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Miha Zobec

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MIHA ZOBEC

Abstract

The essay addresses the trajectories of Rudi Guštin and his siblings Marija and Ferdinand, who migrated from the Julian March, a region with a sizable Slovene and Croat population that was annexed to Italy after World War I, to Argentina. While Rudi relocated first to Argentina, returned to Yugoslavia, and eventually remigrated to South America, his siblings settled in Argentina and retained regular contact with the family left behind. Drawing on personal correspondence, interviews and institutional documents, this essay examines Rudi's affection for Yugoslavia and the lack thereof in the case of his siblings.

'BROTHER RUDOLF, HE IS SO ENCHANTED BY [YUGOSLAVIA], that it does not make sense to discuss the matter with him. Let him do what he wants, we know his preaching by heart already.'[1] These are the words of Marija describing the attitude of her brother Rudolf—known as Dolfi at home and then Rudi in Argentina—before his departure for Yugoslavia in 1948. Like his siblings, sister Marija and brother Ferdinand, as well as many other Croat- and Slovene-speaking men and women from the Venezia Giulia/Julian March region,[2] annexed to Italy in the aftermath of World War I, Rudi Guštin left his native territory. Economic downturn and fascist repression were becoming burdensome, so he followed in the footsteps of his brother in relocating across the ocean to Argentina,

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[1]Department of History and Ethnography of the National and Study Library in Trieste (Odsek za zgodovino in etnografijo Narodne študijske knjižnice v Trstu, hereafter OZE NŠKT), f. Emigration (Izseljenstvo), letter of Marija to Zofija Guštin, 23 January 1948.

[2]A region with a sizable Slovene and Croat population (numbering around 600,000 in the interwar period) (Čermelj 1965, pp. 16–7), the Julian March roughly corresponded to the Austrian Littoral in the context of the Habsburg Empire. The region was incorporated into Italy with the bilateral Italo–Yugoslav agreement signed in Rapallo in November 1920.

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a country in need of a labour force for economic expansion (Lewis 1992, pp. 187–89). Yet, while he began to call Argentina his new home, with the onset of the Cold War in the late 1940s he felt increasingly marginalised as a Slavic-speaking leftist. Like many emigrants of South Slavic origin around the globe, lured by socialist Yugoslavia, he responded to the country's repatriation campaign. However, even though he felt closely associated with Yugoslavia, his point of origin was still part of Italy.[3] Still, he began to consider Ljubljana, the town he moved to with his wife and child upon their return, his home. Unfortunately, his stay in the 'homeland' did not match his expectations of the socialist project. In addition, he felt disheartened by the Cold War and the instability caused by the Tito–Stalin split in 1948. The fact that Rudi was an Italian citizen in Yugoslavia at the peak of the Trieste crisis[4] in 1953–1954 heightened his insecurity.[5] Therefore, in 1959 he decided to re-emigrate to Argentina, where he resumed his association with his emigrant peers. Rudi Guštin came from a Slovene-speaking village that, despite border issues following World War II, remained in Italy. Even though he was an Italian citizen all his life and lived in Argentina, he called Yugoslavia his homeland and participated in Julian March emigrants' associations.

While Rudi's trajectory is unusual, it is embedded in the experience of the Guštin family, which was separated by the ocean and divided by state borders. His parents and his sister Zofija remained in the village of Repen on the Italian side of the Italo–Yugoslav border. Rudi's sister Valerija lived in Yugoslavia, as she was married into the village assigned by border demarcation to Yugoslavia, despite being only a kilometre away from Repen. Three siblings went to Argentina: Ferdinand went there first, in 1924, Rudi followed in 1928, and Marija relocated last, in 1929. The essay illuminates their experience through an analysis of their personal correspondence, mainly written and received by Rudi's sisters in Argentina and at 'home', interviews by historian Aleksej Kalc with Rudi and Valerija Guštin,[6] and official documents, mostly relating to the diplomatic infrastructure of Italy and Yugoslavia and highlighting the transterritorial endeavours of these Adriatic neighbours to monitor the Julian March emigrants. These emigrants were Italian citizens —having left the territory when it still formed part of the Italian state—yet they frequently regarded Yugoslavia as their homeland. Socialist Yugoslavia, more in

[3]Migration studies have reflected a great deal on the notion of returning. As the social fabric of places is constantly changing and migrants themselves change, the idea of 'returning' to the place of origin has been challenged. See, for instance, King and Kuschminder (2022), Žmegač (2010).

[4]The Free Territory of Trieste (FTT, established in 1947, dissolved in 1954) was one of the Cold War's hotspots. Until the signing of the London Memorandum in 1954, the border around the city of Trieste and the Istrian towns remained unresolved. The provisional FTT comprised Zone A (Trieste and environs) under the Allied Military Government and Zone B (Istria from Koper to Novigrad) under the Yugoslav Military Command. The Trieste crisis reached its apex in the autumn of 1953. In September, Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito publicly asserted Yugoslavia's claim to the Trieste hinterland at a mass rally, a move that intensified regional tensions. This was followed in October by the decision of the United States and the United Kingdom to assign Zone A to Italy without prior consultation with Yugoslavia.

[5]The information concerning Rudi's decisions derives from oral history interviews, and the temporal references therefore cannot be established with precision.

[6]These two interviews were recorded on 23 March 1995 (Valerija Guštin) and on 13 August 1997 (Rudi Guštin). Both the letters and the interviews are stored at the Department of History and Ethnography of the National and Study Library in Trieste (Odsek za zgodovino in etnografijo Narodne študijske knjižnice v Trstu, hereafter OZE NŠKT).

particular, often treated them as loyal subjects. The epistolary collection consists of around 80 letters, the majority written by Marija, and a smaller number written by Ferdinand and his wife Kristina, and by Rudi, all of whom were communicating with (their sister) Zofija. An additional 17 letters in the collection were sent from Repen to Marija by siblings Valerija, Rudi and Mihael, who stayed put. The corpus of correspondence spans almost 30 years. The oldest letter in the collection was sent in the beginning of the 1930s, the most recent one at the end of the 1950s. The bulk of the collection—58 out of 78—is composed of letters sent in the post-World War II era. Although definitive information is lacking, it is likely that the collection is incomplete—as is the case with most surviving bodies of correspondence (see for instance Baily & Ramella 1988, p. 3; Elliott *et al*. 2006, p. 3). Furthermore, Marija's letters indicate that the surviving corpus represents only a small portion of a much larger epistolary exchange amongst family members, relatives and members of the wider village community on both sides of the Atlantic. Nevertheless, the preserved collection provides a valuable and unique insight into subjective perceptions of the migration process (Baily & Ramella 1988, p. 4) as experienced by those who relocated. The émigré perspective is preponderant in research on correspondence, given that scholars most often only have access to the emigrant side of written communication and only rarely to that of those who remained behind or to both sides (Elliott *et al*. 2006, pp. 3–6; Cancian 2021, p. 40).[7]

An exchange of letters continues the dialogue broken by the act of migration. In that way, written correspondence resembles conversation (Gerber 2006, p. 2; Cancian 2021, pp. 42–3). The analysis of letters is hence similar to the practice of oral history as both refer to the subjective aspect of reality. Yet, while the content of letters is fixed, an oral history interview is always a product of the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee (Portelli 1991, p. 54). Thus, had Rudi and Valerija been interviewed by somebody other than Kalc, or had the interview been recorded at some other point of their lives, the result would have been different. Furthermore, silences are present both in interviews as in written correspondence.[8] In the former, they are the result of presumed expectations on the part of the interviewer, supressed memories or similar issues; in the latter, omissions arise both from the correspondents' awareness of each other, which allows them to take many things for granted, and from the desire not to disclose certain issues. Moreover, our correspondents communicated in dialectical and colloquial language, using certain phrases and metaphors to avoid referring directly to certain matters, especially intimate or family matters. In addition, epistolary practices were shaped by correspondents' expectations; writers often tailored their letters to what they believed the recipient wished to hear. As we learn from Kalc's interview with Valerija, this sometimes meant that the emigrant experience was depicted in more positive terms than was actually the case.[9]

[7]For general analyses based on both sides of a correspondence, see, for example, Baily and Ramella (1988), Gerber (2006), Cancian (2010, 2021). For a study from the perspective of those who stayed put, see Da Orden (2010). For an excellent state-of-the-art overview of the scholarship on migrant correspondence, see Borges and Cancian (2016).

