Yugoslav *Gastarbeiter* and the Ambivalence of Socialism: Framing Out-Migration as a Social Critique

Ulf Brunnbauer

Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies, Regensburg

ulf.brunnbauer@ur.de

Abstract

Labour migration was a hallmark of the openness of socialist Yugoslavia towards the West. By the early 1970s, more than one million Yugoslav citizens lived abroad, two thirds of them in the Federal Republic of Germany. This article argues that the so-called *Gastarbeiter* (guestworkers) migration a headache for the communist regime because the *Gastarbeiter* embodied structural shortcomings of the economy, especially its inability to provide enough jobs. Left-wing student protesters in 1968, critical film-makers and intellectuals claimed that out-migration was a consequence of inequality and alienation in the country. In this article, I focus on representations of the *Gastarbeiter* in the press in the 1960s and 1970s, arguing that constant reporting reminded readers of unsolved problems of the country. Out-migration and its criticism highlighted the pitfalls of the country's integration into the capitalist world economy.

Keywords

Yugoslavia – socialism – migration – *gastarbeiter* – labour – social critique – press – public opinion

1 Introduction

1968 was a momentous year in the history of socialist Yugoslavia. Not only did the country's national football team almost win the European Football Championship in Italy in June 1968, but at the same time Yugoslavia experienced its own protest movement. Triggered by discontent over the reduction of grants

and the intolerable conditions in student dormitories, students in Belgrade staged a demonstration on 3 June 1968. The protest soon grew into a large movement and took on a more immanently political character. It spread to other university cities in the country. Students rallied against inequality and the privileges enjoyed by the bureaucratic class ('the red bourgeoisie'), disillusioned by the realities of socialism in Yugoslavia. The Belgrade students did not want to overthrow socialism but claimed to stand for it. They accused the ruling League of Communists of betraying its own ideals. Students notably refrained from criticising Tito and instead showcased his portraits at the demonstrations. For a week, they occupied the University of Belgrade and organised their own, self-managed protest commune under the banner of the 'Red University Karl Marx'. A police clampdown followed.¹

Recent research highlights these protests as Yugoslavia's contribution to the global '1968'.² While the protests were provoked by domestic grievances and a growing divide between the dominant partisan generation and a much better educated student generation, protest in Yugoslavia was also connected to events that were taking place elsewhere in Europe and witnessed through travel and mutual observation. The protests in Belgrade, in particular, have been inscribed in a chain of events linking places like Paris, Berlin, Prague and college towns in the United States.³ What students in Yugoslavia and their international peers had in common was their rebellion against existing socio-political structures and the conservatism of the post-war order. The Yugoslav students presented a broad left-wing critique, in this case of a system that considered itself socialist. They criticised the market-oriented economic reforms implemented by the government in the mid-1960s as an attempt to restore capitalism, and they attributed the unemployment and growing social inequality as consequences of these reforms.

1 An interesting collection of primary materials documenting these events (students' resolutions, police reports, party minutes) can be found in: Vesna Djukić (ed), *Beogradski univerzitet i 68. Zbornik dokumenata o studentskim demonstracijama* (Belgrade 1989).

2 Boris Kanzleiter and Krunoslav Stojaković (eds), *'1968' in Jugoslawien. Studentenproteste und kulturelle Avantgarde zwischen 1960 und 1975. Gespräche und Dokumente* (Bonn 2008); Boris Kanzleiter, *'Rote Universität'. Studentenbewegung und Linksopposition in Belgrad 1964–1975* (Hamburg 2011); Danilo Udovički, *Treći juni 1968: Od kritike svega postojećeg, do uništenja svega postignutog* (Novi Sad 2014); Marko Zubak, 'Omladinski tisak i kulturna strana studentskoga pokreta u Socijalističkoj Federativnoj Republici Jugoslaviji (1968–1972)', *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 46:1 (2014) 37–53. See also: Ralph Pervan, *Tito and the students. The university and the university students in self-managing Yugoslavia* (Netherlands 1978).

3 Hrvoje Klasić, *Jugoslavija i svijet 1968* (Zagreb 2012).

Thus, the student movement of 1968 was also a manifestation of Yugoslavia's incorporation into the international community and the international market. It embodied the tensions that were created by opening up a socialist system towards the West. In his study of Yugoslavia's economic policies, Vladimir Unkovski-Korica has stressed the transformative as well as corrosive effects of the country's integration into the international division of labour in the 1950s and 1960s:

The deeper the integration of the economy in the world market [...] the more directly the latter's competition logic became expressed within Yugoslavia, and the more it caused friction on the shop-floor, bringing into question the legitimacy of the governing apparatus.⁴

It is therefore highly indicative that among their demands the student protesters singled out one of the most striking phenomena of Yugoslavia's integration into the international capitalist economy and openness towards the West: labour migration. A police report dated 6 June 1968, prepared for the Central Committee of the League of Communists, described the slogans shouted at demonstrations and graffiti splashed on buildings:

The participants in the demonstration shouted the following slogans: 'Long live Tito, Tito – Party. Down with the socialist bourgeoisie. Down with bureaucracy. *We want employment in our country.* We want a fair distribution of personal incomes. *We don't want to go to Sweden for work.*⁵

The theme of out-migration came up early in the student protests. The second proclamation made by the striking students in Belgrade on 3 June 1968, explained that they were rallying 'for narrowing the great social inequality in our society, for the timely eradication of unemployment, *so that our population is not forced to go abroad.*'⁶ Another protest resolution issued by them a day later proclaimed:

We are not fighting for our own narrow material interests. We are furious about the enormous social and economic differences in our society. We

4 Vladimir Unkovski-Korica, *The economic struggle for power in Tito's Yugoslavia. From World War II to non-alignment* (London and New York 2016) 3.

5 'Odeljenje CKSKJ za informacije. 6.VI 1968. Parole koje ističu studenti u demonstracijama', in: Djukić, *Beogradski univerzitet i 68*, 311. Italics by the author.

6 Kanzleiter and Stojaković, '1968' in *Jugoslawien*, 233. Italics by the author.

are against only the working class bearing the costs of economic reform. [...] *It hurts us that thousands of our people must go abroad, to serve and work for global capital.* We want, with our knowledge, vigour and love, to build our socialist society.⁷

Resolutions by students' councils in Belgrade and other university towns contained the demand that the government should undertake measures to guarantee the employment of qualified cadres in the country and prevent them from going abroad. Time and again, they pointed to massive out-migration as a sign of the marginalisation of workers and of unemployment, calling it unworthy of a socialist country.⁸ These demands appeared precisely on time: 1968 saw a jump in the number of people leaving for employment abroad by more than one hundred per cent. Yugoslavia was also finalising negotiations with the Federal Republic of Germany on a recruitment agreement, which would be signed in October, making Germany the single most important destination country for Yugoslav *Gastarbeiter*.⁹ Hence, 1968 also represented an important date in the migration history of socialist Yugoslavia – the only socialist country to allow out-migration for economic purposes to the West.

