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The Kin-State and Sending-State Policies of Interwar Yugoslavia: The Issue of Julian March Immigrants in Their Yugoslav 'Homeland' and the Return of the 'Tenth Banovina'

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This contribution analyses the ways in which interwar Yugoslavia addressed two different diasporas, one comprising the emigrants and the other encompassing the external kin of Slovenes and Croats living in the Italian region of Julian March/Venezia Giulia. In addition, it examines how, on the one hand, the emigrants who 'returned' and, on the other, the Julian March migrants who fled the region to settle in Yugoslavia, were integrated into the Yugoslav nation-building project. It suggests that Yugoslavia's diaspora-building was importantly linked to overcoming internal divisions in a complex country and restoring political legitimacy. Furthermore, it argues that diaspora-building was more part of a discourse than carried out in earnest, since Yugoslavia, occupying an unfortunate position in the international system, was ill-equipped to provide emigrant care or serve the return migrants and Julian March immigrants.

Keywords: The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia, Yugoslav diasporas, kin-state and sending-state policies, nation- and state-building

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Introduction

Yugoslavia's successor states devised their nationhood in times of socialist and monarchic Yugoslavia. Diaspora programmes – now employed by Croatia and, to a lesser extent, Slovenia, the countries with the once highest rates of emigration in the former Yugoslav area – to a large extent reflect the trends already set in motion in the past by monarchic Yugoslavia (Ragazzi 2017). Similarly, the attitude of Slovenia towards 'its' minority in Italy reveals some long-standing patterns, conditioned by bilateral (political) relations, an international political framework and the relevance of economic exchange with Italy. This economic exchange has long been unequal: whereas Italy has been among the chief trading partners of Slovenia (Yugoslavia), Italy's commerce with the latter has only been of negligible importance. Therefore, the long legacy of today's policies and the fact that the first Yugoslavia was a comparatively weak state operating in the era of state interventionism and protectionism – orientation which is, again, now becoming increasingly popular – makes the analysis of the country's diaspora programmes in the context of its nation- and state-building projects even more relevant.

Monarchic Yugoslavia was, like other fledgling countries in Southeastern and Central Europe, a nationalising state built on the ruins of empires. The processes of post-imperial transition and the establishment of a new state entity were, in the Yugoslav case, incredibly complex. First, the newly formed state was composed of regions deriving from different contexts – Austro-Hungarian on the one hand (Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina) and Serbian (previously Ottoman) on the other. Second, the state envisaged itself as a representative of the tripartite Yugoslav nation, composed of Serb, Croat and Slovene 'tribes'. Given the different traditions of statehood and already existing nation-building projects within previous entities, fashioning a new, Yugoslav, nation was an incredibly arduous undertaking (Nielsen 2014; Wachtel 1998). Yet the nation-building endeavour did not stop at the Yugoslav borders; the project was essentially conceived as a trans-state process, creating a global community based on presumed ethnic origin (Ragazzi 2017). Consequently, both the emigrants and the Yugoslav kin minorities, 'accidental diasporas' which resulted from the border settlements following the First World War (Brubaker 2000), were to become part of a tripartite (consisting of Serb, Croat and Slovene 'tribes') Yugoslav nation. However, tying the emigrants to a community sharing a similar fate was a backbreaking enterprise since the majority of them had already relocated as Austro-Hungarian subjects (Brunnbauer 2016). Bonding with the external kin, consisting primarily of around half a million Slovenes and Croats who were subject to the Fascist Italianisation, was equally troublesome since Italy was considered far superior to the fledgling Balkan state which, during the period of post-imperial transition, faced many issues with internal cohesion. Furthermore, Yugoslavia's policies towards the kin minorities were hardly consistent and reflected the state's intricate composition. While Slovenian and Croatian parts of the kingdom were concerned with the issue, the 'dominating' Serb part was primarily interested in maintaining sound economic relations with one of Yugoslavia's foremost trading partners. With a view to engaging diasporas, Yugoslavia looked to attract mainly overseas emigrants for return migration and to welcome the migrants arriving from the territory annexed to Italy in the wake of the Great War. National considerations were, here, as was generally the case in diaspora and migration policies, coupled with economic reflections, as the emigrants were thought to possess the necessary skills for fostering Yugoslavia's industrialisation and were used for nationalising the Yugoslav labour market, hence substituting for the 'foreign' (many were actually just foreign-language-speaking persons who had been employed in the pre-World War I era) workers. Nevertheless, whilst national considerations encouraged the inclusion of immigrants of Yugoslav origin, there were also socio-economic and practical concerns, most notably the issues linked to Yugoslavia's demographic development,

economic difficulties and the problem of citizenship, all of which hindered the process. The aim of the article is therefore twofold: first, to display the ways in which monarchic Yugoslavia's authorities addressed its two 'diasporas' – one consisting of emigrants and the other of kin minorities – and to analyse how this endeavour was linked to the country's state-building. Second, by examining the placement of return migrants and the Julian March[1] immigrants in Yugoslav societies, it seeks to understand the practical outcomes of the country's diaspora programmes.

