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Social and cultural aspects of the historiography on the Second World War in Slovenia

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, which acts as a symbol for the end of the Cold War, all former communist societies in Eastern Europe found themselves in a transitional period of post-communism during which the departing old was intertwining with the coming new. The perspective thus extends in two opposite directions simultaneously – towards the past and towards the future. A new identity was and still is being sought and a new value system being built. This also makes it necessary to strike a new balance between the past and the present, and has accordingly prompted an increased interest in the past.

At the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, changes were evident on a global scale, of which developments in Slovenia made up an integral part. In the mid-1980s, Slovenian society had been overwhelmed by a wave of social changes. They peaked with the introduction of parliamentary democracy, which coincided with Slovenian independence in 1991 and represented a new framework for the Slovenian society as a whole. Slovenian historiography had begun to challenge the obsolete post-World War II patterns already in the mid-1980s. Important changes occurred under the influence of Western social and anthropological historical research, criticism of traditional historiographical orientations pursued at home, as well as the strained political situation in Yugoslavia. Historiography's ideological perspective, its methodology and its prioritization of given themes were all called into question. Some of the (mainly young) researchers followed the example of Western European (especially French and German) authors and focused on social and cultural themes, which had hardly been investigated or not investigated at all, while others endeavoured to explain both the recent and ancient past (from the Middle Ages to modern history) with a more open and relaxed attitude towards politics, ideology, and nationality. The political relaxation during the mid-1980s thus made for an important contribution to transcending monolithic opinions and laid the ground for a new assessment of ideologically stereotyped and one-sided views, an elimination of taboos, and an introduction of plural models of interpreting history.

The pre-1990 historiography on the Second World War and the post-war communist regime in Slovenia (1945–1990) drew its legitimacy directly from the occupation period and the period immediately after the war (then called the national liberation struggle and people's revolution), and purposefully subjected the historiography of the time to that aim. Under communist rule a remarkable number of works was published (30,000 articles and around 1,000 books, according to some statistics) confirming, either explicitly or implicitly, the officially authorised depiction of developments during World War II, which shows the communist-led people's revolution as the heroes, and all other groups, like the *Domobranci* (Home Guard), the church, the bourgeoisie and upper social strata, as traitors.

The vast majority of these works was produced by amateur writers, and relatively few by proper historians who observed what were then the standards of Slovenian historiography.

The chair for examining the period 1941–1945 was established very early (in 1948, making it the first such chair in Yugoslavia) at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana. It was held by Metod Mikuž, who had found himself in a pivotal and contradictory role during the occupation. Mikuž was a Catholic priest who joined the partisan movement, unlike a majority of his peers, including the Ljubljana Bishop Gregorij Rožman. After the war, Mikuž left priesthood and, until his death (1981), became the central author on Slovenian history for the post-1918 period. Nevertheless, he was not entirely spared pejorative characterizations from leading communists.¹ His most important work, *Pregled zgodovine narodnoosvobodilne borbe v Sloveniji* [Overview of the History of the National Liberation Struggle in Slovenia, in five volumes],² is now only rarely used or quoted, although it contains much information and many conclusions that are still considered interesting and useful from a present-day perspective. Tone Ferenc (d. 2003) worked at the Ljubljana-based Institute of the History of the Workers' Movement, renamed the Institute of Contemporary History in 1989. He produced a voluminous opus (of around 1,000 bibliographical units) and concentrated his studies of extensive archival material³ on the systems of occupation (initially German³, later also Italian⁴). Furthermore, Ferenc wrote about the resistance movement, collaboration⁵ and, in the 1990s, the civil war.⁶ Milan Ževart (d. 2006) worked in Maribor and devoted his research to Styria during the occupation. Taking great pride in his Styrian origin, Ževart placed a major emphasis on the national aspects of the resistance, while paying much less regard to its social and revolutionary dimensions.⁷ The question whether the Liberation Front could, although communist-dominated, still be called a coalition of different political groups⁸, and the deci-

- 1 At the session of the politbureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia (CC CPS) on 28 April 1951, for instance, Boris Kidrič, a leading Slovenian communist, called Mikuž a “remnant of the reaction”. Darinka Drnovšek: *Zapisniki politbiroja CK KPS/ZKS 1945–1954* [Minutes of the politbureau of the CC CPS/League of Communists of Slovenia], Ljubljana 2000, p. 267.
- 2 Metod Mikuž: *Pregled zgodovine narodnoosvobodilne borbe v Sloveniji*, 5 vol., Ljubljana 1961–1973.
- 3 Tone Ferenc: *Le système d'occupation des nazis en Slovenie*, in: *Les systèmes d'occupation en Yougoslavie 1941–1945*, Beograd 1963; Id.: *Nacistična raznarodovalna politika v Sloveniji v letih 1941–1945* [The national socialist policies of denationalization in Slovenia 1941–45], Maribor 1968; Id.: *Quellen zur nationalsozialistischen Entnationalisierungspolitik in Slowenien 1941–1945*, Maribor 1980.
- 4 Tone Ferenc: *Fašisti brez krinke: dokumenti 1941–1942* [The fascists without masks. Documents 1941–1942], Maribor 1987; Id.: *La provincia “italiana” di Lubiana. Documenti 1941–1942* [The “Italian” province of Ljubljana. Documents], Udine 1994.
- 5 Tone Ferenc: *Ljudska oblast na Slovenskem 1941–1945* [The people's power in the Slovene lands], 3 vols., Ljubljana 1985–1991.
- 6 Tone Ferenc: *Dies irae. Četniki, vaški stražarji in njihova usoda jeseni 1943* [Days of wrath. Chetniks, village guards and their fate in autumn 1943], Ljubljana 2002.
- 7 Milan Ževart: *Narodnoosvobodilni boj v Šaleški dolini* [The national liberation battle in the Šaleška valley], Ljubljana 1977.
- 8 France Škerl: *Politični tokovi v Osvobodilni fronti v prvem letu njenega razvoja* [The political directions within the Liberation Front in the first year of its development], in: *Zgodovinski časopis* [Historical journal] 5 (1951), p. 7–86; Id.: *Problem koalicije v Osvobodilni fronti* [The problem of the coalition in the Liberation Front], in: *Naša sodobnost* [Our times] 1953, pp. 955–1035.

