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Genuinely Anti-Communist, Tactically Anti-Fascist. Framing Refugeedom in Interwar Yugoslavia (1918–1935)[1]

Abstract: *This article looks at how the Yugoslav state-making process affected the country's attitude toward refugees, and it describes the challenges that refugees faced when adjusting to their lived reality in the host country. In particular, this article considers the impact of both foreign policy and domestic preoccupations in shaping allegiances and rivalries between a variety of actors in the local political landscape and society, on the one hand, and between the different refugee groups, on the other. Finally, the article explores the top-down spatial management of refugees, alongside the strategies refugees pursued to respond to attempts at governing their mobility.*

Keywords: Interwar Yugoslavia, refugees, foreign policy, political parties, space

On June 14, 1924, exactly one year after his assassination, a memorial service honoring the former leader of the Agrarian Union and prime minister of Bulgaria, Aleksandar Stamboliyski, and the other victims of the September 1923 coup d'état, was held in the Belgrade Cathedral. The ceremony proclaimed a brotherhood between the Serbian people and the Bulgarian people, and offered a stage for the leader Kosta

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Todorov to emphasize that Stamboliyski's pro-Yugoslav orientation was at the root of his barbaric assassination.[2]

On October 28, 1932, the anniversary of the Istrian antifascist Vladimir Gortan's execution by the Italian Fascist authorities was commemorated in a Catholic church in Belgrade.[3] Gortan, who had been awarded the status of Istrian refugee, was sentenced to death in 1929 after attacking a group of people heading out to vote. He thus came to symbolize the martyrdom of all the escapees from the Julian March.

Yet, certainly, the most magnificent ceremony devoted to a refugee was the one that accompanied the burial of the remains of General Pyotr Nikolayevich Wrangel in 1929. He was the most eminent personality in Yugoslavia's Russian refugee community, and he had passed away in Brussels the year before. A huge procession stretched from Belgrade train station to the Russian Church of the Holy Trinity. It included representatives from 125 refugee organizations, top-ranking members of the Yugoslav political establishment and the Orthodox Serbian Church, and delegations from the main Yugoslav nationalist organizations.[4] According to the Belgrade daily *Politika*, Wrangel had allegedly expressed the wish of being buried in Belgrade, "in order to wait here for his return to his grateful homeland." Yugoslavia was thus reframed as the springboard for saving Russia, and by association, the entire Slavic world, from the Bolsheviks, as the patriarch put it.[5]

In history, funerals, death rituals, and commemoration practices are good indicators for the presence of a social group in public space. All these practices epitomize or even reshape the meaning attributed to that group in or by society. The above-mentioned examples demonstrate the visibility that certain refugees gained in interwar Yugoslavia after their deaths. They also provide some insight into how the narrative of their refugee experience was created by both refugees and the authorities that supervised the rituals, and how this narrative was later conveyed by these groups to others. In all these cases, the commemorative practices were not aimed at refugee groups alone. Rather, they were evidence of the dynamic relationship built with Yugoslav society as a whole. Ceremonies were certainly an opportunity for taking stock and reflecting on the deceased's life. Yet, they also provided an opportunity for certain refugee groups to reframe their attachment to their surroundings, and for the host society to establish a narrative of welcoming refugees.

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[2] Ivan Ristić, "Bugarska politička emigracija u Kraljevini SHS," *Istorija 20. Veka*, 30, 2 (2012), 50.

[3] "Iz Zagreba," *Istra*, 23 October 1929, 10.

[4] Miroslav Jovanović, "'Heroj je umro – ideja je besmrtna.' Simbolika smrti i pogrebnih rituala u izbeglištvu (Primer Ruskog izbeglištva na Balkanu)", *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju*, 14, 1–3 (2007), 56–59. A photo album of Wrangel's funeral can be accessed in the collection of the Hoover Institution: https://digitalcollections.hoover.org/objects/59101/album-12b-6-oktiabria-1929-v-g-span-classquery-hlbelg?ctx=5e38d4d1502d261291e1800a21d7877fee1e2632&idx=4#

[5] "Svečana sahrana generala Vrangela," *Politika*, 7 October 1929, 7.

Scholarship has widely explored the political nature of refugee policies, with states crafting their entry policy in line with political agendas. Humanitarian endeavors in support of refugees have been critically scrutinized to disclose how national imperatives and states' interests have influenced how refugees are hosted and managed.[6]

Although the first attempt to set up an international refugee regime within the framework of the League of Nations was accompanied by claims of political impartiality, the choice to protect individuals escaping Bolshevik Russia could not be deprived of ideological implications.[7] Besides the international constellations, bilateral relations also determined the circumstances under which certain refugee groups were allowed into neighboring countries. The host states desired to profit from their presence,[8] more often than not by fostering irredentist claims and countering the postimperial border settlement.[9]

Population movements in Yugoslavia have been widely investigated. The burgeoning scholarship on emigration from interwar Yugoslavia has especially focused on state-making's impact on the country's emigration policy.[10] As the historian Ulf Brunnbauer has already noted, the highly selective exit policy enacted by interwar Yugoslavia was driven primarily by the will to engineer the country's ethnic fabric.[11] Conversely, migration flows into Yugoslavia and the presence of foreigners still deserves scholarly attention because the country, like other Eastern European states, has always been regarded as an emigration rather than an immigration country.[12] Historians,

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[6] Matthew Frank, Jessica Reinisch, "Introduction: Refugees and the Nation-State in Europe, 1919–1959," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 49, 3 (2014), 477–90.

[7] Claudena M. Skran, *Refugees in Inter-War Europe. The Emergence of a Regime* (Oxford [England]: New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1995), 229.

[8] Raymond Detrez, "Refugees as Tools of Irredentist Policies in Interwar Bulgaria," in *Migration in the Southern Balkans*, edited by Hans Vermeulen, Martin Baldwin-Edwards, and Riki Van Boeschoten, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 47–62.

[9] Theodora Dragostinova, "Competing Priorities, Ambiguous Loyalties: Challenges of Socioeconomic Adaptation and National Inclusion of the Interwar Bulgarian Refugees," *Nationalities Papers* 34, 5 (2006), 549–74.

[10] Ulf Brunnbauer, "Emigration Policies and Nation-Building in Interwar Yugoslavia," *European History Quarterly*, 42, 4 (2012), 602–27; Edvin Pezo, *Zwangsmigration in Friedenszeiten? Jugoslawische Migrationspolitik und die Auswanderung von Muslimen in die Türkei (1918 bis 1966)* (München: Oldenbourg, 2013); Aleksandar R. Miletić, *Journey Under Surveillance: the Overseas Emigration Policy of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in Global Context, 1918–1928* (Berlin : [London?]: Lit Verlag ; Global Book Marketing, distribution, 2012; Vesna Đikanović, *Iseljavanje u Sjedinjene Američke Države: jugoslovensko iskustvo 1918–1941*. (Belgrade: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2012).

[11] Ulf Brunnbauer, "Introduction to the Special Issue: Migration and East Central Europe–a Perennial but Unhappy Relationship," *Hungarian Historical Review*, 6, 3 (2017), 497–501.

