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Traitors, Cowards, Martyrs, Heroes: Youth Suicide as a Socio-Historical Phenomenon in the 1960s Slovenia

Meta Remec

Ph.D., Research Fellow
Institute of contemporary History
Privoz 11, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia
e-mail: meta.remec@inz.si

Abstract:

The article deals with the phenomenon of youth suicide and attitudes towards suicide in Slovenia after World War II. Based on the police and State Security Service (SDV) reports on suicides, memoirs, newspaper articles, and other materials collected by investigators (such as suicide notes and witness statements), the article sheds light on the social conditions in Slovenia during the 1960s, analyses the discourse of the authorities, the media, and experts in psychiatry, psychology, and criminology on the subject of youth suicide, and highlights the methods used by the socialist authorities to control the citizens. The second part of the article focuses on the police investigation of nine suicides and five attempted suicides of public figures' children, which the authorities considered particularly problematic because the deceased youth were socially engaged, educated, and privileged individuals whose deaths attracted public attention.

Keywords:

suicide, Yugoslavia, 1968, socialism, youth, Aleš Kermauner, Svit Brejc, Borivoj Dedijer

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Introduction¹

"Why was he so unhappy? Why was he such a coward? What else could he have wanted?" asked the Slovenian writer Jože Javoršek in the biography he wrote after his twenty-year-old son fell victim to suicide in 1968.

Javoršek's self-questioning reflects the socialist regime's fears and concerns regarding the alarming phenomenon of youth suicides in socialist Slovenia, which did not correspond to the image of healthy, hardworking, idealistic youth engaged in labour brigades to rebuild the destroyed homeland.

As one of the most developed Yugoslav republics, in the 1960s, Slovenia boasted notable economic development, low unemployment, and a gradually improving living standard. Nevertheless, it still had a suicide rate far above the Yugoslav average. Consequently, the fact that the considerable suicide rate was a Slovenian rather than a general Yugoslav phenomenon meant that the socialist regime was not to blame. The regime refused to accept the foreign newspapers' claims that the increase in the number of suicides was caused by social and political conditions. Instead, it argued that the reasons could be found elsewhere: in Slovenia's history, culture, and traditions, in its Habsburg heritage and its particular Central European mentality, which included tenacity, modesty, perfectionism, and self-aggression.² According to this discourse of intellectuals and media, suicide was seen as inseparable from the Slovenian national character, which was allegedly clearly "Habsburg, Central European, and melancholic".³ Slovenians, "subjugated since time immemorial", who were "pushed to the edge of life with their heads bowed like some unknown, strange, and malnourished European *negroes*", lived "the life that others had expressly determined for them" and were supposedly scarred by a series of psychological failures, including suicide.

"Centuries of slavery have left a negative impact on the strength of the nation." Therefore – even after World War II, which represented the most heroic chapter in this nation's history – Slovenians supposedly remained stuck at the "European periphery", "sad, anxious, and eternally dissatisfied, unable to connect with the optimism of their southern brothers".⁴

¹ The article was written in the context of the research project *Sin, Shame, Symptom: Suicide and Its Perceptions in Slovenia (1850–2000)*, No. J6-3123, financed by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS). I would like to thank Dr John Paul Newman and Orel Beilinson for their invaluable and constructive suggestions during the research and preparation of this text.

² Marko Kerševan, "Razmišljanje o sociološkem ozadju samomorilnosti na Slovenskem", in: Anton Dolenc (ed.), *Samomor na Slovenskem* (Ljubljana, 1990), pp. 183–187, here pp. 185–186 (hereinafter: Kerševan, "Razmišljanje o sociološkem ozadju samomorilnosti na Slovenskem").

³ Kerševan, "Razmišljanje o sociološkem ozadju samomorilnosti na Slovenskem", pp. 185–186.

⁴ Jože Javoršek, *Kako je mogoče* (Maribor, 1978), pp. 11–13 and p. 131 (hereinafter: Javoršek, *Kako je mogoče*).

Statistical data confirm that Slovenia – along with Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia – was one of the former Habsburg territories where the suicide rate had increased the most since the beginning of statistical recording. After the "suicide epidemic" following World War I,⁵ the suicide rate continued to rise until it partially stagnated during World War II. The political authorities expected that socialism would bring a solution, but unfortunately, that did not happen. The authorities as well as the relevant intellectuals noted that there was still a clear "tendency to run away and hide" in the Slovenian society, and it was necessary to establish what people were avoiding and running away from. Suicide was understood as an escape, and the need to escape was supposedly caused by fear and apprehension because "we run away from something that we dislike and fear, and retreat to somewhere that is more convenient and pleasant for us". Is it possible that after all the sacrifices made for the liberation of the country and the nation, people became so dissatisfied and unhappy as to prefer the oblivion of death?⁶

The Slovenian suicide rate failed to align itself with the Yugoslav average and only moved further away from it instead. The sense of a crisis was also fuelled by the fact that the analysts focused on the data collected by Ivo and Bojan Pirc, who calculated an average suicide rate of 19.4 suicides per 100,000 inhabitants for the years from 1931 to 1935, clearly ignoring the fact that the suicide rate in the Slovenian territories that had been part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia had already reached 26 suicides per 100,000 inhabitants in the years between 1937 and 1939.⁷ The police investigators, medical experts, and sociologists who studied the phenomenon of suicides after World War II were firmly convinced that the steep increase had started mainly after 1957, after "the war had long ended and the years of the most severe oppression were over", which was interpreted by the regime's critics as people awakening from the "collectivist euphoria and beginning to resist the oppression", though in a "typically

⁵ Hannes Leidinger, "Die Selbstmordepidemie. Zur Zunahme von Suizidfällen in der Zwischenkriegszeit", in: Wolfgang Kos (ed.), *Kampf um die Stadt: Politik, Kunst und Alltag um 1930* (Wien, 2010), pp. 215–19; Milan Radošević, "Umorni od života: Samoubojstva u Istarskoj provinciji za talijanske uprave između dva svjetska rata, *Problemi sjevernog Jadrana* 16 (2017), pp. 79–102, here p. 96 (hereinafter: Radošević, "Umorni od života").

⁶ Dimitrij Rupel, "Samomor naš vsakdanji", *Sodobnost* (1963) 14, No. 4 (1966), pp. 386–392 (hereinafter: Rupel, "Samomor naš vsakdanji").

⁷ *Statistički godišnjak Kraljevine Jugoslavije*. Knjiga 9 (Beograd, 1938–1939), p. 124; *Statistički godišnjak Kraljevine Jugoslavije*. Knjiga 10 (Beograd, 1940), p. 95; Bojan Pirc and Ivo Pirc, *Življenjska bilanca Slovenije v letih 1921–1935* (Ljubljana, 1937), p. 62.

Slavic, self-destructive manner" – by resorting to suicide.⁸ Their data showed not only an increase in suicides but also a decrease in the average age of suicides, which became a special cause of concern as it indicated that more young people were taking their lives than ever before.⁹ While suicides of other age groups remained an overlooked issue and did not seem to interest the public, the increase in youth suicides during the 1960s became a particularly worrisome phenomenon. What had once been considered a rare phenomenon suddenly became the focus of attention for the authorities, experts, and media.¹⁰

Based on a study of suicide, the present article sheds light on the social conditions in Slovenia during the 1960s, analyses the attitudes of the authorities, the media, and experts in the fields of psychiatry, psychology, and criminology on the subject of youth suicide, and reveals the government's fears and the methods that the authorities used to control the citizens. The second part of the article focuses on a police investigation of nine suicides and five attempted suicides of children of politicians and public figures, which the authorities considered particularly problematic because the suicide victims were socially engaged, educated, and privileged individuals whose deaths attracted public attention. The article aims to show the perception of these events in various sectors of society and draws on the police and State Security Service (SDV) reports on suicides, memoirs, domestic newspapers, anti-regime émigré press, foreign newspapers, and other materials collected by the investigators, such as suicide notes, personal notes of the young suicides, statements of family members and other witnesses, etc.¹¹

The relevant police reports and other regime archive materials were strongly influenced by the contemporaneous ideology and therefore constitute problematic sources whose interpretation calls for their deconstruction and appropriate criticism of the sources. Therefore, the analysis must take into account the exaggerations, inventions, and ideological character of the language used in these sources, as well as the questions of who were the addressees of the reports, whom they intended to please, and – obviously, as we are dealing with the problem of suicide – the emotional burden and trauma involved in the sit-

⁸ Arhiv Republike Slovenije / Archives of the Republic of Slovenia (SI AS), fonds 1931, Republiški sekretariat za notranje zadeve SRS, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 189–193 (hereinafter: SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš); Francesco Russo, "Il club delle vene tagliate", *L'Espresso*, 23 February 1969, No. 8, pp. 16–17; Lev Milčinski, "Samomor in samomorilni poskus", in: Ljubo Bavcon, Miloš Kobal, Lev Milčinski, Katja Vodopivec, and Boris Uderman (eds.), *Socialna patologija* (Ljubljana, 1969), pp. 180–213, here p. 187 (hereinafter: Milčinski, "Samomor in samomorilni poskus"); Niko Grafenauer, "Oblike slovenskega samomora", in: Anton Dolenc (ed.), *Samomor na Slovenskem* (Ljubljana, 1990), pp. 271–290, here pp. 276–278 (hereinafter: Grafenauer, "Oblike slovenskega samomora").

⁹ Grafenauer, "Oblike slovenskega samomora", pp. 276–278.

¹⁰ Thomas G. Masaryk, *Suicide and the meaning of civilization* (Chicago, 1970), p. 29.

