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PRISPEVKI
ZA NOVEJŠO
ZGODOVINO

**The Challenges of Land Tenure
Reforms and the Financial
Inclusion of Peasantry**

**Suicide as a Historical
Phenomenon: Introduction
to the Thematic Section**

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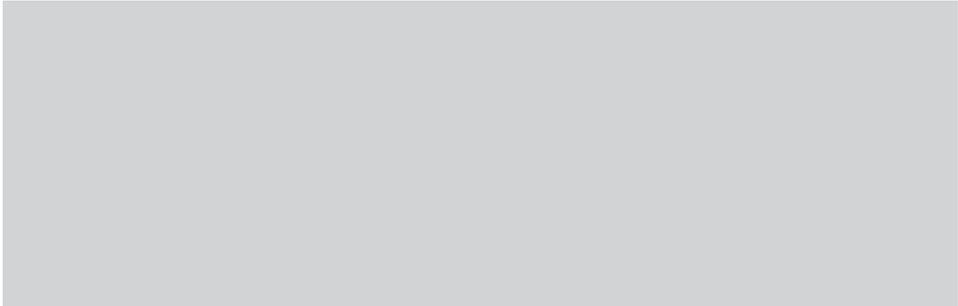
Contributions to Contemporary History is one of the central Slovenian scientific historiographic journals, dedicated to publishing articles from the field of contemporary history (the 19th, 20th and 21st century).

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The journal is published three times per year in Slovenian and in the following foreign languages: English, German, Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Italian, Slovak and Czech. The articles are all published with abstracts in English and Slovenian as well as summaries in English.

The archive of past volumes is available at the **History of Slovenia - Sistory** web portal.

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Razprave – Articles

The Challenges of Land Tenure Reforms and the Financial Inclusion of Peasantry / Izzivi zemljiškoposestnih reform in finančna vključenost kmetov

Land tenure reforms – especially the abolition of serfdom in the Habsburg Monarchy and the Timar system reforms in the Ottoman Empire – significantly impacted the traditional life in Southeastern Europe in the 19th century. These transitions had positive and negative consequences for the peasantry's political, social, and economic status. Peasants became landowners, and their inclusion in the market and the monetary economy became crucial. The social problems of the rural population persisted even as agriculture progressed. In both empires, peasants were burdened with obligatory compensation repayments to the former feudal lords and landowners. The following articles focus on the consequences of land tenure reforms and the abolition of the feudal system in the southern parts of the Habsburg Monarchy and Serbia as a former territory of the Ottoman Empire.

The articles aim to highlight and compare the structure of land ownership, regulations, and tenancy in the two systems: the Orthodox-Byzantine-Ottoman in the southern part of independent Serbia and the Catholic-Western in the southern part of the Habsburg Monarchy. These two systems had different political and social structures. The following contributions offer new insights and compare the internal problems and external challenges faced by the states and institutions from a top-down perspective and the peasantry from a bottom-up perspective.

More specifically, the regions on which the papers focus are the County of Görz and Gradisca and the Province of Carniola in the Austrian part of the Habsburg Monarchy and the southern part of the newly independent Serbia. All these regions can be considered peripheral in their state frameworks, as they were located far from the centres of their respective Empires. The Muslim population left the territory of Leskovac, which became part of Serbia after the Treaty of Berlin (1878) with the Ottoman Empire, leaving their properties behind. The local Christians took over the abandoned land. We will also focus on the problems of the rural population after the abolition of serfdom in the Slovenian territory. The development of microfinance

intermediaries, such as savings banks and credit cooperatives, was an essential prerequisite for the financial inclusion of the rural population. These institutions offered services to the rural population through mortgages and personal loans. The issue of financial inclusion can be directly linked to the abolition of serfdom and the subsequent indebtedness of the rural population. Finally, the last article examines the social consequences of the *colonia* system, found in certain areas of the County of Görz and Gradisca. The *colonia* system was a unique form of land dependency that continued for almost a century after the abolition of feudal relations, which the authorities tried unsuccessfully to abolish formally and legally.

The papers were presented at the European Rural History Organisation (EURHO) conference at the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, organised between 11 and 14 September 2023, at a panel titled *The challenges of the land tenure reforms and financial inclusion of peasantry in the 19th and early 20th centuries in Southeastern Europe*.

