CROSSING STATE AND RELIGIOUS BORDERS IN INTERWAR YUGOSLAVIA

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SINTESI

La maggioranza dei profughi sloveni e croati che immigrarono nel Regno di Jugoslavia provennero dalla Venezia Giulia italiana. A causa della politica fascista di snazionalizzazione e del silenzio della Santa Sede così come della propaganda anti-Cattolica orchestrata dalle autorità jugoslave, tra gli immigrati provenienti dalla Venezia Giulia crebbero sentimenti ostili alla Chiesa cattolica che li indussero a convertirsi alla chiesa serbo-ortodossa. Tale chiesa fu considerata espressione di una fede religiosa che ben si allineò all'ideologia conosciuta come jugoslavismo. Data l'esiguità delle fonti storiche a disposizione l'attenzione di questo saggio si concentra su due casi: la colonia di Bistrenica in Macedonia dove circa metà della popolazione si convertì volontariamente o involontariamente e la comunità serbo-ortodossa in Celje, Slovenia. In questa città, la stragrande maggioranza di sloveni che si convertirono furono immigrati.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Fascismo di confine, Regno di Jugoslavia, Venezia Giulia, migrazioni, conversion

ABSTRACT

During the interwar period, majority of Slovenian and Croatian refugees from Italian new province of Julian March (Venezia Giulia) immigrated to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Because of the Fascist policy of forced assimilation ("snazionalizzazione") of minorities and silence of the Holy See in this regard, as well as strong

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anti-Catholic propaganda from the side of Yugoslav authorities, the critical sentiment towards the Catholic Church arose among the immigrants from Venezia Giulia, which resulted also in conversions to Serbian Orthodox Church. The latter was considered a religion in line with the ideology of Yugoslavism. Due to lack of historical sources, the focus is on two cases: colony of Littoral Slovenes in Bistrenica in Macedonia, where nearly half of the people converted voluntarily or involuntarily, and the Serbian Orthodox community in Celje. In this Slovenian town very high percentage of Slovenian converts were immigrants.

KEYWORDS: border Fascism, Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Venezia Giulia, migrations, conversions

Historical and geopolitical context

After World War I the Kingdom of Italy annexed a region called the Julian March or Venezia Giulia. The majority of the population who lived in this region, which was located on Italy's north-eastern border, were Slovenes and Croats. However, the regime never acknowledged their minority status. The annexation was based on the Treaty of London of 1915 and formally on the Treaty of Rapallo of 1920. To illustrate the numbers, approximately 350,000 Slovenes, which were one third of Slovenian population at that time, and 150,000 Croats were left on the 'other side of the border'.[1] Still, the Treaty of Rapallo was a compromise in comparison to the Treaty of London since Yugoslav diplomacy managed to exclude most of Dalmatia from the latter agreement.

After the 'vittoria mutilata', strong nationalist movements arose in Italy, especially in the ethnically mixed borderland in question where Fascism had gained power sooner than in other regions. This was also the area in which the Italian irredentist movement had been very strong before, during and after the Great War. A typical irredentist act was Gabrielle D'Annunzio's occupation of Rijeka in 1919. Consequently, antifascist

1 Aleksej Kalc, "Med svetovnima vojnama", in *Poti in usode: selitvene izkušnje Slovencev iz zahodne meje*, ed. A. Kalc (Triste: Narodna in študijska knjižnica, 2002) p. 41.

movements in Europe[2] first developed in Venezia Giulia and were mostly composed of Slovenian and Croatian members of different political orientations. Paradoxically, the Slavic resistance movement, supported by the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which in 1929 was known as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, was often accused by Italians of being irredentist, a concept that was not far from the truth according to its basic meaning, as many of them did demand the change of the border.[3]

This context gave rise to Fascism in the Yugoslav-Italian borderland. This specific type of fascism was characterized by the 'defense of the border', accompanied by the vigorous aggression against internal and external enemies. While the forced assimilation of minorities in Venezia Giulia fell in line with the regime's policies of ''Italianità,", the regime's imperial aspirations and its representations of Italians as a superior race that descended from the Roman civilization was used in antithesis to the Slavic barbarians to celebrate the cultural heritage of 'romanità'.[4] It is important to note that this was the Italian state's first experience with larger national minorities, in particular Slovenes, Croats and South Tyroleans.[5]

While the Italianization of state institutions progressed relatively smoothly, the well-organized pro-Slavic Catholic Church remained an issue due to political measures, legal acts and repressive methods. The pro-Slavic members of the Catholic Church in Venezia Giulia were greatly disappointed by the signing of the Italian concordat in 1929, in which the national minority was not mentioned at all.[6] Subsequently another new concept emerged: the Romanization of the Catholic Church in Venezia

2 See: Milica Kacin-Wohinz, *Prvi antifašizem v Evropi: Primorska 1925-1935: bazoviškim žrtvam ob šestdeseti obletnici* (Lipa, Koper, 1990).

3 Cf. Rolf Wörsdörfer, *Il confine orientale. Italia e Jugoslavia dal 1915 al 1955* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009).

4 Cf. Anna Maria Vinci, *Sentinelle della patria: il fascismo al confine orientale 1918-1941* (Roma: Laterza, 2011).

5 Egon Pelikan, "Vizitacije v Julijski krajini v času med obema vojnama", *Acta Histriae*, 3 (2013): 314.

6 John Francis Pollard, *The Vatican and Italian Fascism, 1929-32: A Study in Conflict* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985), 98-101.