sion to begin armed revolt⁹ were discussed by a member of the christian socialist group within the Liberation Front, France Škerl, who introduced an enviable high-level problem-oriented approach and a perspective that, to some extent, deviated from the official standpoints on the themes in question. Škerl, who otherwise treated the partisan movement with an affirmative bias, here drew conclusions which came close to – and sometimes even went beyond – the limit of what was still acceptable to the ruling regime.¹⁰ In this context, domestic opponents of the partisan movement, who were stigmatised as national traitors, were presented as a minor component, as the dark side of the war, and were only rarely discussed in professional literature. The two exceptions were Franček Saje's extremely biased book *Belogardizem* [The White Guard Movement],¹¹ and a much better work written by Boris Mlakar, *Domobranstvo na Primorskem* [The Home Guard Movement in the Littoral (1943–1945)],¹² of which many aspects are still regarded as a reliable source even by present standards.

Writing on World War II was marked by the partisan generation, since all the aforementioned authors, save Ferenc and Mlakar (b. 1947), took part in the partisan struggle. Those authors who were still alive after the democratic changes did not abandon their research; quite to the contrary, they continued publishing their works and pursued their teaching and mentoring uninterruptedly. Their works, and works honouring their memory, are still published today.¹³

Scientific Marxism, presented by the regime's ideologists as the supreme form of scientific activity, is practically non-existent in the aforementioned historians' works. From a methodological perspective they followed the positivist tradition, which still occupied a central position in Slovenian historiography at that time, and largely refrained from problematising events during the war. The first to express disagreement with the stereotypical approach of the older generation was Jože Dežman, who expanded Andrzej Wajda's motto "the youth feels the need to learn the truth about their parents" by adding that "for the sake of historical science we should transcend the level of positivist annotations and vague wishes. Our aim is to create a comprehensive and meaningful theoretical projection".¹⁴ Although Dežman's ini-

- 9 France Škerl: *Počeci partizanskog pokreta u Sloveniji* [The beginnings of the partisan movement in Slovenia], Beograd 1956.
- 10 At the session of the politbureau of the CC CPS on 28 April 1951, the leading Yugoslav ideologist Edvard Kardelj dismissed Škerl's work by stating: "History is written by the enemy". Drnovšek, *Zapiski*, p. 267.
- 11 Franček Saje: *Belogardizem* [The White Guard Movement], Ljubljana 1951.
- 12 Boris Mlakar: *Domobranstvo na Primorskem (1943–1945)* [The Home Guards in the Littoral], Ljubljana 1982.
- 13 Zdenko Čepič/Dušan Nečak/Miroslav Stiplovšek (eds.): *Mikužev zbornik* [Festschrift in honour of Metod Mikuž], Ljubljana 1999; Tone Ferenc: *Izbrana dela. Okupacijski sistemi med drugo svetovno vojno. I. – Razkosanje in aneksionizem* [Selected works. The occupation systems during World War. I. Dismemberment and annexation], Ljubljana 2006; Milan Ževart: *Styriaca. Izbrana dela* [Styrian opus. Selected works], Velenje 2005.
- 14 Jože Dežman: *Zgodovina mladih, zgodovina o mladih* [The young generation's history, history of the young generation], in: Anka Vidovič-Miklavčič (ed.): *Napredno mladinsko gibanje na Slovenskem* [The progressive youth movement in Slovenia], vol. 1, Ljubljana 1982.

tative was not meant as a challenge to the regime – and even drew its methodology more from Marxist theory than from contemporary western influences – it nevertheless warned of the indeterminate methodology of historiography at the time and promoted a more multi-layered and comprehensive approach to studying developments during the occupation period. In accordance with this view the ethnologist Božidar Jezernik published his book on life in Italian concentration camps, *Boj za obstanek*¹⁵ [The Struggle for Survival], which was followed by his anthropological study on German concentration camps published soon after Slovenia's independence, in 1993.¹⁶ Interestingly enough, the only older historian who supported Dežman's initiative was France Klopčič, a declared Marxist and victim of Stalin's purges, whereas others rejected it and distanced themselves from it; this meant that actual change could take place only in the wake of ideological relaxation in the second half of the 1980s.

The defeated side in World War II and its truth had no right to public existence in the homeland, and even less right to join in shaping the picture of the war's histories. Nevertheless emigrant communities in Argentina and the United States, where some 25,000 opponents of the partisan movement had moved in World War II's aftermath, had developed their own view of the course of the war. The interpretation formulated by the partisan movement's opponents in emigration logically aimed to explain and justify their stances during the war and, accordingly, appeared schematic and black-and-white.

Historiography facing new challenges

In the period before the democratic changes, Slovenian World War II historiography to a certain extent produced credible factography, especially in view of its relatively positivist nature and its approach to some aspects of the progress of the war (e. g. occupation systems). However, its major deficiencies were its methodological rigidity and its interpretation, which – since the right to interpret was reserved for the leading politicians and ideologists – was never questioned. Such ideological dictation proved detrimental for the historiography of World War II, as the ever-narrowing ideological and political horizon yielded a distinctly one-sided and distorted image of the past. It was only after the ideological relaxation in the second half of the 1980s that Slovenian World War II historiography finally managed to shift its focus towards investigating more complex and interpretatively challenging topics, thus embracing pluralism of interpretation¹⁷ and preparing the ground for more balanced

15 Božidar Jezernik: *Boj za obstanek: o življenju Slovencev v italijanskih koncentracijskih taboriščih* [Struggle for survival: On the life of Slovenes in Italian concentration camps], Ljubljana 1983.