Although labour migration from Yugoslavia would peak only few years later, by 1968 so-called *Gastarbeiter* migration had already become a topical issue in Yugoslav public life. It attracted considerable attention from newspapers, researchers, intellectuals, policymakers – and rebellious students. Their critique suggests that out-migration was a contentious phenomenon, and not necessarily a source of pride regarding Yugoslavia's openness to the world. Contemporary observers frequently held negative views about the departure of so many Yugoslav citizens. As I will show, not only rebellious students but also journalists and experts often concluded that this movement generated more problems than solutions for Yugoslavia and its developmental model.

In this article, I will argue that the *Gastarbeiter* topic provoked divergent and ambivalent representations that – intentionally or not – highlighted the shortcomings of Yugoslavia's 'actually existing socialism'. I am interested in

7 'Drugovi radnici, građani i omladinci! (4.6.1968)', in: Djukić, *Beogradski univerzitet i 68*, 20–21. Italics by the author.

8 See Kanzleiter and Stojaković, "1968" in *Jugoslawien*, 232.

9 On these negotiations, which started in 1963, see: Karolina Novinščak, 'The recruiting and sending of Yugoslav "Gastarbeiter" to Germany: between socialist demands and economic needs', in Ulf Brunnbauer (ed), *Transnational societies, transterritorial politics: migrations in the (post-)Yugoslav region 19th-21th century* (Munich 2009) 121–144; Heike Knortz, *Diplomatische Tauschgeschäfte. "Gastarbeiter" in der westdeutschen Diplomatie und Beschäftigungspolitik 1953–1973* (Cologne 2008) 140–152.

the patterns of the public images of *Gastarbeiter* and in the question of what concerns were debated when out-migration was addressed by different interest groups. Recent research on migration – more often than not focusing on immigration – has highlighted the importance of framing in the production of shared knowledge and meaning about migration. Migration is often used, because of its evocative power, as a theme through which broader economic, cultural, social and security concerns are articulated that often have little or nothing to do with the issue itself.¹⁰ This also means that depending on the framework applied, the issue in question can acquire very different qualities. Approaching migration from the perspective of inequality and of economic development, or of collective identity and security, or of foreign policy and diplomacy, not only leads to very different descriptions of the phenomenon. It actually implies that the same fact – a person relocating his/her residence across a state border – gains different meanings depending on the frame applied. As Robert M. Entman has highlighted in his often-quoted essay, *framing* means to:

select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.¹¹

Frames guide perception, interpretation and action, which is why they are so powerful and also politically important. They determine the scales of salience, ‘making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences.’ Frames shape what people notice and simultaneously ‘direct attention away from other aspects.’¹² Media play an important role in such framing processes, as they can draw attention to certain phenomena, attribute meaning to them by providing explanatory frameworks, and often – implicitly or explicitly – formulate treatment recommendations. Specific framings thus become linked to different value preferences and notions of relevance. Mobilising a security frame, for example, can make migration look much more acute than when it is framed as another form of human mobility. The visible

10 Cf. Helen Dempster and Karen Hargrav, *Understanding public attitudes towards refugees and migrants*, Working Paper 512 (London 2017) 13–16. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11600.pdf>.

11 Robert M. Entman, ‘Framing: toward clarification of a fractured paradigm’, *Journal of Communication* 43:4 (1993) 51–58, 52.

12 Entman, ‘Framing’, 53–54.

embodiments of these different frames are representations (images, narratives) which can be questioned for the meanings they communicate as well as the epistemological premises on which they are predicated, and for the symbols they use to convey their message.

The student protesters in Belgrade in the summer of 1968 clearly applied an equality and fairness frame to migration. This resulted in the assertion that the out-migration of workers to capitalist countries was a blemish on the communist government. This framing evokes the question of whether the departure of *Gastarbeiter* had a corrosive effect on the Yugoslav system: representations of migration constantly displayed a sense of unease among policy-makers and the public. The government never really managed to control the symbolic politics of out-migration, thus leaving space for the direct or indirect criticism of the state of Yugoslav socialism through discussions of the *Gastarbeiter* issue. Brigitte Le Normand shows that migrant workers themselves articulated what was wrong about the system;¹³ but their public images as well, that is, the meaning attributed to them by observers proved to be highly contentious. These conflicted representations were indicative of the difficulties faced by the Yugoslav communists in managing their parallel, hard-to-align policy goals of building socialism at home, while at the same time integrating their country into the international, capitalist division of labour. This ultimately proved too contradictory for even the most imaginative ideologist to provide a coherent justification. The image of the *Gastarbeiter* was very much at the centre of these representational tensions because migrant workers were such a clear and visible symbol of this deficiency. The Yugoslav communists thus learned that neither migration as a social practice nor its symbolic fallout could be fully brought under control – a lesson many governments around the world continue to make but rarely are ready to accept.

My discussion of the symbolic politics of the *Gastarbeiter* migration is based mainly on the press, arguably the most formative pillar of ‘public opinion’ and source for news about what people assumed to be social reality. I have compiled a collection of press-clippings from the early 1960s to the late 1970s, which includes more than 1500 articles from major Yugoslav newspapers from all republics.¹⁴ The goal was to create an as comprehensive as possible collection of newspaper articles on migrant workers as well as on government

13 Brigitte Le Normand, ‘The *gastarbajteri* as a transnational Yugoslav working class’, in: Rory Archer, Igor Duda, Paul Stubbs (eds), *Social inequalities and discontent in Yugoslav socialism* (London and New York) 50–69, 51.

14 I was also able to draw on collections of newspaper clippings kept in the Croatian State Archive (Zagreb) and by the *Večernje novosti* newspaper in Belgrade.

policies in that area. Many of these articles are full-page, or even longer, features. The collection is not complete but it is representative enough to allow tracing the major themes and their evolution. In that, I go significantly beyond David Goodlett's analysis. Useful as it is, Goodlett has examined a narrower time frame and mainly explores the reflection of government policies in newspaper reporting, and he is less interested in the symbolic dimension of labour migration.¹⁵

The press was not the only medium to produce images of the migrant workers. These figured regularly in Yugoslav films and in literature. Historians Sara Bernard and Brigitte Le Normand have pointed out that both genres added greatly to ambivalent, or outright critical representations of either the *Gastarbeiter* or the policies of the government.¹⁶ Out of these, the work of one filmmaker will figure prominently in my analysis: Krsto Papić's two documentaries on this issue highlight crucial moments. The main thrust of his *Gastarbeiter* films, especially *Specijalni vlakovi* from 1972, was the critique of inequality. Pinpointing the salience of labour migration for articulating concerns about growing inequality, my article ties in with recent research on Yugoslav socialism which (re-)discovered class and the social question as critical issues for understanding the Yugoslav variety of socialism. These questions had been much side-lined by the focus on national conflict because of Yugoslavia's violent breakup. This meant – as Rory Archer, Igor Duda and Paul Stubbs stress in a pertinent volume – that the rich Yugoslav sociological research analysing social stratification has almost fallen into oblivion.¹⁷ As Rory Archer has pointed out Yugoslavia was probably a more inequitable society than other socialist ones, but it certainly differed from them in giving much more space to public scrutiny of it.¹⁸ The prominence of inequality as a point of critique of socio-economic development in the 1960s until the late 1980s, when national issues started to become dominant, helps to explain why labour migration was so strongly framed as a social problem: the act of physical mobility became

15 David E. Goodlett, *Yugoslav worker emigration 1963–1973: Government policy and press coverage* (Lewiston 2007).

16 Sara Bernard, *Deutsch marks in the head, shovel in the hands and Yugoslavia in the heart. The Gastarbeiter return to Yugoslavia (1965–1991)* (Wiesbaden 2019); Le Normand, 'The *gastarbajteri* as a transnational Yugoslav working class'.