[12] Michal Frankl, "East Central Europe as a Place of Refuge in the Twentieth Century: Introduction to the State and Patterns of Historical Research," *Journal of East Central European Studies*, 71, 4 (2022), 473–489.

however, have dealt extensively with refugee groups in interwar Yugoslavia.[13] Refugees from Soviet Russia, by far the biggest community in the country, have attracted the attention of several scholars.[14] This investigation, which gained momentum with the seminal work of Miroslav Jovanović, has included social aspects and has helped to build a picture of the Russian refugees as anything but a homogeneous body. Similarly, the influx of Jewish refugees from Central Europe in the second half of the 1930s has been thoroughly investigated.[15] Unsurprisingly, one of the few historiographical attempts to compare different refugee groups has considered Russian and Jewish refugees.[16]

As for refugee movements from neighboring countries due to the postimperial transition or political events, the most significant body of literature deals with ethnic Slovenes and Croats from the areas allocated to Italy after the First World War. In this case, interwar Yugoslavia acted as their kin state.[17] While Bulgarian refugees have been researched thoroughly,[18] other refugee cohorts from neighboring countries, such as Baranyan and Albanian refugees, have so far been neglected.[19] While several of these studies have explored refugees' interaction with the Yugoslav state and society,

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[13] For an overview on scholarship on refugees in the Yugoslav space see Francesca Rolandi, Pieter Troch, "Refugees in the Yugoslav Space: An Overview of the Historiography," *Journal of East Central European Studies*, 71, 4 (2022), 587–617.

[14] Ljubodrag D. Dimić, "Ruska emigracija u kulturnom životu građanske Jugoslavije," *Istorija 20. veka*, 1–2 (1990), 7–38; Miroslav Jovanović, *Doseljavanje Ruskih izbeglica u Kraljevinu SHS, 1919–1924*. (Belgrade: Stubovi kulture, 1996); Miroslav Jovanović, *Ruska emigracija na Balkanu (1920–1940)* (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2006); Jovana Babović, "Political, Social, and Personal: The Encounters of the Russian Emigration in Yugoslavia, 1921–1941," *Serbian Studies: Journal of the North American Society for Serbian Studies*, 2, 1 (2009), 1–36; Petra Kim Krasnić, "Integracija ruske emigracije v Jugoslavijo med letoma 1918 in 1941," *Zgodovinski časopis*, 75, 1–2 (2021), 188–215.

[15] Milan Ristović, *U potrazi za utočištem: jugoslovenski Jevreji u bekstvu od holokausta 1941–1945*. (Belgrade: Službeni list SRJ, 1998); Anna Maria Grünfelder, *Von der Shoa eingeholt. Ausländische jüdische Flüchtlinge im ehemaligen Jugoslawien 1933-1945*. Wien: Böhlau, 2013; Marija Vulesica, "Yugoslavia as a Hub for Migration in the 1930s: Local Zionist Networks and Aid Efforts for Jewish Refugees," *Dubnow Institute Yearbook XVI/2017*, 2019; Bojan Aleksov, *Jewish Refugees in the Balkans, 1933-1945* (Paderborn: Brill | Schöningh, 2023).

[16] Ana Ćirić Pavlović, "A Multinational Haven for Refugees? The Interwar Kingdom of the South Slavs" in *Being a Refugee: A European Narrative*, edited by Anisa Hasanhodžić, Rifet Rustemović, Heidemarie Uhl. (Vienna: Institute of Culture Studies and Theatre History, Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2018), 71–83.

[17] Aleksej Kalc, "L'emigrazione slovena e croata dalla Venezia Giulia tra le due guerre ed il suo ruolo politico," *Annales* (1996), 23–60; Miha Zobec, *Salvaging the 'Unredeemed' in Italy: The Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Julian March Émigrés*, in *Unwilling Nomads in the Age of the Two World Wars. A Transnational History of Forced Migrants in Europe*, edited by Bastiaan Willelms and Michal Adam Palacz (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 59–74; Nevio Šetić, *Istra za talijanske uprave: o istarskoj emigraciji i njenom tisku u Zagrebu 1918.-1941*. (Zagreb: Dom i svijet, 2008).

[18] Toma Milenković, *Politička emigracija iz Bugarske u Jugoslaviji 1923–1944*. (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2018).

[19] Vujica Kovačev, "Organizacija mađarskih komunista-emigranata iz Baranje u Jugoslaviji 1921–1922. godine," *Prilozi za istoriju socijalizma*, 10 (1976), 325–362.

an overall investigation of the impact of different refugee communities on internal developments in Yugoslavia is yet to come.

This article draws on this rich secondary literature and fresh sources from the archives of Belgrade, Zagreb and Rijeka, and the League of Nations Archives. It will look at how foreign policy and domestic preoccupations affected the interwar Yugoslav state's attitude toward refugees and how this affected both policies and the framing of these refugee experiences–that is, how refugeedom entangled with the making of the Yugoslav state.

This article is divided into three sections. The first section offers insight into the coexistence of different refugee groups in the Yugoslav state during its early phases of existence; it shows how allegiances were grounded in the international context. The next section then describes the ties that refugees established with Yugoslav political actors and the mutual relationships that emerged between refugee groups. It explores how this played out in their lived reality and their perception in the eyes of the local authorities and population. Finally, the article considers the impact of the Yugoslav state-making process on the top-down spatial management of refugees and attempts at governing their mobility, and the strategies refugees undertook to improve their position in the host state.

While this article attempts to offer a holistic insight into refugeedom in interwar Yugoslavia, it is far from exhaustive. It covers a period stretching from the end of the First World War up to the mid-1930s. The First World War as a watershed in population movements does not require any explanation, while the mid-1930s was chosen because of several changes in both foreign and domestic policy that occurred then. This coincided with the weakening of the League of Nations, which would also affect how refugee issues were managed, as witnessed by the unsuccessful outcome of the 1938 Evian Conference.[20] Furthermore, the appointment of Milan Stojadinović as prime minister in 1935 triggered Yugoslavia's rapprochement with the Axis powers, which affected their attitude toward certain groups of refugees.[21] Consequently, the article will not consider Jewish refugees, whose figures increased in the following years despite the new discriminatory practices enacted by the Yugoslav authorities.

[20] The Evian conference, summoned in 1938 to gather delegates from states and relief organizations, failed to find a solution for the German Jewish refugees, with almost all states refusing to admit groups of refugees.

[21] Bojan Simić, "Milan Stojadinović and Italian-Yugoslav Relations (1935–41)," *Qualestoria*, 1 (2021), 269–85.

Between Ideology and Pragmatism: The Geopolitical Dimension to Refugee Policies

When the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes came about in the last months of 1918, it was firmly anchored in the geopolitical context that emerged from the Versailles peace negotiations.

Yugoslavia's political proximity to France, which framed itself as the protector of the new international order against revisionist efforts, remained one of its key features throughout the interwar period. Over the years, contested claims on multinational territories situated at its borders fueled opposition to some of the neighboring countries, such as Italy, Hungary, and Bulgaria. While these countries came to assume authoritarian tendencies and a right-wing political orientation, regional tensions arose out of territorial controversies rather than for ideological reasons. On the contrary, the ideological framework played a role in opposition to Soviet Russia, a constant throughout the entire interwar period.