¹¹ SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, p. 209.

uation.¹² The research shows that suicide, as in other totalitarian regimes, was perceived as a threat, a form of rebellion, and a means of social critique, even though the reasons for each suicide were intimate and not directly related to the regime. It is also shown that suicides can be an ideal rhetorical device to dramatise or stoke the sense of anxiety and fear, whether the perceived crisis is real and objective or not.¹³

Suicide: a public and political problem

In the 1960s, Yugoslavia was opening up to the West and gaining prominence on the international stage. It was on the path towards liberalisation, introducing market economy elements and providing people with Western-style consumption opportunities. However, in reality, prosperity remained an illusion for the majority. Income inequality increased and nearly 330,000 people were unemployed, 45 % of them under the age of 24.¹⁴ Disappointment spread among the youth, especially the educated. The socialist paradise they had been promised was crumbling.¹⁵

With the help of the SDV, the authorities had monitored negative tendencies among young people since the early 1960s, when student associations and alternative cultural groups began to emerge. At first, these groups – one of which was known as the "Black Cats" – were relatively harmless. However, their behaviour was increasingly often reminiscent of the socially maladjusted bourgeois Western youth, from listening to rock and roll music to wearing black jackets, black underwear, and black sunglasses. They were found to be organising private parties with orgies and partner swapping, all in an attempt to enjoy life to the fullest, as the "young miscreants" were convinced that World War III would soon break out. For the authorities, the main problem was that the "Black Cats" were undoubtedly rejecting the authorities and interfering in the political arena by lur-

¹² Muriel Blaive, "Introduction", in: Muriel Blaive (ed.), *Perceptions of Society in Communist Europe. Regime Archives and Popular Opinion* (London, 2019), pp. 1–12, here p. 6; Paul Corner, "Introduction", in: Paul Corner (ed.), *Popular Opinion in Totalitarian Regimes. Fascism, Nazism, Communism* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 1–13, here p. 12.

¹³ Moritz Föllmer, "Suicide and Crisis in Weimar Berlin", *Central European History* 42, No. 2 (2009), pp. 195–221, here p. 199 (hereinafter: Föllmer, "Suicide and Crisis in Weimar Berlin").

¹⁴ Hrvoje Klasić, "Leto 1968: Jugoslavija in študentske demonstracije", in: Miljana Cunta (ed.), *V iskanju svobode. Leto 1968 in njegova dediščina* (Ljubljana, 2018), pp. 31–44, here pp. 31–33 (hereinafter: Klasić, "Leto 1968").

¹⁵ Gorazd Kovačič, "Študentsko gibanje 1968 znotraj družbenih konfliktov jugoslovanskega socializma", in: Darko Štrajn, Lado Planko, Goranka Kreačič and Cvetka Hedžet Tóth (eds.), *1968: Čas upora, upanja in domišljije – Zgodbe študentskega gibanja 1964–1974* (Ljubljana, 2020), pp. 413–432, here pp. 421–425.

ing the children of high-ranking Party officials into their circles. Their behaviour became increasingly risky and (self)destructive. In their tempting fate by driving in the opposite lane and playing Russian roulette, the SDV agents recognised signs of suicidal behaviour, which puzzled the authorities.¹⁶

The data collected by the Institute of Criminology at the University of Ljubljana between 1964 and 1968 show that not only had the overall suicide rate increased, but that between the first and second halves of the 1960s, youth suicides had also become much more frequent. In fact, the youth suicide rate in Slovenia was the highest not only among the Yugoslav republics but also among the countries with the highest suicide rates in Europe.¹⁷

Table 1: The Yugoslav suicide rate, 1955–1964¹⁸

| YU | BiH | Montenegro | Croatia | Macedonia | Serbia | Vojvodina | Kosovo | Slovenia |
|------|-----|------------|---------|-----------|--------|-----------|--------|----------|
| 14.6 | 8.9 | 17.1 | 16.8 | 4.4 | 11.8 | 25.2 | 4.2 | 30.2 |

Table 2: Suicide in 1964 by age groups¹⁹

| | Slovenia | | Austria | | Czechoslovakia | | Finland | | Hungary | |
|-------|----------|------|---------|------|----------------|------|---------|-----|---------|------|
| Age | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F |
| 10–14 | 5.3 | - | 2.4 | 1.7 | 2.4 | 0.5 | 2.1 | - | 5.0 | 12.7 |
| 15–19 | 20.4 | 14.5 | 16.9 | 6.5 | 17.3 | 7.0 | 8.3 | 2.3 | 21.1 | 15.4 |
| 20–24 | 40.4 | 12.6 | 27.2 | 8.0 | 29.8 | 9.3 | 23.2 | 4.9 | 40.9 | 12.3 |
| 25–29 | 46.5 | 7.9 | 26.8 | 13.3 | 30.7 | 8.6 | 21.1 | 9.0 | 35.2 | 14.7 |
| 30–34 | 44.6 | 13.2 | 32.5 | 10.0 | 35.5 | 10.7 | 42.0 | 7.4 | 44.3 | 13.5 |

¹⁶ SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, p. 168 and pp. 204–213; Juliane Fürst, "Introduction. To Drop or Not to Drop?", in: Juliane Fürst and Josie McLellan (eds.), *Dropping Out of Socialism. The Creation of Alternative Spheres in the Soviet Bloc* (Lanham, 2017), pp. 1–20, here p. 2–3 (hereinafter: Fürst, "Introduction. To Drop or Not to Drop?").

¹⁷ *Prevention of Suicide. WHO: Public Health Papers*, 35 (Geneva, 1968), p. 69; *Statistički godišnjak FNRJ* (Beograd, 1955–1964); SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, p. 204–206.

¹⁸ SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, p. 206.

¹⁹ SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, p. 207.

Between 1964 and 1967, the increase was most pronounced in the 20–24 and 30–34 male age groups, where it had already reached an alarming rate of 70.8 suicides per 100,000 population.²⁰

Table 3: Slovenian youth suicide rate in 1967²¹

| Age | Male | Female |
|----------|------|--------|
| Under 14 | 3.4 | - |
| 15–19 | 17.8 | 5.6 |
| 20–24 | 53.0 | 14.9 |
| 25–29 | 36.5 | 8.2 |
| 30–34 | 70.8 | 12.5 |

By 1968, the need to focus on young people was recognised, though without causing any drama and in a manner that would not alarm the public. The socialist regime opted for a typically totalitarian way of tackling suicide: the Ministry of the Interior instructed the media not to publish news of suicide and to devote more space to cultural, scientific, and industrial progress.²²

The prevalent belief was that the realisation of the socialist dream and ideals would solve the problem: manual workers saw the results of their labour at the end of the day; they were rewarded and satisfied while simultaneously too exhausted to dwell on absurd questions about the meaning of life. Most problems were supposedly caused exclusively by the intellectuals who did not see the real fruits of their labour, as their activities were often an end in itself.²³ Nevertheless, the authorities recognised the need for an integrated approach that required cooperation with experts from various fields. The Slovenian Youth Association called for "professional and political" research into the background of youth suicides, suicide attempts, and deaths due to high-risk activities such as mountaineering, which was supposedly a Slovenian particularity compared to the other Yugoslav nations. The roots of alcoholism, self-destructive tendencies, and apparent inferiority complexes, which were supposedly deeply rooted

²⁰ SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, p. 208; *Demografska statistika Zveznega zavoda za statistiko za leto 1964* (Beograd, 1967), p. 17.

²¹ SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, p. 208.

²² Radošević, "Umorni od života", pp. 99–100.

²³ SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 168 and pp. 204–213.

in Slovenian society and represented an integral part of upbringing, were to be investigated.²⁴

The psychiatrist Lev Milčinski organised a group of experts, including a specialist in paediatrics and psychiatry, a sociologist, a psychologist, a criminologist, a jurist, and a journalist, to study the suicide cases of people under the age of twenty from various points of view. They recommended that a special centre for suicide prevention be established to study the phenomenon and coordinate prevention campaigns. The experts warned policymakers that suicide was a seismograph that indicated various disturbances in interpersonal and social relationships and that action had to be taken before a devastating shock occurred. If suicide was considered an indicator of what was going on at the very foundations of society, it was obvious that something or someone was undermining the foundations established after World War II and that a formal investigation was urgent.²⁵ Both the politicians and the expert group members were against discussing the issue in public because of the danger that it would be blown out of proportion and make a deeper impression than necessary and that the public would react with panic. It was noted that the relevant data should be analysed correctly, judiciously, and, most importantly, internally. However, while the experts were worried that a single suicide by a young person, especially a charismatic personality, could trigger an avalanche by encouraging others to engage in self-destructive acts that they themselves would not otherwise have the courage to do, the politicians were afraid that spreading news about suicides among young people could cause unfounded fears and result in an erroneous assumption of an epidemic and consequently threaten their position.²⁶

The Ministry of the Interior agreed to cooperate: while the Registry of Suicide and Suicide Attempts in Slovenia at the Ljubljana Psychiatric Hospital was not officially established until 1970, the archival materials indicate that close cooperation between the psychiatric profession and the Public Security Administration had already been established earlier. The police would report each case discovered in the field, and these would then be entered into the Registry together with the crucial relevant demographic data and information on the occupation of the deceased, an assessment of their mental state, and the basic findings of the police investigation such as the motive, state of intoxication before the crime, location of the act, manner in which the suicide was carried out, and whether there had been previous suicide attempts. These police reports, which were sub-

²⁴ SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, p. 189–201; SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, p. 168–185, 27 November 1969.

²⁵ SI AS 1931, 1728, 226, 24/2-2-69.