Clearly, Yugoslavia was not the first country to embark on diaspora-building. Already in the 19th century, the strategies of fashioning modern territorialised nation-states, paradoxically, also entailed plans for bonding with 'fellow countrymen' residing beyond the country's borders (Osterhammel 2014). Needless to say, the modalities of engaging diasporas shifted over time. As explained by Smith (2003), diaspora-building depended greatly on changes in the global system and the ways in which the states reacted to them. As a result, in a certain period, different countries employed similar programmes of emigrant oversight, though the extent of their outreach depended on their position in the international order. Not only have international circumstances been important but domestic concerns – the issues linked to regime transformation and its legitimacy – were of equal relevance when fashioning these nation-building programmes (Smith 2003; Waterbury 2010a). In addition, by connecting with their 'homelands', diaspora communities have often played a significant role in (re)configuring diaspora programmes, thus implying the necessity of analysing transnational entanglements (Manz 2014). While recognising the relevance of emigrants' transnational engagement for understanding Yugoslavia's diaspora-building – the sheer establishment of the country was vitally linked to diaspora activism – my case-study puts the analysis of the state mechanisms of diaspora construction at the forefront. It does this by looking at Yugoslavia's engagement with the two diasporas, the external kin on the one hand and the 'tenth *banovina*' on the other. Arguably, while policies advanced towards these 2 distinct sets of people differed, the underlying premises for extraterritorial outreach were based on similar foundations such as capitalising on diasporas' resources and on affirming political legitimacy via diaspora engagement. Therefore, the contribution, following Myra Waterbury, attempts to explain the rationale behind Yugoslavia's programmes targeting the members of the national community residing outside the state borders and to examine the contingent events which redefined it (Waterbury 2010b). In addition, by shedding light on the placement of 'returnees' and Julian March immigrants in Yugoslav societies, it also aims to analyse the ways in which these nation-building programmes resonated when confronted with the day-to-day challenges faced by the 'national' newcomers to the country. The idea of emigrant return – as well as presenting Yugoslavia as a safe haven for the Julian March *émigrés* – were critical to Yugoslavia's diaspora policies. Moreover, while the emigrant 'return' differed from immigration in the state's ideological premises, it can be paralleled analytically, since both movements imply immigration to the country (Žmegač 2010). Even though the immigrants' integration into the Yugoslav fabric does not form part of the country's transborder outreach, it provides a test of Yugoslav nation- and state-building projects.

The contribution rests on the analysis of archival material related to the development of Yugoslavia's migration apparatus and infrastructure targeting emigrants and kin minorities. In presenting the bureaucratic structure dealing with migration, the article mostly relies on material from the Emigration Commissariat (EC) – the main organisation and information organ coordinating migration movements – as well as on the archival collection related to Artur Benko-Grado, Yugoslavia's foremost migration expert. In analysing the country's diaspora engagement, the material from the EC is supplemented by that related to the country's diplomatic infrastructure. The projects concerning the return migrants' and Julian March immigrants' colonisation are elucidated by looking into the emigrants' conference

proceedings and the material of the Italian diplomatic corps in Yugoslavia. Relying on its vast network of espionage, Italy was able to gather significant intelligence concerning the Julian March immigrants in Yugoslavia, thus providing data on Yugoslavia's relation with the region in question. The archival material is thus critically discussed, as it is through the lens of the most recent literature which, however, does not address several aspects brought forth in the contribution.

Yugoslavia's extraterritorial engagement has attracted a number of studies, the most often related to the analysis of the country's emigration policies (Đikanović 2012; Miletić 2012) or to exploring the link between Yugoslavia's emigration and nation-building projects (Brunnbauer 2016). The study of Yugoslav diasporas has been equally fruitful. Unsurprisingly, most of the scholarship has addressed Yugoslav emigration in its most numerous settlements – therefore mostly in North America (Đikanović 2016; Larson 2020) and slightly less in South America (Molek 2016; Puh and Silva 2017, 2018; Zobec 2023).[2] The Julian March emigration has also been analysed, most notably by works highlighting its political ramifications (Kalc 1996) and insertion in the Yugoslav socio-political framework (Wörsdörfer 2004; Zobec 2022).

Thus far, little effort has been invested in bringing together these two separate bodies of knowledge, one analysing Yugoslav diasporas and diaspora policies and the other shedding light on the country's stance towards the external kin. Likewise, the relevance of Yugoslavia's diaspora-building for overcoming internal divisions and restoring political legitimacy has thus far not been highlighted. In short, the relevance of the country's extraterritorial engagement for understanding its history has been neglected. By analysing both the ideological underpinnings and practical outcomes of both sets of Yugoslavia's extraterritorial policies, we hope to gain a more comprehensive and nuanced image of Yugoslavia's past. Since diaspora politics are dependent both on domestic concerns and on international relations, examining them helps to better understand both the (domestic) issues which burdened the country as well as its international positioning. Moreover, even though the case-study refers to the interwar Yugoslavia, its findings have broader implications – first, as a consequence of long-lasting legacies of diaspora policies set forth at that time. Second, even though, at first, Yugoslavia did not forcefully engage in diaspora politics like some other countries did at that time (for instance Italy, Hungary or Poland), Yugoslavia's 'case' is equally instructive for comprehending the meanings and strategies of states' extraterritorial oversight. Not least because examining countries that failed in their diasporic endeavours is equally as relevant as exploring those which succeeded (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003).

The article first provides an outline of Yugoslavia's diaspora and kin-state policies. By shedding light on convergences and divergences in engaging 2 diasporas, it endeavours to understand the role of diaspora engagement in the country's nation-building. It then displays the issue of return and immigration to Yugoslavia and thus presents the ways in which migration policies unfolded in practice. Finally, by comparing the conceptual underpinnings and practical developments, it situates the country's extraterritorial outreach in a comparative framework.

The development of Yugoslavia's diaspora and kin-state policies

The strategies of envisioning a de-territorialised entity consisting of Yugoslavs abroad set the Yugoslav attitudes towards diasporas and kin minorities on an equal footing. Yet the policies which the country's authorities advanced towards these 2 different sub-sets of 'Yugoslavs abroad' differed in practice. This section first illustrates the development of Yugoslavia's diaspora policies targeting the emigrants. Second, it looks at the ways in which the state authorities engaged the kin minorities in Italy. Finally, it

sets Yugoslavia's diaspora and kin-state policies in a comparative framework, in a bid to display the underlying purposes of both sets of policies.

The development of Yugoslavia's migration and diaspora policies was vitally linked to changes in the international socio-economic framework following the First World War. As *laissez-faire* capitalism gradually gave way to state-imposed protectionism and control over the economy, the states began to act as nationalising entities, defining themselves as proprietors of titular nations (Foucault 2008; Le Bras 2003; Zahra 2016). Naturally, the shift was not as schematic, as many attributes outlived imperial dissolution. Yet the tumultuous transition ended with the imposition of King Aleksandar's dictatorship in 1929 and the outbreak of the economic crisis. However, drawing on the experiences of and casualties suffered during the First World War as well as on the importance of the country's establishment, the fledgling Yugoslav state carefully monitored and managed population flows from its inception. The mission was to regulate the streams in order to render them economically and nationally 'beneficial' for the state. Consequently, the migrant was, in Yugoslavia like elsewhere during the period, transformed into the 'human capital of the nation'; this meant that their individual interests were disregarded for the supposed advantage of the state (International Labour Office 1921: 89).

Maintaining the loyalty of emigrant Yugoslavs was one of the cornerstones of Yugoslavia's diaspora policies from the country's inception, especially as diasporas in North and South America, as powerful lobby groups, vitally contributed to the establishment of the state during the First World War, in both financial and diplomatic terms. Yet the plans to transform the predominantly Croat and Slovene emigrants – who had relocated before the country's establishment – into dedicated subjects, were slow to materialise. The country was simply too burdened by pressing issues of border settlement, agrarian reform, political instability and financial stabilisation for the authorities to direct their attention towards the diasporas. Nevertheless, soon after the country's establishment, experts working at the Ministry of Social Policy, who were responsible for migration issues, considered that the kingdom had both economic and national interests *vis-à-vis* the great mass of emigrants residing mainly in the US (totalling around 600,000 individuals, of whom around 300,000 were of Croat origin, 250,000 of Slovene origin and 50,000 of Serb origin). In fact, these objectives were complementary, as loyalty to Yugoslavia was needed if the emigrants were to contribute financially to the 'homeland' (Arhiv Jugoslavije, n.d.). Their financial support was considered by policy-makers and migration experts to be critical given that Yugoslavia was in desperate need of capital to facilitate industrial development. In this vein, one of the foremost migration experts of the time, Artur Benko-Grado, suggested that the state authorities could wisely use the workforce in the US by transforming them into temporary migrants, so that they would commute back and forth and thus provide the know-how for Yugoslavia's much-needed industrialisation (Benko-Grado 1924). However, with the imposition of the quota system in the US in 1921 and, especially, with further restrictions in 1924, the realisation of Benko-Grado's programme became unlikely. The proclivity of the US to restrict the outflow of the workforce and to Americanise those already residing there, encouraged the Yugoslav policy-makers to solidify diaspora programmes and to redirect the objectives of the state's *attachés* and diplomatic corps. No longer responsible for technical and organisational issues, their core assignment consisted of 'national-cultural propaganda' (Arhiv Jugoslavije 1928). Furthermore, the Serb, Croat and Slovene emigrants were, through the law based on *ius sanguinis*, to be transformed into Yugoslavs. In other words, the Citizenship Law passed in 1928 not only facilitated the acquisition of citizenship for people of 'Serbo-Croat-Slovene' origin born abroad but also stipulated the perpetuation of membership of those born on what is now Yugoslav soil but who were residing elsewhere – unless they renounced it (Uradni list [The Official Gazette], 19 November 1928). The *ius sanguinis* principle engendered a host of problems for emigrants visiting

Yugoslavia, especially regarding the mandatory military service for men, thus further provoking the estrangement of the emigrant population. Throughout the 1920s, links with the homeland were poorly established and the issue of the Yugoslav diaspora barely resonated in the Yugoslav public view.

Yugoslavia's development was, throughout the 1920s, encumbered by crises linked to organising common statehood and provoked mainly by the unsolved 'Croat question' – which basically included not just Croats but other parts of the former Habsburg Empire, such as Serbs, outside the former kingdom. Turmoil was the most acute in 1924–1925 and in 1928 when the Croat politician with the highest backing – Stjepan Radić – was first imprisoned and then ultimately murdered in parliament. Even the possibility of the country's decomposition surfaced at that time (Axboe Nielsen 2014). To combat disruptive forces, King Aleksandar institutionalised a dictatorship. Fostering more comprehensive diaspora programmes fit well into his endeavour to fashion national unity through administrative reorganisation (the creation of new units or '*banovinas*' bearing the names of rivers), the enhancement of surveillance apparatus and the concept of integral Yugoslavism (from then on the 'tribal identities' of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were to be revoked in favour of an indivisible Yugoslav identity). By invoking our 'tenth *banovina*' (the emigrants allegedly had complemented 9 administrative units on the Yugoslav territory), Aleksandar Karađorđević could hope to restore the government's shattered legitimacy (cf. Waterbury 2010a). Not least because the emigrant bulk consisted of 'riotous' Croats – in addition to the more withdrawn Slovenes. Attempts to attract emigrants in Yugoslav nation-building efforts were now greatly enhanced. A special section – the Department for National Propaganda Work – was institutionalised at the EC in Zagreb, the main institution for coordinating emigration affairs. Radio programmes and propaganda periodicals were set to promote the emigrants' emotional attachment and an Emigration Museum showcasing the breadth and achievements of Yugoslav emigrants was established in Zagreb (Brunnbauer 2016; Larson 2020). In addition, the emigrants were encouraged to visit Yugoslavia and participate in emigrant meetings – so-called Emigrant Congresses and Emigrant Sundays (*Iseljeničkа nedjelja* became an annual event, taking place on the first Sunday in Advent) organised to bond the emigrants with the Yugoslavs at 'home' and thus foster a sense of borderless Yugoslav identity. The cooperation of the private initiative, organisations of emigrant returnees in Yugoslavia, united in SORIS (abbr. *Savez organizacija iseljenika* = Union of emigrant organisations) was crucial in this endeavour (Đikanović 2016; Kalc and Zobec 2021). These societies functioned – as was generally true for Yugoslav civil society in the interwar period and especially in the 1930s – as an 'additional tool for the Yugoslav state- and nation-building project' (Giomi and Petrungaro 2019: 7). It is therefore hardly surprising that the president of SORIS, Milan Marjanović was, at the same time, chairman of the Central Press Bureau (*Centralni presbiro*), the main institution overseeing the country's press.