17 Rory Archer, Igor Duda, Paul Stubbs, 'Bringing class back in: introduction', in: Rory Archer, Igor Duda, Paul Stubbs (eds), *Social inequalities and discontent in Yugoslav socialism* (London and New York) 1–19.

18 Rory Archer, 'Social inequalities and the study of Yugoslavia's dissolution', in: Florian Bieber, Armina Galijaš, Rory Archer (eds), *Debating the end of Yugoslavia* (Farnham 2014) 135–152, 139.

so salient because it was problematised by linking it to a much more – in ideological terms – important issue, that is, the communists' promise to strive for equality and the expectation of the public that this promise be kept.

2 Background: *Gastarbeiter* migration

This article explores representations of *Gastarbeiter* migration: I will not go into the details of its social and economic dimensions, other than as reported and portrayed in the media.¹⁹ My focus is on the symbolic level: what were the main patterns used to represent the *Gastarbeiter*, which dominant motifs and metaphors can be identified, and to which policy concerns can they be related? In debates about migration, societies often articulate fears, anxieties, concerns and value preferences because migration touches essential features of modern statehood. Migration invites debates on questions of belonging and identity, citizenship and sovereignty, entitlements and duties, openness and closure. The public often connects migration with existential questions, which is why migration is liable to semantic overcharging – a fact that constitutes the salience of these debates. Most of the attention, both in scholarly literature and public debate, is on 'problems' associated with immigration. But emigration can equally become overdetermined. It is often framed in terms of a loss to the nation, e.g. of human capital, and as Aija Lulle has convincingly shown, as an indication of the sending country's peripheral position²⁰ – an experience not only of socialist Yugoslavia but much of eastern and southern Europe vis-a-vis the 'West'.

Yugoslavia is a case in point: when *Gastarbeiter* migration reached massive dimensions in the late 1960s, it became a major topic of public discourse. Observers discussed a variety of important social questions connected with out-migration. Yugoslavia, thus, can help turn the migration debate upside-down: in Western Europe and North America, the debate on migration concentrates on immigration, reflecting established hierarchies in the production of knowledge. A quick Ngram search on Google confirms that since the beginning of the twentieth century, publications have paid much more attention

19 For a quick overview of the phenomenon in English, see: Milan Mesić, 'External migration in the context of the post-war development of Yugoslavia', in: John B. Allcock (ed), *Yugoslavia in transition: choices and constraints* (New York and Oxford 1992) 171–198.

20 Aija Lulle, 'Balkans and Baltics: on migration as a factor of regional peripheralization', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 21:1 (2018) 27–42.

to immigration than emigration.²¹ Nancy L. Green and François Weil contend that ‘most migration history is written from where we are: the countries of immigration, past and present.’²² But as the Yugoslav case will show, emigration can be at least as much of an emotive object of public concern as immigration. In addition, Yugoslavia built up extensive research expertise in order to understand the consequences of out-migration and to develop evidence-based, political responses.²³

Neither the Yugoslav public nor policymakers could ignore a process that affected so many people and touched the fabric of the country. The problematic nature of *Gastarbeiter* migration, which would haunt the government until the demise of the state, was evident from the very beginning in the contested discussions within the party in the early 1960s leading up to the liberalisation of migration. Powerful voices opposed out-migration to the West and insisted on the enforcement of the existing ban. One of their concerns was that migrant workers might fall under the influence of anti-Yugoslav émigré communities, especially of the Croatian ultra-nationalists. Yet, in a gradual process, the Yugoslav government in 1963 and 1964 decided to permit voluntary out-migration for economic purposes.²⁴

The government estimated that the potential benefits were higher than the risks.²⁵ This calculation itself indicates that the government was not completely sure about the results of its decision and feared detrimental consequences. Both the hopes and fears of the government would be evident in public representations. These concerns of the government shaped public discourse since they provided the yardstick against which observers measured the success, or failure, of migration. The government created explicit expectations, giving observers a clear framework for evaluating the outcomes of the liberalisation of exit. Importantly, the government also implemented administrative measures for achieving its goals and preventing potential negative outcomes. These

21 <https://books.google.com/ngrams>.

22 Nancy L. Green and François Weil: ‘Introduction’, in: *ibid.* (eds), *Citizenship and those who leave: The politics of emigration and repatriation* (Urbana and Chicago 2007) 1–12, 1.

23 See for example: Silva Mežnarić, ‘Jugoslavenska sociologija (vanskih) migracija – pokušaj sistematizacije’, *Migracijske teme i etničke teme*, 1: 1 (1985) 77–96.

24 See: Othmar N. Haberl, *Die Abwanderung von Arbeitskräften aus Jugoslawien. Zur Problematik ihrer Auslandsbeschäftigung und Rückführung* (Oldenbourg and Munich 1978).

25 See my own analysis of the debates in the early 1960s leading to liberalisation and how they drew on earlier emigration experiences: Ulf Brunnbauer, *Globalizing Southeastern Europe. Emigrants, America and the state since the late 19th Century* (Lanham 2016) esp. 290–299.

measures set the institutional but also the discursive framework for acts of representation.

An expedient motive of the government was to curtail irregular emigration by providing a channel for legal departure. Since the late 1950s, Yugoslav authorities had noted that a growing number of people were leaving the country and taking work abroad, although this was prohibited. Especially in Slovenia and Croatia, where most of these emigrants originated, local authorities urged for a political solution.²⁶ Other reasons for liberalising exit were economic in nature.²⁷ First of all, the government hoped to ease pressure on the domestic labour market by allowing people to leave temporarily. Market-oriented reforms in the early 1960s had led to a noticeable drop in industrial investment and pressured enterprises to trim their workforce in order to achieve profitability. As a consequence, unemployment began to grow, further aggravated by the entry of the baby-boomer generation into the labour market. The government hoped to 'export' unemployment until the Yugoslav economy would regain its growth dynamic.

Another government motive was rooted in the expectation, based on experience, that emigrants would send savings back home. Government officials also hoped that migrants would return with new skills and know-how, thus effecting a brain gain. Indeed, return was envisioned: labour migration was conceptualised as a temporary movement, evident in the official name for Yugoslavia's migrant workers: 'workers temporarily employed abroad' (*radnici na privremenom radu u inostranstvu*). The so-called *Gastarbeiter* were to stay abroad only a few years; surveys among migrant workers indicated that most of them shared this vision. Framing labour migration as temporary was also important for creating a clear distinction between the *Gastarbeiter* and 'real' emigrants. The word 'emigrant' (*iseljenik*) was reserved for those who had left for good, typically before the establishment of socialist Yugoslavia. The word also carried a negative connotation because in public discourse 'emigrants' were often associated with anti-Yugoslav émigré groups, the so-called 'hostile emigration' (*neprijateljska emigracija*).