16 Božidar Jezernik: *Spol in spolnost in extremis: antropološka študija o nemških koncentracijskih taboriščih Dachau, Buchenwald, Mauthausen, Ravensbrück, Auschwitz 1933–1945* [Gender and gender relations in extremis: Anthropological study on the German concentrations camps Dachau, Buchenwald, Mauthausen, Ravensbrück], Ljubljana 1993.

17 Walter Lukan: *Zur Historiographie in Slowenien nach dem Zerfall Jugoslawiens. Ein Kommentar zu Dušan Nečaks "Projekt einer anderen Geschichte"*, in: *Klio ohne Fesseln? Historiographie im östli-*

research. But, from another perspective, such progress also meant raising new questions related not only to substantive but also to terminological and methodological issues.¹⁸

Our views of World War II in Slovenia were long kept within the confines of an explicitly one-sided ideological and political perception of the four-year period. The question that therefore poses itself is: How can this image be balanced by another one that is just as schematic, ideological and single-sided, only written by the anti-partisan side?

Historical elements closely connected with the legitimacy of the previous regime were redefined almost completely in all transition countries. British historian Tony Judt described this phase by stating that whatever was once recognised as the official communist truth has now become an official lie. The introduction of such over-simplified principles to the study of World War II in Slovenia is extremely problematic and constitutes an attempt to establish a new one-sided “truth” and to replace the one-sided “truth” from the communist era. This process involves nothing but the destruction of old myths by building new ones. Now the former “heroes”, the partisans, are turned into the universally “bad”, while the former “traitors”, especially the anti-communists and the church, are turned into “saviours of the nation”. Yet, the events during World War II in Slovenia were too complex to be clarified by simply shifting the premise.

Despite sharing many characteristics with most Eastern European communist states, Yugoslavia's position was nevertheless quite unique. One obvious reason lay in the autochthonous revolution which swept the country in the spirit of the pan-European struggle against Hitler and which was even recognised by the great anti-Hitler coalition as a whole – especially in light of the simultaneous anti-occupation resistance led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, which was seen as a valuable contributor to the joint struggle. From an international point of view, the Yugoslav communists thus took over authority through legal means, based on agreements between the leader of the partisan movement, Josip Broz Tito, and the president of the Yugoslav government in exile, Ivan Šubašić. This, however, does not mean that discontinuity from the pre-war regime was entirely absent in domestic politics. Because the war followed a very different course from one Yugoslav province to another, events in Slovenia too unfolded in a specific manner. During the period of 1941–1945, the Slovenian territory was not only under occupation but dismembered and annexed by neighbouring countries (except in the case of Germany, where the annexation was effected only *de facto* rather than *de iure*). All three occupying forces (German, Italian, and Hungarian) shared the objective of denationalising the Slovenes, although their methods for achieving it differed. In the long term, there would be no room for the Slovenes as an ethnic community in the order created by the axis powers. After the pre-war political elite had compromised itself by entering into collaboration with the Italian occupier and taking a passive stance in organising resistance, the Slovenian communists were presented with a perfect opportunity to

chen Europa nach dem Zusammenbruch des Kommunismus, in: Österreichische Osthefte 1/2 (2002), pp. 345–362, pp. 358–362.

18 Peter Vodopivec: Historiography in Slovenia today, in: Slovene studies. Journal of the Society for Slovene studies 1/2 (2003), pp. 5–22, p. 8.

build a mass movement whose principal objective was not only to drive the occupiers out of the country but to carry out a revolution to seize power. On the other hand, some Slovenian middle class forces drifted into collaboration, first with the Italian and later also with the German occupiers. They justified their action simply through their opposition to the communist revolution; but, given the domestic and international circumstances, collaboration with the occupier ultimately placed the anti-communist side in the camp of World War II's defeated enemies. Since the occupation in 1941–1945 was most obviously characterised by domestic political turmoil, it may be claimed that the Slovenes, particularly in the Italian-occupied Province of Ljubljana, also found themselves embroiled in a civil war. The need for a comprehensive illustration of the wartime situation in Slovenia is all the greater because there is too often a tendency to discuss it without due regard to broader Yugoslav or international contexts. This then often creates the impression that Slovenia was the scene of an internal dispute of local significance, completely unrelated to any other developments unfolding around the world. Yet there is also a tendency to assign a pan-Slovenian character to conditions in the Province of Ljubljana and thus obliterate the specific course of events that took place in other Slovenian provinces. All these aspects make it clear that the issues involved are too complex and contradictory to allow a one-sided and one-dimensional interpretation.¹⁹

Politics and the profession – cultural struggle rather than reconciliation

Optimistic expectations that the democratisation of society would also bring an end to political pressures on historiography were not fully met. The events that took place during World War II are still a central issue in clarifying the past, and their effects remain as current as ever. In historical judgment the period between 1941 and 1945 remains subject to very conflicting interpretations. In accordance with differing views of contemporaneity, different political groups also pass differing judgments on the past, and Slovenia is no exception. This, moreover, has also turned the issue of World War II into a major political question exploited by the advocates of various political options for their own ends.²⁰

Eventually, a concise overview of the most sensitive topics in Slovenian contemporary history was prepared at the behest of the Slovenian National Assembly (Parliament), which aspired to transcend bitter polemics on the character of contemporary Slovenian history by commissioning an expert study²¹ that would lay the foundations for determining the Parlia-

19 Bojan Godeša: *Druga svetovna vojna in današnje slovenske travme* [The Second World War and present Slovenian traumata], in: Ervin Dolenc (ed.), *Teze za razpravo na Okrogli mizi. Problemi slovenskega zgodovinskega o 20. stoletju* [Theses for debate at the round table. Problems of Slovenian historiography in the 20th century], Ljubljana 1999, pp. 32–37.