In short, the Yugoslav policy-makers devised programmes targeting the emigrants primarily because they considered them to be a financial asset but also because, by engaging diasporas, they justified the idea of a global Yugoslav nation transcending state boundaries. Whereas the emigrants residing overseas seemed financially promising for Yugoslavia, the state could not expect a similar material gain from external kin in Italy. Yet, the authorities considered migrants fleeing the territory to settle in Yugoslavia as a useful vehicle for nationalising the labour market, so they also nationally underpinned any economic interests related to these groups. In addition, Slovenes and Croats living in Italy were relevant for Yugoslavia, not simply because the state authorities could, at least potentially, play with the idea of retrieving from Italy the territory that a significant share of Yugoslav politicians and public alike considered Yugoslav by virtue of its ethnic composition. Yet, while this idea of the 'unredeemed' or 'enslaved brothers' in Italy reverberated in the Slovenian part of the kingdom and, to a lesser extent, in

Croatia, it was all but irrelevant to others, especially to the ruling Serb elite, geopolitically oriented towards the Danubian basin and the Balkans (Čermelj 1955; Tchoukarine 2011). Furthermore, as the country was officially a *status quo* rather than an irredentist state (Čermelj 1965; Mylonas 2012), the statements regarding border revision were only raised in secret and were claimed publicly only at mass rallies in support of minorities in the Italian annexed region during the authoritarian turn in the early 1930s. In addition, Yugoslav prudence in engaging kin minorities was further posited by the fact that Italy was Yugoslavia's 'superior neighbour' (both in terms of economic development and of the position it occupied in the international framework) which had no specific obligations regarding the minorities on its territory. Since 1922, the country had been run by the fascist regime that considered territorial aggrandisement – also at the cost of Yugoslavia – and treated ethnic minorities as foreign elements on Italian soil (the official term was '*allogeni*' – allogenic – 'native but foreign'), seeking thus to Italianise them (Di Michele 2023; Pergher 2012; Sala 2000). Those living in the borderlands (as Slovenes and Croats in Julian March and Germans in South Tyrol) were regarded as especially problematic, given that the state's authorities considered they could function as a 'fifth column' of their 'homeland' in case war broke out (Brubaker 1996: 5). Therefore, while Italy worked on nationalising its territory and Italianising its minorities, Yugoslavia's potential engagement on behalf of its external kin was obstructed. It was additionally hampered by the fact that Yugoslavia itself had a record of mistreatment of minorities on its territory (petitions regarding the abuse of minorities' rights flooded the League of Nations – see Cowan 2003). Therefore, raising awareness about the discrimination of Slovenes and Croats in Italy was problematic for Yugoslavia. Activism on behalf of kin minorities was further hindered by the fact that Italy was one of Yugoslavia's primary trading partners. Whereas Yugoslavia depended on exports to its Western neighbour, the Italian economy was fine without Yugoslavia – while as much as one quarter of Yugoslav exports were directed to Italy, barely one tenth of the country's import was coming from there (Belin 1930). Therefore, given the financial benefits of Italian trade and power in the international political framework, Yugoslavia's authorities adjusted its engagement of kin minorities in accordance with its relations with Italy. Consequently, as the idea of territorial loss did not resonate evenly across Yugoslavia, the country's authorities could justify economic arguments – hence the benefit of exchanges with Italy – without losing too much popular appeal by neglecting external kin.

Specificities aside, a number of parallels could be observed in policies geared towards diasporas on the one hand and those engaging kin minorities on the other. Like diasporic engagement, that on behalf of external kin was also rudimentary in the 1920s and rose to prominence in the 1930s. In the 1920s it did not entail state-wide coordinated activities and was confined to specific organisations particulary suited for engaging those in a nearby country. One of these organisations was the Office for Occupied Territory (*Pisarna za zasedeno ozemlje*), headquartered in Ljubljana and which, in the years following the Great War, collected intelligence regarding the demeanour of the Italian authorities towards Slovenes and Croats in and around Trieste and Gorizia. Spying on the territory that was with the Rapallo Treaty which was officially annexed to Italy in 1920 was continued by other organisations with similar aims and was accompanied by the activism of the paramilitary units of Orjuna (Organisation of Yugoslav Nationalists = *Organizacija jugoslavanskih nacionalista*) (Zobec 2022). The latter operated clandestinely on the adjudicated territory, supporting the anti-regime groups which sprang up as the Italian authorities pushed hard for national homogenisation after the introduction of the Yugoslav dictatorship in 1926 (Kacin-Wohinz and Verginella 2008). All these organisations had clear irredentist aims which were, however, not officially backed by the country's authorities. With the introduction of King Aleksandar's dictatorship, previously sporadic activities, scattered among various organisations, became part of a centrally coordinated programme, indirectly championed by the royal government.

Following the homogenising and nationalising principles institutionalised by the introduction of the Fascist dictatorship, the Italian authorities cracked down on the Slovene and Croat anti-fascist movements on sham trials in 1929 and 1930. In response, Aleksandar considered fuelling homeland nationalism and presenting the fate of the Julian March minorities to be intrinsically linked to Yugoslavia (cf. Brubaker 2000). By organising rallies which included organisations with the largest backing across Yugoslavia (such as the National Defence – *Narodna odbrana*, association of war veterans tied to the court; *Sokols*, the state-wide gymnastic association ingrained with Yugoslav nationalism; and the Adriatic Guard – *Jadranska straža* – association which strove to present Yugoslavs as a maritime nation, tied to the Adriatic sea), Aleksandar also hoped to exert pressure on Italy and thus present Yugoslavia as a force to be reckoned with in international relations. This strategy was made possible thanks to the activism of Julian March immigrants (as explained in the next section, they were flowing to Yugoslavia throughout the interwar period), directed by the *émigré* politician, lawyer Ivan Marija Čok. Čok left Julian March in 1928 and was Aleksandar's personal acquaintance – he familiarised himself with the Belgrade elite during the Paris Peace Conference where he functioned as an expert on ethnic issues (Bucarelli 2006; Rejec 1998). Many immigrants from the territory were philo-Yugoslav,[3] so the regime wisely sought to 'use' them in order to stir up internal unity. As a result they were settled in areas considered to be nationally sensitive, for instance on the borders with Austria where they replaced previous, mostly German-speaking officials; the centre of their associational activities was in Zagreb, as the regime hoped it could thus redirect Croat resentment against the Serb ruling elite into protests against Italy (*Archivio Storico Diplomatico Degli Affari Esteri* 1931). Yet, orchestrated engagement for the kin minorities was but a short-lived endeavour which was eclipsed as the European powers reframed their foreign policies in the wake of the ascent of Nazi Germany and the Italian imperial expansion in Ethiopia. As a result, Yugoslavia lost its traditional ally in France and began reorienting its foreign policies towards Italy and Germany. With the Treaty of Friendship, signed by the Italian and Yugoslav foreign ministers in 1937, the external kin finally disappeared from the agenda of the Yugoslav authorities. The Treaty did not contain special provisions for minority protection – the Italian foreign minister just promised that the state would solve the issue by treating it as a question of 'internal affairs' (Kalc 1996). Despite the mobilisation efforts carried out during King Aleksandar's rule, the engagement did not entail providing tangible benefits to Yugoslavs in Italy. Following Alan Gamlen (2008), it could be thus claimed that, when targeting the kin minorities, policies advanced by the Yugoslav authorities entailed only diaspora-building mechanisms (hence, defining the boundaries of the nation as stretching beyond state borders, thus sensitising the home public about the issue) and not diaspora integration mechanisms (providing those residing abroad with citizenship or some comparable document setting diaspora members on a par with those living in the homeland). Therefore, offering them citizenship was not an option – anything similar to it could provoke an undesired (diplomatic) scandal with Italy – and the issue of citizenship, as explained in the next section, was one of the most pressing problems the Julian Marchers faced upon settling in Yugoslavia. While the government facilitated immigrants' obtention of Yugoslav citizenship (although the procedure, as explained later, was not so straightforward), it also sought to encourage the external kin to stay in Italy and retain Italian citizenship so that, if the borders should ever be reframed, Yugoslavia could have some reasonable claim on the territory. The fact that the Yugoslav services could not deploy diaspora integration mechanisms when targeting kin minorities made these sets of policies different from those advanced to diaspora members across the ocean who were considered to be Yugoslav citizens.