In order to achieve these goals, the government attempted to govern the whole migration process – hence the existence of such rich archival material. The massive intervention of the government produced further ambiguities in public discourse, as the following discussion will highlight. The government created expectations concerning its ability to manage migration that ultimately

26 Brunnbauer: *Globalizing Southeastern Europe*, 295–299.

27 Haberl presents one of the best analyses to date of the process that led to the Yugoslav government's decision to permit labour migration, op. cit.

could not be met. This became a similar trap to the one encountered by governments today who claim to control immigration. A recent report on attitudes towards immigration has stressed that 'setting unrealistic targets that cannot be met may in fact increase public unease by cementing a belief that migration is "out of control"'.²⁸ The Yugoslavs had a similar experience. This harboured an even higher corrosive potential because communist governments were particularly eager *not* to be seen to be out of control as their legitimacy depended on the execution of specific goals promised to the citizens.²⁹

The major instruments developed by the government to out-migration have been already described in the works of Othmar Haberl, Sara Bernard and my own analysis:³⁰ first of all, it concluded bilateral treaties that regulated procedures for the recruitment of Yugoslav workers and stipulated the terms of their employment abroad. In 1965, the first such agreement was concluded with France; in subsequent years, other agreements followed, for example with Austria and the most consequential treaty in 1968 with West Germany. The recruitment agreements laid down mandatory return by establishing the so-called rotation principle: after a few (two to three) years, migrant workers were to be replaced by new recruits, if there was still demand for their labour in the host country. Return was desired by both Yugoslavia and the host states. In the German speaking countries, this was evident in the name given to the migrant workers, *Gastarbeiter* (guestworker), which soon entered the Yugoslav vernacular (*gastarbejter*). Based on these agreements, the Yugoslav government built an institutional apparatus for selecting and transporting migrant workers under the umbrella of the Federal Employment Office. Workers were supposed to leave only under its guidance and not, for example, by individually arranging an employment contract with a foreign employer or just to join friends and relatives. In reality, less than half of all *Gastarbeiter* would move through this official channel.

The agreement with Germany deserves special mention not only because Germany would easily become the single most important destination country for Yugoslav migrant workers. It also had peculiar foreign policy salience. It was part of negotiations between the two countries to re-establish diplomatic

28 Dempster and Hargrav, *Understanding public attitudes*. 16.

29 For a general discussion of regime legitimation under communism, see: T. H. Rigby, 'Introduction: Political legitimacy, Weber and communist mono-organisational systems', in: T.H. Rigby and Ferenc Feher (eds), *Political legitimation in communist states* (London 1982) 1–26.

30 Haberl, *Die Abwanderung von Arbeitskräften aus Jugoslawien*; Bernard, *Deutsch marks in the head*; Brunnbauer, *Globalizing Southeastern Europe*, ch. 6.

relations which had been discontinued by the Federal Republic of Germany in 1957 after Yugoslavia recognised the GDR. In January 1968, ambassadors were exchanged once again and only afterwards could a recruitment treaty be signed. The negotiations on the agreement were further complicated by Yugoslavia's demand that the German government should rein in the activities of the 'hostile emigration' based in Germany.³¹ The German side rejected this demand, citing freedom of expression and of association. For its part, there were concerns about the over-expansion of the number of migrant workers at a time when the country was experiencing its first (and short-lived) post-war recession. Eventually, foreign minister Willy Brandt got his way: he approached the recruitment agreement with Yugoslavia mainly from the point of view of *Ostpolitik*; he saw it as a foreign policy tool that would facilitate rapprochement with a communist-led country and strengthen Yugoslavia's connection with the West.³²

The agreement with Germany led to another surge in the number of Yugoslav citizens going abroad, from 57,000 in 1968 to 127,000 in 1969 and 240,000 in 1970. In the 1970s, Germany hosted two-thirds of all Yugoslav *Gastarbeiter*. We can assume that this fact created additional headaches for the Yugoslav government and public: how to deal with the reality that only a generation after the country's devastating occupation by Germany and the successful partisan struggle against the Wehrmacht, people were going to exactly this country? By that time, Yugoslavs had become used to the inhumane Germans portrayed in numerous partisan films – now they would be bosses and colleagues; interestingly, this question was not raised by the press although it seems hard to believe that no citizen was puzzled about this turn of fate.

3 The suffering of the *Gastarbeiter*

In exploring the *Gastarbeiter* theme as a medium of social critique, another 1968 event forms a useful starting point: in that year, the first documentary film made by one of Yugoslavia's foremost directors came out, '*Halo München*' by Krsto Papić.³³ Papić, who was born in 1933 in Montenegro and worked mainly in Zagreb, made his debut as a film director in 1965; his first feature film '*Iluzija*'

31 See on this topic, Christopher Molnar, *Memory, politics, and Yugoslav migrations to post-war Germany* (Bloomington 2018) ch. 4.

32 On the motives of each side and complications during the negotiations, see Novinščak, op. cit.; Knortz, op. cit.

33 '*Halo München*', director and script Krsto Papić, camera Krešo Grčević. Zagreb film, 1978, 13 min. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2ZB5tVgwfo&t=15s>.

appeared in 1967.³⁴ Breaking with the aesthetic canon of bombastic partisan films, he used the medium to reflect on the prevailing conditions of Yugoslav socialism. Papić twice shot documentaries about the *Gastarbeiter*: ‘*Halo München*’ and ‘*Specijalni vlakovi*’ in 1972. These two short films are considered among his most valuable works.³⁵

Halo München, which includes staged scenes, captures important facets of the early *Gastarbeiter* experience – both of the migrants and of those they left behind. The fifteen-minute film depicts the Dalmatian hinterland of Split, a karst region with a long tradition of out-migration. The film shows how the Deutsche Mark has replaced the Yugoslav dinar on the local market, German cars with German registration plates travel unpaved roads, the postman delivers mail from all over Europe, and locals try to make calls to Germany (‘Hallo, München’) through shaky phone connections at the post office. The film also presents derelict, empty houses scarred by World War Two bullets and partisan graffiti, indicating that the encounter with Germany was not always happy. At the end of the film, in one of the most evocative scenes, a village teacher conveys the intricacies of Croatian grammar to his pupils. When a German car appears, the children run out of the modest school building to chase the disappearing car while the sad-eyed teacher is left alone with a large map of Yugoslavia.

Papić’s semi-documentary is a reflection on alienation and foreignness, the conflict between modernity and tradition, and between urban and village life; while the *Gastarbeiter* are conveyors of modernisation and urbanisation, there is also a world to be lost. Past and present do not match. The film alludes to some of the fundamental tensions haunting socialist Yugoslavia, manifest in the divergence between ideology and reality. Film critic Juraj Kukoč aptly summarises its highly provocative message: ‘Instead of a better life thanks to socialism, a somewhat better life is ensured by the West. [...] The ideologies and powers that promise a better life constantly change, while the people continue to go somewhere else in order to find a better life.’³⁶

Four years later, Papić returned to the *Gastarbeiter* theme with an even more provocative film, ‘*Specijalni vlakovi*’ (Special Trains, 1972),³⁷ classified

34 For an excellent overview and interpretation of Papić’s oeuvre, see issue 61 of the Croatian film journal *Hrvatski filmski ljetopis* devoted to his work. *Hrvatski filmski ljetopis* 16:61 (2010) 6–106.

