Goran Vojnović

Southern Scum Go Home!

Čefurji raus!

Presented by: Krystyna Pieniążek-Marković

Southern Scum Go Home!, published in 2008, is the debut novel by Slovenian writer. It ranks among the most important works of contemporary Slovenian literature addressing post-Yugoslav identity, migration, and social exclusion. Although the novel centres on the coming-of-age story of Marko Đorđić, a teenager and son of Bosnian Serb Radovan, growing up in Ljubljana's Fužine neighbourhood – often described as an immigrant ghetto – it is unmistakably political. Through the young protagonist's experiences, the author explores ethnic and social tensions in Slovenia following the breakup of Yugoslavia. The novel provides a pointed critique of contemporary nation-building and exclusion, while portraying the tragic economic, social, political, and national conditions of post-war Bosnia.

Through the young protagonist's experiences, the author lays bare the ethnic and social tensions that emerged in Slovenia after the breakup of Yugoslavia. The novel thus offers a pointed critique of contemporary nation-building and exclusion, while depicting the tragic economic, social, political, and national conditions of post-war Bosnia.

The novel's political dimension emerges from the everyday lives of its characters, members of a group known as *čefurji*. In Slovenian discourse, *čefurji* is a pejorative term for immigrants from the former Yugoslav republics and their descendants, particularly those from Bosnia and Herzegovina – as are the narrator's parents – as well as Serbia and Montenegro. Vojnović shows that this category functions as a tool of symbolic exclusion. The novel explores the relationship between citizenship, ethnicity, and national identification. Although the protagonists were born or raised in Slovenia, they continue to be perceived as "Others," "internal Others," or "Balkan people," and their membership in the Slovenian (European) national community is constantly called into question. Crucially, they identify themselves as *čefurji*: non-Slovenians in Slovenia and non-Bosnians/Serbs/Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina or Serbia.

Fužine is not merely a neighbourhood where immigrants live; it also symbolizes social and economic marginalization ("apartments are small, families are big, and living standards are low", p. 20). The characters inhabit a world of limited life prospects. The young protagonists' destructive and self-destructive behaviour – including setting fire to rubbish, vandalising others' property, committing physical assaults, leaving restaurants without paying, and using drugs – is portrayed as stemming from loneliness, neglect, a lack of communication with their parents, and a sense of helplessness. Such behaviour becomes a form of rebellion against a life defined by social inferiority, lack of recognition, and limited prospects for upward mobility. Violence, aggression, and conflict with the law do not stem from a "Balkan character"; they result from marginalisation. In this way, Vojnović exposes ethnic stereotypes and points to the social roots of problems attributed to migrants: "The fact that she looks at you as if you're a thief, even before you're actually a thief. And that's how

everyone always looks at us” (pp. 34-35).

An important political dimension of the novel is its critique of the nation-state model that came to dominate Slovenian public discourse after 1991. Vojnović reveals the paradox facing the younger generation of Fužine residents: they are simultaneously “too Balkan” for Slovenians and “too Slovenian” for people in their parents’ countries of origin. Marko occupies a liminal space between two cultures, unable to identify fully with either (see especially the chapters *Why Slovenia Pisses Me Off*, *Bosnia Is Totally Fucked*, and *Why Bosnia Is Not for Čefurji*). This liminality finds expression in the novel’s language: a profanity-laden mixture of colloquial Bosnian-Serbian-Croatian and Slovenian, interpreted as a sign of resistance to cultural homogenisation and a means of articulating an alternative identity.

Another political aspect concerns the portrayal of state institutions. Of particular significance is the scene in which the police detain Marko and his friends (the chapter *What Kind of Dickheads of People Are They? [Slovenian police]*). The young protagonists, all minors, experience extraordinary violence and humiliation at the hands of the officers, suggesting the existence of mechanisms of systemic discrimination. The state emerges as an institution that reproduces social stereotypes. The novel’s publication sparked controversy, prompting the Slovenian police to investigate the author over passages they considered offensive. Although the case was soon dropped, the state institution’s response itself underscored the work’s political significance. *Southern Scum Go Home!* can be read as Vojnović’s first novel about the consequences of the disintegration of a shared political and cultural space. It portrays the fate of a generation born after the breakup of Yugoslavia that inherits national conflicts and stereotypes created by older generations. The novel raises questions about the possibility of coexistence among different cultural communities within the modern nation-state and the price individuals pay for policies of exclusion (including the issue of the so-called “erased”).

LANGUAGE: Slovenian/Slovenščina

CENSORSHIP STATUS: