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ZRC SAZU, Inštitut za slovensko izseljenstvo in migracije, Založba ZRC /  
ZRC SAZU, Slovenian Migration Institute, Založba ZRC

*Tisk / Printed by*  
Birografika Bori, d. o. o.

*Naklada / Printum*  
150

*Naslov uredništva / Editorial Office Address*  
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# BUILDING LOYALTY ON THE MARGINS: INTERWAR YUGOSLAVIA AND EMIGRANTS FROM THE JULIAN MARCH AND PREKMURJE

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COBISS 1.01

## ABSTRACT

### **Building Loyalty on the Margins: Interwar Yugoslavia and Emigrants from the Julian March and Prekmurje**

By examining the cases of emigrants coming from the Julian March to Argentina and Prekmurje to the United States, the article evaluates state-diaspora relations in the interwar context of shifting borders and changing political regimes. Whereas the Slovene-speaking population of Prekmurje, due to lasting Hungarian influence, was reluctant to embrace the Yugoslav idea, Slovene and Croat emigrants from the Julian March were fond of it. Assessing the methods of the Yugoslav extraterritorial nation-building process and emigrants' identifications, the author suggests that while Prekmurje emigrants maintained their non-national identity, the Julian March diaspora developed its own vision of the Yugoslav "homeland."

**KEYWORDS:** disputed territories, state-diaspora relations, Julian March, Prekmurje, interwar Yugoslavia

## IZVLEČEK

### **Oblikovanje lojalnosti na obrobjih: Izseljenci iz Julijske krajine in Prekmurja ter prva Jugoslavija**

Da bi prikazal odnose med državo in diasporo v kontekstu spreminjajočih mej in političnih sistemov po prvi svetovni vojni, avtor predstavi primera izseljencev iz Julijske krajine in Prekmurja. Medtem ko slovensko govoreče prebivalstvo Prekmurja zaradi dolgotrajnega madžarskega vpliva ni sprejemalo Jugoslavije, so bili slovenski in hrvaški izseljenci iz Julijske krajine navdušeni nad jugoslovansko idejo. Z raziskavo jugoslovanskega zunajteritorialnega narodotvornega procesa in identifikacij izseljencev avtor ugotavlja, da so prekmurski izseljenci ohranjali svojo nenacionalno identiteto, diaspora iz Julijske krajine pa je razvila svojo lastno vizijo jugoslovanske »domovine«.

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** sporna ozemlja, odnosi med državo in diasporo, Julijska krajina, Prekmurje, prva Jugoslavija

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1930, when the region of Prekmurje was already integrated into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav ambassador to Washington, Leonid Pitamic, an acclaimed lawyer of Slovene origin, pointed out the difficulties the Yugoslav diplomatic corps faced in engaging Prekmurje emigrants. Pitamic underlined that the attitude of these emigrants toward Yugoslavia was anything but favorable. As the emigrants came from the northeastern region, ceded to Yugoslavia with the Treaty of Trianon, Pitamic regarded them to be brought up in strictly “Hungarian spirit” and therefore recommended prudence in addressing them (Pitamic, 1930). Similarly, the Yugoslav ambassador to Buenos Aires, Ivan Švegel, a Slovene career diplomat with experience in the Austro-Hungarian service and an admirer of King Aleksandar, emphasized caution in dealing with emigrants who derived from the Julian March region, incorporated to Italy with the Treaty of Rapallo (Švegel, 1932).

To create a loyal Yugoslav diaspora, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, from 1929, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (hereafter, I will refer to the state simply as Yugoslavia), followed the practices of other states. For example, by the end of the nineteenth century, Italy strived to transform “its” emigrants into a loyal diaspora, known under the name *italiani all'estero* (Choate, 2008; Brunnbauer, 2016: 224). To maintain their national allegiance and extract their economic resources, Yugoslavia attempted to govern members of the tripartite Serbo-Croat-Slovene nation (as proclaimed by the state’s ideology) abroad as Yugoslavs at home, disregarding the state’s borders (cf. Ragazzi, 2017: 13). To pursue this policy, Yugoslavia treated the emigrants (including their descendants) who originated from its territory as subjects unless they renounced their citizenship (Đikanović, 2016: 46–49; Official Gazette, 1928: 741). While the state could not police the emigrants, Yugoslavia’s diplomatic corps worked on channeling emigrants’ remittances, interfered in emigrants’ associations, toured their communities, and monitored their attitudes (cf. Larson, 2020: 85). Yugoslavia’s sway over emigrant communities was, however, curtailed by host states’ governments, such as that of the United States, which implemented Americanization programs and introduced immigration restrictions (cf. Varlez, 1929: 11). Moreover, the fact that the majority of those whom Yugoslavia claimed as its emigrants departed as subjects of the Habsburg crown additionally hindered Yugoslavia’s capacities to engage its presumed co-nationals (Brunnbauer, 2016: 228). Yet it seems that nowhere was this task as challenging as with the emigrants coming from the disputed areas such as Prekmurje (part of Yugoslavia but aspired by Hungary) and the Julian March (an Italian region with a substantial presence of Slovenes and Croats). These migrants either did not have Yugoslav citizenship or were brought up in a different cultural background than the bulk of their presumed compatriots (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Map of the Interwar Yugoslavia showing the regions of Julian March and Prekmurje (source: Digitalne zbirke Nacionalne i sveučilišne knjižnice u Zagrebu [Digital Collections of the National and University Library in Zagreb], <https://digitalna.nsk.hr/pb/?object=info&id=578344>).