The Bolshevik government's establishment and the civil war that followed resulted in 750,000 to 3,000,000 refugees leaving Soviet Russia. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes adhered to the interwar refugee regime set up in the League of Nations' framework on the initiative of Fridtjof Nansen. This meant that Yugoslavia signed the main agreements put in place internationally to protect Russian refugees until 1933. Additionally, it was one of the countries that better complied with international obligations linked to the Nansen passport, which was awarded to almost all the refugees residing in Yugoslavia. The interwar international refugee regime targeted certain groups–primarily Russians escaping the Bolshevik revolution and Armenians, and small contingents of Christian refugees from the Middle East.[22] While in the latter cases, the figures were low,[23] Yugoslavia's engagement in favor of Russian refugees placed it among the countries that contributed the most to providing uprooted individuals with a new home.[24] Estimates give a figure of around 40,000 Russian refugees resettling in the country in 1923, while in the late 1920s, there were some 30,000 Russians still in the country.[25]

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[22] Skran, *Refugees in Inter-War Europe*, 105, 113, 118.

[23] Numbering, twenty and ten, respectively, according to John Hope Simpson, *Refugees: Preliminary Report of a Survey*, (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1938), 416. A 1936 article mentioned the figure of 35 Assyrians and Chaldeans, and 150 Armenians, emphasizing that the latter had mostly acquired the Yugoslav citizenship ("Blizu trideset hiljada ljudi, žena i dece žive kod nas pod pokroviteljstvom Društva Naroda," *Politika*, 20 June 1936, in League of Nations Refugees Mixed Archival Groups (Nansen Fonds), Commission Files, Nansen Office for Refugees, C1561-457-20B-80207-16809-Jacket2

[24] Skran, *Refugees in Inter-War Europe*, 120.

[25] Jovanović, *Doseljavanje Ruskih izbeglica*, 173–86.

As in other Eastern European countries, such a generous welcome drew on the notion of cultural proximity among Slavic peoples.[26] Yet, Yugoslavia's case was special, as it shared an Orthodox religious affiliation that had nurtured historical ties since the nineteenth century when Russia had framed itself as a champion of the Orthodox element in the Ottoman Empire. This was reinforced by the Russian Empire playing the role of protector for Serbia amid the 1914 Austro-Hungarian ultimatum. Thus, hospitality to Russian refugees used to be conceptualized as a way of paying off a debt originating in the First World War.[27] While Czechoslovakia was widely perceived as a haven for republican and progressive refugees, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes mainly welcomed monarchist and ultraconservative segments of the Russian emigration, and the Wrangel's military units, which all fitted better into the fiercely anti-communist local climate.[28] The existence of circles of progressive Russian refugees in Yugoslavia, especially represented by the Yugoslav branch of the organization Zemgor, did not significantly influence the Russian community, but it nonetheless stirred up conflicts with the local reactionary leadership.[29]

Nonetheless, the international context also conditioned the welcoming of Russians in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes; it was the outcome of negotiations with the League of Nations, France, and the United Kingdom. The latter were the two powers that, after having been involved in the Russian Civil War, actively engaged in finding a refuge for the troops defeated by the Bolshevik army. In 1922, when they had to be evacuated from Istanbul, the Yugoslav government finally consented to allow in additional contingents of Russians, after it had agreed a fee for each accepted refugee.[30] Although the Yugoslav government openly stated its view that international agreements were mere recommendations, and it treated the legal status of Russian refugees as a matter of internal affairs, Russian refugees experienced their condition as determined not only by Yugoslav policies but also by an international set of regulations.[31] International commitments went beyond the

[26] Lars Karl, Adamantions Skordos, *Pan-Slavism*, in *European History Online* (http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/transnational-movements-and-organisations/international-organisations-and-congresses/pan-ideologies/lars-karl-adamantios-skordos-pan-slavism)

[27] Jovanović, *Doseljavanje Ruskih izbeglica*, 22; Miroslav Jovanović, "Slika 'drugog': ruske izbeglice u zemljama Balkana," *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju*, 5, 1–3 (1998), 39.

[28] Catherine Andreyev, Ivan Savický, *Russia Abroad. Prague and the Russian Diaspora, 1918–1938* (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 2004), 177–81; Babović, "Political, Social, and Personal," 18.

[29] Paul Robinson, "Zemgor and the Russian Army in Exile," *Cahiers du monde russe*, 46, 4 (2005), 719–37.

[30] League of Nations Refugees Mixed Archival Groups (Nansen Fonds), Registry Files (1920–1927), R1748/45/24633/24633/Jacket 1.

[31] League of Nations Refugees Mixed Archival Groups (Nansen Fonds), Registry Files (1920–1927), R1852/1A/14897/11812.

League of Nations and also involved the International Labor Organization and other transnational agencies and charities that were occasionally involved.

Furthermore, the Yugoslav government also hosted other refugee groups from neighboring countries. In these cases, the national framework and Yugoslavia's bilateral relations with the countries of origin shaped the refugee policy. This was the case with Stamboliyski's followers who escaped Bulgaria after the March 1923 coup d'état against the Agrarian government, and the September 1923 attempt at a communist insurrection. Once again, a sentiment of cultural proximity also aligned with Stamboliyski's political views. His understanding of Yugoslavism, which did not exclude a future union between Bulgaria and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and opposition to irredentism at the expense of the neighboring Yugoslav state, created the preconditions for admitting Bulgarian refugees, including communists. A figure of roughly 4,000 emigrants were allowed into the country in the second half of 1923, after a massive influx of communists that followed the repression of the September Uprising.[32] Yugoslavia acted as a rear for Bulgaria, which harbored plans to overthrow the Sofia government. Those refugees who entered the country in 1924 and 1925 to escape repression encountered a less favorable atmosphere, as Yugoslavia had abandoned plans to oust the new Bulgarian government.[33]

The strategy of deploying refugees as pressure tools designed to destabilize neighboring countries went as far as providing a sanctuary to conflicting factions of the refugees resulting from the regime change. While Yugoslavia had hosted Ahmed Zogu in 1924 when his rival Fan Noli seized power, it also hosted Zogu's opponents once he imposed himself as president, and later as king.[34] Similarly, tactical preoccupations conditioned the Yugoslav policy on refugees coming from the Baranya region. The Yugoslav army, which had occupied the area around Pécs after the First World War, displayed a tolerant attitude toward all forces siding against Miklós Horthy, the regent of Hungary. Again, rather than ideological concerns, what conditioned the Belgrade government the most was its irredentist claims that targeted the areas bordering Hungary. In August 1921, when a desperate attempt at creating a Soviet-inspired republic–the Serbian–Hungarian Baranya–Baja Republic–was crushed by the Hungarian forces, an estimated 5,500 refugees entered the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.[35]

Among them, the roughly 2,000 ethnic Serbs and Croats who left Baranya were not the only coethnic refugees who found refuge in the interwar Yugoslav

[32] Ristić, "Bugarska politička emigracija," 45–46.

[33] Milenković, *Politička emigracija iz Bugarske*, 271.

[34] Paskal Milo, *Shqipëria dhe Jugosllavia*, *1918-1927* (Tirana: Botuese, 1992), chapter 3. (A Serbian translation of the book is available at the following link: https://archive.org/stream/AlbanijaI-Jugoslavia191827/Albanija-i-Jugoslavia-1918-27_djvu.txt).