[8]As underlined by Luisa Passerini (2008, pp. 231–37), silences too form part of a discourse and thus ought to be understood within the context of the whole dialogue.

[9]OZE NŠKT, f. Izseljenstvo (Emigration), interview by Aleksej Kalc with Valerija Guštin, 27 March 1995.

The Guštin correspondence was subject to complex epistolary ethics on the composition of letters, content and desired timeframes for sending or receiving them (Gerber 2000). The letters between Marija and Zofija (and other family members) were sent at regular intervals with a significant break during the war. Continuous correspondence aside, and in line with epistolary ethics, there were certain dates when correspondents felt particularly obliged to write: the major holidays such as Easter and Christmas and on name days, considered even more relevant than birthdays. Furthermore, virtually all letters in the collection correspond to a certain form: the salutation ('Dear sister … ') is followed by a note on the date of the previous letter's arrival and response to its content. Notwithstanding the similarities, there are striking differences in the content of these letters. Whereas Marija's and Ferdinand's letters mostly refer to private matters concerning the addressee, family members and others from the village community, Rudi's letters address political issues at length. It could be argued that these distinctions correspond to different ways (despite evidently frequent encounters between them) in which the siblings reconstituted their lives after the emigration.[10] Even though Rudi's and Ferdinand's letters are scarce, the image of them mediated through Marija's correspondence corroborates the attitudes expressed in their correspondence.

The essay investigates this epistolary collection to explain identity choices (particularly identification with the new, socialist Yugoslavia) as transmitted through attitudes and emotions. Exploring the mechanisms that contributed to the siblings' divergent pathways in Argentina, the essay seeks to illuminate Rudi's politicisation and the lack thereof in the cases of Marija and Ferdinand. Focusing on Rudi, who was the only one to display affection towards Yugoslavia, the essay examines the way in which his migrant experience served to negotiate his Yugoslav identity and influenced his participation in trans-state networks. In addition, it assesses siblings' attitude to the socialist Yugoslavia in light of contingent events, such as the incorporation of the greater part of Julian March into Yugoslavia or the Trieste issue, and Yugoslavia's postwar precariousness as mediated through correspondence. Finally, the essay considers the significance of the Guštins' narrative for understanding the diversity of 'homeland' attachments amongst emigrants more broadly. While the presented case refers to the Italo–Yugoslav borderland area, it could be also framed by the broader Central and Southeast European context, where state–diaspora relations over the twentieth century (and beyond) have intersected with issues of border delimitation, citizenship and ethnic minorities. The transnational and translocal social fields in which migrants such as the Guštin siblings participated were, therefore, very complex and merit close scrutiny.

While the story of the Guštin siblings is unique, it also resembles the trajectory of many migrants, not only those coming from the vexed area of the Julian March. The essay examines their life-paths, that of Rudi in particular, from three distinct, but complementary perspectives: the level of the sending and receiving states (macro level); the associational and community level (meso); and the level of family (micro). As it is difficult to discuss one level in isolation, the analysis fluctuates between different

[10]On the reconstitution of self through letter writing following emigration, see Gerber (2006).

footings, especially in the first part, but also when assessing village networks as it is difficult to dissociate them from the family and kin. Nevertheless, the essay tries to examine each level by a particular set of documents: material related to Yugoslav and Italian state institutions is used to elucidate Rudi's departure, his integration into Argentine society, his links to the socialist homeland, and the act of 'returning' and then remigrating. Discussion of the family level rests heavily on the personal correspondence, while both personal and state sources, as well as newspapers, are considered in examining the associational *milieu*. All three levels are set in the transnational social space, in particular, in the transnational and translocal migratory social field, which was structured by different social actors, such as states, along with migrant and socialist party transnational associations and family, kin and village networks.[11] In addition, following Winter (2009), different levels are examined in a causal hierarchy, assuming that the macro level set the framework; the meso was constitutive for the social networks in which Rudi, Marija and Ferdinand operated; and the micro was decisive in establishing selection amongst given opportunities.

Rudi Guštin and the trajectory of his family between Italy, Argentina and Yugoslavia

The area from which the Guštin family originated was long dependent on immigration to Trieste, a commercial hub and a major industrial centre of the Habsburg Empire as well as the main port of the Austrian constituency of the empire (Kalc 2008). World War I and its aftermath brought dramatic changes to the regional economy. Trieste, along with Gorizia and Istria, was annexed to the Italian state. Since Italy had no need of another Adriatic port, the city went into decline.

Economic deficiencies, accompanied by fascist nationalising policies, provoked major changes in migration flows. Instead of seeking work in the city, around 70,000 Slovenes and Croats from Trieste's hinterland, Istria and the region of Gorizia relocated to neighbouring Yugoslavia, considered a homeland by many, while others went to distant Latin American countries, primarily Argentina, which took in some 23,000 people (Kalc 1996, pp. 28–9; Purini 1998, p. 40). Given the introduction of restrictive immigration quotas in the United States, first in 1921 and then more drastically in 1924, there was little opportunity to move there. The outflow of Slovenes and Croats mostly occurred in the late 1920s and was concomitant to the new Italian demographic policy that entered into force in 1927. The policy prohibited the emigration of ethnic Italians and aimed to stimulate population growth and substitute emigration with (internal) colonisation in the Italian interior and in the overseas colonies. It did not, however, target ethnic minorities, who felt increasingly threatened by the ban on ethnic press and associations (introduced in 1927–1928) and increased repression of leftist groups and individuals under Mussolini (Vovko 1978, p. 451; Kalc 1996, p. 28; Purini 2014). Furthermore, the prosperity of minority communities was undermined by the dismantling of cooperatives and savings

[11]Following Moraes Mena (2010, pp. 61–2), I consider the transnational migratory social field as one of the constituent elements of transnational social space. Arguably, states play an important role in structuring the field, especially in the period studied, when the presence of supranational organisations was in this regard still negligible.

banks—their primary financial institutions, which had provided credit, facilitated agricultural investment and supported local economic self-organisation. Their suppression deprived rural populations of essential financial services, further pauperising communities already battered by the agrarian crisis that struck the Julian March in the late 1920s (Grossutti 2013, pp. 165–66). Unlike other rural Italians, ethnic minorities had the option of leaving, and many took it.

To a large extent, the trajectories of Rudi Guštin and his siblings reflect postwar precarity. As a boy he was sent to Trieste to learn blacksmithing, but there were no prospects after his apprenticeship. By that time, his brother Ferdinand had already established himself as one of his village's pioneers in Argentina. (According to the interview with Valerija, there had only been three villagers prior to his arrival.)[12] Consequently, Rudi's father suggested migration to the Americas (Argentina) as the most viable option. In the region, migration to Trieste—rather than overseas—was a longstanding tradition dating back to the second half of the eighteenth century. After the Habsburgs declared Trieste a Free Port in 1719, the city developed into one of the empire's major commercial and transport hubs, attracting labour from its hinterland (Kalc 2008). Migration was largely organised through family networks and functioned as a rite of passage for boys and girls who typically left their often large households upon reaching adolescence.[13] However, when Marija decided to leave for Argentina in 1929, her parents were unhappy with her decision, supposedly because the boy she was dating had a well-paid and stable job, a rarity amongst Slovenes and Croats of the Julian March.[14]

Shortly upon disembarking in Buenos Aires in 1928, Rudi met the communist Franc Štoka, originally from a neighbouring village back in the Julian March. Rudi does not seem to have been particularly politically engaged prior to his departure according to the evidence of the letters and interview. However, in the Trieste hinterland, the labour movement had been deeply entrenched in associational culture, the fascist authorities had persecuted and destroyed them, as already mentioned (Koren 1979; Kalc 1996, pp. 25–6). The labour association, known as the Popular Stage (*Ljudski oder*), was reinstated in 1925 in Buenos Aires, the place where many Julian March immigrants found work in the burgeoning construction sector (Mislej 1996, p. 95). The re-created Popular Stage was primarily an emigrant mutual-aid association with a leftist orientation. However, Franc Štoka and his associates transformed it into a socialist organisation closely linked to both the Argentine labour movement and the Yugoslav section of the Argentine Communist Party.[15] The ACP maintained national sections for various immigrant communities—amongst them Italians, Spaniards and South Slavs—to facilitate mobilisation within linguistically and culturally cohesive groups and to integrate immigrant workers into the

[12]OZE NŠKT, f. Izseljenstvo (Emigration), interview by Aleksej Kalc with Valerija Guštin, 27 March 1995.