35 Juraj Kukoč, ‘Opreke u dokumentarnim filmovima Krste Papića’, *Hrvatski filmski ljetopis* 16:61 (2010) 84–91, 84.

36 Ibid. 85.

37 ‘*Specijalni vlakovi*’, director and script Krsto Papić, camera Ivica Rajković. Zagreb film SDF (Zagreb 1972) 16 min.

by Kukoč as the director's 'politically most dangerous' documentary work because it clearly juxtaposed workers and the party-state bureaucracy.³⁸ It nevertheless won a prize at the Belgrade Film Festival in 1972. On the surface, the film criticises the dehumanising practices of German recruiters, for example the medical examination of Yugoslav workers. In actuality, however, the film is a scathing assessment of the social and economic conditions in Yugoslavia. Papić accompanies workers on their journeys to Germany on special trains organised by the Yugoslav and German railways for transporting them from Zagreb and Belgrade to Munich. He lets them talk: men and women hired by German firms tell him about their needs, hopes and fears. Some are in tears, they complain about the necessity of this journey and the impossibility of finding a job in Yugoslavia that would enable them to provide for the family. The film conveys a powerful sense of loss and displacement.

The film evokes empathy for these ordinary people forced by economic circumstances to go to a foreign, unknown land. At the same time, it has only scorn for the government: the Employment Office representative accompanying the *Gastarbeiter* is presented as a heartless technocrat boasting about the professional organisation of the transportation of Yugoslav workers while displaying no sympathy for them. He has all the attributes of the 'new class': he smokes a pipe and sports an elegant suit and dark glasses. Rarely were class differences, and the contrast between empty phrases and real-life hardships in Yugoslavia, so starkly present on the screen. One of the migrants on the train criticises the poor and unfair treatment of workers in Yugoslavia who feel let down by the government. This was exactly the fundamental tension that the hundreds of thousands of Yugoslav migrant workers embodied; the party never really managed to clearly articulate why this was necessary. The last scenes of *'Specijalni vlakovi'* convey another important message: the futility of emigration. Leaving the country will not improve one's life – life as a foreigner in a strange world will prove difficult as well.³⁹

Krsto Papić was not the only filmmaker to shoot films about labour migration.⁴⁰ Vladimir Ivanović lists 30 documentary and especially feature films dealing with the issue in the period 1966 to 1978 alone.⁴¹ In many ways, films were the most evocative medium to generate popular tropes with respect to the *Gastarbeiter*, and these were not flattering. Brigitte Le Normand, for

38 Kukoč, 'Opreke u dokumentarnim filmovima', 86.

39 Ibid. 87.

40 V. Radikić, 'Ekonomska Emigracija na Filmu', *Novosti iz Jugoslavije* (22 March 1972).

41 Vladimir Ivanović, *Geburtstag pišeš normalno. Jugoslovenski gastarbajteri u Austriji i SR Nemačkoj* (Belgrade 2012) 309–312.

example, summarised the emergent *Gastarbeiter* image in films as ‘threatening, ridiculous or pitiable’, or as ‘agents of corruption’, ‘victims and fools’, while other filmmakers placed ‘the ills of labour migration squarely on the shoulders of the government.’⁴² Feature films – and literature – thus usually framed *Gastarbeiter* in cultural and moral terms. Sara Bernard, who analysed images of *Gastarbeiter* in Yugoslav feature films, stresses that

in Yugoslav cinematographies the elaboration went much further [than in literature]. In films, the *Gastarbeiter* passed from being understood as victims of the misery that accompanied their departure and stay abroad to being characters who finally took on all the moral corruption and degradation they experienced that would follow them back to Yugoslavia when they returned.⁴³

4 The *Gastarbeiter* in the press

Film helped to render the *Gastarbeiter* a fixture of public culture in Yugoslavia. Writers also took up the theme, creating almost an entire genre of *Gastarbeiter*-related novels and other forms of literature.⁴⁴ On the literary representation of *Gastarbeiter*, Bernard recognises a tendency by authors to articulate a critique of moral degradation by writing about the *Gastarbeiter*; another prominent theme was suffering.⁴⁵ Yet, when it came to shaping public opinion on a daily basis, probably no medium was more influential than the press. Yugoslav citizens were regular though not excessive newspaper readers: according to a 1969 sociological survey among citizens of voting age (above eighteen years) in Croatia, 21 per cent followed daily newspapers regularly, 53 per cent sometimes and 26 per cent never; radio was a bit more popular, television a little less, while in relation to the press, weekly and monthly periodicals enjoyed more popularity than dailies.⁴⁶ These readers learnt a lot about

42 Le Normand, ‘The *gastarbejteri* as a transnational Yugoslav working class’, 39 and 45.

43 Bernard, *Deutsch marks in the head*, 206.

44 See for example: Branko Svilar, *Gastarbajteri* (Belgrade 1981); Ivan Raos, *Gastarbajteri* (Zagreb 1982).

45 Bernard, *Deutsch marks in the head*, 203–204.

46 Mladen Zvonarević, ‘Relationship between public opinion-makers and public opinion’, in: Allen H. Barton, Bogdan Denitch and Charles Kadushin (eds), *Opinion-making elites in Yugoslavia* (New York, Washington and London 1973) 269–272. The survey also found that men and, unsurprisingly, members of the League of Communists showed greater interest in the press.

Gastarbeiter migration because once it had assumed significant proportions in the mid-1960s, it became a frequent topic of reporting. By the late 1960s, Yugoslav newspapers were full of reports about the *Gastarbeiter*, continuing on into the 1980s.⁴⁷ Some newspapers even ran special sections for the migrant workers themselves, since they were distributed among migrant communities abroad.

When discussing the press in a socialist country, the question of political control invariably comes up. The press in Yugoslavia certainly enjoyed more leeway than in any other state-socialist country. Especially in regard to cultural and social affairs, the press reflected a pluralism of opinions – less so when reporting on government matters. During the liberalising reforms of the 1960s, censorship was abolished – although the party-state maintained red lines on what could be published and continued to exercise control over the media.⁴⁸ The press was urged to adhere to the values of the party and to report ‘responsibly’. As noted by Gertrude Robinson, criticism was to be ‘constructive’.⁴⁹ Criticizing Tito, for example, was certainly out of the question, and so were challenges to the main features of Yugoslav socialism, such as self-management and the principle of ‘Brotherhood and Unity’. Journalists pursued strategies of self-censorship, especially after the government narrowed the space for journalistic freedom in the early 1970s. During the purge of liberal party leaders, newspapers that had supported them were not spared either.⁵⁰ There were also clear limits on the expression of nationalist positions, especially after the crackdown against the so-called Croatian Spring in 1971.

That said, it must be stressed that newspapers in Yugoslavia competed for readers and were under pressure to earn money – so they wanted to be read. Political restrictions could lead readers to abandon their newspaper: when journalists at the hugely popular, Zagreb-based weekly *Vjesnik u srijedu* were forced to resign because they had supported the Croatian Spring, the paper lost its popularity and never recovered. In 1977, it had to close.⁵¹ While the party could limit what was published, it could not force people to read its propaganda. The Yugoslav media audience thus enjoyed more choice than its

47 A useful discussion and presentation of reporting is given by Goodlett, *Yugoslav worker emigration 1963–1973*. See also: Ivanović, *Geburtstag pišeš normalno*, 307–309.