²⁶ Milčinski, "Samomor in samomorilni poskus", p. 183. This is proved by the case of a young man, Vladimir Kovič, who openly admired suicides, talked and read about them, and saw them a sign of courage before resorting to suicide himself (SI AS 1931, 1417, Kovič Vladimir – samomor).

mitted to the members of the expert group for further analysis, also included information on the social circumstances and the basic statements from witnesses and relatives, all of which was used to assess the mental health of the suicide victims and their motives for the suicide. The cooperation between the expert group and the police was excellent, and there were no differences between them at the discursive level. In the files of the investigated suicide cases, the same negative labels for the deceased youth can be found: spoiled, reckless, unpredictable, awkward around women, a product of the petty-bourgeois environment lacking solid moral and socialist foundations. Instead of contributing to a better, classless socialist society, the young individuals in question supposedly wasted their time drinking, partying, and engaging in immoral behaviour, and they were guilty of contempt for the authorities and rejection of all that was wholesome, industrious, and desirable. At all levels, investigators would find evidence of moral decay, unhealthy sexual practices, homosexuality, etc. Reports often pointed out that the individuals involved were illegitimate children and fatherless orphans (a common occurrence in the postwar period) and that they had been growing up in a prosperous and thoroughly female environment dominated by mothers, grandmothers, and aunts, without any strong male role models. The investigators wondered how these young people who played Russian roulette had been raised, why they were so self-destructive, and why their own lives meant so little to them. It is evident from these files that the youth were completely misunderstood and in distress because they could not overcome their inner struggles and cope with everyday life. The behaviour of the young suicides was considered "desertion", which contradicted their "positive qualities" and everything society expected of them.²⁷

The police investigators determined that the causes of the suicides were not related to the socialist regime but rather to physical and mental suffering, problems in school, domestic disputes, "overtiredness", delusions of love, or financial difficulties. Supposedly, most of these issues could have been easily overcome with the proper approach and stricter discipline and were no different than in the decades before the establishment of the socialist regime. For the politicians, however, this was no consolation: it meant that no progress (or at least not enough of it) had been made, that society had failed, and that the re-education system did not work.²⁸

²⁷ SI AS 1931, 1417, Smasek Alenka – samomor, p. 8–12, 18 June 1968; SI AS 1931, 1681/96, 24/G2-63; SI AS 1931, 1417, Hašiš, Batista Boris – podhladitev, Kogovšek Peter – nesreča, Grimm Vincenc – samomor?; SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, Kovač Vojin-Chubby; Onja Tekavčič Grad, "Zgodovina suicidologije na Slovenskem", in: Saška Roškar and Alja Videtič Paska (eds.), *Samomor v Sloveniji in po svetu. Opredelitev, raziskovanje, preprečevanje in obravnava* (Ljubljana, 2021), pp. 37–52, here p. 39; SI AS 1931, 1728, Dokončani samomori, Poročanje centru za preprečevanje suicidov.

²⁸ Radošević, "Umorni od života", pp. 87–91; Föllmer, "Suicide and Crisis in Weimar Berlin", pp. 211–215.

"The suicide club" and the investigation "Hashish"

The attempts to solve the problem quietly failed. The turning point, however, was not the number of suicides but the release of a film. In 1967, the Slovenian director Mako Sajko presented the documentary *Suicides Beware! (Samomorilci, pozor!)* at the Martovski Documentary Film Festival in Belgrade, which publicised the problem of youth suicides in Slovenia.²⁹ In doing so, he opened Pandora's box by discussing a phenomenon that, according to the authorities and experts, was unsuitable to address in public. Although the film does not directly criticise the authorities or portray suicide as a rebellion against the regime, the picture of society presented by it was so poignant that it was banned. The story was picked up by the domestic, foreign (Italian, French and German), and regime-critical émigré press, which looked for signs of the imminent collapse of the socialist system in the rising youth suicide rates. In 1968, the scandal took on an additional dimension: after the suicides of Svit Brejc and other children of the Communist Party officials and prominent public figures, speculations began about the existence of a suicide club among students in Ljubljana that allegedly encouraged suicide in young people and even killed those who might change their minds before the end.³⁰

The Ministry of the Interior gave clear instructions that the matter was unsuitable for newspaper coverage.³¹ The media were instructed not to pay attention to these "individual decisions" because of the danger that these actions would be mythologised. The pressure was clear: the editor-in-chief, several Communist Party officials, and even Stane Kavčič, the Slovenian Prime Minister himself, tried to persuade the author of the article "Klub samomorilcev – da ali ne?" ("Suicide Club – Yes or No?") from publishing the article. However, the authorities did not use their powers of repression to prevent newspapers from openly speculating about the existence of an organised suicide club.³² The issue was also picked up by the Croatian newspaper *Vijestnik u srijedu* (Wednesday News) and especially by the Serbian newspaper *Politika Express* (Politics Express), which published six articles on the problem of suicide in Slovenia between 4 and 10 February 1969. The Slovenian press analysed the issue, presented the data on the increasing number of suicides, and called for action but refused to speculate on the causes of this phenomenon. Meanwhile,

²⁹ Gregor Kocijančič, "Ta film je postal svetovni problem. Mako Sajko, režiser dokumentarnih filmov", *Mladina*, 17 September 2021, No. 37, p. 56.

³⁰ SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 189–193; Francesco Russo, "Il club delle vene tagliate", *L'Espresso*, 23 February 1969, No. 8, pp. 16–17.

³¹ SI AS 1931, 1719, 19; SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 164–167.

³² Tone Fornezzi, "Klub samomorilcev – da ali ne?", *Tedenska tribuna*, 19 June 1968, No. 25, p. 2; SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, p. 104, 17 June 1968.

SLOVENIJA PRVA NA SVETU PO MLADINSKIH SAMOMORIH!
KLUB SAMOMORILCEV – DA ALI NE?

The dilemma in the newspapers: "Suicide Club – Yes or No?" (Tone Fornezzi, "Klub samomorilcev – da ali ne?", *Tedenska tribuna*, 19 June 1968, No. 25, p. 2)

the Serbian and Croatian media were more critical and were used to attack the Slovenian authorities. The youth suicides in question supposedly represented a rebellion against the "Slovenian reality without ideals", a reflection of a nation that had never felt at home in the Yugoslav federation, where boredom and alienation reigned and where no real socialist ideals had ever existed. The Serbian press cynically reported that Slovenians were in such a state because they felt superior to the rest of the country, constantly looked towards the "north", and did not have the proper attitude towards the Yugoslav idea, the Communist Party, or the Yugoslav People's Army, and that the existence of a suicide club was a sign of incompetent leadership.³³

Rumours about such suicide clubs emerged elsewhere, especially during the period of crisis and social change,³⁴ but the Slovenian case attracted international attention and was picked up almost immediately by foreign newspapers. The émigré press wrote that the situation resulted from the experiments to which the authorities had subjected the population and was caused by constant intimidation, pressure, and control that they exercised.³⁵ Suicide was presented as the ultimate means of rebellion by the youth who no longer had any control over anything in their lives except life itself.³⁶ For the critics of the regime, the increase in suicides after 1960 represented proof that the new ideology had failed.³⁷ The evidenced decline in the average age of suicides was supposedly a clear sign that people were awakening from the "collectivist euphoria" and beginning to resist oppression, though in a typically Slovenian, passive-aggressive way.³⁸ The foreign media, which reported 117 youth suicides

³³ SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 189–201; SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 168–185, 27 November 1969; SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 194–195; "Brei des Hasses", *Der Spiegel*, 3 March 1969, No. 10, p. 132.

³⁴ Marcin Zaremba, "Rozmowy Polaków przy wódce. Rok 1951" [Conversations of Poles drinking vodka. The year 1951], in: Piotr Kulas and Krzysztof Świrek (eds.), *Miejsca sporu. Księga dedykowana profesorowi Pawłowi Śpiewakowi* [Matters of dispute. A book dedicated to Professor Paweł Śpiewak] (Warszawa, 2020), pp. 315–327, here p. 316.

³⁵ "Kaj pišejo. Iz pisem iz domovine", *Svobodna Slovenija*, 29 August 1968, No. 35, p. 2.

³⁶ "Noče umreti", *Svobodna Slovenija*, 25 April 1968, No. 17, p. 1.

³⁷ Rupel, "Samomor naš vsakdanji", pp. 386–392; Milčinski, "Samomor in samomorilni poskus", p. 187.

³⁸ Grafenauer, "Oblike slovenskega samomora", pp. 276–278; SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 189–201, 5 March 1969.



A dramatic newspaper title in the Italian press: "The slashed veins club. Ljubljana: Among the witnesses of the most dramatic wave of suicides that has ever occurred in Europe" (Francesco Russo, "Il club delle vene tagliate, *L'Espresso*", 23 February 1969, No. 8, p. 1).

in the Ljubljana area in 1968 alone, noted that Slovenian society had "left the countryside and the old religion behind" but could not (or would not) replace them with the communist ideology and was overwhelmed by a death wish. Especially the thoughtful, intellectual youth suffered because they saw no prospects for development or other means of escape.³⁹ Not only the media claimed that "Slovenian society was overwhelmed by a longing for death": Vladimir Bar-

³⁹ SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašič, pp. 189–201.



The anonymous threatening letter from the supposed Suicide Club (SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 110–111)

tol also describes the spiritual state of Slovenian society as harbouring a genuine desire "to die young like Klement Jug and Srečko Kosovel"⁴⁰ and claims that "never to grow old and infirm and to remain forever in the splendour of one's first youth, beautiful and unique" was seen as a kind of grace from the gods.⁴¹

Media reports of the growing number of suicides as evidence of the regime's rejection and as a drastic way out were ideological and damaging to the regime, which had no adequate means to deny the published statements. The validity of these claims is questionable and cannot be proven,

⁴⁰ Klement Jug (1898–1924) was a Slovenian philosopher and writer who died during his ascent to mount Triglav in unclear circumstances (Marko Klavora, "Klement Jug in njegov vstop v alpinizem", in: Gorazd Bajc and Borut Klabjan (eds.), *Pirjevčev zbornik: poti zgodovine med Severnim Jadranom, srednjo in vzhodno Evropo: ob 70. obletnici akad. prof. dr. Jožeta Pirjevca* (Koper, 2011), pp. 111–130). Srečko Kosovel (1904–1926) was a Slovenian modernist poet (France Koblar, "Kosovel, Srečko (1904–1926)". *Slovenska biografija*. Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, Znanstvenoraziskovalni center SAZU, 2013, available at: <http://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi293661/#slovenski-biografski-leksikon>, accessed: 13 November 2022).