[13]On emigration as a rite of passage in the town of Biella (in the Italian region of Piemont) see Baily and Ramella (1988, p. 12).

[14]OZE NŠKT, f. Izseljenstvo, interview by Aleksej Kalc with Valerija Guštin, 27 March 1995.

[15]OZE NŠKT, f. Izseljenstvo, interviews by Aleksej Kalc with Leopold Caharija and Sonja Kralj (Albin Kralj's daughter—Albin Kralj and Leopold Caharija were comrades of Štoka), 14–16 April 1988 and 16 May 1995, respectively.

broader communist movement. The Yugoslav section thus served as a political and organisational hub for migrants from the Yugoslav lands (Genorio 1988).

Argentina had seen intense labour activism in the early 1900s, and although its intensity varied over time, labour unrest remained a concern for President Hipólito Yrigoyen in the 1920s. His government adopted an ambivalent approach to radical labour movements, combining limited social reforms and occasional intervention on behalf of workers with periodic repression. In the absence of stable mechanisms for political mediation and a fully functioning civil society, debates over labour and social order were often conducted behind closed doors, a dynamic that contributed to mounting political instability (Adelman 1992). This culminated in the 1930 military coup, led by General José Félix Uriburu. Leftist political activity was repressed (Donghi 2001, pp. 385–86). Even though not particularly committed—his inclination was more for amateur theatre than serious political involvement[16]—Rudi suffered a similar backlash from the regime as his dedicated comrades. Like the association itself, subject to frequent raids and suspensions, Rudi was detained three times, largely because mere membership in or proximity to left-leaning organisations was sufficient grounds for police action.[17] Both the fascist regime in Italy and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, through their diplomatic corps, surveilled their citizens in Argentina and were assisted in this by the Italian secret police, OVRA (*Opera Vigilanza Repressione Antifascismo*). The Argentine government also saw leftist activism as a threat.[18] The Yugoslav embassy denounced not only leftist immigrants but also those who displayed even mild scepticism towards the official doctrine of a united monarchical Yugoslavia. Similarly, pro-Yugoslav 'liberal' immigrants from the Julian March who began to express dissatisfaction with the Yugoslav government—some even stating that they would remain in Argentina should war break out in Europe—became targets of harassment by the Yugoslav diplomatic corps.[19] The fact that these emigrants formally held Italian citizenship did not deter Yugoslav diplomats from denouncing them to the Argentine authorities whenever their views were deemed anti-regime; citizenship mattered less to the diplomats than preserving political loyalty amongst the diaspora.[20] Since Ferdinand and Marija did not join any of the Julian March emigrant associations, they did not suffer any such persecution.

[16]OZE NŠKT, f. Izseljenstvo, Guštin family, interview by Aleksej Kalc with Rudi Guštin, 13 August 1997.

[17]His detainment is documented in the report of the Italian embassy to the Ministry of Interior; see, Archive of Slovenia (Arhiv Slovenije, hereafter AS), fond (f.) 1829/362—Royal questura in Gorizia (Kraljeva kvestura v Gorici), box (b.) 15, Allogeni comunisti residenti a Buenos Aires, Roma, II luglio 1933, p. 10.

[18]For the system of Yugoslav surveillance see, Archive of Yugoslavia (Arhiv Jugoslavije, hereafter AJ), fond 385—Embassy of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Argentina (Poslanstvo Kraljevine Jugoslavije u Argentini), b. 6, unit (u.) 37, Komunistička propaganda med iseljenicima, 22. januara 1931. god. 1931. According to a report by the Italian embassy in Buenos Aires, the Yugoslav embassy informed the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the 'communist hideout called Ljudski oder' (AS, f. 1829/362, b. 15, Allogeni comunisti). On the Fascist surveillance of the Julian March emigrant community in Argentina, see Zobec (2019).

[19]AS, f. 74—Royal Ban's Administration. Emigration and Immigration Department of Drava Banovina (Kraljeva banska uprava, Referat za izseljevanje in priseljevanje Dravske banovine), b. 20, letter of the priest Jože Kastelic to Kazimir Zakrajšek, Buenos Aires, 1 July 1933, pp. 2–3.

[20]On the relationship between the Yugoslav diplomatic corps and the Julian March emigrants in Argentina, see Zobec (2022).

Although the interviews do not address this directly, Rudi's repeated detentions for his involvement with left-leaning organisations strongly suggest that he, like many Julian March immigrants, came into conflict with the Royal Yugoslav diplomatic service. More generally, 1930s Argentina, the *década infame*, an era of electoral frauds and abuse of political power, was not a good place to be a left-wing migrant. Slavic speakers were associated with socialism and often treated poorly. When he wanted to sit his driving licence test, Rudi was interrogated by the special police unit for combating communism.[21] The Argentine resentment against socialism did not diminish, rather as time passed it rather increased. The military junta's takeover in 1943 and Peron's in 1945 aggravated political tensions. The colonels outlawed the remaining leftist press, including *Field* (*Njiva*), a magazine published by the Popular Stage that was not explicitly political or activist in its orientation. Perón, who began his ascent as one of the junta's colonels and later became head of the Department of Labour in 1944, relied heavily on labour mobilisation for support. He proposed his 'Third Position' as an alternative to communism and liberalism, avoiding the excesses of both left and right. Nevertheless, despite promoting collective ownership, he remained a staunch opponent of socialism and finally co-opted the labour movement through making promises (Bethell & Roxborough 1997, p. 16; Semán 2017, pp. 32–9). Therefore, as repressive measures continued under Perón, the Popular Stage—by then a member of the umbrella organisation Panslavic Union—was once again shut down by presidential decree (Serrano Benítez 2012). The association had already been suspended earlier under the military junta, and Perón's government now renewed these restrictions.

By contrast, in the aftermath of World War II, fugitives from the socialist takeover in Yugoslavia, amongst them many Croats and Slovenes who had allegedly or actually cooperated with occupying forces during World War II, were welcomed and could carry out their anti-communist political activities unhampered (Kurinčič 1950).

At the same time, political loyalties amongst Yugoslav immigrants in Argentina were far from uniform. While some continued to identify with the royal government in exile, numerous Julian March immigrants, including Rudi, sided with the communist partisans fighting the Axis occupiers who had taken over the country in April 1941. Believing that the disputed territory of the Julian March ought to become Yugoslav by virtue of its ethnic composition, they formed the Littoral Committee (*Primorski odbor*)[22] whose task was to raise international awareness concerning the region. Thus, the organisation petitioned the Paris Peace Conference to cede the Julian March region to Yugoslavia—a demand that was partially realised with the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty, which assigned most of the region to Yugoslavia. The members of the Committee warmly welcomed the first ambassador of socialist Yugoslavia—officially the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (*Federativna narodna republika Jugoslavija*) in 1947. The understanding

[21]OZE NŠKT, interview by Aleksej Kalc with Rudi Guštin, 13 August 1997. On the attitude of the Julian March emigrants in Argentina towards the Kingdom of Yugoslavia's diplomatic corps, see Zobec (2022); on economic development in Argentina in the era in question, see Halperin Donghi (2001).