Reforme zemljiške posesti, predvsem odprava tlačanstva v habsburški monarhiji in reforme timarskega sistema v Otomanskem cesarstvu, so pomembno vplivale na tradicionalno življenje v jugovzhodni Evropi v 19. stoletju, imele so namreč pozitiven in negativen vpliv na politični, socialni in ekonomski položaj kmečkega ljudstva. Kmetje so postali posestniki, ključna je postala vključenost kmetov v tržno in denarno gospodarstvo. Socialne težave podeželskega prebivalstva so se nadaljevale, čeprav je kmetijstvo napredovalo. V obeh cesarstvih so bili kmetje obremenjeni z obveznimi odškodninami nekdanjim fevdalcem in veleposestnikom. Zanimajo nas posledice reforme zemljiške posesti pri odpravi fevdalnega sistema v južnih delih habsburške monarhije in v Srbiji kot nekdanjem ozemlju Otomanskega cesarstva.

Glavni cilj prispevkov je poudariti in primerjati strukturo zemljiške lastnine, regulacije in najemništva v dveh sistemih – pravoslavno-bizantinsko-otomanskem v južnem delu neodvisne Srbije in katoliškem v zahodnem delu habsburške monarhije. Ta dva sistema sta imela različne politične in družbene strukture. Prispevki ponujajo nova spoznanja in primerjajo notranje probleme in zunanje izzive, s katerimi so se soočale države in institucije z vidika od zgoraj navzdol ter kmetje z vidika od spodaj navzgor.

Natančneje, regije, na katere se prispevki osredotočajo, so Goriška in Gradiška grofija ter dežela Kranjska v avstrijskem delu habsburške monarhije in južni del na novo osamosvojene Srbije. Vse te regije lahko štejemo za obrobne v državnem okviru, saj so bile daleč od središča imperijev. Muslimansko prebivalstvo je odšlo z ozemlja Leskovca, ki je po berlinski pogodbi (1878) z Otomanskim cesarstvom postalo del Srbije, in zapustilo svoje posesti. Lokalni kristjani so zavzeli zapuščena zemljišča. Po drugi strani pa se bomo posvetili problemom kmečkega prebivalstva po odpravi podložništva na slovenskem ozemlju. Razvoj mikrofinančnih posrednikov, kot so hranilnice in kreditne zadrage, je bil bistveni predpogoj za finančno vključenost podeželskega prebivalstva. Te ustanove so kmetom ponujale svoje storitve v obliki

hipotekarnih kreditov in osebnih posojil. Vprašanje finančne vključenosti lahko neposredno povežemo z zemljiško odvezo in posledično zadolženostjo podeželskega prebivalstva. Zadnji članek obravnava družbene posledice kolonatskega sistema, ki je bil uveljavljen na območjih grofije Goriške in Gradiške. Kolonatski sistem je bil edinstvena oblika zemljiške odvisnosti prebivalstva, ki se je nadaljevala skoraj stoletje po odpravi fevdalnih odnosov, ki jih je oblast neuspešno poskušala formalnopravno odpraviti.

Prispevki so bili predstavljeni na konferenci, ki jo je organizirala European Rural History Organization (EURHO) na univerzi Babeş-Bolyai v Cluj-Napoci v Romuniji med 11. in 14. septembrom 2023, na panelu z naslovom *Izzivi zemljiškoposestnih reform in finančne vključenosti kmečkega prebivalstva v 19. in na začetku 20. stoletja v jugovzhodni Evropi*.

Nataša Henig Mišič

Nataša Henig Miščič*

Microfinance Providers and Rural Lending in the Province of Carniola Before 1914: a Case Study of the District Credit Cooperative Litija**

IZVLEČEK

MIKROFINANČNI POSREDNIKI IN KREDITIRANJE PODEŽELJA NA KRANJSKEM PRED LETOM 1914: ŠTUDIJA PRIMERA OKRAJNE POSOJILNICE LITIJA

Študija ponuja nova spoznanja in primerja dve različni vrsti mikrofinančnih posrednikov ter njihovo vlogo in vpliv na ekonomski in finančni položaj podeželskega prebivalstva pred začetkom prve svetovne vojne. Zemljiška odveza v habsburški monarhiji leta 1848 je imela pomemben vpliv na tradicionalno življenje v drugi polovici 19. stoletja. Kmetje so postali posestniki in je vključevanje kmetov v tržno in denarno gospodarstvo ključno pomena. Razvoj mikrofinančnih posrednikov, kot so bile hranilnice in kreditne zadruge, je predstavljal bistveni predpogoj za finančno implementacijo podeželskega prebivalstva. Prispevek prikazuje razvoj kreditnega poslovanja v podeželskem okolju na primeru Okrajne posojilnice Litija.