Giulia and in the Vatican.[7] With the Romanization of the Catholic Church, the politicization of the religious field was also enhanced. The Fascist authorities executed a number of measures: all Slovenian and Croatian press was prohibited in 1930, even that which was Catholic; the last Slovenian archbishop of Gorizia, Frančišek Borgia Sedej, was forced by the Vatican to resign in 1931, as was the pro-Slavic bishop of Trieste and Koper, Luigi Fogar in 1936; the personnel of Slovenian and Croatian monasteries was substituted with Italians; the use of Slovenian language was prohibited in the churches surrounding Trieste in 1936; and Italian bishops exerted pressure on local priests to give religious classes in schools in Italian.[8]

As even the last 'sanctuary' of the national minority was lost the emigration of Slovenians and Croats in the late 1920s and early 1930s significantly increased. According to the 'official' evaluation of Yugoslav emigrant societies, in the interwar period their numbers superseded 100,000 people, of which approximately 70% moved to Yugoslavia.[9] Besides ex-Austro-Hungarian soldiers and war refugees, among the first emigrants were Slovenian and Croatian intellectuals, civil servants, politicians and citizens. Catholic priests were also persecuted, and many had already been confined before 1929. These were people who may have been able to act as a cohesive element of the minority community, and thus presented a political threat to the authorities.[10] However, reasons for emigration were also economic.

The kingdom of South Slavs, the receiving country of most of the emigrants from Venezia Giulia, was a multinational and multi-confessional state, with different historical, cultural and political backgrounds. The

7 Egon Pelikan, *Vizitacije v Julijski krajini*, 313-328.

8 Egon Pelikan, *Vizitacije v Julijski krajini*, 315; EgonPelikan, *Tajno delovanje primorske duhovščine pod fašizmom: primorski krščanski socialci med Vatikanom, fašistično Italijo in slovensko katoliško desnico – zgodovinsko ozadje romana Kaplan Martin Čedermac* (Ljubljana: Nova revija, 2002).

9 Piero Purini, "Raznarodovanje slovenske manjšine v Trstu (Problematika ugotavljanja števila neitalijanskih izseljencev iz Julijske krajine po prvi svetovni vojni)", *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 1-2 (1998): 23-42.

10 Vinci, *Sentinelle della patria*.

relationship between the three major religious communities there, the Serbian Orthodox Christians (46.6%), Roman Catholics (39.4%; mostly Slovenes and Croats) and Muslims (11.2%)[11] , was aggravated by unresolved national questions and past conflicts.[12] The constant of interwar Yugoslavia was Serbian centralism, which was complemented by Yugoslav Unitarianism and the conflict between Croats and Serbs. Although it was mostly limited to politics, it also included religious conflicts such as the concordat crisis.[13]

As the state's initial name suggests, only three constitutional nations, which theoretically formed one Yugoslav nation, were recognized: Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Even among the named nations, differences formed political programs, especially regarding interactions between Croats and Serbs; consequently, differences also formed between the Catholic Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church. Croats and Slovenes expected the kingdom to be a federal state, but their representatives at the negotiations for the creation of the state left that question open. In practice, this meant that they had agreed to a centralized system in which the biggest group prevailed. Therefore, the Serbs, in spite of having only a relative majority in terms of national composition of the kingdom,[14] controlled the state apparatus from beginning to the end by having a majority in the

11 According to the 1921 population census (Juraj Kolarić, *Ekumenska trilogija: istočni kršćani: pravoslavni: protestanti*, Zagreb:Prometej, 2005, 893).

12 As Radmila Radić states, the three religious institutions never established a genuine cooperation in the 70 years of the existence of Yugoslav state(s) (Radmila Radić, "Religion in the multinational state: the case study of Yugoslavia", in *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed idea, 1918-1922*, ed. D. Djokić (London:Hurst&Company, 2003, 196). Cf. Paul Mojzes, *Yugoslavian Inferno: Ethnoreligious Warfare in the Balkans* (New York:Continuum Publishing Company, 2016).

13 Gašper Mithans, "On the field of conflict: power relations among Catholics, Serbian Orthodox Christians, Muslims and State authorities in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia", in *Krikščionys ir nekrikščionyskiti (Christians and the non-christian other)*, ed. A. Streikus (ed.), 3 (2013), 189-206; Gašper Mithans, "Sklepanje jugoslovanskega konkordata in konkordatska kriza leta 1937", *Zgodovinskičasopis*, 1-2 (2011), 120–151.

14 The national composition of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (1921) was: Serbs and Montenegrins 38.8%, Croats 23.9%, Slovenes 8.5%, Muslims 6.3%, Macedonians 5.3% and minorities: Germans 4.3%, Albanians 4.0%, Magyars 3.9%, Romanians 1.6%, Turks 1.2%, Italians

National Assembly and dominating both the Government[15] and the army. After a serious political crisis reached its climax in 1928 with the shootings of Stjepan Radić, the leader of the largest Croatian political party, the Croatian Peasant Party, King Aleksandar Karadjordjević introduced the dictatorship on 6 January 1929. In this traditional autocratic dictatorship governed by an 'old-fashioned authoritarian',[16] all political parties were initially dissolved, yet it later became possible to establish a political party as long as it did not have any religious, 'tribal' (the term used to refer to Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) or regional character and did not oppose the national unity and integrity of the state.[17] Within a short period of time, a large number of new laws were adopted in order to endorse integral Yugoslavism as the official state ideology.[18] As Troch states,

"it is clear that it [Yugoslavism, G. M.] was designed to be a synthesis of Croatian, Slovenian and Serbian symbolic resources into a Yugoslav whole. However, the particular way in which the regime applied this national ideology very much discredited the idea of Yugoslavism itself. Precisely because the regime proclaimed Yugoslavism as the cornerstone of its authoritarian politics, opposition against the regime was also expressed as opposition against Yugoslavism. The Yugoslav idea, which had previously been a progressive idea, popular among intellectual circles in all parts of Yugoslavia and certainly not incompatible with Slovenianism,

0.1%, other Slavs 1.6%, others 0.3% (Sabrina P. Ramet, *The three Yugoslavias: state building and legitimation, 1918–2005*, Washington:Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006, 45).