20 Božo Repe: *The Place of the Second World War in the Internal Evolution of Post-War Slovenia and Yugoslavia*, in: *Bulletin of the International Committee for the History of the Second World War* 30/31 (1999 /2000), pp. 127–143.

21 The authors were: Zdenko Čepič, Tone Ferenc, Aleš Gabrič, Bojan Godeša, Boris Mlakar, Dušan Nečak, Jože Prinčič, Janko Prunk, Božo Repe, Anka Vidovič-Miklavčič, Peter Vodopivec, and Milan Ževart.

ment's views. In 1995, the Institute of Contemporary History in Ljubljana issued a report titled *Ključne značilnosti slovenske politike v letih 1929–1955* [Key Characteristics of Slovenian Politics in the Period 1929–1955]. The document covered “the Slovenian politics of the 1930s, when polarisation and ideological intolerance increased, and World War II, when the conflict peaked, and concluded with the 1950s [...], when the pressure of the totalitarian state began to subside.”²² Yet this report too failed to find a minimum general consensus on the past. The project of reconciliation between the conflicting sides during the war, which was extremely popularised during Slovenia's independence in 1991, came to nothing, because events moved in exactly the opposite direction, i. e. towards a further deepening of differences.²³

The first one and a half decades of the independent state's existence were marred by a domestic political struggle which was even given the more or less felicitous name of “cultural struggle”. However, one should not overlook its positive effects in the initial period, especially during the transition from the black-and-white and one-sided presentation of World War II to complex, multi-layered research. Within the context of clarification, the interpretation of the course of the war in Slovenia which had previously been forbidden and untold in the homeland but had remained very much alive in emigration thus finally obtained the right to existence and legitimacy. Various views gradually developed and legitimate differences found their expression in the views of individual historians, which is perfectly logical and normal for democratic societies. Yet before long, another, more problematic side of the flexing of muscles during the cultural struggle came to the surface. Amidst an atmosphere pervaded with (to some extent artificially incited) intolerance, the denial and exclusion of any findings that did not comply with one's own views, and above all the *a priori* entrenchment in one's own “truths”, overwhelmingly prevailed over a brisk exchange of views and opinions that could potentially lead to further knowledge. Observing the “achievements” of the cultural struggle from a distance of 15 years, one may conclude that its positive impact has been virtually nil. Despite an enviable range of views, opinions and theses, the posturing of the cultural struggle has unequivocally rendered a very poor service to the historical profession: Mainly because “clarification” has in essence merely amounted to a revival of theses that were devised during the war and, in a fervid atmosphere of intolerance, continually presented and perceived as new discoveries and views – even though they were not. Nevertheless, it should be noted that both interpretations project a mirror image of the war's genesis and that they mainly differ in their values rather than in the structures of their perception of the disputed period. Both interpretations are, furthermore, based on a deterministic, linear view of the course of the war. Thus, amidst the strained atmosphere of the cul-

22 Ključne značilnosti slovenske politike v letih 1929–1955 [Key characteristics of Slovenian politics 1929–1955], Ljubljana 1995, p. 3.

23 Janja Slabe: Slovenska narodna sprava v časopisju 1984–1997 [Slovenian national understanding in the journal 1984–1997], in: Prispевki za novejšo zgodovino [Contributions to modern history] 1 (2006) (Kresalov zbornik) [Festschrift for France Kresal], pp. 431–446.

tural struggle, Slovenian society is often led to the conclusion that the old patterns of thought and methodologies have indeed persisted – the only thing that has changed is the value.

Revision and the opening of new horizons – an opportunity for a “different” history?

Changes in Slovenian historiography triggered the question of historical revisionism: Some claim it does not exist, others that it has a complete monopoly over Slovenian reality. In my opinion, the vanquished side in World War II was, during the period of establishing a new value system after the fall of communism, undeniably striving to secure itself a position that would present its stance during wartime in the most favourable light. Hence, there are tendencies in certain Slovenian circles to not only relativise the significance of the resistance but even strip it of any positive role, while continually denying the existence of collaboration during the war.²⁴ It should nevertheless be pointed out that this phenomenon is not only emblematic of post-communist Central and Eastern European societies but of certain other countries as well, such as Italy. From an overall perspective, the spectrum of this issue is extremely broad and diversified, and related to particular and often very specific conditions.

Still, controversies about the prevalence of revisionism and the totalitarian legacy cannot conceal the fact that the image of the war has indeed been subject to change and supplementation – in some respects this change was negligible, in others substantial. Thus the issues of World War II and resistance were demythologised and became the subject of critical evaluation.

Clearly, revision in itself is not necessarily a negative thing. Views of the past change, which is not just a typical characteristic of post-communist societies, even though it is perhaps more pronounced there due to the depth of changes. History will always remain subject to new thematisations, just as it will always continue to problematise established views. When writing history, one witnesses constant changes being made and the constant emergence of new interpretations. Each generation looks at the past from its own time frame and poses questions about it that relate to the time in which it lives. It is therefore little wonder that new questions have also been raised about both substantive and methodological problems.

