the central metaphor of the vineyard in the eponymous poem expresses her heartfelt conviction of how important it is to nourish the vineyard / life, support and sustain it in all weather conditions, patiently and steadily, by water and poetry, in order to share it with other people (98).

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