15 Among the 37 governments and 13 different prime ministers in the period of 1918–1941, there was only one non-Serb prime minister, a Slovenian politician and head of Slovene People's Party Anton Korošec (27. 7. 1928 – 6. 1. 1929), but even then the majority of the ministers in the government coalition were still Serbs.

16 Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991*(London: Michael Joseph, 1994), 113.

17 See: Jure Gašparič, *SLS pod kraljevo diktaturo. Diktatura kralja Aleksandra in politika Slovenskel judske stranke v letih 1929-1935* (Ljubljana:Modrijan, 2007), 123.

18 Pieter Troch, "Yugoslavism Between the World Wars: Indecisive Nation-Building", *Nationalities Papers* 2 (2010): 227–244.

Croatianism or Serbianism, was more and more interpreted as a conservative, authoritarian, anti-national idea."[19]

Bringing 'order' to parliament did not solve anything; on the contrary, it enhanced political support for the governmental opposition. The final result of the violation of human rights was the assassination of 'the porcelain dictator'[20] in Marseille in 1934 by both the Croatian Revolutionary Movement also known as Ustaša and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. In the period that followed, in which Milan Stojadinović (1935–1939) led the government, the regime liberalized to some extent. Since Stojadinović was the only prime minister to manage to last his entire term, this was a period of relative stability. It was also the time of the financial crisis and crucial shifts in foreign policy with significantly increased economic cooperation with the Third Reich and improved relations with Fascist Italy.

To summarize, "The kingdom functioned in its first decade as a non-consensual quasi-parliamentary system and subsequently first as a royal dictatorship (1929–1934), then as a police state (1934–1939), and eventually as a Serb-Croat condominium (1939–1941)."[21] The latter was the last attempt to better relations between the Serbs and the Croats by giving Croats more autonomy. However, it was already too late and World War II was close.

Theoretical Framework

An important fact that must be emphasized as a research starting point is that borders are generated by the local people who live near the border –

19 Troch, "Yugoslavism Between.", 235.

20 Mussolini called King Aleksandar Karadjordjević "the porcelain dictator", see: Jože Pirjevec, *Jugoslavija 1918–1992: nastanek, razvoj ter razpad Karadjordjevićeve in TitoveJugoslavije* (Založba Lipa: Koper, 1995).

21 Sabrina P. Ramet,"Vladko Maček and the Croatian Peasant Defence in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia", *Contemporary European History* 2 (2007): 215-231.

either state borders or other kinds of borders. A border is more than a line drawn by the state; it is locally generated by historically changing social, political and economic relations.[22] Moreover, time is also a crucial component of the border. Time, above all, is an element that proves that border is an active entity.[23]

Migrants are considered transnational actors as they often endure ties with their country or region of origin. This perspective was added in the 1990s when transnational migration scholars argued that some migrants continued to be active in their homelands, while at the same time becoming part of their receiving countries. The focus of these studies is how migrants and their descendants participate in familial, social, economic, religious, political, and cultural processes that extend across borders while they also settle in the hosting state.[24]

In this case, migrants were active in migrant societies and Yugoslav politics, as some were involved in resistance movements and others also in diplomacy. Although they were considered national minorities in Italy and their receiving country, Yugoslavia was technically their homeland. These specific circumstances did not erase some of the cultural, economic, political and other differences mentioned above which migrants encountered in Yugoslavia; in fact, for those who moved to southern parts of the new state, these differences were far stronger than in Italy.

Another noteworthy point is the relation between religion, in particular the conversions of immigrants, and politics. According to Pierre Bourdieu, we cannot speak of differentiation of fields before modernity, and none of the fields are autonomous. Thus, the religious field cannot be treated separately from other fields, as well as the term 'religious' is not limited solely to the religious field. The beliefs of both laity and clergy

22 John Cole and Eric Wolf, *The Hidden Frontier: Ecology and Ethnicity in an Alpine Valley* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

23 Sarah Green, *Lines, Traces and Tidemarks: reflections on forms of borderli-ness*, Draft paper, 2009.

24 Peggy Levitt and B. Nadya Jaworsky, "Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends", *Annual Review of Sociology* 33 (2007): 129-156.

are based on the incapability to recognize that political relations are the basis of dynamics in the religious field. Moreover, in larger conflicts with other religious communities, the 'arena of struggle' most often moves to the political field.[25] However, I disagree with Bourdieu who removes the laity's predisposition for symbolic production within the religious field.[26] Instead, in my opinion, although it is hardly possible to speak of high-profile individual activities by Catholic believers or laypeople that transcend the boundaries of established religious discourse in interwar Slovenia[27], laity can either defend religious institutions or resist their policies, and in this way they exercise their activity and subjectivity. In such a way, everyday life practices such as consumerism help shape the religious field by challenging the representation and transmission of religious ideas.[28]

Religious conversions, which are the crossings of the religious border, will be analyzed as a cultural passage or a transition "in the quest for human belonging"[29] and an opposition or a political statement.[30]As Gauri Viswanathan stresses, conversion also disrupts modern liberal definitions of the self in the name of modernity. Central to this argument is that conversion demands a change of belief as well as a change of communi-

25 Pierre Bourdieu, "Genesis and the Structure of the Religious Field", *Comparative Social Research* 13 (1991): 1-44; Pierre Bourdieu,"Le champ religieux dans le champ de manipulation simbolique", in *Les nouveaux clercs* (Genève:Labor et Fides, 1985), 255-261.