[22]In 1942, after reports emerged that the royalist forces commanded by Draža Mihailović had collaborated with the occupying armies, the Committee withdrew its support for them, backed Tito, and changed its name to the Yugoslav Committee. On this, see Mislej (1994).

seems to have been mutual since the staff at the embassy endorsed the Julian March emigrants and cherished their 'patriotic work' during the war, which had included fundraising for the partisan movement, public advocacy on behalf of Yugoslavia's anti-fascist struggle, and efforts to counter pro-Axis narratives within the émigré community.[23]

In the immediate postwar years, socialist Yugoslavia projected an image of rapid modernisation and social transformation, advancing a powerful ideological narrative that framed socialism as a pathway to collective progress and national renewal. The new state launched ambitious industrialisation programmes, prioritising investment in machine manufacturing, shipyards, armaments and electrical industries as part of its five-year plan (Calic 2019, pp. 182–83). At the same time, Yugoslavia—much like its monarchic predecessor—actively sought to encourage the return of emigrants whose labour and expertise were considered essential for economic reconstruction and the fulfilment of the five-year plan (Šegvić 1953; Brunnbauer 2016). To this end, special repatriation commissions were established in major centres of Yugoslav emigration, and pro-regime migrant associations helped disseminate information to prospective returnees about opportunities in their 'homeland'. Argentine authorities, concerned about the potential loss of workers, did not welcome these activities but did not formally oppose them; nevertheless, they closely monitored the initiatives of Franc Pirc, Yugoslavia's ambassador to Argentina (Simić 2020, pp. 795–97).

The image depicting Yugoslavia as a country transitioning to industrial society and socialist renewal proved attractive not only to politically committed supporters of the regime but also to individuals who, like Rudi, had not previously been engaged in organised political activity. Rudi's 'idealism'—his belief that 'the future of humanity lay in communism'—was therefore shaped less by doctrinal conviction than by the broader promise of participation in a transformative national project. This vision was reinforced through the media: during his first stint in Argentina, Rudi subscribed to *Comrade* (*Tovariš*), a family-oriented magazine published in the People's Republic of Slovenia with a broad readership. In the second half of the 1940s, the periodical frequently depicted the 'Yugoslav path to progress' and celebrated wartime heroes, offering emigrants a compelling vision of a reconstructed homeland.[24] Alongside this ideological appeal, concrete material incentives further encouraged return. Rudi was promised by a repatriation committee that he could train as a lathe operator, with a guaranteed job awaiting him at the machine-producing Litostroj factory in Ljubljana.[25] Such assurances were typical of the incentives used to attract skilled or semi-skilled workers needed for the state's industrialisation drive (Šegvić 1953; Simić 2020).

While citizens displaced by the war and former migrants to Western European countries began returning to Yugoslavia directly after the war, repatriations (immigrations) of the 'old

[23]AJ, f. 25—Ministry of Labour (Ministarstvo rada), Emigration Department (Odeljenje za iseljenike), b. 66, u. 189, social attache Dalibor Soldatić, Izvještaj o stanju i radu Jugoslovenskih iseljeničkih organizacija u Argentini sa kratkim pregledom iselj. organizacija u Uruguayu-u, Chileu, Boliviji i Brazilu, Buenos Aires, 22 April 1947.

[24]Information regarding Rudi's words and ideas is based on an interview conducted by Aleksej Kalc with him (OZE NŠKT, interview with Rudi Guštin, 13 August 1997). *Comrade* (*Tovariš*) has been analysed by Sonja Merljak (2008).

[25]OZE NŠKT, interview by Aleksej Kalc with Rudi Guštin, 13 August 1997.

emigration' overseas were most numerous in 1947–1948. In 1949, their number dwindled and only a contingent of immigrants from Australia arrived. The number of those who actually 'returned'—a total of 16,128 individuals in the entire period, including 1,748 from Argentina and 5,541 from the United States—was half that expected by the authorities, largely due to the economic upswing in overseas destinations (Šegvić 1953, pp. 14–9).

Despite its propaganda campaign and tangible efforts to welcome 'repatriates', war-devastated Yugoslavia was not prepared to absorb the number of returnees it received. The Emigration Department coordinated their return and settlement with other ministries and offices. The state allocated funds for basic accommodation and subsistence, and formally recognised years of employment abroad for purposes such as seniority and pension calculations (Šegvić 1953, pp. 39–41). In practice, however, implementation at the local level often fell short of these intentions. Reports produced by Yugoslav mass organisations, including the Socialist Workers' Union of Yugoslavia, noted that local administrations frequently neglected the needs of returnees. Many repatriates, accustomed to comparatively higher living standards abroad, encountered inadequate housing upon their return, while their professional skills and work experience were often underutilised or disregarded.[26] Confronted with bureaucratic hurdles and inhospitable local communities with meagre infrastructure, many immigrants chose to re-migrate. However, in the emerging Cold War context, returning to Western countries was far from straightforward. Yugoslavia was still widely perceived as part of the hostile Eastern bloc, and Western immigration regimes became increasingly restrictive towards migrants from socialist states. At the same time, Yugoslav authorities tightly regulated emigration through exit permits and administrative controls, making onward migration difficult even for dissatisfied returnees (Brunnbauer 2016, p. 268).

Rudi entered Yugoslavia, the state he considered his homeland, in 1948 in Split (Dalmatia) and was then transferred to Rijeka (Istria) where his family was welcomed by his wife's relatives. Before moving to Ljubljana where he, as promised, was employed in the Litostroj factory, he spent several months in the house of his wife's family in the town of Renče at the Italian border. Even though the family had another child while living in Ljubljana, life in Yugoslavia was becoming increasingly burdensome as the country was drawn into the emerging Cold War.

The growing sense of insecurity—exemplified by the construction of underground bunkers under the factory, as well as the Cominform crisis of 1948—prompted Rudi to reconsider his decision and return to Argentina after a decade spent in Yugoslavia. In his mind, Argentina remained a country of abundance,[27] contrary to Yugoslavia, where food was rationed or not always easily available. Furthermore, Peron's redistribution of wealth from the agrarian landowners to the industrial bourgeois and the institutionalisation of workers' rights promised prosperity to the working class, making Argentina attractive to workers like Rudi. In addition to an increase in wages, Peronism introduced an eight-hour

[26]AJ, f. 142—Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia (Socijalistički savez radnog naroda Jugoslavije), b. 84, u. 352, Problematika društveno-političkog rada među iseljenicima-povratnicima, pp. 2–3.
[27]OZE NŠKT, Guštin family, interview by Aleksej Kalc with Rudi Guštin, 13 August 1997.

workday as well as paid leave and unemployment compensations (Peralta-Ramos 1992, pp. 44–5).

As an Italian citizen, Rudi could easily return to Argentina after obtaining the necessary papers through the Committee for Italian Emigration (*Comitato dell'emigrazione italiana*) in Rome. Italians constituted the largest immigrant group in Argentina and bilateral relations between Italy and Argentina were good. After returning to Argentina with his family in 1959, Rudi Guštin worked as a turner at the Mercedes Benz factory in Buenos Aires.[28]

Rudi and his siblings in the emigrant associations

This section briefly steps back to the interwar period in order to contextualise the associational landscape from which Rudi later emigrated. Despite fascist suppression, there were a number of Slovenian associations in the Trieste hinterlands before Rudi's first departure. Most had been set up in the period of political mobilisation in the Austrian part of the Habsburg Empire, hence in the late nineteenth century; they ranged from national-liberal to socialist ones, as well as peasant mutual-aid societies (Kalc 2014a).

In Argentina, emigrant associations developed that adapted earlier organisational models to new social and political circumstances. One such organisation was the Popular Stage, which continued the activities of the eponymous labour society in Trieste and its hinterlands. Following Jose Moya (2005) it could be argued that the Popular Stage in Argentina combined the characteristics of a mutual-aid society, hometown association and political group. Local ties were kept up through socialising in restaurants, and this activity formed the basis of the organisation. In this sense, the society was a hometown association, as local identities and links to local 'native' (homeland) communities did not lose their validity, as evident in the examined epistolary collection. On the contrary, despite the increased politicisation with pronounced leftist activism, parochialism (*campanilismo*) remained significant and—as much as it encouraged the stability of locality-based groups—it undermined the association's cohesion.[29] As a mutual-aid society, the association's social department, assisted by lawyers of International Red Aid (an international social-service organisation, founded by the Communist International),[30] supported the immigrants: it protected them against unscrupulous labour suppliers, organised the sending of remittances, helped find relatives in Argentina and safeguarded women against prostitution—a particular threat for female immigrants.[31]

[28]OZE NŠKT, Guštin family, interview by Aleksej Kalc with Rudi Guštin, 13 August 1997; on Italian immigration to Argentina see Devoto (2007), one of the most authoritative studies on the subject.