Instead of justifying Wilsonian principles, the Paris Peace Conference created nation-states whose borders hardly overlapped with their presumed ethnonational boundaries. Due to the perception of the state in terms of “property” of its titular nation, issues of ethnic minorities, along with irredentism and border revisionism, burdened interwar East-Central Europe (cf. Brubaker, 1996: 6; Poznan, 2018: 165). Many states believed that the territories with a high amount of their co-nationals, which by postwar agreements had been adjudicated to other states, ought to be annexed (redeemed, according to the official slogan), basing their requests on ethnonational grounds. Likewise, state authorities regarded those incorporated regions where numerous “co-nationals” lived as being reunited with their homelands. Therefore, while Yugoslavia considered the annexation of Prekmurje as that territory’s liberation from the Hungarian yoke, the Julian March, with its Slovene and Croat populations, remained an area of “unredeemed brothers.”

Although the Yugoslav authorities considered the Slovene-speaking population of Prekmurje to form part of its titular nation, this population’s long-standing embeddedness in the Hungarian framework, impositions by the new authorities, and lasting particular ethnic identifications obstructed the incorporation of the region to its “homeland” (Kosi, 2020). Considering that the incorporation at “home” was not free from obstacles, the difficulties in engaging Prekmurje emigrants could be hardly surprising. The Julian March largely corresponded to the territory known as the Austrian Littoral in the epoch before the Great War. The annexation of this region to Italy and the accompanying Italianization, along with the ensuing economic crisis, resulted in the emigration of Slovene and Croat populations primarily to neighboring Yugoslavia and Argentina.

By examining the emigrants' newspapers, as well as the material of Yugoslav embassies in Buenos Aires and Washington, I aim to analyze how the emigrants from the Julian March and Prekmurje developed their particular identifications and, consequently, attitudes toward the self-proclaimed Yugoslav "homeland." Shedding light on their attitudes, I aim to find out how the emigrants from these disputed territories re-created the society they had abandoned while integrating into the new world. Coming from the region where political mobilization dated to the Austrian state context, the Julian March emigrants rallied around the image of their region, which they viewed as enslaved by Fascism. In so doing, they inscribed into the wider anti-Fascist resistance, becoming thus disturbing not only to Italy but also to their Yugoslav "motherland," which persecuted communists and was afraid that anti-Fascist sentiments might hinder relations with Italy. By contrast, as Prekmurje emigrants derived from the Kingdom of Hungary, where local and parliamentary politics were in the hands of the gentry, they were not as politically engaged (cf. Judson, 2016: 359). Instead, they considered priests as those who could facilitate the perpetuation of their local traditions. Consequently, the legacies of different political cultures shaped distinctive emigrants' attitudes.

The emergence of mass politics saw the development of the press. While the Julian March enjoyed a tradition of publishing, in Prekmurje, the first newspaper in Prekmurje Slovene appeared only in 1913 (*Novine*, edited by Jožef Klekl Sr.). Two separate practices can also be observed by examining the newspapers' structures. Contrary to the Julian March emigrants' newspapers (*Novi list/Slovenski list* and *Slovenski tednik*), which delivered the news on international politics on the first page, the most prominent newspaper of Prekmurje emigrants *Amerikanski Szlovecov Glász* (ASG, known in English as the *American Wendish Voice*, published in their largest settlement, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania) reported on American events, politics, and associational life on the front. Furthermore, whereas news from the "old place" in ASG (in the section "*Ka novoga vu sztárom kráji?*") referred mostly to local chronicles, those in Julian March newspapers contained information on the Fascist persecution in the area. In addition, while the Julian March newspapers reported amply on Yugoslavia, reference to the South Slavic state can only rarely be found in ASG. Given the Hungarian legacy, it is not surprising that a particular inclination toward Hungary, also manifest in cooperation with Hungarian emigrants, could be discerned in the newspaper. Yet, it would be too far-reaching to claim that the newspaper politically supported Hungary, at least during the years for which archival issues are accessible, hence from 1924 on (1924, 1927, 1936, 1939).