26 Cf. Bradford Verter, "Spiritual Capital: Theorizing with Bourdieu against Bourdieu", *Sociological Theory*, 2 (2003): 150-174.

27 As the majority of the emigrants from the Venezia Giulia were Slovenes (so-called Littoral Slovenes), the focus of this article is predominantly on this national group and the Slovenian part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. As most of the converts from their midst converted to Serbian Orthodox Church, conversions to other religions will not be discussed.

28 Cf. Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980).

29 Diane Austin-Bross, "The Anthropology of conversion: introduction", in *The Anthropology of conversion*, eds. A. Buckser and S. D. Glazier (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 1-14.

30 Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton:Princeton University Press, 1998).

ty. Moreover, conversion is a traditional migrant act that can undermine fixed categories of ethnic or social belonging.[31]

In most cases these conversions were transcultural interactions, yet, statistically, the strongest reason in Slovenia to convert was for personal gain such as getting divorce, marrying a person of other religion or legitimizing children. Many of these converts, however, hardly practiced the 'new' religion. However, religion is itself transformed by all aspects of the migration experience, as conversion is in its substance, especially through the process of settlement and the emergence of ethnic and transnational ties.[32] Religion also "links people through time by allowing them to feel part of a chain of memory connecting the past, present, and future."[33] However, as in case of the converts, also these ties were broken. Even Catholic Littoral Slovenes from Venezia Giulia and Catholic Slovenes from Yugoslavia had profoundly different views on Vatican policy. Therefore, interactions between the religiously 'allochthone' minority such as Serb Orthodox in mostly Catholic Slovenia and the migrants from Venezia Giulia who converted from Catholicism to the Orthodox Church were even more specific.

Immigrations to Yugoslavia

Around 70,000 people moved from Venezia Giulia to Yugoslavia, with a significant number of them to settling in Slovenia; however, this is only an evaluation of the Yugoslav emigrant societies.[34] Although there is no material to support this claim, most historians cite this data, as a major-

31 *Ibidem*.
32 See: Levitt, Jaworsky, Transnational Migration Studies, 140.
33 *Ibidem*, 141; Cf. Daniele Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (Cambridge:Polity, 2000).
34 Lavo Čermelj, *Life-and-Death Struggle of a National Minority, the Jugoslavs in Italy* (Ljubljana: Jugoslav Union of League of Nations Societies, 1936), 174.

ity of the archives of the emigrant societies were destroyed during World War II.[35]

The problem with the sources is even more complex as the population census in Italy in 1931 did not distinguish nationalities or 'colloquial languages' as it had in 1921. This also occurred in Yugoslavia and in other countries where they emigrated as the immigrants were often registered as Italians. Furthermore, we cannot estimate how many people emigrated multiple times or illegally, as there is no data about returns until 1926 and no statistics for the years between 1918 and 1920 when the largest number of emigrants left Venezia Giulia.[36] Moreover, we cannot rule out the possibility that numbers in statistics from the Fascist period have been forged and have shown smaller number of emigrants.[37]

Legal and illegal emigration to Yugoslavia took place in four major waves. The first wave was directly after the Great War and included war refugees who had moved from the territories near the Isonzo front and never returned, ex-Austro-Hungarian soldiers, many intellectuals, clerks, civil servants and the unemployed. This wave was of a national-political character and was stimulated by economic and political reasons. The most important immigration destinations were Ljubljana,[38] Maribor,[39] Celje, Kranj, and Črnomelj, although some also moved to southern parts of Yugoslavia. In Maribor, the Littoral Slovenes mostly substituted its Germans.

35 Kalc, *Med svetovnima vojnama*, 41; Purini, *Raznarodovanje slovenske manjšine*, 28-29.

36 Teja Krašovec, "Primorski priseljenci v Ljubljani – v luči popisa prebivalstva iz leta 1928", *Arhivi*, 1 (2012): 92-93.

37 According to the evaluation of Italian diplomatic representatives in 1934, the number of Slavs from Venezia Giulia in Yugoslavia was appx. 50,000 (Purini, *Raznarodovanje slovenske manjšine*, 23).

38 The number of Littoral Slovenes in Ljubljana in the interwar period was 6,205 (Teja Krašovec, "Primorski priseljenci v Ljubljani med obema svetovnima vojnama", PhD diss. University of Primorska).

39 Approximately 4,000 Littoral Slovenes lived in Maribor (Aleksej Kalc, "L'emigrazione slovena e croata dalla Venezia Giulia tra le due guerre ed il suo ruolo politico", *Annales: anali za istrske in mediteranske študije = annali di Studi istriani e mediterranei = annals for Istrian and Mediterranean studies. Series historia et sociologia*, 8 (1996): 34).