[35] Kovačev, "Organizacija mađarskih komunista-emigranata iz Baranje," 348.

state. Much more conspicuous was the number of ethnic Slovenes and Croats who left areas annexed by Italy after the First World War. According to most estimates, 70,000 individuals from the Julian March found refuge in the Yugoslav state.[36] Amid deteriorating relationships between Italy and Yugoslavia, refugees from the Julian March became living evidence of the plight of areas annexed to Italy, which the Yugoslav state did not stop laying claim to[37]. Opposition to the imperialist plans nurtured by Fascist Italy convinced the Yugoslav authorities to host antifascists, which put them at odds with the dominant political power in Italy. This also applied to a small contingent of supporters of the Free State of Fiume, which existed de jure as a buffer zone between Italy and Yugoslavia between 1920 and 1924 but was overthrown by a coup d'état in March 1922. The president, Riccardo Zanella, together with his followers–who often identified themselves with their city affiliation, as Fiumians rather than as Italians or Croats–found refuge and precarious financial support in the Yugoslav state.[38] Furthermore, Yugoslavia acted as a springboard for Italian antifascists willing to reach Austria. This went as far as establishing contacts between the Italian Antifascist concentration in Paris and circles close to the Yugoslav government, but it was brought to a halt because of the Yugoslav rapprochement with the Axis powers.

This blend of ideological commitment and pragmatism implied an oscillating support for progressive or conservative forces. In the case of Russian refugees, the staunch anticommunism that characterized the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes facilitated the reception of escapees from Bolshevism, and the declared pan-Slavism nurtured empathy toward refugees of Slavic origin. Similarly, irredentist claims on areas annexed by Italy and Hungary became entangled with the welcoming of refugees from borderlands, as happened in the case of Istrian and Baranyan refugees. Yet, while support for anti-communist Russian refugees lay on ideological foundations, in other cases, claims on territories allocated to neighboring states were crucial. In particular, the fact that left-leaning groups from neighboring countries were more likely to be ready to seek a compromise with Yugoslavia on territorial settlements made their agendas more acceptable. This was the case with Stambolyiski, who had committed himself to appeasement with Yugoslavia after the First World War. It was also true of the Baranyan refugee community's leadership. Béla Linder had taken part in the peace negotiations after the First World War to the point of being blamed by Hungarian nationalists for having contributed to Hungary's territorial loss.

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[36] Kalc, "L'emigrazione slovena e croata dalla Venezia Giulia tra le due guerre," 29.

[37] On the relations between Italy and Yugoslavia in the interwar period, see Milan D. Ristović, *Mussolini ante portas. Italijanski fašizam i jugoslovensko susedstvo,* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2021).

[38] Ljubinka Toševa Karpowicz, *Rijeka / Fiume 1868–1924. Od autonomije do države* (Rijeka: Udruga Slobodna država Rijeka, 2021), 296–304; Ljubinka Toševa Karpowicz, "Riccardo Zanella u Beogradu između srpske, francuske i italijanske masonerije," *Vojno-istorijski glasnik*, 42, 1–2 (1998), 41–53.

The Yugoslav "instrumental antifascism" went as far as to allow the transit of foreign communists to be later redirected to Austria. Despite the ban on the Communist Party in Yugoslavia, foreign communists were apparently allowed to escape through Yugoslavia, in some cases at the price of providing information on their Yugoslav comrades. Nonetheless, such information provision appears not to have been a sine qua non condition. The Italian-born Lelio Jacomelli, after nine years spent wandering around Europe, was let through, although he claimed to know nothing about Yugoslav communists because of language barriers.[39] In such cases, it was likely that their supposed harmful activities against Fascist Italy protected them from deportation to Italy. As we will see, political preoccupations conditioned the refugee regime at several levels.

Building Alliances and Coping with Rivalries: Refugees and the Domestic Political Landscape

Not only international, but also internal developments in interwar Yugoslavia affected the policies implemented toward different refugee groups. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes brought together areas that had previously belonged to different imperial and national units, and it initially had to establish and organize a new state out of diverse territories. The first postwar decade was marked by an oscillating between the predominance of the Serbian-based and conservative Radical Party and the Democratic Party; the latter advocated a more modern but similarly centralized state-building project. The centralism that some of the predominant political parties advocated clashed with the federalist orientation represented mainly by the Croatian Peasant Party, which managed to gain power in a coalition for a short stint in 1925-26. These struggles went underground in January 1929 when an authoritarian turn led to a ban on political parties and the centralization of power. The king's dictatorship, spanning from 1929 to 1934, coincided with a new phase marked by a rethinking of nationhood, with a novel, integral, and unitary understanding of Yugoslavism constructed. It was also a period of increasing state repression, exacerbated by the anti-communist climate common throughout the country since 1921 when the Communist Party had been banned. Furthermore, from 1929 onward, the international economic crisis badly hit the Yugoslav state.[40]

[39] Hrvatski državni arhiv (HDA), Savska banovina. Odjeljak upravnog odjeljenja za državnu zaštitu (145), k. 70.

[40] Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia* (London: Hurst, 2007); Christian Axboe Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs: Identity in King Aleksandar's Yugoslavia*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014); Ivana Dobrivojević-Tomić, *Državna represija u doba diktature Kralja Aleksandra* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2006).

Refugees often encounter a need to cultivate ties with dominant political actors who champion or oppose their presence in the country. In the multilayered Yugoslav political landscape, allegiances and rivalries affected refugees. In several cases, refugees' precarious position pushed them to seek protection through a tactical display of proximity to the most powerful political circles at the central (Yugoslav) level, as these powers had the last word on matters of internal affairs. Nonetheless, the fragmentation of the local political scene complicated the refugees' attempts to act politically.

As hospitality to Russian refugees was reframed as based on "Orthodox brotherhood", unsurprisingly, their supporters in the Yugoslav institutions were primarily members of the Radical Party. Both the first two heads of the State Commission (a body established to coordinate aid to Russian refugees)–the former Minister of Interior, Ljuba Jovanović, and Aleksandar Belić, who replaced him in 1925–came from the Radical ranks. This was also often the case with local authorities championing the welcoming of small contingents of refugees.[41] Yugoslavia's identification with an expanded vision of Serbia, a core tenet of the Radical Party,[42] was translated into the privileged relations that Russians built with the Serbian element. They were mainly resettled in the predominantly Orthodox areas of the country and continued to refer to the Yugoslav state as Serbia. In some cases, they even referred to Croatia as the "new Serbia."[43]

Russian refugees were caught in the middle of domestic conflicts between supporters of centralist and federalist understandings of the new state. From their arrival, they encountered widespread hostility in the northwestern areas of the country, epitomized by the attempts of the Zagreb-based Regional Government to prevent Russians from disembarking in the port of Bakar near Rijeka.[44] According to a 1921 report from the commander of the gendarmerie brigade in the town of Sveti Ivan Zelina near Zagreb, opposition to the resettlement of thirty-three Russian refugees was to be inserted in a broad spectrum of grievances that included failed plans for the establishment of a future (Croatian) republic and complaints about the tax burden.[45] There was a general feeling that "Russian refugees were sent by the Serbian government as patrols" and that they were going to be awarded the right to vote in the upcoming elections.[46] Similarly,

[41] Toma Milenković, Momčilo Pavlović, ed., *Beloemigracija u Jugoslaviji, 1918–1941* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2006), 127–28.

[42] Petra Troch, "Yugoslavism between the World Wars: Indecisive Nation Building," *Nationalities Papers*, 38, 2 (2010), 227–44.

[43] Milenković, Pavlović, *Beloemigracija u Jugoslaviji*, 73–75; Babović, "Political, Social, and Personal," 16; Jovanović, *Slika 'drugog'*, 50–52.

[44] Jovanović, *Doseljavanje Ruskih izbeglica,* 138.