Ključne besede: mikrofinance, kreditiranje podeželja, hranilnice, kreditne zadruge, Okrajna posojilnica Litija

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ABSTRACT

The study provides new insights and compares two different types of microfinance intermediaries and their role and impact on the economic and financial situation of the rural population before the beginning of World War I. The abolition of serfdom in the Habsburg monarchy in 1848 had a significant impact on traditional life in the second half of the 19th century. Peasants became landowners, and their participation in the market and monetary economy became crucial. The development of microfinance intermediaries, such as savings banks and credit cooperatives, was essential for the financial inclusion of the rural population. The article shows the development of credit operations in a rural environment using the example of the District Credit Cooperative Litija.

Keywords: microfinance, rural lending, savings banks, credit cooperatives, District Credit Cooperative Litija

Introduction

The land tenure reforms and the abolition of serfdom in the Habsburg monarchy in 1848 had a major impact on traditional life in the second half of the 19th century. Peasants became landowners, and their inclusion in the market and monetary economy became crucial. These changes had both positive and negative effects on the political, social, and economic position of the peasantry. First, they were burdened with compensation payments to the former feudal lords and landowners. Second, financial integration was directly linked to the abolition of serfdom and resulting indebtedness of the rural population.¹ Third, their social and economic situation was aggravated by the 1868 Inheritance and Compulsory Portion Law, which exacerbated the problem by further fragmenting estates.² The development of institutions such as savings banks and credit cooperatives was a prerequisite for the financial inclusion of the rural population in the second half of the 19th century.

1 On abolition of serfdom see: Shane O'Rourke, "The Emancipation of the Serfs in Europe," in David Eltis (ed.), *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, vol 4 AD 1804–AD 2016* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 422–40. Roman Sandgruber, *Ökonomie und Politik. Österreichische Wirtschaftsgeschichte vom Mittelalters bis zur Gegenwart* (Wien: Ueberreuter, 1995), 233–37. Žarko Lazarevič, *Kmečki dolgovi na Slovenskem. Socialno-ekonomski vidiki zadoženosti slovenskih kmetov 1848–1948* (Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče, 1994), 14–19. France Kresal, *Zgodovina socialne in gospodarske politike v Sloveniji od liberalizma do druge svetovne vojne* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1998), 30–33. Stane Granda, "Zakon o zemljiški odvezi," in Jože Ciperle (ed.), *Slovenska kronika XIX. stoletja, Knj. 1: 1800–1860* (Ljubljana: Nova revija, 2001), 346, 347. Svit Komel, *Vpliv katastrskih popisov na izvedbo zemljiške odveze na Kranjskem: magistrsko delo* (Ljubljana, 2022), 74–101.

2 On problem of fragmenting of estates see: Žarko Lazarevič, *Plasti prostora in časa: iz gospodarske zgodovine Slovenije prve polovice 20. stoletja* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2009), 106, 108–12. France Kresal, "Posestna struktura od zemljiške odveze do agrarne reforme na Slovenskem," *Zgodovina v šoli*, 1 (1997): 16–25.

The idea of providing financial services to the lower classes has a long history. Small, informal “savings and credit groups” have existed around the world for centuries, particularly in Europe. For example, the Catholic Church founded a pawnshop as an alternative to usury. However, it was not until the 19th century that formal credit and savings institutions for low-income people emerged on a larger scale and with great success. Such institutions are referred to as microfinance intermediaries. Joanna Ledgerwood defined the term in her book *Microfinance Handbook*, which refers to the provision of financial services to a low-income population. Microfinance provides financial services such as loans, savings and insurance to impoverished individuals or communities that are often unserved or underserved by traditional financial institutions, such as banks. In addition to accessible and smaller loans, microfinance typically involves informal assessment of borrowers and investments, access to repeat and larger loans based on repayment performance, streamlined loan disbursement and monitoring of secure savings products (deposits). It thus aims to promote economic development and reduce social exclusion.³ The clients of these institutions were usually low-income groups in both urban and rural areas. Their activities usually provided a stable source of income (often from more than one activity), and, although poor, they were generally not considered to be the “poorest of the poor”.⁴

The article focuses on the emergence of financial networks in the province of Carniola in the second half of the 19th century and the credit policies of these institutions in rural areas. The research provides insights and compares two different types of microfinance intermediaries, their role and impact on the economic and financial situation of the peasant population before World War I. It examines the accessibility of loans for the peasants and how this changed as rural credit cooperatives created a more extensive network in the area. Particular attention is paid to the efficiency of two types of credit: mortgages and personal loans. Both types, savings banks and credit cooperatives, operated with the aforementioned loan policies, but the rural credit cooperatives developed in the last decade of the 19th century made a difference. Personal loans provided by these rural credit cooperatives were particularly beneficial to farmers’ financial needs. In a specific section, the article focuses on a case study, the District Credit Cooperative Litija, an example of a rural credit cooperative operating in a limited area. The well-preserved archival material allows us to see and analyse its credit performance.