The second wave took place after the instatement of the new border between Italy and Yugoslavia after the Treaty of Rapallo in 1920 and the rise of the Fascist regime in Italy in 1922. In this period the reasons to emigrate were mostly political, yet later they also became social and economic. The first victims of Fascist denationalization policy were Slovenian and Croatian teachers due to Gentile's reform of education as well as civil servants who also lost their jobs. Later on, the pressure spread to Slavic workers, peasants, artisans, sailors, mineworkers etc. The authorities stimulated emigration as it was in line with their program of 'ethnic bonification', which included the confiscation of the land of Slovene and Croatian owners and the settling of Italian families. The next wave was triggered by further Fascist anti-Slavic measures in the late 1920s when the last remnants of organized political and cultural activity of Slovenes and Croats were repressed. Notable events were the judicial process against 'rebels' such as 'Slavic terrorists' in Pula (1929) and the First Trieste process (1930). In this wave, the number of illegal emigrants to Yugoslavia significantly increased, and among immigrants were youth and political leaders. The last wave occurred in mid-1930s with Italian interventions in Ethiopia and in the Spanish Civil War. Many Slovenian and Croatian military conscripts who wanted to avoid the mobilization in army fled to Yugoslavia. In Yugoslavia these emigrants were called 'Abyssinians', and they faced major difficulties getting jobs. Another special emigrant category were students who, after finishing schooling in Yugoslavia, usually did not go back to Italy because they had few opportunities for employment there; in addition, bureaucratic measures also often prevented their return.[40]

Many who immigrated to Yugoslavia continued their antifascist engagement in politics, journalism, and diplomacy or in the frame of various migrant societies such as Jugoslovanska matica or Yugoslav society.

The autochthonous population was often inhospitable to immigrants as they presented cheap labor, competition for job posts and social sup-

40 *Ibidem*, 27, Krašovec, *Primorski priseljenci*, 94; Andrej Vovko, "Izseljevanje iz Primorske med obema vojnama", *Zgodovinski časopis*, 1 (1992): 88-89.

port. The primary measure to alleviate the burden of Slovenian peasants and the social and economic situation in Slovenia and Croatia, which had been aggravated by each migratory wave from Venezia Giulia, was internal agrarian colonization, a part of Yugoslav politics since its establishment.[41] Some of the Slovenian immigrants who agreed to cultivate lands were settled in Prekmurje, the region at the Hungarian border that had been part of Slovenia since 1920 in towns such as Benica, Petišovci, Pince, Gaberje, Mostje, Dolga vas, Kamovci, and Žitkovci. This was a clear intervention of the state, which also had clear political implications. Similar to policy in Venezia Giulia, the Yugoslav goal was to change the ethnic composition of the borderland, and nationally conscious Littoral Slovenes were seen as more than suitable to achieve this end. Other colonists were settled in Bosnia, Slavonia, Serbia, and Kosovo and especially in Macedonia, where they formed their own community in the village of Bistrenica in Vardar valley in the third period of colonization from 1929 to1941.

The colonization of Macedonia, then called Southern Serbia, followed the same political goal of Serbian elite – to change the ethnic composition of the region in favor of Serbian and other non-Macedonian Yugoslav ethnic groups. Slovenes, who were candidates for colonization in Bistrenica, were guaranteed national rights, a Slovenian school and a (Catholic) church. However, they were also submitted to same assimilatory policy as Macedonians such as the Serbization of surnames, Serbian schooling and – in some cases – the involuntary reversal into Serbian Orthodox confession.[42] The only newspaper to make a report about the difficult situation was the emigrants' gazette *Izseljenski vestnik Rafael,* which drew attention to the problems of educative language and religious education in 1938.[43]

41 Marjan Drnovšek, Aleksej Kalc, "Poklicne migracije Slovencev v jugoslovanskem prostoru med svetovnima vojnama", in *Priseljevanje in društveno delovanje Slovencev v drugih delih jugoslovanskega prostora*, ed. J. Žitnik Serafin (Ljubljana:Založba ZRC, 2014): 91-117.

42 Branislav Rusić, Vilko Novak, "Slovenci v Bistrenici v Makedoniji", *Traditiones* 2 (1973): 196; cf. Aleksandar Apostolov, "Colonization of Vardar Macedonia between the Two World Wars", *Macedonian review: history, culture, literature, arts*, 2-3 (1990): 120-125.

43 *Izseljenski vestnik Rafael* 8(1938): 75.

Many of these 'colonists' were without the means to sustain themselves and their families, so they did not have many other options. Some successfully adapted and even managed to occupy high positions such as Drago Marušič the civil governor of Drava Banate (i. e. Slovenia), but most of them had problems and many returned to their homes in Venezia Giulia after World War II. As Littoral Slovenes would say, they were foreigners in 'their own homeland'.[44]

Migrants and Religious Conversions

In Slovenian territory contact between Catholicism and other religions as well as atheism is an old occurrence and cannot be exhibited as a novelty of that time, yet in the 20s and 30s of the 20th century, the first signs of religious pluralisation appeared in the territory. The emphasis must first be made regarding the Evangelical Church, which had its own schools and, therefore, 'tradition' in Prekmurje. The first Serbian Orthodox Church in Slovenia was established in Celje in 1932, followed by churches in Ljubljana (1936) and Maribor (1939). The majority of the Serbian Orthodox community was composed of Serbian soldiers and constables placed in the Slovenian part of the Kingdom, as well as immigrant professors, judges and priests. Meanwhile, also the number of Slovenian Orthodox followers increased somewhat, especially in cities.