48 On the Yugoslav media, exemplified in the case of the Croatian press, see: Josip Grbelja, *Cenzura u hrvatskom novinarstvu*, Faculty of Philosophy, Doctoral dissertation, (Zagreb 1998); Božidar Novak, *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. Stoljeću* (Zagreb 2005).

49 Gertrude Joch Robinson, *Tito's maverick media* (Urbana 1977) 226.

50 Goodlett, *Yugoslav worker emigration*, 12.

51 ‘Vjesnik u srijedu’, <http://www.enciklopedija.hr/natuknica.aspx?id=64990> (2 February 2019).

counterparts in the Eastern Bloc countries, while at the same time most newspapers tried to maintain high standards of journalistic professionalism.

As the following discussion will show, the press produced a fairly differentiated picture of the real-life issues facing the *Gastarbeiter*, their families and communities. At the same time, it will become clear that major changes in the press depiction of the issue paralleled shifts in government priorities. Even though the press did not necessarily toe the party line, it dutifully reported on the policy initiatives of the government in this arena as well. The press is, therefore, a very valuable primary source of information both on government policy and the government's perception of the 'problem', as well as on the social practices of migrants. The sheer number alone of articles about the *Gastarbeiter* is extraordinary, so no regular newspaper reader could avoid reading about them.

The variety of reported topics indicates that there was no stable and homogeneous image of the *Gastarbeiter*. In his analysis of the *Gastarbeiter* experience in Austria and Germany, Vladimir Ivanović has stressed that: 'All in all, over the years, the typical image of the *Gastarbeiter* began to be created. The Yugoslavs, too, knew precisely what the typical "Yugoslav foreigner" looked like and which virtues he was proud of.'⁵² It is true that much of Yugoslav society appeared to have a clear notion of the *Gastarbeiter*, but this idea encompassed different facets. One very popular motif, stressed by Ivanović, was of Yugoslav migrant workers overcoming hardship, working industriously, and saving as much money as possible for a better life once they returned.⁵³

Yet, there were also other images that represented different, sometimes opposing, meanings. Rather than a 'typical' image, a more ambiguous, sometimes contradictory one emerges. Even one and the same newspaper tended to portray migrant workers in a different light on its pages. The fact that Zagreb and Belgrade-based newspapers figure more prominently in my analysis is due to these two cities being the seat of more leading newspapers than other places, and not because individual republics are a meaningful category of analysis here. The ambivalences in the media image of the *Gastarbeiter* were in part due to shifting political assessments, which in turn altered the frames for the evaluation of success or failure. In his year-by-year survey of press reporting on 'Yugoslav worker emigration' from 1963 to 1973, David Goodlett has highlighted that coverage in the early 1970s increasingly emphasised negative aspects in line with growing political disillusionment.⁵⁴ He considers 1970 a 'year of

52 Ivanović, *Geburtstag pišeš normalno*, 308.

53 Ibid. 309.

54 Goodlett, *Yugoslav worker emigration*.

transition', when 'displeasure with the massive labour export became a prevalent theme in the press' and 'many reports were critical of specific aspects or results of the policy.'⁵⁵ In the following, I will briefly present the major themes of press reports about the *Gastarbeiter*, contextualising them against the backdrop of the government's major goals. We do not know how readers perceived these reports, other than the general insight provided by contemporaneous surveys that newspaper consumption did indeed influence political views.⁵⁶ Yet, it seems reasonable to assume that some of the coverage provoked reflection among readers.

One of the recurrent features is pride in relation to the hard-working Yugoslavs toiling abroad. Newspapers, especially around the peak years of labour migration in the late 1960s and early 1970s, frequently stressed the significant contribution of the *Gastarbeiter* to the economy of their host country. The title of a long report in the widely read weekly magazine *NIN* in 1971 read: '*Mi smo marke, i za marke*' ('We're a brand, and for [Deutsche] Marks', a play on words based on the words for 'brand' and for the West German currency in Serbo-Croatian).⁵⁷ Newspapers reported that migrant workers from Yugoslavia were on average better trained than those from southern European countries and Turkey (a correct claim, which is why many German employers preferred Yugoslavs over other migrant workers). Newspapers also took pride in the fact that Yugoslavs were employed by leading industrial firms – evident for example in the pictures used in a *Borba reflektor* report about Yugoslav *Gastarbeiter* in Germany, showing emblematic industries such as Mercedes-Benz.⁵⁸

We can only speculate about the meanings that emerged in the minds of the readers of such articles. Did readers ask themselves why their country could obviously not make good use of the efforts of these workers? Why were these people having to go abroad and endure the hardship of life away from home if their work was of such high quality? Newspapers occasionally criticised the loss of skilled workers and suggested a more restrictive approach towards their departure (the government would impose such restrictions in 1973).⁵⁹ In the Zagreb daily *Vjesnik*, economist Ivo Vinski asked: 'What do we gain, and what do we lose?' in connection with the monetary impact of out-migration.⁶⁰ Such reporting reflected a critical discussion among experts. In an economic

55 Ibid. 89.

56 Zvonarević, 'Relationship'.

57 *NIN*, 25 November 1971. See also: Ivanović, *Geburtstag pišeš normalnom*, 308.

58 'Naši radnici u inostranstvu', *Borba*, 30 June 1970.

59 Cf. Goodlett, *Yugoslav worker emigration*, 82.

60 'Što dobivamo, a što gubimo', *Vjesnik*, 5 April 1969.

analysis, Vinski concluded that labour migration represented a loss of human capital for Yugoslavia. According to his calculation, the host countries benefited most from migrant workers, while Yugoslavia saw a net loss.⁶¹ External observers, such as Carl-Ulrik Schierup, came to similar conclusions, arguing that the government's economic hopes as to the outcome of labour migration did not materialise, while western economies benefited from the inflow of cheap and mostly skilled migrant labour.⁶²

Journalists contributed to critical, or at least hesitant, assessments of *Gastarbeiter* migration by highlighting the many hardships the migrant workers faced. Especially before the recruitment stop of 1974, reporters did not fail to contrast the labour efforts of the migrants with their deplorable living and working conditions. We learn a lot from the newspapers about their everyday troubles, such as cramped housing, low pay, dangerous jobs and resentment on the part of the host society. Each year at Christmas, newspapers ran stories describing the epic waiting times at border crossings and about the overcrowded trains when migrants returned home for the holiday. 'A forty-kilometre long line of cars' cried a Tanjug dispatch in relation to the Austrian-Yugoslav border checkpoint at Spielfeld/Šentilj.⁶³ Xenophobic attitudes and violent attacks against Yugoslavs, especially in Austria and Germany, were broadly reported. Migrant workers were often depicted as victims: 'Mi smo samo "Auslenderi"' (We're only *Auslenderi* [German for 'foreigners']) read the title of an article in *Oslobodenje* in 1969.⁶⁴ In 1970, *Nova Makedonija* claimed that among all migrant workers in West Germany, the Yugoslavs faced the highest risk of work injury.⁶⁵ Yet, newspaper reporting did not amount to a full-scale exploration of anti-immigrant sentiments in the two most important destination countries for Yugoslav migrant workers. This would have raised the inconvenient question of why the government did not provide more forceful protection. A much more scathing critique of attitudes towards the Yugoslavs in Germany and Austria was left to people like the artist-cum-*Gastarbeiter* Drago (Dragotin) Trumbetaš.⁶⁶

61 Ivo Vinski, 'Ljudski kapital i neto produkt savremene jugoslovenske emigracije', *Ekonomski pregled* 23: 3–4 (1972) 117–130.