Peasant Population after 1848

Serfdom was a widespread institution in Central and Eastern Europe. Typical features of serfdom included restrictions on freedom of movement, the right to marry,

3 Joanna Ledgerwood, *Microfinance Handbook. An Institutional and Financial Perspective* (Washington, D. C.: The World Bank, 1998), 1. Brigit Helms, *Access for All. Building Inclusive Financial Systems* (Washington: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2006), 2.

4 Ledgerwood, *Microfinance Handbook*, 2.

and the ability to learn a trade. All this was possible only with the consent of the landlord. One of the main differences with modern serfdom was the definition of property rights and the personal legal status of the rural population. In the Habsburg Monarchy, the neo-absolutist period following the revolution of 1848 was a time of intensive reforms in administration, trade, agriculture, industry and other areas, with a focus on property rights and a limited role for the state. The system of serfdom remained in force until 1848. It was a system of hereditary tenure. Peasants had to pay dues or provide services for their land, but it was hereditary because landlords could not freely choose their peasants. Peasants could sell, bequeath or give away their land without asking the landlord's permission, in which case the dues passed to the new landowner. The abolition of serfdom led to full peasant ownership. The dissolution of the old system in the Habsburg Monarchy was one of the lasting achievements of the short-lived Constituent Assembly of the 1848 Revolution.⁵ This process created new opportunities and challenges. Farmers entered the path of financial integration and had to accept cash transactions. The difficult situation raised the question of how farmers could be given access to financial resources.

The abolition of serfdom and land reform were carried out with compensation determined by regional and district commissions. In the province of Carniola, this work was completed by 1853. One-third of the payment was written off because of the abolition of the public law functions previously performed by the landowners. The other third was to be repaid by the farmers in 20 annual instalments. The remaining third was to be repaid by the state in 40 annual instalments, for which it required the peasants to submit tax documents. The sum of the repayment of the land release on Slovenian soil comprised about 20 million guilders in capital and 1 million guilders in interest. Most of this money went to the seats of the larger feudal families, most of which were outside Slovenian territory. However, there was a lack of capital to develop the industrialisation of the Slovenian lands.⁶

Agriculture was the most important sector of the Slovenian economy; in 1910, 67% of the population earned their living from agriculture, although this proportion was steadily decreasing (in 1857, it was still 83%). Slovenian agriculture was underdeveloped and had a very unfavourable ownership structure. Small and passive farms predominated. Social differentiation after land expropriation led to a further deterioration in ownership so that by the end of the 19th century, more than half of the farms owned less than 5 ha of land. The farms were economically underdeveloped and had low yields per hectare. Agricultural production in Slovenia at the end of the century, when more than 100,000 people migrated from the countryside, and in the first decade of the 20th century, was sufficient for subsistence, except for the production of bread grain. This crop was a tenth too small and had to be bought in. This was not a problem, as increased livestock breeding and the sale of wood produced sufficient surpluses. For

5 Tuncer Pammer, "Economic policy during the long 19th century," in Matthias Morys (ed.), *The Economic History of Central, East and South-East Europe* (Abingdon (Oxon); New York: Routledge, 2021), 2, 3, 13, 14.

6 Kresal, *Zgodovina socialne in gospodarske politike v Sloveniji*, 31.

small farms that did not have enough forest and livestock, this was a big problem. They restored extra income from wealthier farmers and seasonal work.⁷

With the introduction of cash transactions or the penetration of capitalist relations into rural areas, peasants had to pay all their obligations in cash. At the same time, with the development of industry and transport, especially the railways, they were confronted with a newly created supply with which the local peasant craft and sales organisation could not compete in terms of price, quality and quantity. They lost an important source of income. The loss of this income could not be compensated by increasing sales of their agricultural products, which was made impossible by poor farming techniques and foreign competition; the influx of American and Russian grain lowered prices on the domestic Austrian market. As a result, the farmer had to sell as much of his produce as possible below cost and reduce his consumption to meet his cash needs.⁸

The transition to a fully independent monetary market economy overtaxed most farms, especially as they were burdened with high monetary compensation from the start. Many farms were also not trained for immediate independent management. Not all of them had their own heavier agricultural equipment, stronger draft animals, and economic experience (former tasks of the landlord). In 1873, the peasants' third of the compensation had barely been paid when a major economic crisis set in, followed by the collapse of the vineyards, the loss of additional income from transport and many other financial problems. Debt and stratification began. By 1890, the debt had reached 120 million gulden in debt. In the province of Carniola, 10,190 farms were sold between 1868 and 1893, i.e. one in five. In addition, many individual plots of land were sold, and farms became smaller. As there were not enough opportunities to make a living from other (non-agricultural) activities, farms were also divided to create new families.⁹