⁴¹ SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 189–193; Francesco Russo, "Il club delle vene tagliate", *L'Espresso*, 23 February 1969, No. 8, pp. 16–17; Tomo Virk, *Bakle in diktatorji. Jug, Bartol et consortes* (Ljubljana: 2016), p. 141.

either in the case of the suicides among the Slovenian vanguard youth or for the deaths among the Slovenian youth in general. In fact, recent studies have shown that the critics of the regime did not have the mobilising power to influence the masses, as the average Yugoslav worker had no real reason to start a new revolution. Even most youth had no ambitions to challenge the regime's power and hardly felt oppressed. The student protests between 1968 and 1971 did not call for the system's overthrow but for its radicalisation. The first generation born and raised after the war called for changes in the political and social sphere, targeted the "old, revolutionary, Partisan generation", but remained firmly within the system. It did not demand that the regime be replaced: the Yugoslav generational conflict was based primarily on the fact that the "fathers" had lost the true path. The ruling elite was targeted because of its inefficiency in carrying out the socialist revolution: the youth demanded "the authentic Yugoslav socialism" they had been promised, not the version in which they had grown up.⁴²

Nevertheless, the damage was done, the atmosphere was tense, and the authorities were embarrassed by being dragged through the mud by the foreign media, so it was decided at the level of the Ministry of the Interior that the matter would be carefully investigated. The investigators noted that immediately after the publication of these articles, they received an abundance of information from concerned parents from various parts of the country to whom their teenagers confided that they were members of a suicide club. Most of these reports were dismissed on the grounds that they were merely attempts of spoiled teenagers to attract attention or excuses for poor school performance. Greater attention was paid only to the case of the 17-year-old Z. R., who attempted suicide after receiving a blank, partially burned piece of paper and a blue silk ribbon, which she took as a hint from Aleš Kermauner's friends to kill herself. The investigators also took into evidence an anonymous letter in which a sixteen-year-old schoolgirl S. M. had received instructions to commit suicide before 20 August 1968 or that someone would help her do it. Though the basis for their conclusion is unclear, the investigators determined that this was mere peer bullying rather than a genuine threat.⁴³

⁴² Gašper Troha, "Družbena vloga literarnega modernizma v slovenski dramatiki", in: Gašper Troha (ed.), *Literarni modernizem v 'svinčenih letih'* (Ljubljana, 2008), pp. 6–15, here pp. 14–15; Mitja Čander, "Maškarada", in: Gašper Troha (ed.), *Literarni modernizem v 'svinčenih letih'* (Ljubljana, 2008), pp. 150–169, here pp. 152–153; Klasić, "Leto 1968", pp. 31–33 and pp. 37–41; Pavle Kristan, "Leta, ki so pretresla svet in oblikovala generacijo: Za živ socializem", in: Darko Štrajn, Lado Planko, Goranka Kreačič and Cvetka Hedžet Tóth, (eds.), *1968: Čas upora, upanja in domišljije – Zgodbe študentskega gibanja 1964–1974* (Ljubljana, 2020), pp. 251–271, here p. 251; Ljubica Spaskovska, *The last Yugoslav generation: the rethinking of youth politics and cultures in late socialism* (Manchester, 2020), pp. 39–41 (hereinafter: Spaskovska, *The last Yugoslav generation*).

⁴³ SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 4–6, p. 96 and pp. 110–111.



A police photo of Alenka Smasek's funeral (SI AS 1931, 1417, Hašiš, Alenka Smasek)

For a long time, the police refused to look for connections between the suicides. It insisted on a classic investigation of each suicide, looked for individual reasons such as school failure, failures with the opposite sex, or family problems, and the investigators were by no means willing to consider any systemic faults. All of this changed with the death of Svit Brejc, which came into focus because of his family situation, and especially the eighteen-year-old student Alenka Smasek. Whereas the previous suicide cases were characterised by the fact that the relevant materials were destroyed by the suicides themselves before their deaths to prevent others from peering into their minds or were taken and destroyed by friends of the deceased to prevent any in-depth analysis, Smasek left behind extensive materials that revealed the connections between the young intellectuals and enabled the police to launch an investigation. With her death, it became clear that several suicides since the death of the actor Janez Čuk in 1964 needed to be investigated.⁴⁴ It turned out that these young people moved in the same cultural circles, visited each other, and passed around tranquilisers, antipsychotics, and other drugs. The network of relationships and connections that emerged during the first part of the investigation

⁴⁴ SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 189–203; "Janezu Čuku v spomin", *Delo*, 8 July 1964, No. 184, p. 5; "Osmrtnica", *Delo*, 9 July 1964, No. 185, p. 8.

appeared extremely troubling, especially when it became clear that more and more children of Party officials and public figures were involved. The authorities launched a large-scale investigation into nine suicides and five attempted suicides by prominent figures occurring between 1965 and 1968 called *Hashish*.

The investigations involved wiretapping, surveillance, photographing funerals to identify the acquaintances of the young suicides, and house searches. Due to the significant reduction of the State Security Service (SDV) personnel in 1966, the investigations were taken over by the Criminal Investigation Department, though in obvious cooperation with the State Security Service, which had the technical means to wiretap the persons of interest.⁴⁵ The cooperation with the SDV is not formally mentioned in the sources, but it certainly took place. Numerous unsigned and sometimes even comical reports of field operatives exist who carried out the surveillance and followed the persons under investigation at every turn, reporting even such trivial things as "They did not make any *čevapčiči* today". The investigators observed the funerals of the young suicides, noting who was present and who appeared particularly upset and grieving. Indeed, at Aleš Kermauner's, it was noted that Marko Pogačnik and the members of the group called OHO held a guard of honour wearing special uniforms and caps. It did not go unnoticed that the funeral became a part of their performance, and the authorities saw this as a mockery of the Partisan honour guard that traditionally performed at the funerals of former Partisan fighters.⁴⁶ The cooperation with the SDV is also evident from the occasional criminal investigators' complaints that they could not record conversations because the "installation of the device was not satisfactory" but that they were already "in agreement with the SDV to remedy this". Clearly, the authorities knew the content of private conversations and had access to letters that the suspects had received from abroad.⁴⁷ The fact that the reports detailing the results of the investigation were sent to the Slovenian Minister of the Interior and the Slovenian Prime Minister testifies to the fact that the authorities considered the suicides an extremely urgent problem.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ljuba Dornik Šubelj, "Aleš Kermauner, sin Dušana Kermavnerja, v dokumentih Arhiva Republike Slovenije", in: Aleksander Žižek and Jurij Perovšek (eds.) *Med politiko in zgodovino: Življenje in delo dr. Dušana Kermavnerja (1903–1975)* (Ljubljana, 2005), pp. 81–87 (hereinafter: Dornik Šubelj, "Aleš Kermauner"). See also: Ana Šela, Tadeja Melanšek and David Hazemali, "Ustroj in delovanje slovenske tajne politične policije v drugi polovici šestdesetih let dvajsetega stoletja", *Studia Historica Slovenica* 20, No. 3 (2020), pp. 811–838.

⁴⁶ Taras Kermauner, *Med gledališčem in fikcijo. Med sanjami in budnostjo* (Ljubljana, 2007), p. 44 (hereinafter: Kermauner, *Med gledališčem in fikcijo*); SI AS 1931, 1417, Alenka Smasek.

⁴⁷ SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 127–128; pp. 119–122, 2 November 1968.

⁴⁸ SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 127–128; pp. 135–137, 17 December 1968; pp. 186–188, 30 June 1982; SI AS 1931, 1417, Smasek Alenka – samomor, pp. 3–6, 12 June 1968.

In addition to some prominent intellectuals like Dušan Pirjevec,⁴⁹ Ivan Mrak,⁵⁰ Marko Prepeluh,⁵¹ and Edvard Kocbek,⁵² who were already under SDV surveillance, another 57 suspects (14 women and 43 men) were identified. They were mostly students: ten of them were born between 1933 and 1944, while the rest were born after the war, between 1945 and 1952. Together with their family members, they were monitored because of their criminal background and their political, cultural, and artistic activities. The investigators divided them into seven subgroups, and each of these was assigned to a different investigator: "Mamila" (Drugs), "Generacija '47" (Generation '47), "OHO", "Grupa Stari trg 11" (Old Square 11 Group), "SNS" (Slovenian National Party), "Grupa 442" (Group 442), and "Katalogovci" (The Cataloguers). The authorities sought to determine the extent of these groups' political activities, dismantle the network of drug traffickers, identify those who corrupted the youth through a network of cultural and artistic groups suspected of hostile political activities, and, above all, determine whether a youth suicide club really existed. The wiretaps revealed that at the meetings of these cultural groups, political issues and social relations were discussed more often than literature and art. Because of the obvious educational disparity between the young academics and the members of the police and the SDV, who often had no formal education, investigators were usually unable to truly decipher the meaning of the conversations. The world of art and the philosophy of the absurd were foreign and incomprehensible to them, so they could only make sweeping judgments about the new art genres as "sick, abnormal, unrelated to real life" and take them as a sign of a "terrible mental

⁴⁹ Dušan Pirjevec (1921–1977) was a Slovenian Partisan, literary historian and philosopher. He was one of the most influential public intellectuals in post-World War II Slovenia and a Professor at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana (Martin Breclj, "Pirjevec, Dušan (1921–1977)". *Slovenska biografija*. Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, Znanstvenoraziskovalni center SAZU, 2013, available at: <http://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi941730/#primorski-slovenski-biografski-leksikon>, accessed: 15 November 2022).

⁵⁰ Ivan Mrak (1906–1986) was a Slovenian playwright, actor, director, writer, and essayist (Ivan Mrak, *Izbrano delo. Proza, drame, dnevniki* (Ljubljana, 1998).

⁵¹ Marko Prepeluh (1921–1998) was a Slovenian lawyer and son of the social-democratic politician Albin Prepeluh (Franc Rozman, "Korespondenca Albina Prepeluha v letih 1917/18", *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 28, No. 1–2 (1988), pp. 175–199).