What united the Julian March and Prekmurje emigrants was their state of being bereft of "homeland," a condition that, in the wake of post-World War I border shifts, many East-Central European migrants had in common (cf. Poznan, 2018: 187). While historiography on states' emigration and diaspora policies has been expanding

recently,<sup>1</sup> the issues of complex loyalties following the postwar transformations have received only scarce attention. In addition, scholars dealing with Prekmurje or Julian March emigrants have mostly dealt with these groups separately, and not through the lenses of state-diaspora relations (cf. Kuzmič, 2001; Kalc, 1996, 2016; Mislej, 1994). Therefore, by comparing these two cases of disputed territories in the wake of post-World War I transitions, this analysis aims to render a more nuanced image of migrations, nation-building, and sovereignty and to suggest their transnational dimension.

## EMIGRATION AND INCORPORATION OF PREKMURJE TO YUGOSLAVIA

The region of Prekmurje (Hungarian *Muravidék*, German *Übermurgebiet*) was historically (up to 1920) linked to the Kingdom of Hungary and its westernmost counties of Vas and Zala. With poor traffic connections to urban districts and administrative centers, the area was continuously on the margins of successive state formations, the Kingdom of Hungary, the Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia, socialist Yugoslavia, and even for a certain period in Slovenia. Land fragmentation, demographic pressure, and shortage of jobs in the wider region made seasonal migrations to the Hungarian interior common among Prekmurje inhabitants (Olas, 1957: 176–181; Kalc et al., 2020: 82). In addition, before the Great War, these migrants participated in transoceanic movements. Most of these movements were temporary, but eventually, many of them stabilized. They established their communities in Illinois, Ohio, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, with their largest settlement in the latter state's town of Bethlehem (Horváth, 1922: 55–58; Kuzmič, 2001: 38). In the interwar period, transoceanic movements carried on. However, because of the US immigration quota, they redirected to Argentina, where most Prekmurje emigrants settled in the Avellaneda district of Buenos Aires (Cmor, 2003).

The nationalization and economic as well as infrastructural integration of Prekmurje into the Hungarian framework (the bridge over the Mur River was built only in 1922) meant that around 90,000 (Olas, 1957: 183) Slovene-speaking inhabitants of the region had, at best, minimal contacts with Slovenian Carniolans and Styrians. Consequently, the Slovene national movement, which had flourished in Carniola and Styria by the end of the nineteenth century, was nearly absent in Prekmurje. Furthermore, grounding their beliefs in ethnolinguistic nationalism, Slovene nationalists aimed at incorporating the Slovene-speaking population of Prekmurje into a

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1 See, for instance, Green and Weil (2007) for the link between emigration and constitution of modern states, Green and Waldinger (2016) for the way migrant-sending states' shape emigrant transnational practices, Brunnbauer (2016) for the link between Yugoslavia's migration policies and nation-building processes, and Larson (2020) and Đikanović (2016) for the analysis of Yugoslav diaspora in the United States.

unified Slovene polity. However, the Slovene-speakers of Prekmurje conceived their “Sloveneness” (referring to themselves as *Sloveni* or *vogrski* (Hungarian) *Slovenci*) predominantly in regional terms (Kosi, 2018: 96). In addition, the Hungarian authorities stimulated regional identification by supporting the press in the Slovene of Prekmurje and discouraging the circulation of books in standard Slovene (particularly religious books published by Mohorjeva družba (Mohor’s Society) were popular among the peasants) (Jerič, 2001: 36–37). Furthermore, to dissociate them from the Slavic background, Hungarian nationalists claimed that Slovene-speakers of Prekmurje belonged to a particular Wendish ethnicity (Kuzmič, 2001: 101).

As the Hungarian authorities regarded Prekmurje Slovenes as a friendly ethnicity, many Slovene-speaking individuals viewed the emerging South Slavic state as unwelcome. Even though younger Catholic priests who studied in Styria and Carniola generally supported the incorporation, the older ones who enjoyed wider popular support, such as Jožef Klekl Sr., were reluctant to embrace the Yugoslav rule. What encouraged them to devise autonomism within the Hungarian context was a fear of the (possible) domination of Serbian orthodoxy over Catholicism in the emerging state as well as the lack of interest for the region of Prekmurje by the new authorities (Jerič, 2000: 67; Jerič, 2001: 80). This very characteristic—the Serb supremacy—was also used by the priests in emigration to steer Prekmurje emigrants away from Yugoslavia. Many natives, who were used to living in the Hungarian state, saw the incorporation to Hungary as a promise of stability.