[45] HDA, *Zbirka kontrarevolucija* (1357), k. 1, Komanda 1. vođa 1. čete 1. bataljona IV žandarmerijska brigade, 15 January 1921.

[46] HDA, 1357, k. 1, Kr. kotarska oblast u Sv. Ivanu Zelina, 29 December 1920.

Croatian nationalists (Frankists) feared that Wrangel's troops could have been deployed to crush a possible Croatian upheaval.[47] Some archival sources sporadically reported on Russian refugees collaborating with the Serbian-dominated intelligence network, which was at odds with the Croatian Peasant Party.[48] Similarly, the brief stint that saw the Croatian Peasant Party in power allegedly coincided with many Russian employees being replaced with Yugoslav citizens.[49]

International rivalries were echoed in domestic conflicts and fueled hostility toward refugees. For instance, Russians were accused by communist sympathizers of being "reactionary" and of stealing jobs.[50] Such a label was not exclusively imposed on Russian refugees from outside, as they used to present themselves as best suited to the anticommunist struggle, having experienced communism firsthand. Another matter of discontent was the allocation of land to Russians.[51] The resettlement of Russian refugees was arguably perceived as a top-down project implemented by the central government at the expense of locals. Grievances found a breeding ground in sectors advocating major decentralization, and they entangled with the temporary rapprochement between the Croatian Republican Peasant Party[52] and the Soviet Union, which culminated in Stjepan Radić's visit to Moscow in 1924.[53] Moreover, intolerance was allegedly also fueled by the Catholic clergy, which was likely not to appreciate the proportional increase of the Orthodox population in certain areas.[54] More often than not, however, intolerance toward refugees was due to more prosaic reasons, as refugees were often blamed for any unattended consequence of their arrival. When local shopkeepers in Kotor raised their prices after a mass influx of Russians, rage against these newcomers grew locally.[55] Competition for employment cost a Russian refugee his life in Belišće, where 250 workers had been resettled. Tensions arose out of the fear that Russians could have retained their jobs, while local workers had been fired, as the latter, unlike Russians, used to strike.[56]

Similarly, ethnic kinship did not always grant refugees an enthusiastic welcome. Conflicts with the locals were also reported with refugees from the Julian March, ever since their arrival. Ethnic Croats who escaped Fiume (now known as Rijeka) in 1920

[47] HDA, 1357, k. 1, Predsjednički ured Kr. redarstveno ravnateljstvo, 28 October 1924.

[48] Državni arhiv u Rijeci (DARI), Riječka kvestura (53), A9, k. 464, d. Tommaseo Milovan

[49] Milenković, Pavlović, *Beloemigracija u Jugoslaviji*, 8.

[50] HDA, 1357, k. 1, Predsjednički ured Kr. redarstveno ravnateljstvo, 28 October 1924.

[51] HDA, 1357, k. 1, Veliki župan županije virovitičke, 6 November 1924.

[52] The Croatian Republican Peasant Party was renamed as Croatian Peasant Party in 1925.

[53] Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević, "Stjepan Radić and His Journey to Moscow and the Croatian Republican Peasant Party Entering the Peasant International," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, 4, 3 (1972), 7–29.

[54] Petra Kim Krasnić, "Integracija ruske emigracije v Jugoslavijo med letoma 1918 in 1941," *Zgodovinski časopis*, 75, 1–2 (2021), 205.

[55] League of Nations Refugees Mixed Archival Groups (Nansen Fonds), Registry Files (1920–1927), Russian refugees, R1717/45/19080/12542.

[56] HDA, 1357, k. 1, Veliki župan županije virovitičke, 6 November 1924.

encountered a hostile reception in Croatia and Slavonia, where local municipalities were rarely opposed to the resettlement of even small groups.[57] A circumspect attitude toward outsiders was allegedly exacerbated by the deterioration of the economic situation as a consequence of the 1929 crisis.[58]

The rift between centralists and federalists that marked Yugoslav interwar politics did not spare other refugee groups. The commitment to a unitarian understanding of Yugoslavism displayed by the Belgrade-based organization of the emigrants from the Julian March after 1930 happened to clash with antigovernment sentiments in Croatia. It took until the late 1930s for the Croatian Peasant Party to start spreading its influence among refugees from the Julian March.[59] Nonetheless, besides taking sides in domestic controversies, refugees also framed themselves as mediators. For instance, because of unitarist views widespread among the Istrian refugees, they presented themselves as capable of contributing to a rapprochement between Serbs and Croats, as the poet Rikard Katalinić Jeretov, who led the main organization in charge of refugees (Jugoslavenska Matica), used to do.[60]

With the Russians, belief in shared Orthodox traditions fostered an ideological interaction with the Radicals, whereas the Democratic Party, who championed a modernizing-albeit-authoritarian path to state-building, became the main advocate of refugees from the Julian March.[61] Although the refugees claimed an unwillingness to get involved in political struggles,[62] over the years their leadership cultivated a tight relationship with political sectors advocating major centralization. Nationalist and even paramilitary groups, such as the Organization of Yugoslav Nationalists (Orjuna) and the Revolutionary Organization of the Julian March TIGR, could count on significant membership among Julian March refugees, rooted in Yugoslav support for guerrilla actions in neighboring Italy.[63] The two organizations provided an infrastructural network for escapees from the Julian March into Yugoslavia, which was often also used by Italian anti-fascists.[64] In the early 1930s, support for the authoritarian steps undertaken by the Yugoslav king granted the Julian March

[57] HDA, Zemaljska vlada, Odjel za unutarnje poslove (79), kk. 5463, 5464, 5465.

[58] Kalc, "L'emigrazione slovena e croata dalla Venezia Giulia tra le due guerre," 11.

[59] Wörsdörfer, *Il confine orientale*, 154.

[60] Gradska knjižnica i čitaonica "Viktor Car Emin" Opatija, Zbirka ostavštine Rikarda Katalinića Jeretova,, k. 6, Anketa o srpsko-hrvatskim odnosima, 1922.

[61] "Pismo iz Jugoslavije," *Istarska riječ*, 23.2.1923, 2; "Iz Novog Sada," *Istra*, 26 March 1931, 7–8.

[62] "Resen in miren kongres emigracije iz Julijske Krajine v Beogradu," *Istra*, 16 September 1932, 3.

[63] Milica Kacin-Wohinz, Značilnosti in oblike protifašističnega odpora na Primorskem med dvema vojnama," *Annales*, 6, 8 (1996), 18.

[64] Kalc, "L'emigrazione slovena e croata dalla Venezia Giulia tra le due guerre," 9; Vasilije Dragosavljević, "Irredentist Actions of the Slovenian Organization of Yugoslav Nationalists (ORJUNA) in Italy and Austria (1922–1930)," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 59, 3 (2019), 31–52.

refugees renewed press capabilities and the associated infrastructure.[65] Tactical reasons entangled with a belief, widespread in the generations that came of age in the early 1920s, that protection from Italian imperialism could come exclusively from a strong and centralized Yugoslav state. A centralist approach to Yugoslavism was key to the dream of Yugoslav unity that many Istrian emigrants used to cultivate.[66]

From time to time, domestic political actors supported the same groups for diverging reasons. Opposition in Yugoslavia to the Bulgarian government installed in 1923 pooled together members of the Radical Party and the Democratic Party in their support for Bulgarian refugees, due to territorial controversies with Sofia.[67] Simultaneously, the Agrarian Party,[68] the underground Yugoslav Communist Party, the Independent Workers' Party of Yugoslavia, and the Independent Trade Unions,[69] all offered aid firsthand to Bulgarian refugees for various ideological reasons.