⁵² Edvard Kocbek (1904–1981) was a Slovenian poet, writer, essayist, translator, member of the Christian Socialists within the Liberation Front of the Slovenian Nation, and a Slovenian Partisan. After the war, he was a Slovenian minister in the federal government until 1946. After his return from Belgrade in 1946, he was also the vice-president of the Presidium of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia and a federal deputy. Due to the political dispute surrounding the book *Strah in pogum* (Fear and Courage), which addressed some taboo issues from the Slovenian People's Liberation Struggle (Kocbek's outlooks on the death and liquidation of the political opponents, the issue of betrayal and deception among the Partisans, the issue of Catholics in the People's Liberation Struggle), he was forced to retire in 1952 and was under surveillance for the rest of his life (Andrej Inkret, *In stoletje bo zardelo: Kocbek, življenje in delo* (Ljubljana, 2011); Andrej Inkret and Peter Kovačič Peršin, "Edvard Kocbek naš sodobnik", *Sodobnost* 39, No. 6–7 (1991), pp. 565–579).

degeneration" that had to be eradicated or it might infect an entire generation of young people. The reporters described the young intellectuals as unbalanced and noted, with relief, that they were at least not political dissidents.⁵³

The suicides of two (or more) connected young people who took their own lives at the same time or in the same narrow time frame were most concerning, as this suggested a degree of organisation and planning. In these cases, the deceased could not simply be labelled as failed and lonely outcasts who could not cope with their own failures. The joint decision of two or more people to die by suicide without anyone around them noticing any negative tendencies meant that society had failed completely and that the entire social environment and every lead that was uncovered had to be examined meticulously.⁵⁴ The investigation was constantly hampered by the lack of written sources. The few farewell letters found were analysed but did not provide any answers to the questions that the deaths had raised. Borut Bartol, the self-proclaimed "Banzai philosopher" and the son of the eminent Slovenian writer Vladimir Bartol, stated that he was a *kamikaze* who "will fulfil his last task to the smallest detail". He also stated that "a person's entire life is completely absurd and illusory" and that he was retiring "at the age of 24, before graduation and at the beginning of a brilliant academic career, knowing that he will achieve absolutely nothing with his death", which meant that he would accomplish nothing with his life either and that his existence was completely meaningless. Puzzled by these records and wondering whether there was something else in the background that they did not understand, the investigators searched the records for hidden meanings and secret connections, feeling that they had missed something and that there was a threat to the system and society that they did not see because it was hidden in all the nonsense, as they did not want to believe that the deaths of these young people could be completely senseless.⁵⁵

Fathers and sons

The *Hashish* investigation focused particularly on the suicides of Aleš Kermauner (1946–1966), Borivoj Dedijer (1945–1966), and Svit Brejc (1947–1968), which were seen as the trigger for all other suicides and could also be interpre-

⁵³ SI AS 1931, 1417, Hašič, Smasek Alenka – samomor, pp. 3–6, 12 June 1968; Marci Shore, "(The end of) Communism as a Generational History: Some Thoughts on Czechoslovakia and Poland", *Contemporary European History* 18, No. 3 (2009), pp. 303–329, here p. 309 (hereinafter: Shore, "(The end of) Communism").

⁵⁴ SI AS 1931, 1719, 19.

⁵⁵ SI AS 1931, 1417, Hašič, Bartol Borut – samomor.

ted as examples of a showdown between the generation of war-hero fathers and sons who were "still receiving pocket money" at the same age – or, as Marci Shore noted, an "Oedipal revolt of each generation of sons against its succession". Such a generational break was not a Slovenian peculiarity, as it also occurred in other societies, not only socialist, except that the withdrawal of "Slovenian sons" was more extreme than elsewhere.⁵⁶ The historiographical, sociological, anthropological, and political study of this phenomenon has proven that "generation" is "often an elusive, slippery concept that requires more precise definition depending on the context of analysis".⁵⁷ The "deauthorisation of the fathers", "the radical alienation of the sons", and the recurrent political expressions of this alienation were studied from various viewpoints to understand the "self-sacrificing idealism, the populism, and the murderous and suicidal irrationalism of militant youth movements", as Alan Spitzer called them.⁵⁸ What was often the main question were the reasons for this disillusionment and rejection of the older generation's values and whether the "irrational youth" had grounds for rejecting the authority of their fathers. As early as the 1960s, Slovenian intellectuals noted that society tended to attribute all negative tendencies too quickly and too easily to harmful influences from the West when, in fact, there was a lack of self-criticism and self-reflection on the actual social situation in Slovenia.⁵⁹

Contrary to popular belief, the passive "young rebels" that were "characteristically the children of yesterday's radicals" and revolutionaries⁶⁰ had a very difficult time prospering despite their obvious privileges. In most cases, they could not compete or match their heroic Partisan and vanguard parents, and the question arose whether the children who chose suicide were the most determined and militant or those who faltered first.⁶¹

The relevant reports suggest that the three young students – Aleš, Borivoj, and Svit – were friends connected through drug use. They belonged to the same cultural groups and, above all, shared complicated relations with their fathers. The difficult family circumstances and disappointment with the role of the hero fathers seem to be a *leitmotif*: all three were children of writers, communists,

⁵⁶ Shore, "(The end of) Communism", p. 313; Fürst, "Introduction. To Drop or Not to Drop?", p. 2.

⁵⁷ Spaskovska, *The last Yugoslav generation*, pp. 7–8.

⁵⁸ Alan B. Spitzer, "The Historical Problem of Generations", *The American Historical Review* 78, No. 5 (1973), pp. 1353–1385, here p. 1365 (hereinafter: Spitzer, "The Historical Problem of Generations").

⁵⁹ Rupel, "Samomor naš vsakdanji", pp. 386–392.

⁶⁰ Kenneth Keniston, *Youth and Dissent* (New York, 1971), pp. 273–274; Spitzer, "The Historical Problem of Generations", p. 1366.

⁶¹ Meta Kušar, "Med arhetipom in kompleksom", in: Gašper Troha (ed.), *Literarni modernizem v 'svinčenih letih'* (Ljubljana, 2008), pp. 16–43, here pp. 26–27 (hereinafter: Kušar, "Med arhetipom in kompleksom").

and active fighters against Nazism who, at some point, fell out of favour with the authorities. All three fathers were convicted at show trials by the regime and forced to "earn" their way back into the Communist elite. Vladimir Dedijer,⁶² Dušan Kermauner⁶³ (1903–1975), and Jože Javoršek⁶⁴ (1920–1990) were prominent public figures, and their children's suicides could not go unnoticed.

It was important for the regime to find a scapegoat. The finger was pointed at intellectuals and cultural figures such as Dušan Pirjevec and Edvard Kocbek, who were seen as harmful influences on the youth. The protagonists of the disputes and related showdowns were not the authorities directly but rather the intellectuals who supported the regime.⁶⁵ Jože Javoršek, who went from a regime's victim to its collaborator, played a crucial role. Javoršek attacked Dušan Pirjevec in his novel *Nevarna razmerja* (Dangerous Affairs) and publicly accused Edvard Kocbek of being involved in the suicide of his son and several suicides of young intellectuals during that period by inciting them to doubt everything and everyone.⁶⁶ According to Javoršek, it was under Kocbek's influ-

⁶² Vladimir Dedijer (1914–1990) was a Partisan, politician, scientist, and Tito's formal biographer. In the early post-war years, he represented Yugoslavia in the United Nations and was a senior government official. In 1954, Dedijer defended the political dissident Milovan Djilas and his right to freedom of expression before the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. In response, Dedijer was expelled from the Party, removed from his political offices, and dismissed from his teaching position at the History Department of the University of Belgrade. Djilas was jailed, while Dedijer received a suspended prison sentence of six months. In 1959, Dedijer was allowed to leave the country with his family. From then on, he devoted himself to writing about history and teaching. He taught at the University of Belgrade and served as visiting professor of history at various universities in the United States (Michigan, Harvard, Stanford, Princeton, Yale) and Europe (the Sorbonne, Paris; Manchester, England; and Stockholm, Sweden). In 1978, he became a full member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts ("Vladimir Dedijer". *Wikipedia*, available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Dedijer, accessed: 15 November 2022).

⁶³ Dušan Kermauner (1903–1975) was a politician, historian, publicist, and member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia since 1920. He was arrested in 1948 and put to a show trial for his alleged collaboration with the Gestapo while imprisoned in the Buchenwald concentration camp during the World War II. After more than a year of physical and psychological torture in prison, he was released when he agreed to collaborate with the SDV and retire from public service (Taras Kermauner, "Dušan Kermavner kot komunist v slovenski zgodovini ali z osnutka za življenjepis Dušana Kermavnerja", in: Žižek, Aleksander and Perovšek, Jurij (eds.), *Med politiko in zgodovino: življenje in del dr. Dušana Kermavnerja* (1903–1975) (Ljubljana, 2005), pp. 7–14; Jože Pirjevec, "Dušan Kermauner", available at: <https://www.sazu.si/clani/dusan-kermavner>, accessed: 15 November 2022).

⁶⁴ Jože Javoršek alias Jože Brejc (1920–1990) was a Slovenian Partisan, communist, and writer. Javoršek was put to a show trial in 1948 and condemned to seven years in prison. He earned his way back among the communist elite by becoming an active member of the SDV and especially by monitoring Edvard Kocbek (Andrej Inkret, "Jože Brejc–Franček alias Jože Javoršek ali spregledano poglavje iz Kocbekove biografije", *Sodobnost* (1963) 75, No. 12 (2011), pp. 1596–1605) (hereinafter: "Jože Brejc–Franček alias Jože Javoršek ali spregledano poglavje iz Kocbekove biografije").

⁶⁵ Ivo Svetina and Meta Kušar, "Meta Kušar z Ivom Svetino", *Sodobnost* (1963) 72, No. 1 (2008), pp. 25–44 (hereinafter: Kušar and Svetina, "Meta Kušar z Ivom Svetino"); Anja Pirnat, "Jože Javoršek in Matej Bor: Korespondenca 1955–1988", *Slavistična revija*, 68, No. 2 (2020), pp. 153–156 (hereinafter: Pirnat, "Jože Javoršek in Matej Bor: Korespondenca 1955–1988").

⁶⁶ Pirnat, "Jože Javoršek in Matej Bor: Korespondenca 1955–1988", pp. 153–156.