In the attempt to contain Hungarian influence, which remained considerable until the international demarcation commission finally settled the Hungarian border in 1924, the Yugoslav authorities confiscated the otherwise forbidden emigrant press. They considered the latter as one of the principal vehicles disseminating pro-Hungarian views (District Captain of Murska Sobota, 1926: 39). Despite being prohibited in Yugoslavia because of their pro-Hungarian views, newspapers such as *ASG* circulated widely among natives of Prekmurje. The emigrant newspapers, written in the old mother tongue, facilitated transoceanic connections and were accessible to those who were not keen users of Slovene standard (Kardoš, 1934: 82). Ultimately, whereas most of the press in Prekmurje was published in the Slovene orthography, *ASG* was among the few papers which continued to be published in the old tongue using the Hungarian orthography. This fact also manifested its distance from the new state of Yugoslavia.

## **BETWEEN HUNGARY, YUGOSLAVIA, AND THE LOCAL CONTEXT: PREKMURJE MIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES**

The struggle to remain within the Hungarian state context resonated widely among Prekmurje emigrants. They were among those emigrant groups that post-war Hungarian authorities, disregarding the territorial losses, considered “inherited”



from the Kingdom of Hungary. Consequently, in the attempt to discard the Trianon territorial provisions, Hungary continued to court and monitor these emigrants (Poznan, 2018: 181–182). Yet as Prekmurje was annexed to Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav authorities also believed they had the right over the same emigrant group. However, despite the effort in devising an institutional apparatus targeting the emigrants, called *Iseljeniška služba* (Emigration Service) (Hranilović, 1987; Đikanović, 2012; Brunnbauer, 2016), Yugoslavia faced greater challenges in engaging this emigrant community. Having emigrated in the pre-World War I period,<sup>2</sup> these emigrants had scarcely any contact with Slovene (or Croat) emigrants. Therefore, winning their loyalty was a strenuous endeavor.

As was the case with the rest of Hungarian emigrants in the pre-World War I period, the Hungarian authorities attempted to obtain the support of Prekmurje emigrants (regarded as members of a friendly Wendish ethnicity) by controlling and supporting the emigrant clergy. Particularly Lutheran pastors (about one-third of Slovene-speakers of Prekmurje were evangelical), not subject to the Vatican, were prone to follow the commands of Hungarian authorities (Antalics, 1998: 133–134; Kuzmič, 2001: 116–117; Poznan, 2018: 184). Following Hungarian policies, in the aftermath of World War I, the Lutheran pastor Ernest Stiegler and Catholic cleric Lovrenc Horváth established the Hungarian Wend's Federation of America. This organization aimed at convincing victorious powers of the Great War about the necessity of annexing Prekmurje to Hungary. The federation could count on both supporters in Prekmurje and irredentists in Budapest (Kuzmič, 2001: 120–135). To raise public awareness, the organization instigated a wave of protests against the Yugoslav rule over Prekmurje in the settlements of Prekmurje emigrants (*Amerikan-szki vogrszki-szlovenov*, 1921: 13).

However, not all the emigrants supported the “Wendish option.” A part of the Catholic community vocally advocated the union with the rest of Slovenia, considering “Hungarian Slovenes” deluded. In the paper *Vogrszki Szlovenecz*, edited by Martin Godina,<sup>3</sup> they rejected the notion that Slovenes (*Szloveni*) of Prekmurje formed a separate ethnicity, distinct from Carniolan and Styrian Slovenes, claiming that “state borders do not separate nations!” (*Krajina szlovenstva*, 1917: 1). They seem to be influenced by Slovene clergy who, via the Raphael Society, an organization catering to emigrant support and pastoral care, worked on co-opting Prekmurje emigrants into the national framework (cf. Kolar, 1990; Kalc & Zobec, 2021). Thanks to the society's links to American clergy, the Slovene parish in Bridgeport, Connecticut, was

2 Their number is hard to assess: the Yugoslav authorities in Prekmurje consistently wrote about 60,000–70,000 emigrants (District Captain of Murska Sobota, 1924) whereas the statistics of the United States set the figure of Slovene-speaking emigrants born in Hungary at a mere 7,000 (Kuzmič, 2001: 31). Whereas the first number seems exaggerated, the second is probably underestimated given the number of settlements in which the emigrants lived.

3 Probably the brother of the Slovene national activist, pro-Yugoslav military leader and priest Jožef Godina (cf. Hozjan, 2020: 156).

established. There, Prekmurje emigrants welcomed a Slovene priest from Styria (Arnez, 1971: 9–10). Finally, with the settlement of Hungarian borders in 1924, Prekmurje emigrants in Chicago began cooperating with their Slovenian Catholic peers. In the city, previously the center of *Hungarian Wend's Federation*, they started referring to themselves as “Slovenci” or “prekmurski Slovenci” and rejected the term “Hungarian Slovenes” (*vogrski Slovenci*) (Horwath, 1924a: 5; Horwath, 1924b: 4).