With a few minor exceptions, socio-anthropological, economic and cultural studies on World War II which would deal with everyday life, the problems of ordinary people, stereotypes or micro histories of the war were almost completely non-existent during the period of democratic changes. Since these aspects would largely facilitate the recognition of the complexity and contradictions of wartime, the need for an accelerated study of these questions is more than justified. Nevertheless, the bulk of research has at crucial times instead concentrated on the political-ideological (re)interpretation of World War II, while pushing

24 Lenart Riha: V Sloveniji kolaboracije ni bilo. Pogovor z dr. Markom Kremžarjem [In Slovenia there was no collaboration. Talk with Dr. Marko Kremžar], in: Tretji dan. Krščanska revija za duhovnost in kulturo [The third day. Christian review for spirituality and culture] 5/6 (2006).

methodological and conceptual questions and the expansion of research areas on to the backburner. Several historians have been calling attention for some time to this deficiency in Slovenian World War II historiography.²⁵ At the same time it should be noted that the conditions governing Slovenian historiography are not exceptional in the context of contemporary historical research in post-communist Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, it is still reasonable to ask oneself why Slovenian research into World War II has veered in that direction (as well).

Whereas research into social history, everyday life and the problems of ordinary people is already a traditional branch in European historiography, it only became part of Slovenian historiography in the second half of the 1980s, whereby, as pointed out by several experts, it also drew on the works of older Slovenian historians (e.g. Josip Mal).²⁶ In the last 20 years, studies on these aspects have undergone a major expansion, and have become especially popular with the younger generation of historians who largely focusses on the 19th and the early 20th century. Since the mid-1990s the magazine *Zgodovina za vse – vse za zgodovino* (History for All – All for History) has been published in Celje with a view to promoting research into everyday life, paradigmatically orientated towards historical anthropology. In this regard, Slovenian historiography may be said to be keeping abreast with Western European trends.

This is why, in spite of the modest foundations laid in previous periods, the explanation that research into World War II has been neglected due to a lack of tradition holds only to a limited extent. Amidst an electrified atmosphere, occasionally such an approach to World War II research could even be understood as an attempt to relativise if not conceal the communist past, because it questioned the one-sided and schematic views that some politically exposed historians strove to assert. Therefore, this unfortunate situation was mainly the result of the way in which recent history was clarified. Clarification was most certainly legitimate and urgently required, but it was nevertheless characterised by a Manichean atmosphere of intolerance that was opposed to introducing a new complex of methodological and theoretical questions on the model of contemporary Western European historiography. In this regard the magazine *Borec* [The Fighter] met a typical fate in 1990 when it transformed from “the magazine for the history of the National Liberation Struggle and the preservation of revolutionary traditions” to “the magazine for history, anthropology and literature”. Its new orientation at first seemed to promise the possible beginning of a new conceptual research centre. But its potential was never fully realised, its founders (Božo Repe and Jože Dežman) parted ways both politically and ideationally under the influence of political and ideological divisions in Slovenian society, and the two researchers shifted their focus

25 Godeša: *Druga svetovna vojna*, p. 37, and Oto Luthar: *Between Reinterpretation and Revisionism. Rethinking Slovenian Historiography of the 1990s*, in: Ulf Brunnbauer (ed.): *(Re)Writing History – Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism*, Münster 2004, pp. 331–349.

26 Andrej Studen: *Proučevanje slovenskega vsakdanjika* [Investigation of Slovene everyday life], in: Ervin Dolenc (ed.): *Teze za razpravo na Okrogli mizi. Problemi slovenskega zgodovinopisja o 20. stoletju* [Theses for debate at the round table. Problems of Slovenian historiography in the 20th century], Ljubljana 1999, pp. 20–23.

to themes receiving more media coverage (e. g. Repe turned to Slovenia's independence in 1991; Dežman concentrated on totalitarian elements of communist society).

Since no conceptual centre for World War II research (e. g. an institution or magazine) evolved, the new direction was gradually and non-systematically asserting its place in historiography, but it may be claimed that in recent years Slovenian historians who specialise in World War II have in fact been discussing these aspects. What connects all the researchers is mostly their selection of themes, which differs from the classical military-political studies of World War II. Although most researchers belong to younger generations, older and established historians have been dealing with such topics as well.²⁷ One circle of researchers has realised that it is impossible to obtain a global image of World War II without knowledge of the whole range of segments of everyday life and its socio-economic background. According to these researchers, the military-political and institutional perspectives are indeed important, yet they are (by far) neither the only ones nor all-encompassing. The economic, social and cultural aspects of people's lives during the war are also worthy of research. Slovenian researchers thus began to focus on revealing the tender tissue of ordinary people's life worlds. Such an expansion of the observer's perspective and the construction of a more complex, global image of the war have made researchers confront new challenges and methodological questions. Given such a loose starting point, the selection of themes is extremely diversified and encompasses socio-economic aspects, everyday life in military units under occupation, as well as micro studies of individual people's destinies.

Marta Verginella's book with the typical title *Ljudje v vojni* [People in the War] made her one of the first authors to draw attention to the need for a different approach in discussing the memory of the war in the Littoral.²⁸ Verginella's introduction foregrounded methodological problems about the materials to be used in research. The sources that have been preserved enable historians above all to illuminate the political and military aspects of wartime, yet they often lack information that would throw light upon the economic, social and cultural turmoil and help historians determine the seismic shifts in the lives of social classes and groups during the war. She warned that the slim chances of accessing socio-historically important information for the period in question may hinder research seriously. The lack or even absence of written sources, along with the previously selected documentation, encouraged her to include oral sources (oral history) as an important supplement for giving a voice to ordinary people and all those who have been confined from written documents and thus remained invisible in grand, "official" history. Until then, literature had presented the memory of occupation and denationalisation as an indivisible whole, hence as an indoctrination

27 Ferdo Gestrin, a distinguished authority on the economic history of earlier periods, was largely dissatisfied with previous research on the war. In his book *Svet pod Krimom* [The World under Krim Hill], Ljubljana 1993, he was one of the first authors to draw attention to the frequently contradictory and complex hierarchy of ordinary people's values, which influenced their decisions during the war.