All Yugoslavia's programmes of extraterritorial outreach adapted to external factors, such as structural transformations of the global economy (mechanisms targeting overseas diasporas adjusted

to the cessation of overseas emigration) and changes in the system of international relations (geopolitical reframing with the rise of Nazism) as well as to shifts in internal structures of power (the imposition of King Aleksandar's dictatorship). Both the overseas diasporas and the kin minorities were increasingly engaged during Aleksandar's authoritarian rule, presumably as a result of the strategy to foster national homogenisation (showcasing the breadth of the nation extending beyond borders pointed to national unity and power) and thus alleviate the effect of potentially disruptive internal disparities. To obtain a glimpse of the inequalities present in Yugoslavia, it suffices to look just at the illiteracy levels – while, in Macedonia, these reached 88 per cent of the population, in Slovenia only 8 per cent were illiterate (Kosier 1930). Furthermore, as the authorities promoted certain visions of diasporas and groups loyal to the regime while forcefully suppressing others, the goal was also to prevent alternative political forces – offering different visions of Yugoslav identity and polity organisation – from emerging. Moreover, by referring to the Yugoslavs abroad, King Aleksandar also sought to present the country as an entity which could, as a 'global nation', wield power in international relations. However, Yugoslavia's sway in this sphere was actually very limited, as the country occupied an inferior position in the international system and with an ineffective, predominantly agrarian economy – the ratio between agricultural resources and population was, in Yugoslavia, the worst in Southeastern Europe – could not hope for improvement (Tomašević 1955). As a result, even though the country, like other fledgling states in East Central Europe, conceived of nation-building in ethnonational terms and devised diaspora programmes accordingly, its power to put ideas into practice was limited. Despite the divergence in application of diaspora mechanisms (only diaspora-building mechanisms employed in the case of the external kin and both diaspora-building and integration for overseas diasporas), treating these separate sets of policies jointly reveals the underlying purposes that were common to the country's extraterritorial endeavour. While essentially targeting Yugoslavs residing abroad, the primary rationale, as outlined, was primarily linked to the country's internal dynamics. Namely, they formed part of the strategy to forge internal unity in a highly unstable country, marked by significant disequilibria and resistance to the centralised government. To combat resistance and engender national unity, the government, as explained in the following section, also maintained control over immigration and return migration to the country.

Return migration to Yugoslavia and its role in nation-building

Luring the emigrants to 'return' had long been one of the pillars of Yugoslavia's diaspora policies. Needless to say, only 'national' migrants were welcome and the policy of promoting return depended a great deal on the country's economic situation.

During the era of *lassiez-faire* capitalism, migrants were travelling between Europe and America unobstructed. Many of those who went to the US looked to pursue their goals at home, alleviate debt burdens and ameliorate households. These movements were brought to a halt by the First World War. The Habsburg consuls, being familiar with the transatlantic mobilities of their subjects, at that time anticipated massive re-migration in the immediate post-war period. As a cause of return, they cited not only the cessation of mobilities resulting from belligerency. Among the more relevant factors which they enumerated were the expected economic crisis in the US (resulting from the transition from a military economy) along with the detrimental labour conditions, especially concerning workers from Eastern and Southern Europe who were seen as 'undesirable aliens' subject to xenophobic sentiments, as advanced by labour organisations (Haus-, Hof- and Staatsarchiv 1917)

Mass-scale return migration indeed occurred, taking place in the immediate post-war years when as many as 37,611 migrants (according to the estimates of the EC) were welcomed by the newly established Yugoslavia (Karanović 1978). However, the fledgling South Slavic state was ill-prepared to host so many migrants. As a result, many returnees became utterly disillusioned with the newly founded country and opted to return to America. However, their discontent was not provoked only by Yugoslavia's incapacities; it also resulted from the hardships which they endured on the way to the 'homeland'. In addition to the necessity of disembarking in France and travelling on the continent all the way to Yugoslavia, many emigrants often fell prey to swindlers taking advantage of fluctuating currencies in the post-war era. Some of these were allegedly commissioned by Italy, Yugoslavia's imperious neighbour, interested in dominating the weaker state (Arhiv Jugoslavije 1920).