The abolition of serfdom was a double-edged sword. It freed the serfs and granted them equality with other classes of the population. It freed them from paying taxes and duties in kind, which was undoubtedly a considerable gain. Still, on the other hand, it deprived them of the benefits of serfdom or forced them to repay a heavy monetary debt. It mainly affected small farmers and nomads, sometimes also middle peasants. In this way, the process and transition of agriculture from a predominantly natural to a market capitalist economy was accelerated.¹⁰

Debt was the result of complex social and personal relationships and circumstances. The broader context of borrowing is undoubtedly the process of economic and social modernisation. Debt is a phenomenon that emerges and operates at the intersection of personal financial and social conditions, individual aspirations and the macroeconomic environment of society and the economy. The pioneers of the national movement, Josip Vošnjak, Janez Krek and others, were the ones who pointed

7 Ibidem, 34, 37.

8 Lazarevič, *Kmečki dolgovi*, 15.

9 Kresal, *Zgodovina socialne in gospodarske politike v Sloveniji*, 32.

10 Lazarevič, *Kmečki dolgovi*, 14.

to (over)indebtedness. The debt was defined as terrible because of the unjust capitalist system and the impending agrarian crisis. The approach was from a national and social perspective. It was essential to know about the economic integration of the Slovenian space into the global economic area in the second half of the 19th century and the processes of economic and social modernisation in agriculture. Farmers were active participants in this process and not passive observers. New technologies require not only knowledge but also funds for urgently needed investments. However, economic modernisation was accompanied by social modernisation, which posed an additional challenge in terms of costs. It was also necessary to finance the modernisation lifestyles towards the middle-class ideal of housing, clothing and society, which included the concept of social modernisation, i.e. the symbolic integration of peasants into society.¹¹

The law of 1868 allowed the fragmentation of peasant property. Because of its harmful effects, in 1889 the state amended a law prohibiting the division of medium-sized farms. The economic crisis accelerated the fragmentation of peasant property after 1873, which further influenced the decline of small and medium-sized peasant holdings. Farmers were increasingly tied to the market, where they could need a lot of money.¹²

Financial Networks in the Province of Carniola

Network analysis explains the geographical distribution of financial institutions, the links, the impact of distance and the overlap between different types of financial intermediaries. Furthermore, by examining the structure and functioning of financial networks, the financial needs of the population (savings and credit cooperation) and the state and general economic development, modernisation and industrialisation should be considered.

Financial intermediaries generally provide liquidity services, mobilise savings, allocate resources, and collect and transmit information. Their role is to accumulate a wider range of loanable funds to make them available over a wider geographical and temporal horizon to ensure their efficient use by competitive users of capital.¹³ The main objective of microfinance institutions was to improve the financial situation of different social groups, especially the poorer classes of society. The funds raised collected by these institutions helped to overcome hardship and contributed to the local and regional economy.

Savings banks were financial institutions that emerged in the early 19th century. Their main purpose was to collect funds or savings deposits from the lower but captive classes of the population. Deposits in savings banks could be used by depositors where

11 Žarko Lazarevič, *Delo in zemlja: male študije kmečkega sveta* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2022), 48–51.

12 Lazarevič, *Plasti prostora in časa*, 106, 108–12. Jasna Fischer and Franc Rozman, "Socialna demokracija in kmetstvo na Slovenskem 1870–1918," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 37, No. 1 (1997): 6, 7.

13 Paul Glasserman and Peyton H. Young, "Contagion in Financial Networks," *Journal of Economic Literature* 3 (2016): 779–81, 10.1257/jel.20151228.

and when they needed them. By increasing the savings rate, savings banks increased capital accumulation and played an essential role in economic growth.

The development of financial institutions in Slovenian territory(ies) and particularly in the province of Carniola, can be traced back to 1820 when the first savings bank was founded in Ljubljana, the capital of the province of Carniola. However, the network only began to grow in the second half of the 19th century, with a delay of over sixty years. The Savings Bank opened in Zagorje in 1872 but was liquidated in 1879. The actual founding moment came in 1882. At the beginning of the new century, six regulated savings banks were operating in the province of Carniola. This trend accelerated, and their number more than doubled by the beginning of World War I. By 1913, there were fourteen savings banks in the province.¹⁴