28 Marta Verginella: *Ljudje v vojni. Druga svetovna vojna v Trstu in na Primorskem* [People in the war. The Second World War in Trieste and the Littoral], Koper 1995. Cfr. Id./Alessandro Volk/Katja Colja: *Storia e memoria degli Sloveni del Litorale. Fascismo, guerra e resistenza* [History and memory of the Slovenes from the Littoral. Fascism, war, and resistance], Trieste 1994.

and a preference of a collective story over many individual ones. The book's fundamental message lies in its "bottom-up" perspective presenting the linear and one-sided image of anti-fascism and resistance in the Littoral as misleading, since the life of the Littoral Slovenes was subject to various social, economic, cultural and political variables. Verginella returned to the issue of memories and ordinary people in the war in her later work.²⁹

The first monographic work to attempt at providing an equal treatment of all sides involved is my own book *Kdor ni z nami, je proti nam* [Whoever is not with us is against us]³⁰ on the Slovenian intelligentsia during World War II: I employed a comparative analysis to demonstrate why most Slovenian scholars declared themselves in favour of the resistance movement, their ideological premise, and the more pragmatic side of their decisions. The conditions arising from the strains of war often ensued extreme political options (both left-wing and right-wing), aiming at creating disunity among the intellectuals by means of oversimplification and a Manichaean division, and ultimately at confronting them with a *fait accompli*. What had previously been a marginal radical group – the communists – proved very successful in such designs, so that Slovenian society during the war largely transformed according to their schemes. The basic message of my book is that the atmosphere of intolerance – hence the title of the book – was not particularly encouraging for reflection or for intellectuals who would not allow themselves to be indoctrinated – which should be their main characteristic in the first place.

Doroteja Lešnik and Gregor Tomc published the book *Rdeče in črno: Slovensko partizanstvo in domobranstvo* [Red and Black: The Slovenian Partisan and Home Guard Movements],³¹ in which the central focus was not on bloodshed and armaments, but on the background of military organisation – internal and external relations, everyday life, values, and norms. Typical of this orientation is the tendency to distance oneself from recent official historiography and understanding of the period and also from ideological attempts to re-evaluate World War II. The study uncovers a new space kept hidden for many decades. It illuminates the untold side of the development of both the partisan and Home Guard armies in Slovenia by bringing ordinary people to the fore with all their wartime flaws, distresses and fears, thus finally also allowing them to be non-paragons, non-commanders, non-heroes and non-revolutionaries. Jože Dežman and Nataša Kodrič Budna had previously presented the lives of partisans in a small military unit.³² Damijan Guštin pointed to

29 Marta Verginella: *Suha pašta, pesek in bombe. Vojni dnevnik Bruna Trampuža* [Dry pasta, sand, and bombs. The war diary of Bruno Trampuž], Koper 2004.

30 Bojan Godeša: *Kdor ni z nami, je proti nam. Slovenski izobraženci med okupatorji, Osvobodilno fronto in protirevolucionarnim taborom* [Whoever is not with us is against us. Slovenian intellectuals between the occupiers, the Liberation Front, and the anti-revolutionary side], Ljubljana 1995.

31 Doroteja Lešnik/Gregor Tomc: *Rdeče in črno. Slovensko partizanstvo in domobranstvo* [Red and black. The Slovenian partisan and home guard movements], Ljubljana 1995.

32 Jože Dežman/Nataša Kodrič Budna: *Gorenjski partizan. Gorenjski odred 1942–1945* [The partisan in Upper Carniola. The Upper Carniola unity 1942–45], Kranj 1992.

the question of the partisan army's social origin,³³ and later devoted himself to studying life in the occupiers' prisons.³⁴

Aleksander Žižek introduced a new approach to studying the occupation systems and life under occupation in Styria. His research also expressed the everyday hardships of ordinary people, thus changing the previous perception of the occupation, which had focussed merely on the prism of violence and denationalisation measures.³⁵ Later Žižek also dealt with the German occupational authorities' methods of indoctrinating the Styrian population.³⁶ Bojan Himmelreich concentrated on comparative research on the mobilisation of the population during World Wars I and II.³⁷ The first work that tries to comprehensively cover the issue of everyday life is Mojca Šorn's book *Življenje Ljubljančanov med drugo svetovno vojno* [The lives of the people of Ljubljana during the Second World War].³⁸ Her research unveils a broader context of administrative, social, economic, sanitary, cultural, and social life in the Slovenian capital.

Following Slovenia's independence, international interest in the Slovenian history of World War II has increased, although several studies in regard have been produced by scholars with Slovenian roots.³⁹ Important contributions to an enlarged knowledge of World War II in Slovenia have been made by works adding anthropological dimensions to the social and the political.⁴⁰