Catholicism appeared predominant in areas where Slovenian and Croatian ethnic territory were contiguous, as well as among supporters of the former Croatian Peasants' Party (Hrvatska seljačka stranka). The number of members of the Jewish community decreased somewhat to around 800, primarily in Prekmurje, which was still the largest population in the

44 Drnovšek, Kalc, *Poklicne migracije Slovencev*, 98-105; Kalc, *Med svetovnima vojnama*, 39-54; Mojca Ravnik, "Z meje na mejo", in *Poti in usode: selitvene izkušnje Slovencev iz zahodne meje*, ed. A. Kalc (Trieste: Narodna in študijska knjižnica, 2002), 54-61; Stanko Bensa, *Od Soče do Mure. Pot istrskih in primorskih beguncev* (Lendava:Pince Marof, 2011).

Slovenian part of the Kingdom; instead, the number of Muslims in Slovenia at this time was minimal. With the exception of some initiatives for an ecumenical movement, the reaction of the dominant Catholic Church to this religious pluralism was expectedly negative since it was accompanied by agitation for the conversion of Catholics to other faiths, largely on the side of representatives of religious communities from other parts of the new state.

Conversions in an otherwise religiously exceptionally homogenous 'Catholic' environment[45] occurred in interwar Slovenia primarily due to transcultural and transnational interaction with nations and ethnic groups from other parts of Yugoslavia belonging to non-Catholic faiths. Conversions were most frequent right after World War I and in the first half of 1930s. We can estimate that a couple thousand people converted, but very little research has been made about it yet.[46]

We can distinguish conversions into three main categories. First are conversions for political (public) reasons such as conversions to the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Old Catholic Church, which was especially common in the 1930s due to political and religious opposition and political opportunism. The second kind was conversions for personal reasons or gain, in particular from Catholicism to the Serbian Orthodox Church or Islam in cases such as divorce or marriage to a spouse of a different faith. Finally, conversions were also made for religious reasons including reconversion to the Catholic Church.

In the next pages this essay will focus on politically motivated religious conversions. The sources for the research of conversions are scarce

45 According to the 1921 census, 96.6% of Catholics, 2.6% of Protestants, 0.6% of Orthodox, 0.1% of Muslims and 0.1% of people of other religions lived in Slovenia; a similar religious composition was also in 1931 (*Verska, jezikovna in narodna sestava prebivalstva Slovenije: popisi 1921-2002*, Statistič ni urad Republike Slovenije, Ljubljana, 2003, p. 68).

46 Aleš Maver, "V (ne)znanem novem svetu: paberki iz verskega življenja v Celju med svetovnima vojnama", *Studia Historica Slovenica: časopis za humanistične in družboslovne študije*, 2-3 (2014): 505-518. On Evangelical Church see: Boštjan Zajšek, "Nemški evangelič ani na Slovenskem med obema vojnama", *Kronika*, 1 (2011): 91-106.

whereas there are considerably good records of conversions of Catholics due to divorce, marriage with a spouse of different religion and legitimization of children born out of wedlock. Among this population we can also identify Slovenian immigrants from Venezia Giulia.[47] In particular it is difficult to find the reason for conversion. While we have the names, dates and places of origin of the converts for some parishes in Slovenia, we can only speculate from the press and biographic sources that the reasons for conversions were also political. From this perspective, many clerks and politicians converted due to pragmatism and opportunism, and because of lively political propaganda of the Serbian Orthodox Church and Old Catholic Church.

According to some admonitions and observations, the main targets of this proselytizing were in fact the immigrants who were unfavorable towards the Catholic Church. In the early 1930s, after a decade of hoping that the Holy See would intervene and condemn the Fascist denationalization, even Christian Socials, a major Catholic 'faction' among minorities in Venezia Giulia, began to criticize the Vatican's politics of silent submission to and, to some extent, also in cooperation with the Italian Fascist regime. The majority of Vatican criticism published in Yugoslav press was written by the emigrants from Venezia Giulia and, according to the opinion of Apostolic nuncio in Yugoslavia, ErmenegildoPellegrinetti, stimulated conversion to Serbian Orthodox Church.[48]

On several occasions Nuncio Pellegrinetti warned against the 'apostasies', which were, as he stated, particularly intense in Slovenia, where even a special committee for Serbian Orthodox propaganda existed, and

47 Nadškofijski arhiv Ljubljana [Archiepiscopal Archives of Ljubljana], NŠAL V., 100, Konvertiti 1874–1938. Zgodovinski arhiv Celje [Historical Archives of Celje], SI_ZAC/0995, Pravoslavna župnija svetega Save v Celju.