Yet convergence with the Slovenian emigrant community was virtually absent in the emigrants' most compact settlement, Bethlehem. Some emigrants there remained in favor of Hungary even by the end of the 1920s when the emigrants claimed the revision of Trianon (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1929; cf. Puskás, 2000: 230). As ambassador Leonid Pitamic observed, the emigrants in Bethlehem were under the influence of pastor Stiegler, an educated and capable person who helped them handle official affairs and managed to dominate a relatively homogenous and non-structured emigrant community (Kuzmič, 2001: 290). A man of German origin (born in Sopron, Hungary), Stiegler settled in Bethlehem in 1914 and quickly familiarized himself with the language of Prekmurje emigrants. Allegedly, he criticized Yugoslavia because the state was dominated by Serbs who subjugated Croats and Slovenes. Given emigrants' legacy and the priest's influence, it is understandable that they did not relate to “Carniolans or Carniolan Slovenes.” Moreover, the Yugoslav Ambassador Pitamic realized that winning their support was an arduous endeavor that could be accomplished only by disseminating literature written in Prekmurje “dialect” with the Hungarian orthography (Pitamic, 1930). Nevertheless, the Yugoslav diplomatic corps did not seem to have invested any further effort in courting the community. This disinterest might be attributed to the fact that the emigrants eventually refrained from supporting Hungarian recovery of “lost territories.”

Ultimately, as Stiegler helped them re-create the image of their homeland and integrate into the host society, the emigrants instead commemorated the anniversary of his ordainment than the Hungarian or Yugoslavian holidays. The twenty-fifth anniversary of Stiegler's service was pompously celebrated with prominent guests such as American politicians and the Hungarian diplomatic corps (Prevecs dobro sze poszrecso, 1936, 1). Eventually, Stiegler and the emigrants accepted the border settlement and refrained from territorial revisionism. Consequently, they could handle unproblematic relations with Yugoslavia and travel to Prekmurje without losing attachment to Hungary. Yet translocal links to their communities in Prekmurje remained more relevant than transnational concerns. This local channel served to perpetuate traditions threatened by the implementation of annexation policies in Prekmurje.

## THE JULIAN MARCH AND “ITS” EMIGRATION

Massive transoceanic migrations were a latecomer to the major part of the Julian March (Italian *Venezia Giulia*). Before the Great War, because of rapid industrial development, Trieste—the principal port of Cisleithania—, Rijeka, Pula, and eventually Monfalcone and Gorizia, functioned as magnets absorbing workforce from the surrounding crownlands (Kalc et al., 2020: 39–40). Following the war, the region underwent a tumultuous period of transition, which signaled an economic downturn and massive emigrations from the territory. With the introduction of the Fascist dictatorship in 1926, the emigration of non-Italian teachers and other state-employees was followed by those active in the clandestine anti-Fascist struggle. Finally, the economic, and in particular agrarian crisis, accompanied by the dissolution of saving banks and cooperatives, triggered the outflow of the (semi) agrarian population, directed primarily to Argentina (Vovko, 1978: 450–451; Kalc, 1996: 26–27; Kalc, 2016). Of around 100,000 Slovenes and Croats who emigrated from Italy in this period, about 70,000 relocated to Yugoslavia, 22,000 to Argentina, and 5,000 to France and Belgium (Kalc, 1996: 28–29; cf. Purini, 1998: 39–40). This massive emigration was embedded in the context of the Italian prohibition on the emigration of ethnic Italians (the law of 1927). This practice also indicates that the state encouraged the outflow of ethnic minorities. Nonetheless, the Italian policy was not dissimilar to the one pursued elsewhere in Europe. To put it bluntly, the departure of ethnic minorities was invariably seen as a mechanism for realizing states’ nation-building objectives—also by interwar Yugoslavia (Brunnbauer, 2012: 605; Zahra, 2016: 109–110).