- 33 Damijan Guštin: Rast in razvoj slovenske partizanske vojske v prvi polovici leta 1942 in krajevni ter socialni izvor njenih borcev [Growth and development of the partisan army in the first half of 1942 and the geographical and social origins of its fighters]. Master's thesis at the Faculty of Arts, Ljubljana 1987.
- 34 Damijan Guštin: Za zapahi: prebivalstvo Slovenije v okupatorjevih zaporih [Behind bars: Slovenia's population in the occupiers' prisons], Ljubljana 2006.
- 35 Aleksander Žižek: Kratak oris strukture in delovanja Štajerske domovinske zveze na Celjskem v letih 1941 do 1945 [Short overview on the structure and work of the Styrian Home League in the Celje region 1941 to 1945], in: Celjski zbornik 28 (1993), pp. 199–274.
- 36 Aleksander Žižek: Slovenci, Vindišarji, Spodnještajerci in banditi. Vloga Štajerske domovinske zveze in tiska – časnikov *Štajerski gospodar* in *Marburger Zeitung* – pri indoktrinaciji spodnještajerskega prebivalstva [Slovenes, Windisch, Lower Styrians and bandits. The role of the Styrian home league and of the press – the journals 'Štajerski gospodar' and 'Marburger Zeitung' – in the indoctrination of the Lower Styrian population], in: Acta Histriae 2 (2007), pp. 747–768.
- 37 Bojan Himmelreich: Namesto žemlje črni kruh. Organizacija preskrbe z živili v Celju v času obeh svetovnih vojn [Black bread instead of bread rolls. The organisation of food in Celje in the times of both world wars], Celje 2001.
- 38 Mojca Šorn: *Življenje Ljubljančanov med drugo svetovno vojno* [The lives of the people of Ljubljana during the Second World War], Ljubljana 2007.
- 39 Gerhard Jochem/Georg Seiderer (eds.): Entrechtung, Vertreibung, Mord. NS-Unrecht in Slowenien und seine Spuren in Bayern 1941–1945, Berlin 2005; Dieter Blumenwitz: Okkupation und Revolution in Slowenien (1941–46). Eine völkerrechtliche Untersuchung, Wien 2005; Marcus Ferrar/John Corsellis: Slovenia 1945. Memories of Death and Survival after World War II, London 2005; Tamara Griesser-Pečar: Das zerrissene Volk. Slowenien 1941–1946, Wien 2004; Michael Wedekind: Nationalsozialistische Besatzungs- und Annexionspolitik in Norditalien 1943–1945. Die Operationszonen „Alpenland“ und „Adriatisches Küstenland“, München 2003.
- 40 Silvija Kavčič: Überleben und Erinnern. Slovenische Häftlinge im Frauen-Konzentrationslager Ravensbrück, Berlin 2007; Sabine Rutar: Totalitarian Structures and Social Practice: Deviance in Yugoslavia Between 1941 and 1951, in: Darko Darovec (ed.): Retorike Deviantnosti: Kriminalci,

As mentioned, the sociopolitical atmosphere in Slovenia was, and still is, dominated by a so-called cultural struggle and, for the most part, not in favour of innovative forms of research. Still, certain themes, as a by-product of the ongoing polemics, were eventually taken up and resulted to be of substantial importance for research into ordinary people's everyday lives and the socio-cultural aspects of World War II. For example, a politically motivated discussion arose about the total number of victims during World War II, with all sides involved placing almost exclusive emphasis on "their" victims. The Gordian knot was finally cut by a study conducted by the Institute of Contemporary History, which up to now has yielded a number exceeding 90,000 (the research is still in progress) in the territory of the present-day Republic of Slovenia.⁴¹ Since the number amounts to approximately 6 percent of the then population, it places Slovenia among the countries with an above-average number of victims.⁴² The research also provided ample information to facilitate further analyses of the social, age, gender and professional structure of the victims. In a similar manner, political demands were made in the 1990s to address the hitherto neglected question of the thousands of Styrian and Upper Carniolan Slovenes who were mobilised into the German army.⁴³

In the early 1990s, Slovenia also witnessed the beginning of more systematic research into women's history (Marta Verginella, Sabina Ž. Žnidaršič, Peter Vodopivec, Andrej Studen); the 32nd meeting of Slovenian historians held in Celje in 2004 was entirely devoted to the question of women in history.⁴⁴ Vida Deželak Barič,⁴⁵ Dunja Dobaja⁴⁶ and Ljuba Dornik Šubelj⁴⁷ wrote about the role of women during World War II, while the role of women in

izobčenci in devianti skozi zgodovino/Rhetoric of Deviance. Criminals, Outlaws, and Deviants in History, Koper 2007 (*Actae Histriae* 15/2), pp. 769–780; Id.: Zwischen Volkstumspolitik und Volksbefreiungskampf. Braunkohlenabbau im deutsch besetzten Slowenien, in: Klaus Tenfelde/Hans-Christoph Seidel (eds.): Zwangsarbeit im Bergwerk. Der Arbeitseinsatz im Kohlenbergbau des Deutschen Reiches und der besetzten Gebiete im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg, Essen 2005, pp. 537–569; Id.: War, Memory, and Nation in the Northeastern Adriatic: A Contribution to Methodology, in: Jože Pirjevec/Gorazd Bajc/Borut Klabjan (eds.): Vojna in mir na Primorskem. Od kapitulacije Italije leta 1943 do Londonskega memorandumuma leta 1954 [War and peace in the Littoral. From Italy's capitulation 1943 to the London Memorandum 1954], Koper 2005, pp. 241–254; Rolf Wörsdörfer: Krisenherd Adria 1915–1955. Konstruktion und Artikulation des Nationalen im italienisch-jugoslawischen Grenzraum, Paderborn 2004.

