

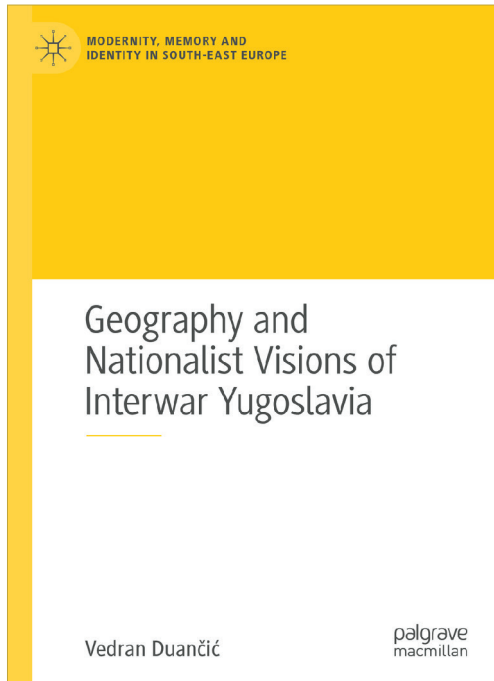
Duančić, V.: Geography and Nationalist Visions of Interwar Yugoslavia. Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. 286 p.

Vedran DUANČIĆ's monograph represents a very significant and important contribution to investigating nation building processes in their connection with geographical knowledge, related to the context of South Slavic regions. The research is well situated in the interdisciplinary debate concerning the contribution of geographical knowledge and cartography in shaping the idea of nation and in naturalising the spatial dimension of the modern, territorial state, as well as in contributing to the personification of nation state, thus strengthening the bond between the territorial state and the national community. The most innovative contribution compared to the existing literature is the deep comparative analysis of geographical works produced by several figures of Serbian, Slovenian and Croatian geographers, such as the Croatian Filip LUKAS (1871–1958) or the Slovenian Anton MELIK (1890–1966). Thanks to this comparative analysis of different scholars, DUANČIĆ's analysis goes well beyond the traditional and mainly exclusive focus on the Serbian geographer Jovan Cvijić. Moreover, connecting all these figures and showing their educational background and theoretical approach, the author gives an important contribution to comprehending the processes of knowledge circulation related to geographical ideas in the first half of the 20th century.

From the beginning of the book and in line with recent trends in international literature from Benedict ANDERSON (1986) to Guntram HERB (1997), Steven SEEGEL (2018) and Charles WITHERS (2001), DUANČIĆ stresses the role of geographers and geography in nation building processes, sustaining how far this “played an exceptional role in making and breaking interwar Yugoslavia” (p. 2). In his perspective, the different figures who at this time developed scientific studies in the field of geography and cartography, significantly contributed to the processes of integration or – on the contrary – separation of the different ethnical and cultural components that characterised the Balkan region. This happened due to the geographical skill, which enabled a homogeneous description of physical and cultural landscapes, thus integrating, and reinforcing other historical and/or political narratives. On one side, geographical representation and narrations were aimed to stress the territorial unity of Yugoslavia, also in response to threatening politics of the neighbor countries – especially Germany, Hungary, and Italy. On the other side, various geographical perspectives between Yugoslavian geographers also reflected the political fragmentation and the tensions between different Yugoslavian cultural entities, such as e.g., the ambition of a unified and independent Croatia, as formulated by the Croatian geographer Filip LUKAS.

From a theoretical perspective, DUANČIĆ situates his reflection in the crossing and circulation of geographical ideas at the time, specifically in the production of German language geography with its reflections on the different national geographies of Eastern Europe, notably in Poland with Eugeniusz ROMER, in Hungary with Pál TELEKI and, of course, in Serbia with Jovan Cvijić. The book is based on an extensive research and analysis of printed sources. In fact, primary sources are basically related to geographical works of academic geographers, mainly Yugoslavian and German and Austrian, but also some Polish, French and American works are taken into account. Despite the rich references to primary literature sources, the work considers and analyses limited archive sources, which could have shed better light on the relations and networks between scholars and the circulation of European geographical ideas in the Balkan.