The cover of Jože Javoršek's book *Kako je mogoče* (Jože Javoršek, *Kako je mogoče* (Maribor, 1969))

ence that contemporary Slovenian literature started to celebrate the cult of misfortune and death, while any expression of *joie de vivre* in art was labelled as shallow, naïve, and trivial. The Partisan movement and all those who remained faithful to its ideas and morality were ridiculed and "dragged through the mud" because of Kocbek and his associates. "The only heroic chapter in the nation's history" was maligned, and anaemic quasi-intellectuals were celebrated, filling the minds of the youth with theories of chaos and absurdity.⁶⁷

However, the person that Javoršek attacked most resolutely was his own son and his generation of "cowards, incompetents, and failures". In the biography *Kako je mogoče* (How Is It Possible), first published in 1969, Javoršek called his son a "traitor" and wrote openly that he considered his son's suicide a clearly anti-Slovenian act and a betrayal, which he deeply resented his son for. He was ashamed of him as a father, a communist, and a Slovenian. In his opinion, the youth of such a small nation as Slovenia should develop greater creative powers than that of larger nations, and it should be revolutionary, courageous, and bold. Instead, the Slovenian youth were mindless, disintegrated,

⁶⁷ Inkret, "Jože Brejc–Franček alias Jože Javoršek ali spregledano poglavje iz Kocbekove biografije, pp. 1596–1605, here p. 1604; Javoršek, *Kako je mogoče*, pp. 12–13.

idle, and, sadly, among the first in the world in terms of suicide rate. The new generation had allegedly lost all the positive qualities of the previous generation of fighters and, according to Javoršek, consisted of weak eternal whiners, although they no longer had any reason for this.⁶⁸ Javoršek asked himself where all the energy and belief in a better future had gone and was deeply disappointed with the turn the society had taken. It seemed that the youth had adopted the worst from the past as well as from the contemporaneous society: the "*dolce far niente balcanese*" attitude undermined the traditional Slovenian work morale, while the Slovenian youth did not possess the energy, optimism, and vitality like the other Yugoslav nations. Javoršek accused his son of escaping rather than developing his talents and putting them at the service of the nation. Instead of thanking those who gave him a life of peace and prosperity, he chose death by suicide. Javoršek wrote:

No fear of life could or should have driven you to death. All you should have done was roll up your sleeves and work like millions of others, and in addition to all the weekdays and everything they involve, you would have also experienced holidays. I would only accept your action if it were crystal clear that you would go hungry for the rest of your life, forced to walk around naked in the street and lie down wherever you happened to find yourself when you were exhausted. I say to myself: my son has evaluated the hardships of life and the nothingness of death, and the hardships seemed immeasurably worse, so he decided to die. It would be sad, as any misery is sad. But none of life's hardships threatened you.⁶⁹

Javoršek represented the older "generation of fighters and Partisan heroes", "the avant-garde", and "the carriers of progress". He was convinced that the youth were undoing these achievements, although they were only holding up a mirror to the fathers and showing them that in the two decades after the end of the war, they had turned into ordinary and very boring petty-bourgeois *apparatchiks*.⁷⁰

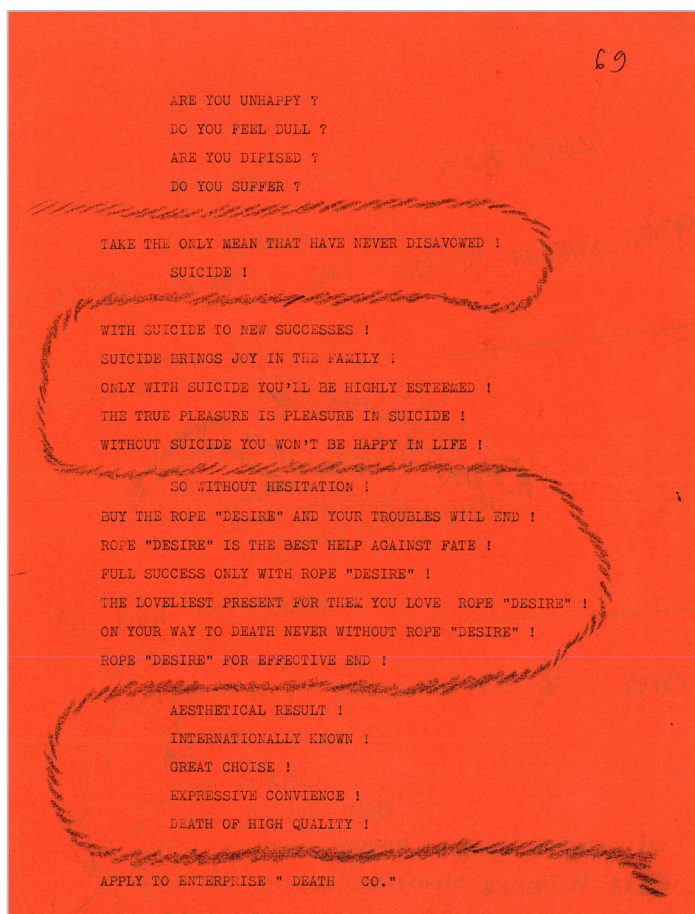
Alongside the discourse that suicide was a senseless act of the spoiled and cowardly, another type of discourse emerged: the opinion of many intellectuals who argued that the suicides were rational and reasoned decisions and, as such, criticised society.⁷¹ The "Schopenhauerian and Leopardian" mindset of the Slovenian youth was seen as no coincidence, and young intellectuals

⁶⁸ Javoršek, *Kako je mogoče*, pp. 7–9, p. 25 and p. 105.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 169, p. 182 and p. 234; Shore, "(The end of) Communism", p. 307.

⁷¹ Dornik Šubelj, "Aleš Kermauner", pp. 81–87; SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 127–128; SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 119–122, 2 November 1968.



Aleš Kermauner's poem *Are You Unhappy?* (SI AS 1931, 1417, Alenka Smasek – samomor)

opposed Javoršek and his theses in articles such as "*Marsikako je mogoče*" ("In Many Ways Is It Possible").⁷² However, the police reports and field observations indicate that the authorities did not consider the opinions of the academics particularly problematic, as they could be silenced in "one way or another". The real problem was that society in general did not condemn these individuals as the authorities expected. According to police investigators, there was a real danger that a "Slovenian Palach" would emerge. In fact, Aleš Kermauner, instead of being labelled a traitor, became a legend among the younger generation, although his brother Taras Kermauner repeatedly emphasised that Aleš

⁷² Taras Kermauner, "Marsikako je mogoče", *Naši razgledi*, 5 September 1969, No. 17, pp. 504–505; 19 September 1969, No. 18, pp. 536–537.

had not been Jan Palach, that he had not killed himself in protest in the middle of Ljubljana, and that his death was not a statement but an intimate act.⁷³

The investigators focused on Kermauner's friends, who were supposedly determined to prove that the young poet's suicide had not been an act of cowardice and escape from trouble and that the other suicides had been rational and well-considered decisions as well. Based on the secret records of the meetings of literary and cultural groups, the investigators concluded that Kermauner was becoming an idol and a hero or even a saint and a martyr and that a myth was being created around him and his death. His poems were analysed, recited, and translated into other languages. It was clear that his death triggered numerous artistic performances and intensive activities in the field of literature and philosophy, of which two contributions by the young Slavoj Žižek attracted the most attention. The chief investigator highlighted the need to undermine Kermauner's work, poetry, and public image in order to stop the posthumous editions of his poems, which had achieved the status of cult works and now circulated among the youth. It was emphasised that this could not be achieved by the police but rather by the loyal personnel in the cultural circles.⁷⁴

The authorities were also concerned with the role of Svit Brejc, who was accused of drug use, theft, vandalism, as well as illegal political activities. His nationalist political organisation, the SNS, supposedly strived for the disintegration of Yugoslavia and Slovenian independence. It was said that the collapse of these ideas was the reason for his death. Allegedly, Svit had realised that his ideas were isolated and limited to a narrow circle of like-minded individuals, that other young intellectuals did not support them, and that he was an outcast as well as a personal and ideological failure. Svit's ideas were essentially undermined by his father, who warned the authorities about his son's activities.⁷⁵ The investigators also analysed the role that Javoršek played as a father. Javoršek, who was a completely absent father for a long time – not only because of his imprisonment but also because he could hardly accommodate his son's Bohemian lifestyle in search of a deeper meaning of life – eventually returned to Ljubljana, more out of profound homesickness for the "Slovenian hills and valleys" and his hometown

⁷³ Marko Juvan, "Literarni modernizem, teorija in politika 'dolgega leta '68' med centrom in periferijo", in: Darko Štrajn, Lado Planko, Goranka Kreačič and Cvetka Hedžet Tóth (eds.), *1968: Čas upora, upanja in domišljije – Zgodbe študentskega gibanja 1964–1974* (Ljubljana, 2020), pp. 357–372, here pp. 369–370; Kermauner, *Med gledališčem in fikcijo*, p. 20.

⁷⁴ SI AS 1931, 1417, Hašiš, Kermauner Aleš – samomor; SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 105–107; SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 1–29, 23 December 1968; Slavoj Žižek, "Aleš Kermauner. JAZ–VLOGA", *Tribuna*, 13 October 1967, No. 1, p. 5; Slavoj Žižek, "Aleš Kermauner. Zveza artikel-ime", *Tribuna* 18, 23 October 1967, No. 2, p. 10.