Left-leaning groups found themselves on the other side of the ideological barricade as far as Russian refugees were concerned. Communist circles ostracized the arrival of Wrangel's troops up to the point of their being responsible for sporadic attacks,[70] while the Agrarian Party parliamentarian Miloš Moskovljević, repeatedly criticized the general's excessive power that he was able to accumulate in the Yugoslav state.[71] Opposition to the resettlement of Wrangel's soldiers was rooted not only in ideological confrontation but also in threats to their possible role in a reactionary change of government, as would later happen in Albania and Bulgaria. Ahmet Zogu overthrew Fan Noli's government by drawing on Russian units coming from Yugoslavia.[72] Similarly, Russian refugees participated in the coup d'état against Stamboliyski in June 1923, but their involvement in Bulgaria's polarized political arena had started before.[73] In 1922, Stambolyiski's rapprochement with Soviet Russia resulted in the increased ostracization of Russian refugees in the country.[74]

The political orientation that prevailed within the refugee communities–or at least among their leadership–not only affected their ties with domestic stakeholders

[65] Kalc, "L'emigrazione slovena e croata dalla Venezia Giulia tra le due guerre"; Miha Zobec, *Salvaging the 'Unredeemed' in Italy*.

[66] Dušan Diminić, *Sjećanja: život za ideju* (Rijeka: Adamić, 2005), 18. I would like to thank Mila Orlić for drawing my attention to this book.

[67] Ristić, "Bugarska politička emigracija," 56–57.

[68] Milenković, *Politička emigracija iz Bugarske*,104–9.

[69] Milenković, *Politička emigracija iz Bugarske*, 109, 119–22.

[70] Jovanović, *Doseljavanje Ruskih izbeglica,* 309–10.

[71] "Wranglerova akcija protiv rusa," *Jutarnji list*, 14 March 1922, 2.

[72] Jovanović, *Ruska emigracija na Balkanu*, 56–58; Petra Kim Krasnić, "Ruska emigracija in jugoslovanska politika do Sovjetske zveze med obema svetovnim vojnama," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 61, 1 (2021), 67.

[73] Dmitar Tasić, "The Emergence of New Paramilitary Organizations in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia after the First World War," *Nationalities Papers*, 49, 6 (2021), 1184.

[74] Jovanović, *Ruska emigracija na Balkanu*, 48–49.

but also shaped their mutual relations. While direct competition rarely emerged, it happened that the welcoming of a particular group was counterposed to measures in support of other cohorts, which were regarded as insufficient. In 1927, the Istrian magazine *Istra. Vanstranačko-nacionalni list* reported on the alleged welcoming of two thousand of Wrangler's supporters in Zagreb at the very moment when two thousand Istrian refugees were fired.[75] Comparisons were often drawn with Russian refugees, as they formed the largest community of foreign refugees. As an article from the magazine *Istra* put it, Istrian refugees regarded themselves as "citizens," rather than as "newcomers," "foreigners" "emigrants," or "Russians who left their own country." In particular, the term "emigrant" was steadfastly opposed because it implicitly denied them the possibility of Yugoslavia being their homeland.[76] Comparisons, however, also served to criticize the Yugoslav authorities for their lack of support for coethnic refugees. Yet, as the magazine article's implicit argument put it, they should have been prioritized for their belonging to the Yugoslav nation.[77]

Declared antifascism fostered proximity between Istrian and Bulgarian refugees. An editorial on fascism written by the Bulgarian leader, Kosta Todorov, appeared in the outlet *Istra*. Another article described the leader Ivan Marija Čok, of the pro-government union of the emigrants from the Julian March, greeting Bulgarian leaders at Belgrade train station when they were about to return home upon amnesty.[78] This move was described as epitomizing "Yugoslav sentiments from Isonzo-Soča to the Black Sea."[79] Crucially, the dichotomy of anticommunism versus antifascism determined the main axis of this political constellation. Russian and Bulgarian refugees were usually framed at opposed sides of the political spectrum, to such an extent that external actors tried to maneuver them against each other. In 1924, the Bulgarian authorities allegedly tried to infiltrate a few Russian refugee groups among Bulgarians in Yugoslavia, so they could control them.[80]

Mutual relationships increased whenever refugees lived shoulder to shoulder and shared the same dwellings, workplaces, or spaces of sociability. This likely happened in certain urban areas inhabited by newcomers. For instance, in the Ljubljana suburb of Sibirija, newly arrived Russian refugees populated the improvised shacks, along with refugees from areas allocated to neighboring countries after 1918 and domestic

[75] "Živio Wrangel! Crknite Istrani!" *Istra. Vanstranačko-nacionalni list*, 11 June 1927, 3.

[76] "Nekoliko riječi umjesto programa," *Istra*, 22 July 1929, 3.

[77] "Resen in miren kongres emigracije iz Julijske Krajine v Beogradu," *Istra*, 16 September1932, 3.

[78] Milenković, *Politička emigracija iz Bugarske*, 392

[79] "Bugari i Julijska Krajina," *Istra*, 17 March 1933, 1; "Jugoslovensko-bolgarsko zbliževanje in emigracija," *Istra*, Easter 1934, 23; "Jugoslavenski i bugarski književnici u obrani naše kulture u Julijskoj Krajini," *Istra*, 1 June 1934, 5.

[80] Arhiv Jugoslavije, Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Kraljevine Jugoslavije 1919–1941 (14), fasc. 210, jed. 755, Ministarstvo unutrašnjih dela Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca Odjeljenje za državnu zaštitu, 31 January 1924.

migrants.[81] The Yugoslav cities, particularly the capital of Belgrade, witnessed the springing up of shantytowns that hosted the rural population striving to make a living on the margins of big urban centers. In other cases, informal settings attracted refugees from the same area, as happened in Zagreb at the shacks by the Ciglana site, which became a loosely defined Istrian enclave in the middle of the city center.[82]

Nevertheless, the spatial dimension of resettlement often became a matter of negotiation between the Yugoslav authorities and refugees, and it became a litmus test for refugees' positioning within the host society.

Top-down Spatial Management and Spontaneous Mobility: Refugees and Space

As soon as different refugee contingents reached the Yugoslav state, state bodies increasingly strove to govern their mobility. In many cases, the authorities tried to benefit from the influx of individuals regarded as loyal to "reclaim" the ethnically mixed border areas. For instance, although a substantial part of the German and Hungarian population had already left after 1918, the authorities still regarded the northeastern areas of the country, from Međimurje to Vojvodina, as in need of Slavicizing. Some Slovenes and Croats from the areas allocated to Italy replaced German and Hungarian civil servants,[83] and contributed to the construction of a narrative on refugees from the Julian March as "border guards of our nation."[84] Similarly, some of the first Russian refugees, including civil servants, were resettled in the regions of Banat, Bačka, and Baranya at a time when the border with Hungary was yet to be settled.[85] In this case, loyalty and cultural proximity compensated for the fact that the newcomers were not members of the titular nation.

The fertile Vojvodina plane was widely regarded as a developed and civilized area, which, having been included in the Habsburg Empire, boasted a shared culture and civilization with the upper Adriatic area. The situation proved to be different in the southern areas of the country, which were stricken by destitution, political instability, and turmoil. Several Russian former Wrangel soldiers were redirected to what is currently Macedonia to work on constructing infrastructure. They were also

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[81] Petar Kim Krasnić, "Prihod in namestitev ruskih emigrantov v Kraljevino SHS v arhivskim in avto/biografskih viri," 3, 1 (2020), 103–10

[82] Šetić, *Istra za talijanske uprave,* 107.