The fact that the emigrants fled Fascist repression decisively shaped their political attitudes. In addition, their activities were marked by the aim to recreate the social life dismantled by the Fascist measures. Relying on a tradition of associational life and newspaper publishing, they quickly began establishing their associations. Like in the Julian March and Yugoslavia, the division between those who regarded the struggle against Fascism in national terms and socialist internationalists also appeared in Argentina (Kalc, 2016: 3; Zobec, 2019: 225). Whereas the former were essentially “heirs” of Trieste’s liberal and Catholic politics, the latter perpetuated the traditions of the disbanded socialist association *Ljudski oder* (The Popular Stage). The viewpoints of nationalist liberals in Argentina roughly corresponded to those advocated by the older generation of emigrants (*stara struja*) in Yugoslavia. Many of them were fond of Yugoslav centralism and unitarism (the belief that Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes were but tribes of a Yugoslav nation). They believed that powerful Yugoslavia represented a bulwark against the Italian threat. With the advent of European border revisionism, they began to consider that the solution to the issue of Julian March lay in the annexation to its “motherland,” hence Yugoslavia (Vovko, 1978: 458–459; Kalc, 1996: 35–36). By contrast, socialist emigrants, forming part of the younger generation of Julian March emigrants in Yugoslavia (*mlada struja*), believed

in the necessity of an international struggle against Fascism and considered fighting against injustice in Argentina of vital importance for defeating the Fascist domination and, consequently, also for liberating the Julian March (Zobec, 2021a: 11). As the Yugoslav diplomatic corps denounced the disloyal emigrants to the Argentine police, these schematic differences began to alter, and the overwhelming support for Yugoslavia among nationalists withered. Likewise, the state repression undermined socialist bellicosity. Consequently, while many emigrants continued to identify with Yugoslavia, their point of reference was not the actual Yugoslav state but its reconfigured image.

## THE JULIAN MARCH EMIGRANTS IN ARGENTINA AND THEIR “HOMELAND”

Inimical relations between the emigrants and the diplomatic corps almost coincided with the implementation of dictatorship in Argentina. The *coup d'état* of General Uriburu in 1930 initiated a period of undemocratic governments and electoral fraud known in Argentine history as *Decada infame*—the Infamous Decade. During this era, the Yugoslav embassy cooperated with the Argentine police in persecuting Croat and Slovene emigrants, including those coming from the Julian March, accusing them of communist activism. As it turned out, both socialists affiliated with the association *Ljudski oder* and those who criticized the Yugoslav government or the embassy were harassed (cf. Dragutinović, 1931; Kacin, 1937: 123–128). The Yugoslav diplomatic service exercised such policy not only in Argentina. In fact, within the whole Yugoslav emigration (the “tenth banovina”), the state emissaries followed the ideology practiced in the other nine administrative units and combated disloyal emigrants (Larson, 2020: 126). Unsurprisingly, the measures that the Yugoslav diplomatic corps undertook ultimately backfired. As the emigrant priest Jože Kastelic observed, the Yugoslav embassy was incredibly successful in alienating the emigrants and discrediting the country it represented. Finally, the denunciations proved to be the best marketing campaign for anathematized newspapers, increasing their circulation (Kastelic, 1933).

As a result, many emigrants began to unite on the grounds of opposition to the Yugoslav government. The Julian March emigrants presumably found stimulus by the Italian opponents of Fascism who, when the anti-Fascist movement was gaining momentum in Argentina, rejected Mussolini's extraterritorial nation-building project (Aliano, 2012; Bisso, 2016). In 1936, with the arrival of the ambassador of Slovene origin, Izidor Cankar, relations with the emigrants improved, although not substantially. Despite the ambassador's care for the emigrant press and education, the divisions were hard to overcome. The emigrants were apparently disappointed by the ambassador's ignorance of their social issues (Kacin, 1958). Eventually, the Julian March emigrants who unremittingly supported Yugoslavia composed Cankar's most

loyal personnel, beginning with his secretary Viktor Kjuder, an emigrant and former journalist of the liberal Triestine Slovene newspaper *Edinost* (Unity). Kjuder cooperated with the Union of Yugoslav Emigrants from the Julian March, an umbrella association of Julian March emigrants in Yugoslavia whose leadership allied with the Yugoslav authorities and King Aleksandar in particular (Zobec, 2021b).

The disillusionment with Yugoslavia could be clearly recognized by analyzing emigrants' commemorative practices.<sup>4</sup> Following Pierre Nora (1996: 7), I argue that the need to commemorate the events symbolizing past realities was especially pronounced among the emigrants simply because they were not in touch with the world they had left. Although many emigrants called Yugoslavia their homeland, the analysis of commemorative practices shows what they attributed to the state-promoted celebration of Unification Day (*Dan ujedinjenja*, the commemoration of the establishment of Yugoslavia on December 1, 1918) was not always congruous to the meaning imposed by the state. After all, commemorative practices constitute a contested field even though they might appear consensual (Gillis, 1994: 5). Whereas the celebration of unitary Yugoslavia was at the forefront of official commemorations, demands for social restructuring and incorporation of Julian March often appeared in the emigrant newspapers (Zobec, 2021a: 14).