[29]OZE NŠKT, personal file of Franc Štoka; Franc Štoka, 'Politično udejstvovanje primorskih Slovencev v Južni Ameriki oziroma Argentini', undated. The legalisation of prostitution in Argentina between 1875 and 1955 transformed Buenos Aires into a destination offering lucrative opportunities for pimps and brothel operators. On prostitution amongst female immigrants from East Central Europe in Argentina, see Esch (2021, p. 284).

[30]On International Red Aid, see Ryle (1970).

[31]AS, f. 1696—Collection Littoral Slovenes—emigrants in South America (Zbirka primorski Slovenci—izseljenci v Južni Ameriki), Franc Štoka, 'Ob 37 letnici delavskega kulturnega društva Ljudski oder v Buenos Aires', undated, presumably written in 1962 (37th anniversary of the establishment of Ljudski oder).

In the late 1920s, the Popular Stage became affiliated with the Yugoslav section of the Argentine Communist Party. This section included both Croats and Slovenes, the most numerous South Slavic immigrant ethnic groups. As a far-left society of the Julian March immigrants, the Popular Stage operated transnationally. However, Yugoslav unity within the Argentine Communist Party and the emigrant community more broadly was hampered by the lack of contact between Croats and Slovenes and their differing employment patterns: whereas Slovenes worked in construction and industry, Croats (Dalmatians) most often worked on cargo ships.[32]

By taking part in organisations such as the Argentine Anti-Fascist Alliance (*Alleanza antifascista argentina*), the Popular Stage—more specifically, the Slovenian and Croat members—also cooperated with Italian opponents of fascism. For instance, they helped organise an event commemorating the death of Vladimir Gortan, an Istrian anti-fascist who was executed in Pula in 1929.[33] This form of transnational anti-fascist cooperation, however, did not survive the end of World War II. Slovenian and Croat emigrants from the Julian March living in Argentina publicly advocated for the annexation of most of the region to the new Yugoslavia, a position that provoked discomfort and disagreement amongst Italian emigrants, including those on the left, who opposed what they perceived as the national appropriation of the region (Mislej 1994, p. 93).

These tensions illustrate the fluid and contingent nature of transnational political collaboration amongst emigrant communities in Argentina. Cooperation between Slovenes, Croats and other South Slavs of various political backgrounds re-emerged during World War II and its immediate aftermath, though now within explicitly Yugoslav frameworks rather than broader anti-fascist coalitions. This cooperation took institutional form first in the Yugoslav National Defence (*Jugoslovanska narodna odbrana*—a revival of the association which had united South Slavic immigrants in South America during World War I, chiefly royalist during World War II). It was later followed by Free Yugoslavia (*Slobodna Jugoslavija*, a pro-Tito group of emigrants) and in the Committee of Yugoslav Littoral in Argentina (*Odbor za jugoslovansko Primorje v Argentini*), an autonomous association focused specifically on the future of the Julian March.[34] The left-wing Julian March immigrants took part in the Slavic Union (*Union Eslava*), an alliance comprising various communist-leaning immigrant groups of Slavic background in Argentina. Yet, within the Slavic communities, the Julian March emigrants, including Rudi, functioned in the exclusively Slovene association, Slovene People's Home (*Slovenski ljudski dom*) which, thanks to the intervention of the Yugoslav embassy, united previously

[32]OZE NŠKT, Štoka, 'Politično udejstvovanje primorskih Slovencev v Južni Ameriki oziroma Argentini', 3.

[33]On the event see: Archivio centrale dello Stato (ACS), Casellario politico centrale (CPC), personal file of Giuseppe Tuntar, b. 5240, file 026121, Copia dell'appunto pervenuto dall'On. Divisione Polizia Politica in data 26 novembre 1929.

[34]The Committee was first known as the Littoral Committee and functioned as a subunit of JNO. Gaining independence in 1942, it was renamed the Committee of Slovenes and Croats from Venezia Giulia. With the Italian capitulation in September 1943, it became the Committee of Yugoslav Littoral in Argentina. Finally, after the war, it became the Committee of the Yugoslav Littoral; see Mislej (1994). On the activities of South Slavic immigrants in Argentina during World War II see Antić (1986); for the Julian March emigrants specifically see Mislej (1994).

separate associations under the leftist (communist) aegis. Slovene People's Home operated until 1949 when, as a member of the Slavic Union, it was closed down by the Peronist authorities as part of their crackdown on leftist organisation (Serrano Benítez 2012).

The Slovene People's Home was supported by the Yugoslav embassy, which provided financial assistance, political backing and ideological guidance. The association functioned as a key social and cultural space in which Yugoslav socialist ideals were normalised and reinforced. This orientation was clearly reflected in *Slovene Voice* (*Slovenski glas*), the bulletin of the Slovene People's Home, whose editorials, front pages and published letters from returnees gave glowing accounts of life back 'home'. These letters, undoubtedly censored, presented socialist Yugoslavia as a workers' state with no exploitation; the first five-year plan was successfully underway and any reports to the contrary were 'false news' spread by migrants hostile to socialism (Klinc 1948).[35]

With gradual democratisation that followed Perón's overthrow in the mid-1950s, emigrant leftist associations re-emerged and, after several failed attempts, united in 1974 to form *Triglav*, named after Slovenia's highest peak. Composed largely of emigrants from the Julian March, including Rudi, the association explicitly referenced both Slovenia and Yugoslavia in its official name (*Asociación mutual esloveno-yugoslava*), reflecting socialist Yugoslavia's accommodation of national and republic-based identities, as noted in the country's unification statement adopted at the Second Session of the Anti-Fascist Assembly of National Liberation of Yugoslavia (*Antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije*), Yugoslavia's constitutive organ, in 1943.[36] A Yugoslav–Slovene identity was likewise the dominant frame of identification amongst emigrants from the Julian March, a region wherein the local Slovene-speaking population had been incorporated into Italy after World War I and were officially classified as Italians. However, as anthropological research demonstrates, sustained repression of associational activities, coupled with prejudice against Slavic immigrants—often equated with socialists—frequently fostered a form of social 'invisibility' amongst members of the Julian March community. In response, many sought to integrate seamlessly into the host society without overtly maintaining their cultural distinctiveness, and in some cases by adopting a more widely accepted Italian identity (Molek 2021).

Nonetheless, pre-migration experience also played a crucial role in shaping emigrant identities, as evidenced also by inherited gender dynamics which structured both the ways in which associations in Argentina operated and the organisation of migrants' everyday lives. These patterns were subsequently reinforced and entrenched within Argentine society. In post-World War I Julian March, bourgeois women in Trieste and Gorizia established several associations, mostly of humanitarian and educational character, and published their own journals (Verginella 2018, pp. 1045–47). While associational culture was vibrant also in the countryside, the clergy there spent considerable effort to affirm traditional gender roles through Marian societies (*Marijine družbe*). Women were active also in traditional village associations (such as singing and reading societies, which had

[35]See also, 'Ne poslušajte tistih, ki vam branijo povratek v domovino', *Slovenski glas*, 6 February 1948.

[36]In clarifying the meaning of the Yugoslav designation, the statement reads as follows: 'Yugoslavia is constituted as a state which integrates various nationalities, amongst them also the Slovene one, currently a republic within Yugoslavia to which we belong'. See Baretto (1981).

already been established in the late nineteenth century), but were rarely involved in the actual organisation or direction, which was done by men. Likewise, only few women were on the governing boards of the most common town associations, such as the liberal Unity (*Edinost*) or the socialist Popular Stage. This gendered division was endured by the Julian March associations in Argentina, even those that proclaimed progressive attitudes. These organisations had separate female sections, which were assigned specific tasks, such as educating and taking care of the association's youth and sending clothes and food for the devastated Yugoslavia after World War II (Jamšek 1944).