- 41 Prior to the research, the estimates ranged between 60,000 and 65,000 victims.
- 42 Tadeja Tominšek Rihtar/Mojca Šorn: Žrtve druge svetovne vojne in zaradi nje (april 1941-januar 1946) [The victims of the Second World War], in: Janvit Golob et al. (eds.), Žrtve vojne in revolucije [The victims of the war and the revolution], Ljubljana 2005, pp. 13–21.
- 43 Marjan Žnidarič/Jože Dežman/Ludvik Puklavec: Nemška mobilizacija Slovencev v drugi svetovni vojni [The German mobilization of Slovenes in the Second World War], Celje 2001.
- 44 Aleksander Žižek (ed.): Ženske skozi zgodovino. Zbornik referatov 32. zborovanja slovenskih zgodovinarjev [Women in history. Proceedings of the 32nd Meeting of Slovene historians], Ljubljana 2004.
- 45 Vida Deželak-Barič: Politizacija žensk v času druge svetovne vojne [The politicization of women during the Second World War], in: *Ibid.*, pp. 317–322.
- 46 Dunja Dobaja: Podoba ženske v slovenskem katoliškem časopisju med drugo svetovno vojno [The representation of women in the catholic press during the Second World War], in: *Ibid.*, pp. 361–366.
- 47 Ljuba Dornik Šubelj: Vloga žensk v obveščevalnih in varnostnih službah na Slovenskem pred, med in po drugi svetovni vojni [The role of women in intelligence and security services in the Slovene lands before, during, and after the Second World War], in: *Ibid.*, pp.159–168.

the anti-revolutionary camp was also discussed by Boris Mlakar.⁴⁸ These research samples show that while women had a very specific position in the partisan movement, the collaborationist and anti-revolutionary activities were almost exclusively “men’s business”.

Despite the still existing huge research gaps in the Slovenian historiography on World War II, the new research findings are included in more comprehensive overviews of the wartime events, and every attempt is being made to place them within a broader framework of national history. The concept of the *Slovenska kronika XX. stoletja (1900–1995)* [Slovenian Chronicle of the 20th Century (1900–1995)], a bestselling Slovenian publication issued by *Nova revija* in the mid-1990s (editor-in-chief: Marjan Drnovšek), was wholly based on new themes and methodological findings, thus ensuring that the period of World War II was treated in line with the current state of research. Many years of research efforts by the Institute of Contemporary History yielded a voluminous collective work titled *Slovenska novejša zgodovina* (Modern Slovenian History), covering the period from the formation of the United Slovenia programme in 1848 to the Republic of Slovenia’s international recognition in 1992.⁴⁹ The work included coverage of the political, cultural, social, and economic aspects of the Second World War in Slovenia and represents the most comprehensive overview yet of World War II in Slovenia. The coverage of World War II here differs from previous works both through its greater ideological balance and because it provides a more thorough examination of the period.

The chapter on World War II in Peter Vodopivec’s book *Od Pohlinove slovnice do samostojne države* [From Pohlin’s Grammar to an Independent State]⁵⁰ draws on an in-depth knowledge of the distinctly multi-layered wartime developments. Vodopivec never hesitates to provide his own personal views and interpretation of matters.⁵¹ A key pioneer of the new orientations in Slovenian historiography, he also employed socio-economic and cultural history approaches in his monograph, thereby producing an integral and well-balanced account. Vodopivec’s book represents a new qualitative challenge and comprehensive approach to Slovenian history, which so far has too often been interpreted through an excessively one-sided and black-and-white prism.

Socio-historical and anthropological approaches have, thus, met with some response with regard to the period of the occupation 1941–1945 – although the scope of such research still continues to be relatively modest. What is more, this broadened knowledge of World

48 Boris Mlakar: *Ženska kot objekt in subjekt v okviru protirevolucionarnega tabora na Slovenskem med drugo svetovno vojno* [The woman as object and subject in the framework of the counterrevolutionary side in the Slovene lands during the Second World War], in: *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* [Contributions to modern history] 1 (2004), pp. 39–48.

49 *Slovenska novejša zgodovina 1848–1992. Od programa Zedinjene Slovenije do mednarodnega priznanja Republike Slovenije* [Slovenian modern history 1848–1992. From the programme of a United Slovenia to the international recognition of the Republic of Slovenia], Ljubljana et al. 2004.

50 Peter Vodopivec: *Od Pohlinove slovnice do samostojne države. Slovenska zgodovina od konca 18. stoletja do konca 20. stoletja* [From Pohlin’s grammar to an independent state. Slovenian history from the end of the 18th century to the end of the 20th century], Ljubljana 2006.

51 For a somewhat modified version of Vodopivec’s text on World War II see also: Peter Štih/Vasko Simonič/Peter Vodopivec: *Slowenische Geschichte. Gesellschaft-Politik-Kultur*, Graz 2008.

War II too often remains marginal to the general public.⁵² Plenty of work still awaits historians for a more balanced and in-depth examination of all the Second World War in Slovenia. This includes the more classical political, ideological, and military topics, which are far from having been comprehensively researched. In my opinion the distinction between classical historical themes and new approaches is beside the point. Rather, the question is one of balance, to ensure as integral and substantial a depiction of the wartime events as possible.

Concluding, it may be said that Slovenian World War II historiography has experienced a breakthrough in quality over the last 20 years by undergoing a transition from a mainly one-sided representation to in-depth and complex studies, thanks to wider possibilities for conducting free research and a better accessibility of archive materials. This re-evaluation has not only involved the conceptual and political dimensions of history, but also the introduction and assertion of new methodological techniques. Yet, despite the undeniable progress achieved, many open questions remain. What is more, most recent achievements result no less ambivalent than the political and economic transition as a whole, thus providing a highly mixed picture. Conflicting evaluations of the achievements are best illustrated by the age-old dilemma of whether the glass is half-full or half-empty. Despite the fact that no renewed canonical view of the period under occupation has yet been reached and that in fact it does not even make sense to attempt at creating a uniform memory, I think that the historiography of World War II would already mark a significant achievement if it merely became part of “normal”, rather than “exclusive” historiography.

52 Dušan Nečak: *Slowenische Historiographie: Das „Projekt einer anderen Geschichte“*, in: *Klio ohne Fesseln? Historiographie im östlichen Europa nach dem Zusammenbruch des Kommunismus*. Österreichische Osthefte, 1/2 (2002), pp. 335–344.