Moreover, as the emigrants identified with the misery of Julian March, they organized events condemning Fascist policy over the region. Specifically, the Trieste Trial, the Fascist show trial at which four activists were given death sentences, and many were incarcerated, was transformed into *un lieu de mémoire*. The Trial, which coincided with Uriburu's coup, provoked protests of Slovene and Yugoslav emigrants around the world, with particularly pronounced demonstrations in the United States (Kalc & Milharčič Hladnik, 2015). In Argentina, the leftist emigrants participated in the manifestation organized by the Italian anti-Fascists, but the dictatorial regime dissolved the event (Mislej, 1994: 98). Subsequently, more manifestations were held to commemorate the Trial. The greatest of them followed the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and was animated by the Defense Alliance of Yugoslavs in Italy, the organization of Julian March emigrants in the United States (Veličastna manifestacija za primorske brate, 1936: 1), and probably also by protests of the Italian emigrants against the imperialism of their "homeland" (Bertagna, 2009: 3). The Yugoslav diplomatic corps never endorsed these manifestations so as not to provoke diplomatic scandal with Italy, which, in the second half of the 1930s, was becoming an ever more crucial Yugoslav partner.

The "plight" of the Julian March was not absent from the memorial frame of the "ordinary" emigrants. However, their recollections were more linked to the public representation than private remembrance. In the emigrant correspondence, instead of references to the Fascist terror, one finds affirmations of familial solidarity and ties to a particular village community (Zobec, 2013). In this perspective, it is essential to

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4 For a detailed analysis see Zobec, 2021a.

note *when* references to the Julian March, informing the communal identity, were evoked. It could be argued that remembrance of the “enslaved” region came to the fore when the Fascist persecution was especially pronounced or Yugoslav “liberation” was drawing near. After all, following World War II, the campaign for incorporating the region into socialist Yugoslavia acquired massive emigrant support. Numerous signatures demanding annexation were sent to the Paris Peace Conference in 1947 (Mislej, 1994). Yet even though memorial references to the Julian March united these emigrants, not everybody felt invoked by this vision. Among them were those who volunteered for Italy to fight in Ethiopia, despicably called “lost sons” by the emigrant newspaper (*Izguljeni sinovi*, 1935: 1). They were expelled from the community sharing the memory of the region’s misery. In addition, as dictatorial governments in Argentina introduced an atmosphere hostile to non-Argentines, and dominant prejudices, particularly against Slavs associated with socialism, became widespread, many Julian March immigrants embraced anonymization in the Argentinian society. Furthermore, to evade stigmatization, some immigrants began to identify themselves as Italians, adopting a widespread and accepted identity in Argentina (Molek, 2016: 18).

## CONCLUSION

The ways Julian March and Prekmurje emigrants devised their relation to the self-proclaimed Yugoslav “homeland” reveal contrasting attitudes. Whereas the emigrants of Prekmurje often demonstrated their adherence to local traditions, the emigrants of Julian March stressed their allegiance to Yugoslavia. Yet, their attachment to the Yugoslav state was particular as it foresaw the rearrangement of the state they considered their homeland.

The distinction in Prekmurje and Julian March emigrants’ attachment to Yugoslavia owed mainly to the legacy of the pre-World War I period. In the Julian March, then the Austrian Littoral, Slovene nationalist associations emerged with the advent of politicization. They advocated the unification of Slovene-inhabited crownlands and pan-Slavism. By contrast, in the Hungarian Prekmurje, the links to Styria and Carniola were virtually absent. The Slovene-speaking population there often considered its position to be separate from Slovenia proper. As politics in Hungary were in the hands of the gentry, social activities in Prekmurje mainly revolved around the parish. Therefore, it is not surprising that priests fared much better than state emissaries in the contest for winning Prekmurje emigrants’ loyalty. While identifications depend on many factors, Prekmurje emigrants’ relation with the priest often determined their attitudes.

Even though both emigrant groups were subject to competing states’ interests, it seems that eventually, no state of origin could engage the targeted emigrants. While Yugoslavia and Hungary did demonstrate ambitions to control their

presumed co-nationals, postwar circumstances and limited consular infrastructure eventually curtailed their engagement. In the face of this weak role of states, most emigrants from both groups were in general more translocal than transnational in their attitudes. Even if many Julian March emigrants, especially in times of increased Fascist oppression, identified with the image of an imperiled minority and vowed for the liberation of Yugoslavia's "unredeemed territories," tying their cause to the international anti-Fascist movement, still only a minority was politically engaged. Consequently, many emigrants maintained translocal connections to their communities, as exemplified in the emigrant newspapers circulating in Prekmurje and emigrant correspondence in the Julian March. These connections were more relevant than transnational links to the states, which were absent for them. Prekmurje migrants thus nurtured their "localism" by maintaining ties with their compatriots at home, who, in turn, embraced emigrants' press and used it to affirm the specialty of Prekmurje Slovene.