The founding pattern of credit cooperatives was similar. As in other parts of Europe, especially in the Habsburg Monarchy, credit cooperatives were founded in Slovenian territory, initially in the urban centres, on the model of the Schulze-Delitzsch credit cooperatives. In the province of Carniola, the establishment of this type of microfinance intermediary began in the mid-1870s. The Prva Dolenjska hranilnica in Metlika was one of the first cooperatives to be registered. The founding wave was slow. Institutions were established in urban centres and were not sufficiently accessible to people living in rural areas. The first credit cooperative based on the Raiffeisen model was established in 1892. From then on, only this type of credit cooperative was set in the province of Carniola, and 193 were founded before World War I.¹⁵ In 1911, for example, a total of 236 credit cooperatives of both types were operating in the province.¹⁶

Observing the dynamics of financial networks and the development of financial intermediaries also supports the hypothesis of the existence and successful functioning of parallel financial institutions with business overlaps in both urban and rural areas, sufficient free financial resources, and the need for accessible credit, which was particularly the domain of credit cooperatives.¹⁷

Urban and Rural Financial Intermediaries and Small Farmers

The Carniolan Savings Bank, the only microfinance institution in the province of Carniola for over sixty years, had an obvious attitude towards small landowners. It was very reluctant to lend to this segment of the population for fear of facing possible

14 *Statistik der Sparkassen in Österreich für das Jahr 1913 bearbeitet vom Bureau der K. K. Statistischen Zentralkommission, Neue Folge Österreichische Statistik Herausgegeben von der K. K. Statistischen Zentralkommission, 15. Band, 1. Heft* (Wien: Der kaiserlich-königlichen Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1916), 16, 17. Žarko Lazarević and Jože Prinčič, *Zgodovina slovenskega bančništva* (Ljubljana: ZBS - Združenje bank Slovenije, 2000), 26, 43.

15 Ivan Mohorič, "Razvoj kreditnega združništva," *Veda. Dvomesečnik za znanost in kulturo*, 1 (1913): 37, 47.

16 *Ibid.*, 34–58.

17 Glasserman and Young, "Contagion in Financial Networks," 779–81.

insolvency due to the poor financial situation of farmers who find it difficult to repay their debts. Despite the obstacles of its business policy, the Savings Bank helped the poor residents to a large extent through various charity campaigns. Every year, it allocated part of its net profits to help the city's poor through various institutions. Individuals rarely received open financial assistance.¹⁸

However, the increased cash turnover brought about by the new economic boom in the early 1880s put an end to the financial crisis. This allowed the Carniolan Savings Bank to change policy and take some steps to help small farmers. The bank lowered the interest rates on mortgages taken out by small landowners. Since 1881, there has been a separate category of mortgage loans with a lower interest rate intended exclusively for the inhabitants of the province of Carniola. The following text was published in the *Slovenski narod*: “The interest rate on loans of up to 300 guildens will be lowered on 1 July to make it easier for small farmers. The interest rate on deposits will be 4% for smaller mortgages.”¹⁹

The agricultural survey, carried out on 17 and 18 April 1884, was an attempt to assess the social and economic situation in the countryside of the province of Carniola. The survey was conducted during the economic depression that followed the collapse of the Vienna Stock Exchange in 1873.²⁰ The decade after 1873 saw a sharp fall in prices, which remained low until the mid-1880s. The prices of grain and manufactured goods fell, while those of meat and wine rose.²¹ The results of the agricultural survey were extremely unfavourable. They showed how poor the economic situation of farmers in the province was a result of a long-term development path. The results showed a chronic lack of capital and over-indebtedness in rural areas.²²

By the end of 1887, the total amount of mortgages issued by the Carniolan Savings Bank was 11,504,448 guildens, of which 3,932,913 guildens were to persons in the province of Carniola, almost a quarter of the total – by the end of 1887, loans to small farmers had been issued for 349,902 guildens, which represented 8 per cent of the amount for the province of Carniola and only 3 per cent of the total. Two years later, the situation was very similar. 12,932,544 guildens were spent, of which 4,462,439 guildens or 26 per cent of the total, were spent in the province. The new level of loans to small farmers was 403,529 guildens, the same percentage as in 1887, i.e. 8 per cent of the province of Carniola and 3 per cent of the total amount.²³

The Jubilee Book of the Carniolan Savings Bank, issued in 1895, shows that 1,500 small farmers benefited from soft loans. Low-interest mortgage loans accounted for

18 For more about Carniolan Savings Bank and “small farmers loans” see: Nataša Henig Miščič, “Odnos Kranjske hranilnice do malega kmeta v sedemdesetih in osemdesetih letih 19. stoletja,” in Mojca Šorn (ed.), *Lakote in pomanjkanje: slovenski primer* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2018), 105–11.