This troubled return to the country provided a major impetus for Yugoslavia to construct comprehensive migration apparatus. Despite the initial failures in organising return, emigrant re-migration was considered pivotal both for Yugoslavia's economic development and for its nation-building, especially in the context of forging economic autarky – which became particularly viable in the 1930s. It was thought that returnees would help to industrialise the country, which was desperately short of capital but rich in natural resources. By taking part in colonisation programmes, returnees would also improve land cultivation and 'nationalise' the areas which ethnic minorities forcibly abandoned (Aranicki 1931). Not surprisingly, the areas with highest rates of ethnic minorities – such as Vojvodina, Macedonia, Kosovo and Metohia – were to be primarily targeted by colonisation (Tomasevich 1955). The experts committed to improving Yugoslavia's socio-economic standing, together with the country's authorities therefore proposed channelling emigrant capital into colonisation programmes and re-migrant participation in them as a means of managing resources and population on the territory. The issue of colonisation was, along with the agrarian reform, present already with the advent of the new state, but it became increasingly pressing with the expansion of governmental control over the economy and accompanying tendency to re-direct the exit into internal migration in the later 1920s and early 1930s (Aranicki 1930; Benko-Grado 1927; Kosier 1926). However, the programme never really yielded much fruit. Frankly, the whole effort was based on misconceived premises. Yugoslavia was a country experiencing rapid demographic growth: in the 20 years of its existence, the population expanded from 12 to almost 16 million. With its high density of agrarian population, low productivity (the yield per hectare was among the lowest in Europe) and shortage of capital, there were very few prospects for return migrants to the countryside (Tomašević 1955). Consequently, poorly planned colonisation projects were barely able to attract emigrants. In fact, out of 9 administrative units, only 1 (*Sava banovina* which mainly entailed inland Croatia) established a special fund for colonisation (Tajništvo SORIS 1933).

Nonetheless, in its endeavour to welcome migrants affected by the onset of the Great Depression in the US, the migration service explicitly highlighted its willingness to provide assistance in terms of organising repatriation to and facilitating integration into the Yugoslav labour market (Aranicki 1931). Even though these efforts faded with the onset of the economic crisis in Yugoslavia (the country was hit with a delay) when Yugoslav migrant activists encouraged the adoption of reception countries' citizenship, the Yugoslav authorities continued to consider repatriation and colonisation (Bartulica 1933). The idea of substituting foreign workforce with 'national' returnees lay at the core of this project. Yet the methods of achieving this goal were not explained. Given that unemployment was high in the industrial sector, settlement on land was proposed as a solution, although without a plan for carrying it out, other than following the colonisation programme adopted in Sava banovina (Bartulica 1933). With the worsening of the economic crisis that the Yugoslav authorities were unable to address, return to

Yugoslavia hardly remained an option and was only seldom considered at emigrant congresses (I. Slovenski izseljenski kongres 1936; Lazarević 1995). Yugoslavia could therefore offer hardly any help to emigrants wanting to return they could count neither on employment in the Yugoslav industry nor on earning a living from agriculture. In addition, many of these emigrants were elderly people and, as such, were hardly employable even in normal circumstances. Many returnees were thus 'superfluous' to Yugoslavia's socio-economic requirements. Lofty plans and promises advanced by the Yugoslav migration service thus barely conformed to the reality on the ground.

A stark contrast between programmatic ideals and the bleak reality can be observed when assessing returnees' individual trajectories. While the Yugoslav authorities lauded the emigrants' struggle abroad for the 'national cause', they were reluctant to provide them with much-needed socio-economic support upon return. The story of Pavle Mrazovac, who was a functionary and an activist in several Serbian organisations in America and a plant manager in an automobile factory in Detroit, is a case in point. Convinced that the age of prosperity would be eternal, he had no savings when he was laid off at the age of 54. As a result, upon returning to Yugoslavia he turned to EC, hoping that the institution could help him to escape poverty. Yet his request, despite being embellished by the attachments confirming Mrazovac's merits (and even recommendation by the EC), was turned down on the grounds that any pension awarded would burden the Emigration Fund (a special fund in which emigrants were obliged to invest when leaving the country), especially because it would cause a domino effect, provoking the authorities to also provide pensions to other applicants. Supposedly, there were hundreds of cases like Mrazovac's – and none had been provided with a pension thus far. To amend his utterly precarious situation – Mrazovac lived with his wife in a small, dark room in Zagreb – SORIS proposed moving him into the home of elderly emigrants on the island of Hvar (Hrvatski državni arhiv 1937).

Mrazovac's is but one in a myriad of cases of return migrants who entered interwar Yugoslavia. According to SORIS' report at Emigration Sunday in 1932, there were more than 100,000 returnees trying to make a living in their 'homeland' (Tajništvo SORIS 1933). Their trajectories are, however, difficult to examine, given that the material related to the local authorities is patchy. Yet what we *can* discern from the functioning of the state system is that the returnees continued to be monitored well after their arrival on Yugoslav territory. While these practices became regularised and standardised with the expansion of policing in the 1930s, they were already applied in the 1920s. However, in the post-war period, it seems that the police apparatus observed only the presumed enemies of the state, hence communists in the first place (in Yugoslavia, the communist party was already banned in 1921) (Hrvatski državni arhiv 1923). In the 1930s, beginning with the increased surveillance during King Aleksandar's dictatorship, all persons returning to Yugoslavia were to be interrogated by the authorities at their places of residence. They had to disclose their emigrant trajectories, present their voyages, explain how long they were absent and whether they participated in any associations – and if these societies (and persons with whom they socialised) had anti-state objectives (Hrvatski državni arhiv 1931).

The act of monitoring returnees was in line with the surveillance employed by the dictatorial regime. These techniques and procedures were adopted in order to successfully instil Yugoslav identity from above and thus render national unity. Following the strategy 'He who is not with us, is against us', control was needed to permeate society and ordinary men and women were encouraged to denounce anyone who drifted away from the adopted line of unitary Yugoslavism (Axboe Nielsen 2009). Pervasive surveillance was, of course, concomitant to the expansion of Yugoslavia's bureaucratic apparatus, especially that targeting migrants and diasporas.

In a country facing severe economic difficulties, return migrants could barely obtain a reasonable job or live on agriculture, despite the noble promises which the state authorities advanced. In addition, their stay abroad sufficed for keeping them under surveillance. Therefore, the contradictions in Yugoslavia's migration and diaspora policies and the fact that the state fashioned profuse propaganda programmes but was not able to provide tangible assistance either to emigrants or to returnees, accounts for the feebleness of Yugoslavia's bureaucratic apparatus. It also shows how important both fostering consent and creating a feeling of national unity were in building a 'tenth *banovina*' and luring the emigrants to settle in Yugoslavia. The role of diasporas seems to have been critical in this regard since the emigrants, to a large degree, derived from the parts of the country where discontent was the highest. Despite the gradual transition to parliamentarism, the propaganda apparatus geared at fashioning the 'tenth *banovina*' remained in place, except that the Croat 'part' of the kingdom began to devise its own independent services following the Cvetković–Maček agreement establishing autonomous Croat *banovina* in 1939. Furthermore, notwithstanding the cessation of dictatorship, the return migrants continued to be closely observed.