A second critical point of the book is the almost neglected comparative analysis with Italian geographical works and Italian geography in general. Despite, as stated before, the author considers the danger represented by Italian politics towards Yugoslavia and underlines the importance of geographical unity as a tool for political discourses, the book lacks a comparative analysis of the methodologies that sustained Italian argumentation against the political and sci-



entific discourse developed in the same period by Yugoslavian geographers.

The book begins with a rich introductory chapter, that discusses international literature on nation building and geographical contribution to nationalism, situating these discourses in the historical and political context of South Slavic regions at the beginning of the 20th century. The second chapter of the book is dedicated to the origin of Yugoslavian geography, especially in its relationship with German geography and, above all, in connection with the German geographer Albrecht PENCK's theorisation and methodologies. The author recalls the different figures, which animated Slovenian, Croatian and Serbian geography since the first decades of the 20th century. These figures are put in connection with the further steps in the establishment of academic and governmental geographical institutions in South Slavic lands. The third chapter presents and discusses the fundamental figure of the Serbian geographer Jovan CVIJIĆ, in relation to the establishment of modern geography in academic studies. Under a scientific-theoretical point of view, DUANČIĆ analyses CVIJIĆ's understanding of geography, putting his interpretation close to the development of geomorphological studies, and stressing the analogies and differences with the German geographer Friedrich RATZEL. Other aspects concern CVIJIĆ's political explanation of geographical unity, specifically his national idea of a unified Serbia which was then applied to understand the whole Yugoslavian state. This intellectual process culminated with the publication of the volume *La Péninsule balkanique*, CVIJIĆ's most renowned work, that became a masterpiece of Balkan geography and a manifesto of Yugoslavia political unity. Chapter 4 describes the geographical discourses that formed the base for establishing the Yugoslavian state, starting from CVIJIĆ's fundamental work. The narration also considers the role of different European powers in promoting and shaping the unification process of Yugoslavia.

The fifth chapter introduces the topic of geopolitics and its reception by Yugoslavian scholars in the field of geography. In this context, it highlights the figure of the Croatian lawyer Ivo PILAR who firstly introduced political geographical issues to the Yugoslavian debate, particularly in relation with border questions. The work of the Swedish geographer Rudolf KJELLÉN, regarded as the founding father of geopolitics, received much attention by Yugoslavian geographers. The last chapter comes back to the Croatian geographer Filip LUKAS, whose work was already presented in Chapter 4, in order to discuss the new anti-Yugoslavian discourse he developed starting from the late 1920s. First, LUKAS criticised on scientific basis the idea of a geographical unity of Yugoslavia, thus questioning its political project, even if he admitted the absence of a geographic unity of a Croatian state, as this also lacked natural boundaries. However, in sustaining the idea of a unified and inde-

pendent Croatian state, the main point of LUKAS' theorisation was anchored to a geographical principle. He recognised four different geographical regions inside Croatian territory, whose differences had shaped the character and the identity of Croatian people. His work became one of the most important intellectual contributions to establishing the pro-Fascist state of the Ustasha regime in the 1940s.

One of the strong points of the book is the great reconstruction of the networks and circulation of ideas that sustained the emergence of geographical research in the Balkans. In particular, very interesting and original is the analysis of LUKAS' works and theories, presented for the first time in an international publication and connected to the theorizations of European and North American geographical ideas. Another remarkable contribution of the book concerns the debate about Eastern European national geographies in comparison with, and in relation to, Western European and specifically German language geography in the first half of the 20th century, as already done by scholars such as Steven SEEGEL (2018) and Maciej GÓRNY (2018).

The book would have benefitted from a broader archival investigation of primary sources, especially to extend the analysis of intellectual relations and networks, as well as a deeper comparison with Italian geographical works and intellectual figures. Despite of that, the book is a very rich contribution to the debate on histories of geographies and their involvement in nation building processes.

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