These gender roles were firmly anchored in Argentine society more generally. Even though Eva Perón, the president's wife, sought to empower women, especially working-class women, she promoted traditional gender roles, presenting herself as a model, a leader who was subservient to the husband. Moreover, the Peróns viewed feminism as an imported ideology that was pernicious to Argentina and, most significantly, to the Peronist movement (McGee Deutsch 1991, pp. 272–73). Given Perón's stress on masculinity, some female Slovene immigrants perceived Argentine culture as macho. Sofija Kralj, whose father was one of the Popular Stage's most engaged activists, thought it disturbing that in Argentina, women were considered suspicious if they were seen on the streets talking to men who were not their husbands or relatives.[37] Thus, the gendered separation of emigrant associations was amplified by the culture of the host country.

Could the associational level explain the aspects which distinguished Rudi from the other family members? Given that neither Ferdinand nor Marija were as active as Rudi in associations, this could at least partly explain Rudi's inclination towards Yugoslavia contrary to the reservation of the other two. As explained in the following pages, the interplay of several factors should be considered in explaining inclination towards associative culture—or lack thereof in the case of Marija and Ferdinand who, unlike their brother, were not involved in associational and political activities and therefore were less susceptible to the lure of a united Yugoslavia.

The rest of the family and the village network

As their letters suggest, Marija, Rudi and Ferdinand—the Guštin siblings who relocated to Argentina—often spent evenings together reading correspondence and discussing matters back 'home'. They socialised with fellow villagers in Argentina and were keen to receive news from their home village beyond just friends and relatives. In the same fashion, events in Argentina were conveyed back to villages.[38] Village networks, so pronounced in the correspondence, were significant in the Julian March outflow to Argentina, as the pioneers in the early 1920s paved the way for future newcomers (Kalc 1996, p. 32).[39] However, as much as the community provided a sense of identity, a vehicle for

[37]OZE NŠKT, interview of Aleksej Kalc with Sofija Kralj, 16 May 1995.

[38]On Marija's curiosity about her image in the community, see: OZE NŠKT, f. Izseljenstvo, Guštin family, letter of Marija to Zofija Guštin, 15 October 1933.

[39]On the role of village networks in migration processes, see Baily (1992); for the analysis of these networks amongst Julian March emigrants in Argentina, see Zobec (2013).

socialisation and a safety net, its oversight mechanisms were also oppressive. As a result, the Guštin correspondents at times asked the ones 'at home' not to spread their news.

Notwithstanding the vitality of emigrant village networks in Argentina, the community was present in the lives of the Guštin siblings to different degrees. Despite their closeness, their life-paths were strikingly different, informed by the time of their arrival to Argentina, their gender, occupation profile and character traits. All these factors influenced their social and political attitudes and shaped their interaction with family and community networks.

Ferdinand, who moved to Argentina first, in 1924, entered the country before the peak of migration from the Julian March, in 1928. The first functioning Julian March association, the Popular Stage was formed a year after his arrival. As a trained blacksmith, he benefited from the country's relative prosperity at this time. His metalworking skills allowed him to find employment in mechanical trades, and he eventually established his own workshop. Since emigration from the Julian March was predominantly male, many men had to find spouses outside of the emigrant community (Sjekloča 2004; Molek 2021, p. 236). However, rather than trying to find a partner in the land of adoption or in the emigrant community, Ferdinand relied on his networks back home and invited a girl he had known from home to join him as his wife. Although there is no evidence they had been romantically involved prior to Ferdinand's departure, they married soon after her arrival. The couple quickly established themselves, building a house and then having two children. Ferdinand's lack of enthusiasm for associational and political activities could perhaps be explained by his rapid establishment as a family man. Ferdinand's letters to Zofija mainly refer to private matters and are often filled with certain nostalgia and regret over having sent their younger sister Marija to live with another family, for whom she worked as a maid and with whom she therefore spent much of her childhood and youth away from her biological family. Ferdinand justified this decision by referring to the hardships of the period, explaining that 'there was war' (by which he was referring to World War I)—'misery, and too many children in the family'.[40]

Marija, who migrated in 1929, was the last of the siblings to arrive in Argentina, where she found work as a housemaid. According to Valerija, the parents regretted her departure given that she had been seeing a young man with a stable job. In Argentina, she met a man from the neighbouring village but maintained ties with her former love, Anton, who ultimately joined her in 1936.[41] Yet, as the letters suggest, it was difficult for him to come across because Marija contemplated return in the early 1930s to be with him. However, her ability to support herself independently as a housemaid in Argentina discouraged her from pursuing this option further.[42] As an independent single woman with her own income, she decided to stay and asked Zofija in a letter to tell her mother not to worry that she was unmarried.[43] Marija's statements concerning female earnings correspond to the reality of the Great Depression: unlike their male counterparts who suffered severe

[40]OZE NŠKT, letter by Ferdinand Guštin, 29 January 1933.
[41]OZE NŠKT, interview by Aleksej Kalc with Valerija Guštin, 27 March 1995.
[42]OZE NŠKT, letter by Marija Guštin, 15 October 1933.
[43]OZE NŠKT, letter by Marija Guštin, 12 February 1936.

unemployment, most Slovene women in Argentina were employed as maids for bourgeois families in Buenos Aires and there was no shortage of work for them (Ličen 1957, p. 99; Lukač 1958, p. 235; Molek 2021, p. 233). Domestic work was a tradition amongst the women from the Julian March; in the nineteenth century and even earlier, many women from the region had found work with Trieste's affluent families (Kalc 2014b).[44]

Marija's boyfriend Anton—whose occupation was never indicated in the letters—was not as fortunate as the Guštin siblings. When he arrived in Argentina, the economy was still recovering from the Depression and he had trouble obtaining a stable job. During this period, Marija acted as the primary breadwinner, supporting both herself and, at times, Anton. Although he later obtained steady work as a warehouse labourer, his earnings remained significantly lower than those of Ferdinand or Rudi. The correspondence between Marija and her family repeatedly refers to Anton's employment insecurity, exemplifying the experience of many male immigrants during the Great Depression. One letter notes: 'He is still staying with ours [siblings' families, does not state which one—author] and does not work yet; we keep telling him that he does not need to rush—it must be hard for him, as he was used to regular work and a steady paycheck'.[45]

Rudolf arrived in Argentina in the late 1920s when emigration from the Julian March was at its peak and associational life was becoming vibrant. In addition to the Popular Stage, several other associations had appeared in the late 1920s. These included Education (*Prosveta*), a formally non-political yet nationally-oriented society; the Camp (*Tabor*) which promoted a pro-Yugoslav, monarchic orientation; and Our Home (*Naš dom*), an association composed largely of immigrants from rural areas of the Julian March (Mislej 1996). Unlike Ferdinand and Marija, Rudi quickly transcended boundaries of the village network. He became active in the Popular Stage, although he never formed part of its governing board, and found a spouse within the emigrant community, from a town close to Gorizia. They married in 1936 and their first child, a girl, was born in 1941.[46]

In the 1930s, the nostalgia occasionally expressed in Marija's letters was countered by the assessment that the living standard in Argentina was better than at 'home'. 'As long as one can count on a steady income and is healthy, life is good here, the food is better and conveniently priced' she wrote in 1937.[47] She added that Anton, who had just arrived in Argentina at this time, thought it would be difficult for her to adapt to life in her native village if they went back, given the limited economic opportunities and the challenges of adapting to familiar yet altered surroundings.[48]

World War II caused the family great pain: both parents as well as Valerija's and Zofija's husbands lost their lives during the conflict. After the war, the feelings of the Guštin siblings towards 'home' shifted considerably. Grief is evident in Marija's postwar correspondence and she was frequently nostalgic, expressing desire to visit loved ones back in the Julian March.[49]

[44]For an analysis of identity issues (based on the study of the Austrian census of 1910) concerning Slovene immigrant women in Trieste during the intense nationalism of the early twentieth century, see Cergol Paradiž and Testen Koren (2022).

[45]OZE NŠKT, letter by Marija Guštin, 23 April 1936.