[83] Slobodan Bjelica, "Istrani u Novom Sadu između dva svetska rata," *Godišnjak Filozofskog fakulteta u Novom Sadu*, 41, 2 (2016), 103–17.

[84] "Naši u Beogradu," *Istra*, 5 January 1933, 7.

[85] Jovanović, *Doseljavanje Ruskih izbeglica*, 199–200; Babović, "Political, Social, and Personal," 17.

deployed there as border guards or worked on repressing local insurgencies.[86] From the early 1930s, the Julian March refugees were briefly included in the colonization of these areas, a project aimed at Slavicizing and Christianizing areas with a substantial Muslim population.[87] The purpose of ethnic engineering in the southern areas of the country was best symbolized by the case of the Bistrenica colony, where an association of Julian March refugees, via a union of agrarian communities in Skopje, bought the land for a nominal fee from Turks pushed to emigrate.[88] Nonetheless, colonization attempts frequently failed and were swiftly abandoned.

Yet, in most cases, rather than being dispatched to a location deliberately, refugees were prevented from reaching certain areas regarded as sensitive. Various measures were implemented to prevent Russians from moving to the capital city from 1921 onward, because of hygiene-related concerns–a typhus epidemic broke out in 1920– and concerns about overcrowding and social turmoil.[89] As the Ministry of Interior put it, in 1921, Belgrade was so crowded with Russian refugees that no more room remained for its inhabitants.[90] While there were always individuals who managed to reach big cities, close cooperation between the Yugoslav state and the refugee leadership was established to limit the Russian refugees' movement. Upon their arrival, Russians were assigned a place of residence that they could not leave without authorization. Until 1930, every Russian refugee had to be a colony member. The Yugoslav police, who were tasked with providing documents to refugees, including the Nansen passport, used to rely on the colony leaders, who were given additional disciplining power over other refugees.[91]

Refugees' distribution was managed in line with the role the state attributed to the various refugee groups. For ethnically mixed refugee groups, such as the refugees from Baranya, ethnic belonging determined the geography of resettlement. Refugees of Slavic origin were allowed to resettle anywhere in Yugoslavia and to take part in the colonization of rural lands from Vojvodina. On the contrary, non-Slavs were either encouraged to emigrate or were intentionally scattered around the country.[92] As the Ministry of Interior documents show, this allowed tighter police control, and it avoided refugees' concentration in urban areas, which was believed to encourage

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[86] Milenković, Pavlović, *Beloemigracija u Jugoslaviji*, 79; Jovanović, *Doseljavanje Ruskih izbeglica*, 209

[87] DARI, Riječka prefektura (8), k. 142

[88] Vladan Z. Jovanović, "Tokovi i ishod međuratne kolonizacije Makedonije, Kosova i Metohije," *Tokovi istorije*, 3 (2006), 25–44; Jernej Mlekuž. "'Ne Srbi ne Slovenci, ne katoličani in ne pravoslavci, pa tudi ne italijanski in naši državljani': Slovensko časopisje o slovenski koloniji v Bistrenici v letih 1930–1940," *Two Homelands*, 52 (2020), 131–46.

[89] Jovanović, *Doseljavanje Ruskih izbeglica*, 211–18.

[90] AJ, 14, fasc. 217 jed. 773.

[91] Milenković, Pavlović, *Beloemigracija u Jugoslaviji*, 98–100.

[92] Kovačev, "Organizacija mađarskih komunista-emigranata iz Baranje," 345.

social turmoil. Yet, other elements, such as class, played a role in the resettlement and determined the distribution of refugees not only in urban and rural areas but also between the city center and peripheries. For instance, intellectuals from Baranya tended to move to Belgrade, while miners and peasants found employment in the country's peripheral areas.[93] Most of the roughly three thousand refugees from the Julian March in Belgrade resided in the periphery, except for civil servants, lawyers, businesspeople, and independent artisans who inhabited the city center.[94]

In other cases, the geography of resettlement mirrored shifting political fortunes. Upon their arrival, Bulgarian refugees were initially allowed to remain in the border area around the city of Niš, a convenient location from which to make the new Bulgarian government anxious.[95] In 1925, as a reaction against the communist attack on the Saint Nedelya Church in Sofia,[96] the Yugoslav government restrained its support for the political activities of the Bulgarian emigration and refugees were relocated away from the border.[97] Political belonging conditioned the shaping of internal hierarchies. Left-wing sympathizers were interned in the small Serbian town of Gornji Milanovac, which they could leave only upon authorization. Because of the lack of jobs, in most cases, resettlement led to unemployment and destitution.[98] On the contrary, those agrarians who opposed collaboration with the communists were allowed to reside in Belgrade and could often count on stable employment.[99]

Refugees often defied the government's efforts to hamper their mobility. The left-leaning Bulgarian emigrant Petar Ivanov escaped from Gornji Milanovac, hidden in a train. He was stopped four months later at the Zagreb train station as undocumented. An arrest warrant was issued as he had left his designated place of residence.[100] Mobility constraints did not prevent migration paths from being extremely staggered, marked by attempts at making a living in various places. The Russian refugee Dimitrije Ševčenko stated he had wandered between Turkey, the US, France, Romania, Italy, Bulgaria, France, Belgium, and Austria.[101] The fact that the Julian March refugees found themselves in their kin state did not make their path more straightforward, as witnessed by various similarly nonlinear trajectories. The Istrian refugee Josip Flego claimed to have been wandering between Italy, Yugoslavia, Germany, and Latvia, after

[93] Kovačev, "Organizacija mađarskih komunista-emigranata iz Baranje," 345–47.

[94] "Naši u Beogradu," *Istra*, 5 January 1933, 7.

[95] Ristić, "Bugarska politička emigracija," 46–54.

[96] Milenković, *Politička emigracija iz Bugarske,* 362.

[97] Ristić, "Bugarska politička emigracija," 58; Milenković, *Politička emigracija iz Bugarske*, 256–63, 312.

[98] Milenković, *Politička emigracija iz Bugarske*, 320–23.

[99] Milenković, *Politička emigracija iz Bugarske*, 331.

[100] Milenković, *Politička emigracija iz Bugarske*, 329.

[101] HDA, 1357, k. 2, Ševčenko Dimitrije ilegalan dolazak u državu; HDA, Savska banovina. Odjeljak upravnog odjeljenja za državnu zaštitu (145), k. 96.

having fought as a volunteer in Carinthia.[102] Extreme mobility often led to refugees being depicted in a grim light, fostering their perception as outsiders.

In other cases, initial trajectories were later reversed by political changes. The most telling example is that of Bulgaria, which was a haven for left-wing sympathizers under the Stamboliyski government, and attracted individuals at odds with the Yugoslav regime because of their political views. In 1922, the Baranyan refugee Josip Brogli left Yugoslavia for Bulgaria, fearing a forced deportation back to Hungary.[103] In the same period, Bulgaria served as a springboard for certain Russians willing to be repatriated, as they could count on Soviet emissaries and established channels, as well as a League of Nations scheme to support repatriation.[104] Within a few months, these movements would be reversed, with left-wing sympathizers leaving Bulgaria en masse. The extreme mobility typical of many migration paths often testified to what was a troubled process of adaptation to the host society. This affected, albeit to different degrees, all refugee cohorts.