62 Carl-Ulrik Schierup, *Migration, socialism and the international division of labour. The Yugoslavian experience* (Aldershot 1990).

63 'Kolona duga 40 kilometara', *Tanjug*, 24 December 1972.

64 'Mi smo samo "Auslenderi"', *Oslobodenje*, 30 October 1969.

65 'Od site stranski rabotnici vo FR Germanija Jugoslovenite živeat najopasno', *Nova Makedonija*, 13 September 1970.

66 In 1980, Trumbetaš was even arrested and sentenced to jail for hostile political propaganda by a Yugoslav court. On his artistic work see Drago Trumbetaš, *Monografija* (Velika Gorica 2001).

When newspapers criticised the domestic government for not providing the *Gastarbeiter* enough protection they typically referred to social rights of Yugoslav citizens abroad. In 1969, for example, *Politika* ran a story titled: 'Life abroad without enough support in the country', highlighting the lack of Yugoslav consular offices.⁶⁷ Another newspaper in 1971 stressed that Yugoslavia spent only six dollars per head for the support of *Gastarbeiter*.⁶⁸ This made it difficult for migrants to enjoy all their rights and questioned the reality behind the government's claim that it was providing protection for those 'temporarily employed abroad'. Such critical undertones became more common when many migrant workers returned from Germany and other host countries phased out recruitment as a result of the economic crisis following the oil price shock. As underlined above, the *Gastarbeiter* were supposed to return and newspapers hailed their re-arrival. In fact, *Gastarbeiter* who failed to return were even criticised, as though remaining abroad amounted to treason. But returnees faced many difficulties; reintegration into Yugoslav society was hard, especially because of the shortage of jobs and housing. Newspapers criticised the lack of domestic employment opportunities and the often lacklustre support for returnees in contrast to lofty policy declarations. In 1979, *Politika ekspres* reported 'huge difficulties concerning the employment of our workers who were temporarily employed abroad.'⁶⁹ Such reports, of course, reminded readers that unemployment was a persistent problem in Yugoslavia.

It was in this context that newspapers praised those migrant workers who developed their own initiatives as part of preparations for a successful return. One phenomenon drew particularly strong attention: the so-called '*devizne fabrike*'.⁷⁰ Most of these were small industrial enterprises established, or substantially expanded, by the associated savings of migrants, then matched by a loan from a Yugoslav bank. The first such factory appeared in the district of Imotski in Dalmatia in the late 1960s, an area of mass emigration. By the mid-1970s, more than twenty such initiatives had emerged all around the country. Their main goal was to provide employment for the locals as well as returning *Gastarbeiter*. Policymakers considered them an important instrument of

67 'Život u tuđini bez dovoljno podrške u zemlji', *Politika*, 24 July 1969.

68 'Koliko se brinemo za naše u svijetu', *Večernji list*, 19 August 1971.

69 'Ko sve podmeće nogu', *Politika ekspres*, 15 September 1979.

70 The phenomenon remains unexplored, one of the few contemporary studies is Vedriš, Mladen, *Od deviznih ušteda do radnih mjesta u domovini*. 1978. The German public broadcaster ZDF has produced a documentary, 'Die Leute von Aržano' in 1974 (by Rudolf Stengl) about the first such factory, 'Pionerka' in the Dalmatian hinterland village Aržano.

economic development in depressed areas.⁷¹ In a 1975 article on such factories, *Politika* emphasised that: 'Our workers are helping themselves and their home region.'⁷² Returnees built factories in godforsaken villages in the underdeveloped parts of Yugoslavia.⁷³ The reports refrained from questioning the viability of such initiatives, instead emphasising the enthusiasm and initiative of the workers. The '*devizne fabrike*' were extolled as examples of a sensible use of migrant savings. We do not know whether the irony was lost on readers or not when they learnt about workers who basically invested in buying a workplace for themselves or for their family. Was this what self-management and the association of labour were supposed to be?

In general, newspapers praised *Gastarbeiter* if they lived up to the norms of the good Yugoslav citizen, which they were also expected to do abroad. Migrants were lauded for forming associations and clubs that provided spaces for socialising and upholding homeland customs. These initiatives were also seen as an important counterweight to the attempts of the so-called 'hostile emigration' to win over Yugoslav *Gastarbeiter* for their cause (this was a major concern for the government, not least because the majority of migrant workers were Croats, and the Croatian ultra-nationalist diaspora formed the strongest group). *Gastarbeiter* who failed to resist anti-Yugoslav propaganda – a rare occurrence judging from the papers – were harshly criticised. A 1974 series of articles on *Gastarbeiter* issues in the Bosnian daily *Oslobodenje* warned against visiting 'national-chauvinistic and anti-Yugoslav' cultural events.⁷⁴ Newspapers also emphasised that those workers who had left the country independently of the official channel were at most risk of running into problems. It is clear that the press was concerned about the image of Yugoslavia that migrant workers projected abroad. The fact that some became criminal or engaged in unlawful acts was not concealed, but presented as a warning.

Concerns about identity became a major motif in reports about the *Gastarbeiter*, and also of government actions to maintain the 'Yugoslavness' of its migrant workers. In the 1970s, hundreds of thousands of workers returned – the exact number is unknown due to incomplete statistics and substantial

71 Local government proved very creative in extracting money from 'its' migrants, see: Jenni Winterhagen, *Vom 'Gastarbeiter' zum 'transnationalen' Modernisierer. Die Verwendung von 'Remittances' am Beispiel des ehemaligen Jugoslawien*, Institute of East European Studies, Free University of Berlin, M.A. thesis, 2006.

72 'Rastu "devizne" fabrike', *Politika*, 28 October 1975.

73 See for example: 'Povratnici grade fabriku', *Ekspres politika*, 27 December 1971, about such a project in the village of Capari in Macedonia.

74 'Nacional-šovonistički i antijugoslovenski "koncerti"', *Oslobodenje*, 26 June February 1974.

secondary migration; the Yugoslav census of 1981 recorded around 282,000 returnees while the highest – and improbable – estimates claim up to 600,000 returnees during the 1970s. Many *Gastarbeiter*, probably the majority, decided to stay abroad: the official number of Yugoslav citizens living abroad was higher in 1981 (836,704) than in 1971 (774,080), despite a peak in returns in the mid-1970s.⁷⁵ Demographer Ivica Nejašmić calculated the stock of Yugoslav migrants living abroad at almost 600,000 in 1985, almost 70 per cent of the number in the peak year 1973.⁷⁶

Reports on non-return indicated the failure of a major government policy despite the implementation of a variety of measures to stimulate return. When it became evident that many *Gastarbeiter* families would delay return, reporting shifted to the consequences of this decision. Newspapers described difficult family arrangements, as migrant parents had to decide where their children should live and go to school. Migration now appeared to threaten family stability. Newspapers also devoted considerable attention to the fact that many migrants were women (more than a third), stressing that female workers faced specific problems.⁷⁷ How would they balance their professional and family roles abroad, which was difficult enough in Yugoslavia? The welfare of children became a major theme, regardless of whether they remained in Yugoslavia or joined their parents. Education abroad was a special concern, since it was closely linked to the expectation that the *Gastarbeiter* and their offspring would maintain a Yugoslav identity. *Politika* asked: 'When will the social agreement on the additional schooling of our children abroad be concluded?'⁷⁸ *Ekspres politika* described schooling opportunities for Yugoslav children abroad as insufficient.⁷⁹ Language education was considered particularly important: there was allegedly an 'army of young people who has forgotten our language.'⁸⁰

This brief summary of major press motifs in relation to the *Gastarbeiter* attempts to highlight the complexity and ambiguity of these representations. While the image was never monochromatic and reflected the variety of real-life experiences, there is a sense of the reports becoming more disillusioned over

75 Republički zavod za statistiku SR Srbije, *Lica na privremenom radu u inostranstvu: prema rezultatima popisa stanovništva 1971. i 1981. godine* (Belgrade 1981). For a discussion of these numbers see also Bernard, *Deutsch Marks in the Head*.