48 Archivio Segreto Vaticano (ASV), Archivio di Prefettura, Diari del card. Pellegrinetti, n. 14, 9. 7. 1934.

the most 'vulnerable' group to convert were the immigrants from Venezia Giulia. He particularly pointed out the town of Celje.[49]

A well-known case of conversions is of the Littoral Slovenes who moved to Bistrenica in Vardar valley in Macedonia and established a colony there in 1931. This colony, which was populated with approximately 200 Littoral Slovenes,[50] was set up with the intervention of Triestine lawyer Ivan Marija Čok, the president of the Yugoslav emigrant association. In *Slovenski beograjski tednik*, Slovenian Beograd Weekly, Slovenian writer Vladimir Bartol published an interview with an 'influential and well-informed emigrant from Venezia Giulia', and in the interview he exposed some interesting aspects of the character of Littoral Slovenes. In his opinion, Littoral Slovenes were closer to Serbs than other Slovenes; hence they were more susceptible to Serbian assimilation. Bartol saw reasons for this in special political circumstances in Venezia Giulia that resulted in the weakened organization of Slovenian Catholic Church, as well as the reserved behavior of the hierarchyin the Vatican regarding the Fascist repression of Slovenian clergy and the preservation of Slovenian language in churches. Therefore, he observed the belief that the Catholic faith was not as strong among the emigrants as it was before, and could be noticed among general emigrant population from Venezia Giulia in their full religious indifference and conversions to other religions. A special case is the colonization of Littoral Slovenes in Vardar valley.[51]

In Bistrenica Slovenes were subjected to voluntary and involuntary conversions to the Serbian Orthodox Church, which was part of the as-

49 ASV, Arch. Nunz. Jugoslavia, Indice 1209, busta 31. Letter from Pellegrinetti to Pacelli, subject: Ancora circa il Caso di Mgr. Fogar e gli Slavi, Beograd, 11. 6. 1936; ASV, Arch. Nunz. Jugoslavia, Indice 1209, busta 31. Letter from Pellegrinetti to Pacelli, subject: Ancora Istria e Santa Sede, Beograd, 8. 8. 1933; ASV, Archivio di Prefettura, Diario di Pellegrinetti, n. 14, 9. 7. 1934.

50 189 people in June 1934 (Arhiv Jugoslavije [Archives of Yugoslavia], 67 Agrarna reforma, Naseljenici na Kosovu i Metohiji i Makedoniji, fasc. 28, n. 264, List of inhabitants – refugees from Istria in Bistrenica [Spisak naseljenika – izbeglica iz Istre, koji so se naselili u s. Bistrenici, Bistrenica, 2. 6. 1934]).

51 *Slovenski beograjski tednik* 1 (1933): 4-5.

similation process authorities carried out there. As the Orthodox faith was perceived as part of Serbian identity, Catholicism was perceived as an element of Slovenian identity; however, Catholicism was also associated with Italians and Fascism, and therefore were an *a priori* threat to Serbs and Yugoslavs. Alas, the centralist authorities and politicians considered accepting the Serbian Orthodox faith as proof of loyalty to Yugoslavism and believed it would make Slovenes better Yugoslavs. That was also a slogan that proselytisers used for propaganda to convince people to convert. In these 'Orthodox surroundings' a substantial number of colonists collectively converted.[52] Their conversion was also partially due to false promises, extortion and even threats. Those who resisted the most were sent to the district board where they were threatened with exile – called 'foreigners and Italian spies' – unless they converted. After the great efforts of Catholic bishop Janez Frančišek Gnidovec, a Catholic church was built in 1935, but no Catholic priests were permanently stationed there. Besides difficult economic conditions, the involuntary conversion was the main reason for many Slovenes to leave Bistrenica, while also tensions arose between Catholics and converts.[53]

Paradoxically, the promotion of Yugoslavism by the Serbian Orthodox Church was just part of propaganda, while in the 1930s Serbian nationalism also grew very strong among the Orthodox clergy. The conversions were reasonably frequent in Slovenia. On the one hand they were motivated by the disorder of ecclesiastical law in the new state as well as the variety of legal traditions of the Islamic, Roman Catholic, Serbian Orthodox,

52 According to two reports, in 1935 13 families (75 people) who converted to Serbian Orthodox Church and 23 Catholic families (100 people) lived in Bistrenica; similar data is in the report from 1934. Nearly half of the Slovenian population converted. It is not clear what happened with Littoral Slovenes in Bistrenica who converted; some reports mention that most of them reconverted to Catholicism during and after World War II, other than those who returned to Slovenia remained Orthodox (Rusić, Novak, *Slovenci v Bistrenici*, 199-200).

53 Rusić, Novak, *Slovenci v Bistrenici*, 198-200; Arhiv Jugoslavije [Archives of Yugoslavia], 67 Agrarna reforma, Naseljenici na Kosovu i Metohiji i Makedoniji, fasc. 28, n. 264, Report [izveštaj] to the Association of agricultural cooperatives on the visit in Bistrenica, Skopje, 20. 9. 1933.

and Evangelical religious communities. On the other hand they enabled marriage annulment through conversion from Catholicism to the Serbian Orthodox Church or Islam.[54]

Archdiocesan Archives of Ljubljana keep the records of reconversions to the Roman Catholic Church and in the requests and letters of parish priests some of the converts' backgrounds are also explained. Usually they reconverted to Catholicism because they wanted to die Catholics.[55] Reconversions were especially frequent in the period from 1936 to 1939, probably because of the change of political regime as the Catholic Church again gained power with the Slovene People's Party in government (part of the Yugoslav Radical Union) after the dictatorial period when Yugoslavism and the Serbian Orthodox Church was favored.

The Serbian Orthodox Parish in Celje

Of three Serbian Orthodox parishes in Slovenia in the interwar period,[56] only the archive of the parish in Celje has been preserved. It includes the chronicle and the register of parish members and is kept in Historical Archive of Celje. Celje was an important center of Serbian Orthodox community as the first Orthodox church in Slovenia after the Great War was built in the town in 1932.[57] According to the publication of statistical data from the population census in 1931, also known as *Mesta Kraljevine*

54 Janez Cvirn, *Boj za sveti zakon: prizadevanja za reformo poročnega prava od 18. stoletja do druge svetovne vojne* (Ljubljana: Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije, 2005); Gašper Mithans, "Rimskokatoliška cerkev in poskusi »očiščenja« škodljivih vplivov znanosti, verske pluralizacije in 'nemoralne' filmske produkcije ter tiska na Slovenskem v obdobju med svetovnima vojnama", *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 1 (2014): 130-143.