The post-World War I context of shifting borders created areas whose links to national frameworks were fragile and ambiguous. Even though the states endeavored to build their respective "emigrant nations" (Choate, 2008), they faced difficulties engaging the emigrants coming from these disputed territories. Diaspora building projects were, therefore, from the very beginning challenged by the migrant-sending states' inability to treat many of their presumed co-nationals as diaspora members. State-diaspora relations were, however, not unidirectional: it was not just that states aimed at building diasporas; migrants, too, exercised influence on state formation. As the case of Prekmurje shows, migrant transoceanic connections, which often bypassed states' initiatives, did not just serve to perpetuate relations threatened by emigrants' dislocation. They also shaped the process of state (dis)integration of these disputed territories.

Despite being embedded in the interwar context, the issues of migrations from disputed areas continue to be relevant for studying transnational dimensions of state- and nation-building processes, especially in the contexts of transitions. The case of Trieste emigrants in Australia in post-World War II is a case in point. These emigrants who fled to Australia with the annexation of Trieste to Italy in 1954 nurtured non-national belonging that was later challenged by the Italian state and emigrant associations which managed to dominate the community and incorporate them into the national framework (Nelli, 2000). Even though many emigrants embraced national narratives, they often kept their particular identifications, not infrequently also by corresponding with members of their communities at "home." Understanding these processes is instructive not only for challenging state-promoted notions of diasporas as homogenous entities but also for displaying the importance of transnational and translocal contacts within the context of transitions.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The author would like to thank Ulf Brunnbauer, Aleksandra Tobiasz, and the reviewers for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

This work was supported by the Slovene Research Agency (ARRS) under Grant Z5-1880 "Minorities, Diasporas and the Subversives: Extraterritorial Control Over the Slovene Emigrants during the Interwar Period" and the programme P5-0070 (B) "National and Cultural Identity of the Slovene Emigration in the Context of Migration Studies."



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## Povzetek

### OBLIKOVANJE LOJALNOSTI NA OBROBJIH: IZSELJENCI IZ JULIJSKE KRAJINE IN PREKMURJA TER PRVA JUGOSLAVIJA Miha ZOBEC

Avtor v prispevku proučuje odnose med izseljenci iz Prekmurja in Julijske krajine ter njihovo jugoslovansko »domovino«, s čimer želi predstaviti zapletene odnose med državo in diasporo v obdobju med obema svetovnimi vojnama. S Pariško mirovno konferenco so namesto etnično enotnih nacionalnih držav, kot je bilo pričakovano, nastale države, katerih meje so se le v majhni meri prekrivale z njihovimi etničnonacionalnimi ozemlji. Zato je bilo medvojno obdobje obremenjeno z vprašanji revizionizma meja ter etničnih manjšin. Poleg omejitve priseljevanja, ki so jih postavljale ciljne države, so odnose med državami in diasporo obremenjevale tudi spremembe meja. Ker so bili izseljenci iz Julijske krajine italijanski državljani, izseljenci iz Prekmurja pa so prihajali z območja s stalnim madžarskim vplivom, se je Jugoslavija soočala z velikimi težavami pri naslavljanju teh izseljenskih skupnosti. Ti dve skupini izseljencev se nista razlikovali le po svojem odnosu do Jugoslavije, temveč tudi po svoji družbeni strukturi. Medtem ko je bila za Julijsko krajino značilna tradicija društvenega življenja in izdajanja tiskanih medijev, se je življenje slovensko govorečega prebivalstva v Prekmurju vrtelo v glavnem okoli cerkve.

Posledično so prekmurske izseljence »usmerjali« duhovniki, izseljenci iz Julijske krajine pa so tvorili strukturirano skupnost, ki je izražala različna mnenja, tudi glede Jugoslavije. Vendar pa so si zaradi represivne politike jugoslovanskega diplomatskega zbora kljub podpiranju Jugoslavije na koncu ustvarili alternativne vizije »domovine«. Jugoslavija se je torej izkazala za neuspešno pri vzpostavljanju nadnacionalnih vezi s prekmurskimi izseljenci ter pri pridobivanju naklonjenosti izseljencev iz Julijske krajine. Namesto nadnacionalnih sta ti dve izseljenski skupnosti vzpostavili translokalne in transregionalne povezave, katerih cilj je bil bodisi ohranjanje lokalnih tradicij, kot je to veljalo za prekmurske izseljence, bodisi ozaveščanje o »zaslužnji« regiji, kar je bila stalna tema komemoracij priseljencev iz Julijske krajine.