19 “Naznanilo hranilnice in zastavnice,” *Slovenski narod*, May 8, 1881, 4.

20 For more on the effects of the stock market crash of 1873 on Slovenian territories see: Peter Vodopivec, *O gospodarstvih in socialnih nazorih na Slovenskem v 19. stoletju* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2006), 263–80.

21 Andrej Pančur, *V pričakovanju stabilnega denarnega sistema* (Celje: Zgodovinsko društvo, 2003), 234.

22 Miha Seručnik, “Socialne razmere na kranjskem podeželju v luči gradiva za kmetijsko anketo 17. in 18. aprila 1884 v Ljubljani,” in *Kronika* 56, No. 3 (2008): 506, 518, 519. See also: Lazarevič, *Kmečki dolgovi na Slovenskem*, 16–19.

23 SI ZAL LJU 362, folder, 29, *Denkschrift*, 1895, 20.

only a tiny fraction of the Savings Bank's expenditures. The question arises to what extent the management of the Savings Bank had small landlords in mind when it offered low-interest mortgage loans.²⁴ As time went on, the Savings Bank moved away from its original purpose and began to target a more affluent population. The creation of the Credit Association in 1875 and the amendment of Article 17 in 1888,²⁵ which allowed the Savings Bank to do business with municipal authorities, also boosted turnover. These loans made it possible to finance major municipal projects, such as water supply systems and electrification.²⁶

In the second half of the 19th century, rural credit was seen by many as a major problem. Janez Bleiweis in his book "Zgodovinske črtice c. k. kmetijske družbe na Kranjskem" ("Historical Lines c. k. of the Carniolan Agricultural Society") writes that the importance and necessity of establishing a loan fund was discussed as early as 1862 at a meeting of the General Assembly of the Carniolan Agricultural Society.²⁷ Land reform and emancipation had created a free but undercapitalised peasantry, and the fall in agricultural prices in the 1880s later left some holdings overburdened with mortgage debt.²⁸ Ivan Mohorič, the author of the article "Razvoj kreditnega združništva" (Development of credit cooperatives), stressed that "savings banks offered only mortgage loans, which did not correspond to the economic depression and were unsuitable for the small business sector. Therefore, the form of the reformed financial organisation should be a credit cooperative based on unlimited guarantee and personal credit."²⁹ Before the introduction of credit cooperatives, smallholders and the landless were dependent on shopkeepers, agricultural traders, and other informal lenders for credit. Credit was expansive, and some accounts describe interlinked markets' credit relationships that are part of other transactions.³⁰ The agricultural crisis at the end of the 19th century and the lack of suitable lenders were essential conditions for the establishment of credit cooperatives. In rural areas, the initiators were also able to use the networks of the Catholic Church, which contributed to the successful expansion of the network of credit cooperatives. The credit cooperative managed to collect a large amount of small savings, which it then distributed to farmers through low-cost loans.³¹

24 Ibid.

25 "Občni zbor kranjske hranilnice," *Slovenec*, July 30, 1888, 3.

26 SI ZAL LJU 362, folder 29, Denkschrift, 1895, 11, 12.

27 Janez Bleiweis, *Zgodovinske črtice važnejšega delovanja c. k. kmetijske družbe na Kranjskem od pričetka njenega v letu 1767. do konca leta 1867* (Ljubljana: C. k. kmetijska družba na Kranjskem, 1867), 36.

28 Timothy Guinnane, "Cooperatives as Information Machines: German Rural Credit Cooperatives, 1883–1914," *The Journal of Economic History* 2 (2002): 368.

29 Mohorič, "Razvoj kreditnega združništva," 45.

30 Guinnane, "Cooperatives as Information Machines," 368.

31 Christopher L. Colvin, Stuart Henderson and John D. Turner, "The Origins of the (Cooperative) Species: Raiffeisen Banking in the Netherlands, 1898–1909," *European Review of Economic History* 4 (2020): 752, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ereh/hez018>. Lazarevič and Prinčič, *Zgodovina slovenskega bančništva*, 29.