Interwar Yugoslavia and the issue of Julian March immigrants

Following the First World War, Italy initially occupied and then, with the treaty of Rapallo in November 1920, annexed a greater part of the former Austrian Littoral (*Österreichisches Küstenland*). As a result of the economic downturn of the region and the policies of Italianisation, especially apparent with the entrenchment of the Fascist dictatorship, Slovenes and Croats massively abandoned the territory. Scholars consider that around 100,000 South Slavs left the region at that time, of whom 70,000 emigrated to Yugoslavia, 30,000 relocated to South America and around 5,000 to France and Belgium (Kalc 1996; Purini 1998).

The emigrants fled the territory in distinct waves. The first to depart were state employees, laid off by the Italian authorities. The emigrants arriving in Yugoslavia in the immediate post-war period were, by the end of the 1920s, already integrated into the homeland society; many substituted for previous, mainly German-speaking officials and they, instead, shared an emotional attachment to the region and the people left behind than those they politically mobilised. On the other hand, new immigrants, fleeing from economic despair (the regime imposed harsher taxes on the non-Italian population and dismantled their financial institutions) and Fascist discrimination that was becoming ever harsher after the introduction of the Fascist dictatorship in 1926, were arriving. These immigrants were pronouncedly politicised and fervently opposed the Italian oppression in emigration. In continuation, the Fascist policy of denationalisation outlawed the ethnic press and dissolved Slovene and Croat associations. Moreover, the persecution at the hands of the political police and the Fascist Special Tribunal (*Tribunale speciale per la difesa dello stato*), aimed at intimidating the masses by punishing any resistance, forced additional young anti-fascists and their families to seek shelter in Yugoslavia (Vovko 1978; Zobec 2022).

In general, the immigrants were not welcomed by the host society, even though they regarded Yugoslavia as their homeland. Seen by natives as those who were depriving them of jobs, they were called by natives either 'Lahi' (a derogatory word for Italians) or even fascists (Čermelj 1972). Moreover, most immigrants were in favour of a strong Yugoslavia, seen as a bulwark against Italian expansion, as opposed to Slovenes who supported autonomism or Croats who stood for federalism (Bartol 1993).

Though not numerous, a vocal emigrant minority was committed to the anti-Fascist struggle. The majority were too busy with their daily existence to be actively involved. To make ends meet or for other purposes, some emigrants cooperated with the Italian consular infrastructure. In addition, there were

emigrants who were simply indifferent to the discrimination against Julian March minorities (Anon. 1932: 6). The issue of citizenship obstructed immigrants' integration into Yugoslav society. The fact that they were Italian citizens reduced the possibilities of their getting employed in the public sector or applying for welfare programmes. While the process of obtaining Yugoslav citizenship should have been relatively straightforward according to the legislation (the Citizenship Law, passed in 1928 facilitated its acquisition to persons of Serb-Croat-Slovene descent), taxes had to be paid for the procedure. Becoming fully fledged Yugoslavs was, therefore, a financial burden which many emigrants, in times of economic crisis, could not afford. Nevertheless, affiliating with emigrant associations could ease their inclusion into Yugoslav societies given that the entrepreneurial emigrants devised a closed-shop system offering jobs to the associations' members. This system was tied to the Yugoslav employment agencies and thus well integrated into the state structures (Wörsdörfer 2004). The mechanisms of migrants' settlement in Yugoslavia are not entirely clear but it is generally accepted that they were not completely dependent on employment opportunities. Political factors seem to have been at play as the regime deployed the most combative emigrants to Croatia so as to deflect Croat resistance against Serb hegemony in opposition to Italy (Archivio Storico Diplomatico Degli Affari Esteri 1931).

The emigrants' troubled position in the Yugoslav nation-building project – the fact that the state authorities recognised the immigrants as an asset in the affirmation of Yugoslav identity but did not offer them tangible assistance in integrating – could best be illustrated by displaying the paradoxes of their colonisation on the Yugoslav territory. As in the case of returnees, colonisation was considered one of the primary settlement mechanisms for Julian March immigrants, many of whom were of peasant background, so their emigrant activists introduced colonisation programmes soon after the country's establishment. In turn, with the agrarian reform, these incomers filled the rural estates vacated by the Hungarian lords in the acquired territory of Prekmurje (in northeast Yugoslavia). In addition, they were assigned places in Macedonia and Kosovo, a region then known as South Serbia, where they would substitute for officially unrecognised ethnicities of Kosovo Albanians and Macedonians (Wörsdörfer 2004).

Yet, much like in the case of emigrant returnees in Yugoslavia, the colonisation programmes would only become more elaborate with the reconfiguration of the country under King Aleksandar's rule. Furthermore, the economic crisis and ensuing unemployment were decisive for the authorities, pushing them to seek additional opportunities in the countryside. Yet, despite attracting increased demand, these plans were equally poorly conceived and thus barely yielded any tangible results. The settlement envisaged by Ivan Marija Čok, the foremost *émigré* politician and an ally of King Aleksandar, in 1931 in Macedonia is a case in point to illustrate the misfortunes which occurred in colonising the Julian March migrants. To publicise the effort, Čok presented the campaign to populate the lands purchased from 'Turks' in a hotel in Ljubljana and across the emigrant as well as the Yugoslav press. Čok's mission was concomitant to the massive Serbianisation campaign of Vardar Macedonia (part of former South Serbia) undertaken by the ban of the eponymous *banovina*. Internal colonisation by members of the constitutive nation was one of the pillars of this enterprise (Archivio Storico Diplomatico Degli Affari Esteri 1934). However, the settlement of Julian March emigrants was not a particularly fortunate one and issues began to emerge as soon the colonists arrived in the Macedonian colony of Bistrenica. Endeavours to modernise agriculture were in vain, as the cooperative which managed the effort was poorly directed and the property rights were not settled. In addition, the colonists were exposed to inadequate sanitary conditions, causing malaria. Ethnic issues came to the fore as well. Despite being on a 'civilising mission', the colonists, too, fell prey to the country's homogenisation and were forced to convert from Catholicism to Orthodox Christianity (Drnovšek and Kalc 2014; Wörsdörfer 2004). This practice was rejected both

by the settlers themselves and by the most prominent emigrant organisation in Slovenia in the 1930s, the St Raphael Society, an emigrant care organisation established by the Catholic Church. As a result of the presumed menace of religious conversion and ethnic assimilation, the Slovenian St Raphael Society labelled the Slovenian emigrants in the southern parts of the country 'our inner diaspora', thus hinting at the complexities of Yugoslavia's nation-building. The Julian March immigrants were clearly not concentrated only in colonies – they inhabited towns too and were often accompanied there by immigrants from *Drava banovina* (an administrative unit corresponding to parts of current Slovenia in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) which relocated to the southern parts of the country (Kocmur 1938). The colonisation campaign ultimately failed, leaving many colonists destitute and discontent.