55 Nadškofijski arhiv Ljubljana [Archiepiscopal Archives of Ljubljana], NŠAL V., 100, Konvertiti 1874–1938.

56 This is a problem in other parts of former Yugoslavia as well. In Serbia, for example, all archives of Serbian Orthodox Church are closed for the public (Cf. MarijanaBelaj et al. (eds.), *Ponovno iscrtavanje granica: transformacije identiteta i redefiniranje kulturnih regija*, Zagreb:Hrvatsko etnološko društvo, 2014).

57 The first Serbian Orthodox church on Slovenian territory was built in the beginning of 18th century near Slovenian-Croatian border in Bela krajina. A small Orthodox community of descendants of Uskoks lives there.

Jugoslavije, in the town of Celje 7,602 inhabitants lived, of which 6,967 were Roman Catholics, 337 were Orthodox,[58] 129 were of The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (German Church), 97 were Muslims, and 35 were of Reformed Helvetic confession as well as others.[59] It was also an important destination for refugees from Venezia Giulia, but no study of this community exists, and we can only estimate that it included around 1,000 people.

There were only 5 Orthodox believers in Celje in 1920, whereas by the end of 1936 the Serbian Orthodox parish already numbered 352 Orthodox families with 621 members in 85 locales and in all 9 counties, excluding the soldiers, of which there were around 1,000. Out of all Serbian Orthodox believers there were 356 Serbs, 208 Slovenes, 51 Russians, 3 Bulgarians and 3 Germans. In the period from 1922 to 1936 284 people in Celje converted to the Serbian Orthodox Church and 22 people left the Church. Celje had 250 members,[60] of them 87 were Slovenes.[61] This number did not include Slovenes from Venezia Giulia. In the period from 1922 to 1941 30 people were born in Venezia Giulia and all of them including their family members, converted.[62] This means that 117 Slovenes converted. Among them, approximately 25% were Littoral

58 According to the Chronicle of Serbian Orthodox parish in Celje, there were 250 members of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The number above most likely includes members of other Orthodox Churches as well, eg. Russian Orthodox. According to the census there were 16 Russian speaking people in Celje at that time who often visited Serbian Orthodox Church, which was the sole Orthodox Church in the region (Cf. Ilija Đ. Bulovan, *Kronika Srbske pravoslavne parohije v Celju*, Beograd: Arhiv Srbije, Celje: Zgodovinski arhiv, 2010, 77.

59 Pokrajinski arhiv Maribor [Regional Archives Maribor], 1937060/3, Korošec Anton 1919-1940, št. 3, Gradivo iz političnega delovanja.

60 The discrepancy between the numbers in the census from 1931 (337) and the chronicle of Serbian Orthodox parish (250) is most likely because the census includes members of other Orthodox Churches (the category is just "Orthodox"), e.g. Russian Orthodox who often visited Serbian Orthodox Church, which was the sole Orthodox Church in the region.

61 Bulovan, *Kronika Srbske pravoslavne parohije*, 77.

62 See the register of parish members in: Zgodovinski arhiv Celje [Historical Archives of Celje], SI_ZAC/0995, Pravoslavna župnija svetega Save v Celju, n. 4, Domovni protokol Srpske pravoslavneparohije celjske u Celju – sastav po stanju na dan 31./18. Decembra 1936.

Slovenes. Also, believers of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Celje were about 3.3%, a percentage significantly higher than the 0.6% that was recorded in Slovenia. Even though there is rich data on members of the parish in Celje and sometimes the reason for conversion is also stated, political reasons are not mentioned as that would have been inappropriate to register in a 'religious book'.[63]

Conclusion

A rare phenomenon occurred among some of the immigrants in Yugoslavia; after they fled from their homes to another country, which they considered their homeland, they were so disappointed by the actions of the Catholic Church in Italy that they converted to the major and privileged religious community in Yugoslavia, the Serbian Orthodox Church. Due to Fascist violence, they crossed two borders: the border of the state (physical and social) and the religious border. These may have been more or less 'rash' decisions, but we should not deny their significance as well as their ability to accommodate their religious culture to political goals. Although some of the converts reconverted back to Catholicism, we may speak of a transformation of worldviews, especially among Littoral Slovenes in Macedonia. The Serbian Orthodox priest in Celje was not particularly satisfied with converts, stating that the majority of them always remained Catholics 'in their souls', except those who were 'nationally conscious'.[64] This is an example of typical discourse from the Serbian Orthodox Church, which intended to equalize 'true patriots' of the new Yugoslav community to members of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Converts' critical reflexivity of society and politics is questionable as they substituted one religious ideology with that of the Serbian Orthodox Church and Yugoslavism. This was probably done because they tried to

63 *Ibidem*.
64 Bulovan, *Kronika Srbske pravoslavne parohije*, 72.

fit in better in a society that was often exclusive and contrary to their customs. Although Slovenes, they still differentiated themselves from the other members of the local community at a higher degree than expected. Nevertheless, these conversions are acts that indicate the rise of the modern era, including secularization, in parts of South-Eastern Europe.