⁷⁵ SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 1–29, 23 December 1968; SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 129–134, 5 November 1968; SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 123–126, 4 November 1968.

than due to any longing for his son.⁷⁶ He became a father when it suited him, and at that point, he noticed disturbing negative tendencies in his son. In the months before Svit's death, Javoršek decided to "help" him by committing him to the closed ward of the Ljubljana Psychiatric Hospital, where Svit was kept under heavy sedation. Svit deeply resented his father for this and wrote a short story titled *Pavilijon št. Polje* (*Pavilion No. Polje*). The story, which was never published but circulated among Svit's friends, describes Svit's experience, representing the apparent rupture in the relationship between him and his father. Javoršek had in fact never tried to understand his son's positions and, in his testimonies, ridiculed Svit's efforts to create an independent Slovenia, calling them "futile attempts". Javoršek wrote: "How were you, poor soul, supposed to overturn the institutions shaped by the alternately wise and unwise centuries? How could you, frivolous boy, think you were going to win? Impossible."⁷⁷ According to Javoršek, Svit was rightly not taken seriously by the authorities, as he and his friends were utterly incapable of doing anything meaningful, let alone leading a *coup d'état*.⁷⁸

The case of the Dedijer family represented a particular problem caused by the suicide of two sons and the attempted suicide of the third. The first child, barely thirteen years old, resorted to suicide as early as 1959, immediately after being interrogated by the SDV without the presence of his parents. The second son's suicide took place in 1966, while the third attempted suicide in 1968. Two contradictory ideas about the reasons leading to the death of the second son, Borivoj, can be gleaned from the investigation files and interrogations. Father Vladimir claimed that political pressure was exerted against him and his family, while Borivoj's girlfriend stated that the family situation was to blame for the suicide. The situation she described was supposedly common to many families in the post-war period: the parents, active participants in the fight against Nazism, had seemingly suffered many war traumas but also played essential roles in the immediate post-war period during the mass executions of the occupiers' collaborators. She characterised Vladimir Dedijer as a tyrant, dictator, and even a terrorist who could not function as a father but was merely a commander who considered his children as extensions of himself. She stated that Borivoj's records, which she had destroyed in the weeks after his suicide, were replete with signs of profound disappointment with his parents, as Borivoj believed they had abandoned their principles and kept quiet in the face of blatant human rights violations only to remain among the post-war socialist

⁷⁶ Javoršek, *Kako je mogoče*, pp. 225–227.

⁷⁷ Ibid., *Kako je mogoče*, p. 38.

⁷⁸ SI AS 1931, 1417, Hašiš, pp. 135–137, 17 December 1968; SI AS 1931, 1417, Hašiš, Svit Brejc – samomor, pp. 6–7, 28 May 1968; Javoršek, *Kako je mogoče*, pp. 180–181; Ivo Svetina, *Smisel rože* (Ljubljana, 2022), pp. 174–195.

elite.⁷⁹ He was one of the many 1960s youngsters who were ashamed that their parents had "a fetish for guns" and were "tainted with blood".⁸⁰

The file on the Dedijer family contains some of Borivoj's personal belongings, photographs of his room, macabre souvenirs he collected, threatening letters that the family received, wiretap transcripts, and interrogations. Vladimir Dedijer conducted a private investigation and provided the investigators with alleged evidence to convince them to conduct a proper investigation. He later became aware that he and his family were being systematically monitored. This role was allegedly played by Borivoj's girlfriend M. K., who was also Vladimir's office assistant and had been recommended for the job by Jože Javoršek. The true nature of her role became clear after Borivoj's suicide, as she married Jože Javoršek just three weeks later. Vladimir Dedijer demanded that the authorities investigate their role, but this did not happen. Only in 1968, after the suicide attempt of Dedijer's youngest son, who was just fifteen years old at the time, was the case officially opened. The boy had problems with drugs, but his father suspected that he had been deliberately addicted, as he was apparently receiving the drugs for free. All attempts to relocate him and get him out of the circle that had put him under its spell were unsuccessful, while Dedijer's daughter was also being pressured. Jože Javoršek and Mitja Ribičič were allegedly personally responsible for the situation in the family, which Vladimir, of course, was unable to prove.⁸¹

In the case of the Dedijer family, the investigators rejected the idea of political pressures against the family as the cause of the suicides and once again emphasised the role of the father, who was supposed to be held responsible for the deaths of his children. They stuck to Borivoj's alleged statement that his father was a liar and a false hero, that the first suicide in the family had apparently not been enough for him to change his behaviour, and that perhaps a second one was required to teach him a lesson.⁸²

Conclusion

During the 1970s, the media seemed to lose interest in this phenomenon, although the problem itself did not disappear. In fact, the general number of

⁷⁹ SI AS 1931, 1417, Borivoj Dedijer – samomor, pp. 1–3, 9 December 1968; pp. 9–10, 25 March 1969.

⁸⁰ Kušar, "Med arhetipom in kompleksom", p. 37.

⁸¹ SI AS 1931, 1417, M.D., poskus samomora, pp. 4–5, 9 December 1968; pp. 11–13; pp. 240–241, 1 July 1986; SI AS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 135–137, 17 December 1968; pp. 150–151.

⁸² SI AS 1931, 1417, Borivoj Dedijer – samomor, pp. 9–10, 25 March 1969; p. 213; pp. 33–39, 1 June 1969.

suicides continued to increase, while the cases of suicides of children of prominent personalities also continued. The latter phenomenon culminated in 1971 with the suicide of Borut Kardelj (1941–1971), the son of Edvard Kardelj (1910–1979), the second most important politician in Yugoslavia, the main author of the Yugoslav Constitution, and allegedly the person responsible for the extrajudicial massacres during the immediate post-war period. According to the memoirs, Borut, who openly hated and feared his parents and was under constant control of the SDV, killed himself in his parents' house during the New Year's celebration attended by the political leaders of the time.⁸³ The way his death was handled was already a reflection of the "leaden 1970s" when the Communist Party's conservative wing regained the upper hand. The media were once again more strictly controlled, and there was no longer any room for the discussion of issues that might cast a bad light on the situation in socialist Yugoslavia. Edvard Kardelj never spoke out on the subject publicly. According to Josip Vidmar (1895–1992), a prominent Slovenian literary critic, essayist and politician, Kardelj hardly ever mentioned his son's suicide, even in the closest circles of friends, and they talked about it only on a single occasion, when they were discussing Borut's poems and the possibility of publishing them. It was one of the few occasions when Kardelj showed his feelings and said that "everything in him [e.g., in Borut] was corroded".⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the members of the Slovenian political elite, as well as foreign observers, noticed Kardelj's profound pain due to his son's death. The Russian intelligence even reported that Edvard Kardelj was severely affected by his son's suicide and often sought comfort in a drink. Analyses pointed out that such events greatly weakened Party officials and the government in general and that they could be exploited by the foreign media and the enemies of the regime to undermine the internal unity of the Yugoslav nations and their will to remain on the Yugoslav path to socialism.⁸⁵ Therefore, the media remained completely quiet about Borut's suicide, and no newspaper reported it. Only a single émigré newspaper reported that Borut Kardelj "has joined the hundreds of thousands whom the vagaries of time and society have led to the final despair in which death is the only salvation from earthly torments".⁸⁶ The archives contain no evidence of any investigation into his death, while the police investigation into the phenomenon of youth suicide had in fact been closed in 1969 for no clear reason and without

⁸³ Svetlana Makarovič, Matej Šurc and Kotik, *Luciferka* (Ljubljana, 2019), pp. 130–133.

⁸⁴ Josip Vidmar, *Obrazi* (Ljubljana, 2011), pp. 159–160. See also: Janko Kos, *Umetniki in meščani: spominjanja* (Ljubljana, 2015), pp. 177–178.

⁸⁵ Jože Pirjevec, "Iskanje socializma s človeškim obrazom", *Annales* 24, No. 4 (2014), pp. 763–788, p. 772; Kušar and Svetina, "Meta Kušar z Ivom Svetino", pp. 25–44.

⁸⁶ "Vesti iz Slovenije. Kardeljev sin napravil samomor", *Ameriška domovina*, 14 February 1972, No. 31, p. 2.

any results. Nevertheless, it seems that the investigators were still relatively satisfied. They were unable to prove the existence of a *de facto* suicide club, but they did manage to stop drug trafficking and file some criminal charges for minor offences such as burglary, theft, and vandalism. The suicide investigation led to the establishment of secret surveillance of many of those involved, and some files were never closed. The investigators allegedly established that the individuals under surveillance and investigation were not valid representatives of the Yugoslav youth generation and that they were not just alienated from the older generation but also from their peers, even if they shared with them the same socio-historical processes and experiences.⁸⁷ By exerting various pressures against the young intellectuals, the authorities succeeded in breaking up the most problematic cultural groups and an illegal nationalist organisation that proved to be completely amateurish and without any potential to spark a revolution. The failed and isolated individuals had already been marginalised by society, proving that in the two decades following the war, the regime had managed to develop a strong and internally coherent socialist order resistant to such attempts.

The reasons for the deaths in question were categorised as private: as solitary acts of lonely young people without any audience or higher truth. These young individuals were not declarative or loud like Jan Palach, nor were they witnesses to social injustices or rebels against oppression. They were perfect representatives of a generation that Juliane Fürst describes as not

primarily set out to be subversive, counter or subaltern, even if they might not have excluded these conditions as a consequence of their actions. However, they all consciously wanted distance – spatial, mental, and ideological – from the regime under which they lived. And they wanted to achieve this aim by *not* doing rather than doing something.⁸⁸

The youth suicides were compared to Stanislav Neumann, a Czech actor who succumbed to suicide in 1975 at the age of 73 out of disappointment because he no longer had the strength and courage to fight the system. The Slovenian suicides, even if they were mostly still teenagers, were also apparently exhausted and aware that there was no point in "dropping out" by being subversive and militant, as there was "nothing better around the corner". There was no hope, no solution, and nothing to change, so their "dropping out" could

⁸⁷ Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations", in: Paul Kecskemeti (ed.), *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London, 1959), pp. 276–322.

⁸⁸ Fürst, "Introduction. To Drop or Not to Drop?", p. 3.

only be absolute and definitive.⁸⁹ The earlier reproaches against the generation seen as selfish and incapable of great deeds and sacrifices turned into a sense of relief. Supposedly, the young individuals in question chose death because they were personally defeated, bored, and without any ideas. It was certainly better for the regime and the social *status quo* that they died not in the name of higher ideas and values but because – allegedly – they had no ideas at all.