[46]OZE NŠKT, interview of Aleksej Kalc with Rudi Guštin, 23 August 1997.

[47]OZE NŠKT, letter by Marija Guštin, 29 April 1937.

[48]OZE NŠKT, letter by Marija Guštin, 29 April 1937.

[49]OZE NŠKT, Marija Guštin, 19 April 1946.

Marija wrote extensively about sending material support—flour, biscuits, shoes—to family back 'home' who suffered from postwar precarity. However, the changes in the border demarcation and the consolidation of state authority after the war made sending such items to Yugoslavia difficult. Tighter customs controls, restrictions on private parcels, currency regulations, and heightened surveillance of cross-border exchanges between Argentina and Europe, especially Yugoslavia, often delayed, limited or prevented the delivery of goods. Moreover, it often occurred that some items were stolen even before reaching the destination.[50]

Following World War II, the family, who had once all lived in Italy or, before that, in the Hapsburg Empire, were confronted by the border issue. Anxiety was reflected in the letters that Zofija (Rudi's sister) sent to Marija. She wrote, 'we all hope we will belong to Yugoslavia'.[51] However, the border demarcation in 1947 split the family in two, placing Rudi's in-laws and sister Valerija in Yugoslavia while the rest of the Guštins were assigned to the Free Territory of Trieste (FTT) and then, in 1954, to Italy. Border settlement provoked an uproar in the Julian March emigrant community in Argentina, politicising the emigrants. As Marija wrote to Zofija in January 1948, emigrants never used to spend so much time discussing what was happening 'over there'. Since the end of the war, each conversation between Slovene emigrants, regardless of if they knew each other or not, was filled with talk on the situation in the Primorska region (the Julian March).[52]

Rudi, convinced that he ought to sacrifice himself for a 'just' demarcation, namely one that would allocate to Yugoslavia a greater portion of the Julian March, was working tirelessly for the Slovene People's Home and the aforementioned Littoral Committee. His awareness of the region was mediated through local concerns as he was also involved in supporting the war orphans of his native village by sending money over and erecting a monument to the fallen partisans.[53] These local categories did not contradict broader national identifications; rather, they structured everyday sociability by privileging ties based on village and regional origin. This is evident in the recollections of Rudi's sister Valerija, who noted that 'the immigrants from Repen functioned as a village community', and that Albina—originally from Renče near Gorizia—was able to associate with this group primarily through her marriage to Rudi.[54]

While emigrants initially held positive images of their new 'homeland', these perceptions became increasingly tarnished in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when reports from friends and family circulated about extrajudicial proceedings, shootings at the border, and the pervasive politicisation of everyday life during postwar reconstruction in socialist Yugoslavia.[55] However, perceptions of the new Yugoslavia were informed by a variety of factors, including individual involvement in leftist organisations as well as gender and labour profiles. Men employed in skilled or industrial occupations were more likely to

[50]OZE NŠKT, letter by Marija Guštin, 24 October 1947.
[51]OZE NŠKT, letter by Zofija Guštin, 20 November 1946.
[52]OZE NŠKT, letter by Marija Guštin, 23 January 1948.
[53]OZE NŠKT, letter by Rudi Guštin, October 1946.
[54]OZE NŠKT, interview of Aleksej Kalc with Valerija Guštin, 27 March 1995.
[55]See for instance letters by Marija Guštin, dated 12 December 1947, 23 January 1948, 18 September 1948, 31 January 1950, 28 March 1950, 8 May 1950 and 8 June 1948.

view socialist Yugoslavia favourably, given the authorities' promise of transforming the country into an industrial power offering secure employment. By contrast, women, predominantly engaged in domestic labour, were more often sceptical, as their social worlds were largely confined to the private sphere, where translocal ties—rather than broader transnational affiliations—played a more decisive role in shaping perceptions. Marija's letters to Zofija reveal her growing scepticism towards Yugoslavia. She emphasised that reports arriving from 'home' portrayed the country in a bleak light, noting that one heard almost 'unbelievable things' about conditions there. As she explained, the initial enthusiasm they had shared for the new 'homeland'—formed before they had any concrete knowledge of everyday realities—gradually dissipated as more detailed information about the situation in Yugoslavia became available.[56]

Nonetheless, Rudi did not share her opinion and returned to live in Yugoslavia in 1948 with his wife and seven-year-old daughter, regardless of her warnings about the conditions in the country.[57] However, despite the difference in attitudes, Marija felt close to Rudi. When he was leaving for Yugoslavia, Ferdinand stated that he (Rudi) would miss Marija most—and she was glad to hear in 1951 that Rudi was considering a return to Argentina.[58] In Marija's eyes, Rudi was simply 'enchanted' by socialist Yugoslavia.[59] For Rudi, nothing could taint the image of cheerful Julian March emigrants who 'had been waiting for 25 years for that moment', namely the incorporation of the major part of the region by Tito's army. He counted himself amongst those had long awaited for the opportunity to return and who, given the choice, 'would rather go to Yugoslavia'. This inclination was reinforced by the political climate in Argentina, where 'the new Peron government appeared somewhat fascist', and hostile towards Slavs, equated with 'Reds'.[60]

Ferdinand also returned to their home village in 1949, just a year after Rudi, although his journey was only a family visit, not a full return. His decision to go was very sudden and nobody believed he was even going at first.[61] This decision may have been triggered by Rudi's return and/or by nostalgia or curiosity about the place of origin to which he felt connected, although no hint about that could be found in the letter collection. In her letters Marija does not mention Ferdinand as having any particular affection for Yugoslavia, unlike Rudi. Neither do his own letters express any criticism of the new regime. In short, his attitude, as far as can be discerned, can best be described as indifferent.

Marija's concerns with the situation in Yugoslavia continued after Rudi's relocation there. She found it deeply disturbing that letters she sent home were opened by the authorities as was revealed to her by the sister Valerija, so she often destroyed them before finishing them

[56]OZE NŠKT, letter by Marija Guštin, 23 January 1948.

[57]The data on his return are stored in the archive of the Ministry of Labour of the People's Republic of Slovenia, see, AS, f. 236, b. 39, Imenski spisek izseljencev—povratnikov iz Argentinije, ki so prispeli 2. 6. 1948 na Reko. Rudi's return formed part of five organised groups of repatriates, transported from Argentina by the Yugoslav steamships *Partizanka* (a female partisan) and *Radnik* (a worker), and amongst 5,933 individuals who entered Yugoslavia in 1948 (Šegvić 1953).

[58]OZE NŠKT, letter by Marija Guštin, 17 September 1951.

[59]OZE NŠKT, letter by Marija Guštin, 12 January 1947 and 23 January 1948.

[60]OZE NŠKT, letter by Rudi Guštin, 15 August 1947.

[61]OZE NŠKT, letter by Marija Guštin, 3 February 1949.

and began composing new ones as she considered the Yugoslav censors might find the choice of words inappropriate.[62]

Despite her doubts about the new Yugoslavia, Marija was not immune to nostalgia for the old place. The photos of the native home Rudi sent her three years later, just when he was about to travel back to Argentina, reminded her of life in the native village.[63] In her letters, she frequently considered returning herself, although motivated by nostalgia rather than affinity for Yugoslavia. She never did return, not even for a visit, and the exact reasons are unclear. In the 1930s, she was content with her life in Argentina; talk about joining her boyfriend back home were possibly for the benefit of her parents. By the 1950s and later, however, the prospect of returning may have carried a different emotional weight: a visit to her native place could have been emotionally overwhelming, threatening the fragile balance she had established between memory, distance and belonging. Despite the fragmentary nature of the surviving correspondence, a clear shift in attitude over time is discernible.