Immigrant colonisation, in a nutshell, encompasses the intricacies of Julian March immigration in the Yugoslav national framework. On the one hand, the state authorities viewed the immigrants as pillars of Yugoslav identity and deployed them to the places where they would reconfigure the ethnic composition or combat separatist and autonomist tendencies. On the other hand, the same structures of power were reluctant to grant the emigrants full citizenship, stripping them of important rights and thus rendering them more vulnerable to the detrimental effects of the economic crisis. The fact that they were considered bastions of the state's unity but were, at the same time, deprived of citizenship was the most tragic in the Croatian 'part' of the kingdom, where the antagonism towards the regime was the most pronounced (Wörsdörfer 2004). Concurrently, the state authorities held a firm grip on the organised emigrant movement and coordinated its activities according to the country's internal affairs and relations with Italy. Rather than being directed outwards, towards Italy and the kin minorities living there, the objectives which the government pursued by raising awareness about the Julian March issue were oriented into managing the country's internal issues. Surely, the immigrants and the whole Julian March issue were more than suitable for fostering the country's unity and restoring the regime's legitimacy? These efforts, though similar to those pursued by contemporaneous states such as post-Trianon Hungary, were affected by Yugoslavia's singular complexity – namely its intricate composition – and the fact that Yugoslavia was a *status quo* rather than an irredentist state.

Conclusion

Yugoslavia devised its diaspora policies as a modernising state, established through the structural changes of the global socio-economic framework following the First World War. The state built a comprehensive bureaucratic apparatus, targeting both the emigrants and the kin minorities. Different sets of policies were advanced to engage these two groups: on the one hand, economic and national-political interests were at play in addressing the emigrants while, on the other, geopolitical considerations were crucial in fashioning kin-state policies.

Both sets of policies were increasingly put forward during the country's authoritarian turn in the 1930s. Certain cohesion, along with the developed bureaucratic-surveillance-propaganda apparatus, was necessary to foster comprehensive diaspora politics. In turn, these measures were employed precisely to engender feelings of even stronger national unity. Before the dictatorship, the country faced many challenges linked to post-imperial transition, coupled with the burden of the 'Croat question' and issues of political instability. Needless to say, other factors triggering a response *vis-à-vis* Yugoslav diasporas have to be considered too, such as the cessation of emigration and escalated tensions in relations with Italy. Yet despite the efforts of the authoritarian state to fashion diaspora programmes, these never reached the magnitude they had in irredentist states such as Yugoslavia's neighbours – Hungary or Italy. The fact that Yugoslavia never tied its diaspora and kin-state policies into a fully fledged

programme engaging all the Yugoslavs beyond state borders testifies to Yugoslavia's well-known inferior position in the international political and economic system. Of course, the reality of Yugoslavia being a *status quo* and not an irredentist state has to be acknowledged. However, what is striking when observing Yugoslavia is the gap between the diaspora discourse conducted by institutions and informal (yet linked to government) organisations on the one hand and the programme actually undertaken of assisting emigrants and external kin on the other.

As this contribution has attempted to demonstrate, the inability of Yugoslavia to provide diasporas with much-needed assistance can best be illustrated by looking at the return migrants and Julian March immigrants in Yugoslavia. Whereas the state authorities, allegedly building a borderless community of Yugoslavs, boasted that it offered employment and land to those wanting to embrace 'their homeland', these men and women often ended up being impoverished. Being granted Yugoslav citizenship was not as straightforward as it might have seemed; equally difficult was obtaining a stable job or acquiring a plot of land in times of economic crisis and increased population growth. Little to no economic rationale existed in luring the (destitute) emigrants to settle in Yugoslavia, which is also probably why, at the beginning of the 1930s, as the crisis affected Yugoslavia, migration activists refrained from directly attracting emigrants and proposed that the latter adopt the citizenship of the lands of reception instead. The whole endeavour for the Julian March immigrants had equally little to do with economic considerations. National-political reflections were much more relevant here as the state carefully monitored the emigrant settlements and surveilled the associations in order to fashion internal unity and foster the government's legitimacy. Yet the plan was poorly defined, as many immigrants, instead of becoming the *avant-garde* of Yugoslavism, ended up being disillusioned with the state and the emigrant associations tied to it.

However, instead of looking at the practical outcomes, in order to understand the government's rationale of extending political outreach beyond the borders, we should instead evaluate the idea of putting forth diaspora programmes. We could hypothesise that the mission of creating a borderless Yugoslav community stemmed from the need to overcome the conflicts that burdened Yugoslavia throughout the 1920s and to legitimise a regime that regarded a unified Yugoslav identity as its cornerstone. By referring to 'our tenth *banovina*' and 'the unredeemed brothers', King Aleksandar may have hoped to restore shattered legitimacy and unify the country..

Notes

1. 'Julian March' is the English translation of the Slavic designation (*Julijska krajina*) for the Venezia Giulia region, which was annexed to Italy in November 1920. It refers to the territory which included Trieste, Gorizia, Istria, parts of the Dalmatian coast and the easternmost part of the Alps (see Hametz 2005).
2. Work on South Slavic diasporas abounds; I cite here just the most recent studies.
3. Mainly as a result of Italian repression, many Slovenes and Croats from Julian March advocated for a powerful Yugoslavia and viewed political partisanship, occurring in Yugoslavia in the 1920s, as petty.

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