The study of suicide as a specific phenomenon reveals the authorities' clear fear of Western influences, public opinion, and underground social ferment. It demonstrates the means of power used by the authorities, such as wiretapping, persecution, and censorship. The latter still existed in the 1960s, although media control was not as brutal as a decade earlier or later when a public debate about the social causes of suicide would have been impossible. As the suicide rate continued to increase, peaking in the late 1980s, the phenomenon of suicide became a vital part of the nationalist discourse and an instrument for preserving and creating a distinct Slovenian identity in Yugoslavia. However, there was an important twist: if, during the 1960s, the considerable Slovenian suicide rate was attributed to the Habsburg, Central European, and Catholic tradition, in the 1980s, Yugoslavia became the main culprit, as it supposedly suffocated Slovenians to the point where they chose death instead, unable to attain freedom.

⁸⁹ SIAS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, pp. 189–193; SIAS 1931, 1417, Hašiš, Kermauner Aleš – samomor; SIAS 1931, 1416, Hašiš, p. 1; Shore, "(The end of) Communism", p. 313; Fürst, "Introduction. To Drop or Not to Drop?", p. 4.

Meta Remec

IZDAJALCI, STRAHOPETCI, MUČENCI, HEROJI: SAMOMOR MED MLADIMI KOT SOCIALNOZGODOVINSKI FENOMEN V SLOVENIJI V 60. LETIH 20. STOLETJA

POVZETEK

Slovenija se je kot najbolj razvita med jugoslovanskimi republikami v šestdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja ponašala z gospodarskim razvojem, nizko brezposelnostjo in rastjo življenjskega standarda. Idilično podobo napredka in blagostanja je kazila vse višja stopnja samomorilnosti, ki je ostajala visoko nad jugoslovanskim povprečjem in ki je bila za nasprotnike režima dokaz, da je novi ideologiji spodletelo ter da so ljudje nesrečni do te mere, da se umikajo v smrt. Oblast je te argumente zavračala in poudarjala dejstvo, da je bila visoka stopnja samomorilnosti slovenski in ne splošno jugoslovanski pojav, in da torej krivde ni bilo mogoče pripisati socialističnemu režimu. Režim ni hotel sprejeti trditve tujih časopisov, da je porast samomorov posledica družbenih in političnih razmer, in trdil, da naj bi bili razlogi drugeje: v slovenski preteklosti, kulturi in tradiciji, v njeni habsburški dediščini in v njeni posebni srednje-evropski mentaliteti, ki je vključevala vztrajnost, skromnost, perfekcionizem in avtoagresivnost. Pričakovanja, da bo uresničitev socialističnih sanj in ideala prinesla rešitev problema, se niso uresničila. Slovenska stopnja samomorilnosti se ni približala jugoslovanskemu povprečju, ampak se je od njega le še bolj oddaljevala. Zlasti problematika samomora med mladimi je vzbujala precejšen nemir. Oblasti so s pomočjo Uprave državne varnosti (UDV), oz. po letu 1967 Službe državne varnosti (SDV), spremljale negativne tendence med mladimi že od zgodnjih šestdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja in do leta 1968 je bila prepoznana potreba po osredotočenju na mlade, vendar na način, ki ne bi vznemirjal javnosti. Fenomen so želeli raziskati brez nepotrebnega dramatiziranja in to kljub dejstvu, da je bila stopnja samomorilnosti med mladimi v Sloveniji najvišja ne le med jugoslovanskimi republikami, ampak tudi med državami z najvišjo stopnjo samomorilnosti v Evropi. Oblasti so prepoznale potrebo po celostnem pristopu, ki je zahteval sodelovanje s strokovnjaki različnih področij, ter po "strokovnem in političnem" raziskovanju ozadja samomorov med mladimi, pa tudi poskusov samomora, smrti zaradi tveganih dejavnosti, korenin alkoholizma, nagnjenj k samokaznovanju in navideznih manjvrednostnih kompleksov, ki naj bi bili globoko zakoreninjeni v slovenski družbi in bili sestavni del vzgoje. Poskusi, da bi problem obravnavali tiho in interno, niso uspeli. Prelomnica pa ni bil število samomorov, ampak javno predvajanje filma *Samomorivci, pozor!*, ki ga je

leta 1967 slovenski režiser Mako Sajko predstavil na festivalu dokumentarnega filma Martovski v Beogradu. Film je osvetlil problem samomorov mladih v Sloveniji in s tem odprl Pandorino skrinjico fenomena, ki po mnenju tako oblasti kot stroke ni bil primeren za javno obravnavo. Zgodbo je prevzel domači, tuji (italijanski, francoski in nemški) in režimsko kritični emigrantski tisk, ki je v naraščajoči stopnji samomorov med mladimi iskal znake propada socialističnega sistema. Leta 1968 je škandal dobil še dodatno razsežnost: po samomorih Svita Brejca in nekaterih drugih otrok partijskih funkcionarjev in uglednih javnih osebnosti se je začelo javno ugibanje o obstoju samomorilskega kluba med študenti v Ljubljani, ki naj bi spodbujal mlade k samomoru in celo ubil tistega, ki si je pred koncem premislil. Pristojni na Ministrstvu za notranje zadeve so se odločili zadevo poglobljeno raziskati in začeli preiskavo z imenom Hašiš, pri kateri je sodelovala tudi SDV. Osrednji del preiskave so bili samomori Aleša Kermaunerja (1946–1966), Borivoja Dedijerja (1945–1966) in Svita Brejca (1947–1968), ki naj bi bili povod za vse druge samomore in jih je mogoče razlagati tudi kot primer obračuna med generacijo očetov, vojnih herojev, in sinov, ki so pri istih letih "še pobirali žepnino". Vladimir Dedijer (1914–1990), Dušan Kermauner (1903–1975) in Jože Javoršek (1920–1990) so bili vidne javne osebnosti in samomori njihovih otrok niso mogli ostati neopaženi. V javnosti sta se pojavila dva tipa diskurza: da je samomor nesmiselno dejanje razvajenih in strahopetcev ter mnenje številnih intelektualcev, ki so trdili, da so samomori racionalne in razumne odločitve in kot taki kritika družbe, očitno pa je bilo, da javnost teh posameznikov ni obsojala tako, kot je oblast pričakovala. Zlasti Aleš Kermauner je, namesto da bi bil označen za izdajalca, postal legenda med mlajšo generacijo in po mnenju policijskih preiskovalcev je obstajala realna nevarnost, da se ustvari mit o "slovenskem Palachu", kar je bilo potrebno na vsak način preprečiti. Proučeni arhivski viri razkrivajo jasn strah oblasti pred vplivi Zahoda in pred notranjimi sovražniki režima, pred javnim mnenjem, podtalnim družbenim vrenjem z uporabo sredstev, kot so prisluškovanje, preganjanje in cenzura za nadzor nad vpletenimi.

V sedemdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja so mediji na videz izgubili zanimanje za ta pojav, čeprav sam problem ni izginil. Pravzaprav je število samomorov na splošno še naprej naraščalo, nadaljevali pa so se tudi primeri samomorov otrok uglednih osebnosti. Fenomen je dosegel višek leta 1971 s samomorom Boruta Kardelja (1941–1971), sina Edvarda Kardelja (1910–1979), drugega najpomembnejšega politika v Jugoslaviji. Način, kako so obravnavali njegovo smrt, je bil že odraz "svinčenih sedemdesetih", ko je konservativno krilo Komunistične partije spet prevzelo premoč. Mediji so bili spet strožje nadzorovani in ni bilo več prostora za razpravo o temah, ki bi lahko metale slabo luč na razmere v socialistični Jugoslaviji. Policijska preiskava pojava samomora mladih je bila prav tako uradno zaključena leta 1969, vendar tajni nadzor mno-

gih vpletenih ni bil nikoli preklican. Z različnimi pritiski na mlade intelektualce je oblasti uspelo razbiti najbolj problematične kulturne skupine in ilegalno nacionalistično organizacijo, ki se je izkazala za popolnoma amatersko in brez vsakršnega potenciala revolucije v družbi. Ugotovljeno je bilo, da je propadle in izolirane posameznike družba že marginalizirala, kar naj bi dokazovalo, da je režimu v dveh desetletjih po vojni uspelo zgraditi močno in notranje koherentno socialistično ureditev, ki je bila odporna na takšne pretese. Razlogi za obravnavane smrti so bili označeni kot zasebni: ti samomori naj bi bili osamljena dejanja osamljenih mladih ljudi, brez občinstva ali višje resnice. Prejšnji očitki generaciji, ki je veljala za sebično in nesposobno velikih dejanj in žrtev, so se spremenili v občutek olajšanja. Vsekakor je bilo za režim in družbeni *status quo* bolje, da niso umrli v imenu višjih idej in vrednot, temveč zgolj zato, ker naj bi bili osebno poraženi, zdolgočaseni in brez vsakih idealov.

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Avtor: **REMEC Meta**

Dr., znanstvena sodelavka

Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino

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V SLOVENIJI V 60. LETIH 20. STOLETJA**

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Ključne besede: samomor, Jugoslavija, 1968, socializem, mladina, Aleš Kermauner, Svit Brejc, Borivoj Dedijer

Izvleček: Članek se osredotoča na fenomen samomora med mladimi in na odnos do samomora v Sloveniji po drugi svetovni vojni. Na podlagi policijskih poročil in poročil Službe državne varnosti o samomorih, spominov, časopisnih člankov in drugega gradiva, ki so ga zbrali preiskovalci, kot so poslovilna pisma in izjave prič, osvetljuje družbene razmere v Sloveniji v šestdesetih letih, analizira diskurz oblasti, medijev in strokovnjakov s področja psihiatrije, psihologije in kriminologije na temo samomorov mladih ter prikazuje vzvode, s katerimi je oblast nadzorovala državljane. Drugi del se osredotoča na policijsko preiskavo 9 samomorov in 5 poskusov samomorov otrok javnih osebnosti, ki so bili za oblast posebej problematični, saj so bili to družbeno angažirani, izobraženi in privilegirani posamezniki, čigar smrt je pritegnila pozornost javnosti.