How can we account for the divergent perceptions of 'home' and of Yugoslavia articulated by Marija and Rudi—largely private and emotionally grounded in Marija's case, yet explicitly political in Rudi's? While Marija's scepticism towards Yugoslavia was not apolitical, it was articulated primarily through personal experience, affect and familial correspondence rather than overt ideological positioning. I suggest that these micro-level distinctions were closely shaped by the ways in which two other analytical levels were structured and experienced. The differences in Marija's and Rudi's perceptions of 'home' and 'Yugoslavia' can be explained through gender dynamics and the division between public and private spheres. In the Julian March, gender divisions were based on the stark separation between the private and the political sphere. By the late nineteenth century, women in the Trieste hinterlands held significant power in the private sphere—for instance, they had a vital role in forming family strategies—but they were excluded from directing village affairs (Verginella 1993, p. 532). In Argentina, these divisions were perpetuated through translocal village networks, confirmed by the structure of the emigrant associations and amplified by the local Catholic culture. Therefore, while emigration to the city of Buenos Aires had liberated Marija from village traditions, allowing her to feel at ease as a single woman, she was not entirely free from the village network, which continued to exert control through translocal village and kin connections, sustained primarily by letter writing and reinforced by periodic visits from fellow villagers and relatives. Furthermore, while working as a housemaid brought her material and personal emancipation, she hardly had any free time to socialise more widely. Her letters suggest that she mostly socialised with her siblings and their families, within the village network and occasionally with other emigrants from the region. From the material available, it does not seem that Marija was active in any association. If she had been, her role would have been limited to certain female-oriented activities, and she would not have had the option of participating in their administration. Under these conditions, it is understandable that her correspondence with those who remained behind focused largely on family matters and the maintenance of kinship ties, rather than on broader communal or institutional concerns.[64]

[62]OZE NŠKT, letter by Marija Guštin, 31 January 1950.
[63]OZE NŠKT, letter by Marija Guštin, 19 May 1954.
[64]On Slovene emigrants' various reactions to anti-socialist hostility in Argentine society—and to the conflation of Slavs with socialists that accompanied it—see Molek (2021, pp. 238–39).

Given the negative view of postwar Yugoslavia in Peron's Argentina, combined with the gloomy picture of the new 'homeland' that was spreading across the translocal village network and in non-leftist parts of the Slovene community, Marija had little opportunity to develop a positive image—except through Rudi, who loved the place.

While there are not many letters by Rudi in the collection, and all of them are from the postwar era, his writing, besides that relating to family matters, conveys a more politically engaged attitude, explaining his stance to the political situation both in Yugoslavia and Argentina as he explicitly articulated and justified his political positions in relation to developments in both Yugoslavia and Argentina. This interpretation is corroborated by the interview with Kalc and by references to Rudi in Marija's letters that make clear his enthusiasm for socialist Yugoslavia. However, Rudi's perspective on Yugoslavia evolved over time: whereas before World War II he expressed dissatisfaction with the royalist state, he later came to identify with the socialist project of Yugoslavia's second incarnation. Upon returning in 1959 his enthusiasm for socialist Yugoslavia began to slowly wane—rather than resuming his membership in the Popular Stage he joined the association the Dawn (*Zarja*) where he did not organise so significant an event as he did in 1944 when he directed the play commemorating the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Simon Gregorčič, a poet venerated by the Julian March emigrants (Guštin 1996). Rudi eventually became disenchanted as the state entered a period of political and economic crisis in the late 1980s. This later disillusionment was reflected in his gradual withdrawal from organised associational life and a more reserved engagement with Yugoslav-oriented institutions. Contrary to many migrants from the Julian March, who despite becoming ever more Argentinian, continued to politically support the idea of a united Yugoslavia even after its demise in the early 1990s, Rudi was amongst those who advocated for the independence of former republics, starting with Slovenia, as stated in a 1996 interview.[65] Recorded several years after the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the interview reflects a retrospective narrative shaped by the political context of the mid-1990s, suggesting that Rudi may have reframed his earlier views in order to align his past with the realities of the post-Yugoslav present.

As for Ferdinand, his letters suggest his sociability was mostly confined to the circles he had been familiar with from home and he was also active in settling issues amongst the kin, such as the ones related to inheritance. This role positioned Ferdinand primarily as a stabilising figure within the family network rather than as a participant in broader migrant or political communities, reinforcing a pattern in which social embeddedness in kin-based networks limited engagement with collective political identities. As a self-employed mechanic who owned his workshop, Ferdinand had no reason to adopt a working-class political identity or engage in labour/leftist activism of any sort.

Conclusion

By examining the migration trajectory of Rudi Guštin and comparing it with those of his siblings Marija and Ferdinand, the essay explored issues related to Julian March

[65]On emigrants' attitude towards the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia, see Sjekloča (2004). Rudi's position could be discerned in the interview with the emigrant journalist Oskar Molek on 7 April 1996 (Molek 1996).

emigrants in Argentina and their relationship to their Yugoslav 'homeland'. In addition, these biographical pieces help to understand some common issues related to the migrant experience. It is through biographical research, oral history interviews and correspondence, that both individual specifics and general traits come to the fore. The siblings' emigration was subject to family projects that involved collective decision-making, the pooling of resources and expectations of mutual support across borders. Moreover, their lives were deeply enmeshed in village-based networks, both in their places of origin and within migrant communities in Argentina, which structured access to information, employment, housing and emotional support.[66] In addition, rather than being unidirectional, their migrations were open-ended processes: Rudi, Marija and Ferdinand projected their futures in Argentina while simultaneously 'looking back' and maintaining ties with those who remained behind, contemplating return and, in Rudi's case, realising it—only to migrate once again to Argentina. Their trajectories were firmly set in the context of the Julian March emigration to Argentina; and their life-paths were influenced by professional and political traditions they had known at home and shaped by the tumultuous postwar events back 'home'. However, while many elements of their trajectories can be generalised, cases where family members living in nearby villages were assigned to not only different countries but also different socio-political systems following World War II are rare. Thus, the siblings' distinct modes in defining 'Yugoslavism' and attachment towards the 'homeland' are worthy of study.

Rudi's Yugoslavism was shaped by his skills as a qualified manual labourer, his exposure to labour movements and leftist politics, and his involvement in socialist-oriented associations. Although such politicisation was atypical—only a minority of Julian March emigrants were active in associations—it nonetheless reflects the broader political salience of postwar border issues within the community as well as its anti-fascist stance. Rudi thus represents an 'atypically typical' case: not representative, but analytically revealing.[67] Marija and Ferdinand, by contrast, followed more 'typical' social paths and developed sceptical or indifferent attitudes towards postwar Yugoslavia.

The essay has sought to explain siblings' divergent attitudes to Yugoslavia through their biographies, set in a causal hierarchy. The macro level of state policies and economic conditions set the context and structured the transnational social space. Associations, while being structured by the economic and political framework, structured the space as well, especially its social and political fields, providing information channels and frameworks for political activism. Transnational links operated through translocal networks grounded in village ties and family cooperation, which functioned as migrants' central social reference framework. Finally, while the social context of each individual of the Guštin family was critical for the development of divergent trajectories, individual character traits were decisive in establishing different attitudes to Yugoslavia: affectionate in the case of Rudi, sceptical in the case of Marija and indifferent in the case of Ferdinand. Thus, biographical research allows us to understand the many ways in which

[66]For the role of village networks amongst Italian emigrants in Argentina, see Baily and Ramella (1988, pp. 22–3).

[67]On this, see also Carlo Ginzburg's (2010) account of the miller Domenico Scandella (Menocchio) as a liminal case that highlights popular culture in early modern Friuli.

attachment to Yugoslavia was defined, cherished and contested by the Julian March emigrants, and how adherence to the 'homeland' was maintained or challenged by migrants more generally. As this essay has sought to demonstrate, such attachments were not fixed once and for all; rather, they were fluid and contingent processes, as illustrated, for example, by Rudi's eventual disenchantment with Yugoslavia. While this case study displays some characteristics that are unique to the experience of these emigrant groups, it calls for further comparative research into the ways in which attitudes to the 'homeland' were maintained by migrants from the European borderlands during the systemic shifts following the world wars. This would enable us to better understand what was general and what was unique in the experience of the Guštin siblings.

MIHA ZOBEC, Research Associate, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Slovenian Migration Institute, Novi trg 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia; Assistant Professor, Faculty of Humanities, University of Primorska, Titov trg 5, 6000 Koper, Slovenia. *Email*: miha.zobec@zrc-sazu.si http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8655-4669

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