Conclusions

Wrangel, Stamboliyski, and Gortan were three very different figures, who could not be compared in terms of their public relevance and outreach. A man presenting himself as the commander in chief of the Russian army in exile, an overthrown head of state, and a humble refugee who happened to get involved in an armed attack in his home country had little in common, except for the narratives generated about them being shaped to make the refugee communities they symbolized deserving in the eyes of the host state authorities. Pan-Slavic solidarity, anticommunism, and martyrdom in the name of the nation. By looking at the Yugoslav interwar refugee regime, some of the pillars that marked the process of state-making in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (known as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia from 1929) can be detected.

As this article has argued, attitudes toward different refugee groups in the interwar Yugoslav state were shaped by a combination of geopolitical and domestic concerns. The different refugee groups held a variety of political orientations, with common ground in having opposed the governments they had fled. Anticommunism, the ideological framework underpinning the welcoming of Russian refugees, bridged the international and internal dimensions. The Yugoslav state framed itself as a haven for escapees from Soviet Russia, with the underlying assumption that such a move was part of the transnational struggle against communism. Additionally, Yugoslav

[102] HDA, 145, k. 41

[103] AJ, 14, fasc. 213, jed. 764.

[104] League of Nations Refugees Mixed Archival Groups (Nansen Fonds), Registry Files (1920–1927), Russian refugees, R1745/45/23318/22278.

participation in the League of Nations refugee regime helped the country to develop its presence as a full-fledged member of the international community of liberal states established after the First World War.[105]

The Yugoslav refugee regime tended to insert Russian refugees into a rule of law system, facilitating their access to citizenship and protecting them from the ups and downs of the oscillating foreign policy. The fact that the interwar Yugoslav state remained a constant enemy of the Soviet Union throughout the Yugoslav state's existence provided refugees with durable protection. For instance, unlike other foreigners, the deportation of Russians was an exceptional measure, and it had to be authorized by the Ministry of Interior.

Refugees were not only passive recipients of decisions taken within diplomatic circles. Rather, they were active players, able to influence the country's foreign policy. According to Jovanović, the presence of large numbers of refugees affected the Yugoslav decision not to recognize Soviet Russia until June 1940, when the majority of the countries had normalized their relations with Moscow.[106]

On the contrary, discretion and pragmatism pervaded the Yugoslav attitude toward refugees from neighboring countries. These states shared right-wing authoritarian connotations, and so territorial claims to contested territories and international intrigue were all packed in political terms such as anti-fascism. Nonetheless, in these cases, refugees' protections depended on bilateral relations. Additionally, as opponents of right-wing governments, these refugees were often haunted by the allegation that they were communists, which would translate into a constant threat of deportation. Finally, the welcoming of coethnic refugees cannot be detached from the shaping of Yugoslav nationhood that framed belonging in terms of ethnicity. The entanglement between the ideological framework and pragmatic preoccupations shaped a system marked by varying degrees of inclusivity, as epitomized by the 1928 Citizenship Law.

Members of the titular nation, such as Slovenes and Croats from the Julian March, were regarded as future citizens whose inclusion was only a matter of bureaucracy. If individuals of Slavic origin were regarded as potentially assimilable, Russians were prioritized because of their peculiar status, recognized both nationally and internationally. For other nationals, naturalization, albeit possible in theory, required a longer path.[107] The implementation was not always coherent. For instance, the path towards integration was all but smooth for coethnic refugees, as they often faced a lack of opportunities for employment, bureaucratic obstacles, and troubles in adapting to the surrounding context. The need for a superior level of protection

[105] See Elizabeth White, "The Legal Status of Russian Refugees 1921–1936," *Comparativ. Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und Vergleichende Gesellshaftsforschng* (2017), 32–33.

[106] Jovanović, *Ruska emigracija na Balkanu*, 45.

[107] Ivan Kosnica, "Odnos državljanstva i nacionalne pripadnosti u Kraljevini SHS/Jugoslaviji." *Zbornik Pravnog fakulteta u Zagrebu*, 68, 1 (2018), 61–83.

led some of them to emphasize the international dimension to their struggle, as they did by turning to the League of Nations for support.[108]

The position that each refugee group was ascribed in the Yugoslav society shaped, in turn, their spatial trajectories. Those deemed loyal were offered opportunities in the borderlands, where other ethnic groups had begun to be marginalized. Yet, other locations, such as big urban centers, were deemed as not within everyone's reach for pragmatic reasons, out of fear of diseases, overcrowding, or political turmoil. Spatial constraints were imposed from above, with norms designed to compel individuals to reside in the places they were assigned to, or simply prevent them from moving to places where their presence was regarded as inconvenient. Refugees, however, defied regulations and took matters into their own hands, testing opportunities for a better life in several places. Refugees' nonlinear migration paths testified to the challenges that refugees faced in their efforts to adjust to a new country and attain a decent standard of living. Encounters with Yugoslav society, advances in their legal status after years of residence, and opportunities for making a sustainable living all affected how they made sense of their refugeedom and planned their future.

The multifaceted approach to refugee issues and the coexistence of different categories in interwar Yugoslavia, which this article has addressed, were far from unique. Instead of drawing on a universal understanding of human rights and the individual recognition of the refugees' status, as would happen with the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the interwar international refugee system awarded rights to members of certain nationalities. This certainly affected national refugee policies. Yet, as this article has tried to explain, interwar Yugoslavia provides an insightful case study for several reasons. First, the country hosted different cohorts of refugees, both national and foreign. Second, interwar Yugoslavia was known for its multiethnic citizenry and the coexistence of different state legacies, which resulted from the unification of several territories with different national, religious, cultural, and administrative backgrounds. When refugees came into contact with Yugoslav society, they encountered a multitude of actors and inevitably became involved in domestic allegiances and rifts. Their belonging to a variety of political constellations occasionally shaped alliances and, in some instances, allowed external actors to turn refugees against one another. Yet, the similar paths of displacement they encountered made their experiences to some extent comparable. Further research, possibly based on ego-documents such as memoirs and diaries, could compare how different refugees framed their experience in a country painfully trying to turn into a modern nation-state.

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[108] Rolf Wörsdörfer, *Il confine orientale: Italia e Jugoslavia dal 1915 al 1955*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009), 101.

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Сажетак

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Искрени антикомунисти, тактични антифашисти. Држава и избеглиштво у међуратној Југославији (1918–1935)

Чланак истражује утицај процеса градње југословенске државе на избеглиштво у међуратном периоду. Чланак је подељен на три дела. Први део даје увид у суопштење различитих група избеглица у земљи, приказујући како су њихове трајекторије одређивале југословенске геополитичке бриге. Други посматра односе које су избеглице установиле са различитим југословенским политичким актерима, као и међусобне односе између различитих група избеглица. Последњи део истражује просторну димензију избеглиштва, укључујући и управљање избеглицама које су спроводиле југословенске власти, и покушаје избеглица да обиђу ограничења кретања. У чланку је видљиво како су нека од главних питања југословенске политике у међуратном периоду (од учешћа у новом међународном либералном поретку до контроверзи око територија које је Југославија потраживала до антикомунизма и панславизма) утицала на југословенски став према различитим групама избеглица.

Кључне речи: Краљевина Југославија, избеглице, спољна политика, политичке странке, простор