76 I. Nejašmić, 'Statistika jugoslavenske vanjske migracije', *Migracijske teme* 3:3–4 (1987) 297.

77 'Ženi-migranti dvostruko je teško', *Vjesnik*, 7 November 1973.

78 'Školovanje malih jugoslovena u tuđini', *Politika*, 19 December 1975.

79 'Slabe škole za našu decu', *Ekspres politika*, 22 September 1975.

80 'Stranci u sopstvenoj zemlji', *Večernje novosti*, 2 March 1972.

time. Goodlett has concluded that 'the growing groundswell of press opposition [against out-migration] reflected an equally escalating displeasure among high political officials.'⁸¹ It is evident that by the early 1970s labour migration was increasingly framed as a problem rather than as an achievement or opportunity. The press reflected the fundamental unease, even suspicion, among the Yugoslav public and its ruling elite in relation to the *Gastarbeiter*.⁸² The migrants were described as strangers in their own country who no longer fitted in.⁸³ They lived in-between, or as the Ljubljana-based newspaper *Mladina* put it: 'With the body there, with their thoughts here.'⁸⁴

5 Conclusion

In contrast to Krsto Papić and other film directors, the press was more circumspect in addressing the fundamental tensions manifested by the migration of so many Yugoslavs. The furthest it went in its critique of the government was to deplore the lack of support mechanisms. Yet alone by its frequent reporting on the *Gastarbeiter* and their day-to-day hardships, the press – probably inadvertently – contributed to produce doubts about the efficiency of the system. Such a critical undertone mattered: the above-mentioned 1969 media survey had shown that those people who followed the press most regularly were the least satisfied with the political situation.⁸⁵ The near-constant media coverage helped to maintain the *Gastarbeiter* within the margins of the 'imagined' Yugoslav nation, while at the same time making clear that there was a significant divergence between this imagining and lived reality.

The best-known Yugoslav dissident film-maker Želimir Žilnik had made this point much more forcefully in 1968 when he released the short film '*Nezaposleni ljudi*' (Unemployed people). In this film, he gave a voice to workers made redundant by the preceding economic reforms.⁸⁶ While the film is not about labour migration per se, it shows that going to Germany was one of the few options left for these members of the working class – a scathing assessment of the

81 Goodlett, *Yugoslav worker emigration*, 164.

82 See also: Predrag Marković, 'Gastarbeiters as the factor of modernization in Serbia', *Istorija 20. veka* 23:2 (2005) 143–163, 148–149.

83 Cf. Ivanović, *Geburtstag pišeš normalno*, 309.

84 'Telom tamo, mislima ovde', *Mladina*, 26 December 1975.

85 Zvonarević, 'Relationship', 273.

86 '*Nezaposleni ljudi*', director and script Želimir Žilnik, camera Petar Latinović. Neoplanta film, Novi Sad, 1968, 13 min. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SdVgc9z49xU>).

'achievements' of self-management. Unsurprisingly, *Politika* criticised the film for 'superficial and cheap sociologising (*sociologiziranje*)' and 'effect-seeking'.⁸⁷

This episode perfectly illustrates why labour migration was such a 'dangerous' topic, and why the representation of migrant workers mattered: they were the living embodiment of the failure of the Yugoslav economy to provide sufficient and well-paid jobs in the country. This problem became even more acute when opportunities for out-migration declined after the recruitment stop by the West European countries in 1974 – subsequently, unemployment in Yugoslavia grew. Newspaper articles about the *Gastarbeiter* were a constant reminder of the fact that many people were going abroad in search of a better life, despite all the promises of the government, and that this better life was not so great after all.⁸⁸ The continual press reports about the negative consequences of labour migration – such as the increasing shortage of skilled workers, educational difficulties of migrants' offspring, and the challenges of re-integration – showed the failure of government policies: in all those areas, the government had implemented measures intended to achieve the opposite results. Quoting a contemporary observer from the early 1980s, John Allcock in his analysis of social stratification stressed that the gulf between 'that which ought to be' and 'that which is' kept widening.⁸⁹ Migration and its symbolic outfall contributed to this divergence.

My general point is the following: the attribute that made Yugoslavia so unique, that is, its openness to the West, also made it very vulnerable. The country integrated into the global division of labour shaped by capitalist relations but failed to adapt its ideological and institutional apparatus to this new situation. Emigration was a clear illustration of the fact that Yugoslavia was on the periphery, from which people would move to the core, where they were more productively employed. This could not but reflect badly on the reputation of a regime that claimed ideological superiority both vis-à-vis the West and the East. This points to the ambivalence of Yugoslavia's unique geopolitical Cold War position: being socialist but having to interact with the West in a similarly disadvantageous position as countries of southern Europe, by exporting labour while struggling to raise enough investments for development on its own terms. Did non-alignment ultimately mean the worst of both worlds? Labour migration meant becoming dependent on the business cycles and immigration policies of Western Europe, thus partially outsourcing one

87 'Počelo je sumorno', *Politika*, 21 March 1968.

88 Le Normand, 'The *gastarbajteri* as a transnational Yugoslav working class', 50–52; cf. Goodlett, *Yugoslav worker emigration*, 167.

89 John B. Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia* (London 2000) 206.

of the most important pillars of socialist citizenship, i.e. employment. For a regime that based its legitimacy so strongly on claims of independence and sovereignty, this was hardly a welcome development.

Today, East Central and Southeastern Europe have again become major providers of cheap, skilled labour to growing, and aging, West European economies which in some countries of the region has turned out-migration into one of the most acutely felt social problems.⁹⁰ The Yugoslav example, thus, might resonate again: huge-scale labour migration is not only a sign of structural inequalities between different parts of Europe, it also generates significant tensions within the countries of emigration – and for much better reasons than in the host countries that largely benefit from immigration. Migration is not a problem, inequality is.

Acknowledgment

Research for this article was funded by research travel grants provided by the German Research Foundation, DFG, and the German Academic Exchange Service, DAAD.

90 Mark Rice-Oxley, Jennifer Rankin 'Europe's south and east worry more about emigration than immigration – poll', *The Guardian* (1 April 2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/01/europe-south-and-east-worry-more-about-emigration-than-immigration-poll>.