District Credit Cooperative Litija

Looking at the map of Slovenia, it is not difficult to find Litija, which lies almost in the middle of the country, not far from its geometric centre, east of Ljubljana. It can be recognised by the typical meander of the Sava River, which makes its way between the steep banks of the Zasavje hills. During the Austrian period, Litija was the seat not only of the municipality but also of the tax office, the district court and the district administration. The latter began in the mid-19th century when the Austrian Empire reorganised the provincial administration after the March Revolution of 1848 following the abolition of the crisis and the delegated feudal lordships. District governorships were introduced as early as 1849, only to be abolished in the Bachian absolutist period, to reappear in their final form after 1867. The District of Litija covered an area of 686.45 km².³²

The District of Litija included quite different geographical regions. It was situated in the transitional area between the Ljubljana Basin and the Dolenjska Basin, as we understand it today. The rugged territory of the northern part of the district was blessed with a rather sparse settlement and relatively poor transport connections. On the other hand, the centre of the district administration was located next to one of the first and most important roads of the Habsburg Monarchy – the Southern Railway. The less active parts in the southern part of the district centre, which fell under the jurisdiction of Višnja Gora, were located along an important road leading to Novo mesto and Zagreb. Before the end of the 19th century, the Dolenjska railway was built.³³

The Litija Spinning Mill and the lead and Sitarjevec mercury mine, renovated in the second half of the 19th century, were important to the economy of the area. However, both parts of the district - the north and the south - were relatively sparsely populated and concentrated mainly on agriculture. In the northern jurisdiction of Litija, there was less agriculture and, in places with favourable conditions, viticulture played an important role. The statistical data show the relatively low importance of fruit growing, despite the good conditions for it. It should be stressed that despite the well-known emigration, it is not yet possible to speak of depopulation and overgrowth in the modern sense. In any case, fruit growing did not become important until the 20th century. Cattle farming dominated in the district and was more intensive in the southern part. Sheep farming was more modest, with a slightly larger share in the hillier northern part of the district.³⁴

The network of credit cooperatives in the Litija district emerged during the accelerated wave of new credit cooperatives in the province of Carniola. The first credit cooperative in Litija district was founded in Litija in 1894. By the end of the 19th century, the number had grown to seven, divided between the two Judicial districts of

32 Damjan Eli, *Litijsko šolstvo skozi čas. Litija: Osnovna šola* (Litija: Osnovna šola, 2000), 15. Miha Seručnik, "Prebivalstvo, kmetijstvo in vinogradništvo okrajnega glavarstva Litija na začetku 20. stoletja," in Miha Preinfalk (ed.), *Iz zgodovine Litije in okolice* (Ljubljana: Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije, 2011), 568, 573.

33 Seručnik, "Prebivalstvo, kmetijstvo in vinogradništvo," 573, 574.

34 *Ibid.*, 574.

Litija and Višnja Gora. In the first district, there were five credit cooperatives, while in the second district there were two. By the end of the first decade of the 20th century, the number of credit cooperatives in judicial districts of Litija had risen to eleven.³⁵ It is important to note that no savings bank was established in the entire area during this period.

The membership lists show that the District Credit Cooperative was active in the judicial district of Litija. These members were also debtors, as the lists of those who had approved a loan have been preserved.³⁶ This credit cooperative was a financial institution with an unlimited guarantee that offered loans exclusively to its members. However, it accepted savings deposits from anyone, regardless of membership status.³⁷

The credit cooperative in Litija was founded on the initiative of the Association of Slovenian Credit Cooperatives in Celje.³⁸ On 12 July 1894, at the meeting of the Association, it was decided to establish new credit cooperatives, one of which was in Litija. The task was taken on by Ivan Lapajne, the Association's auditor. Under the chairmanship of Luka Svetec, a member of the Carniolan Regional Assembly, the residents met to discuss the statutes of the new organisation prepared by Lapajne.³⁹ By the end of 1894, 31 members had come together and paid the shares needed to set up and run the credit cooperative. They collected a total of 147 shares; each worth 20 crowns. At the beginning of the following year (1895), the credit union was able to start its work. Most of them, nine each, came from Litija, Šmartno pri Litiji and Vače, the others from the neighbouring villages.⁴⁰

Credit cooperatives raised their capital through members' contributions and loans from third parties, the latter excluding any state aid or capitalist intervention.⁴¹ The statutes of the cooperative stated that its purpose was to receive money-saving deposits, to collect money with cooperative credit and to grant mortgages and personal loans to its members. At the top was the principality, with the head and four members taking care of all the business.⁴²

35 SI ZAL LJU 85, Zadrudni register; Mohorič, "Razvoj kreditnega zadrudništva," 46, 49.

36 SI AS 444, Pristopni listi.

37 SI AS 444, Zaključni račun za leto 1896. SI AS 444, *Pravila okrajne posojilnice v Litiji, registrovane zadruge z neomejeno zavezo*, 14. 10. 1894, 1.

38 For more about credit cooperatives unions see: Žarko Lazarevič, Marta Rendla and Janja Sedlaček, *Zgodovina zadrudništva v Sloveniji (1856–1992)* (Ljubljana: Zadrudna zveza, 2023), 101–12.

39 Miloš Štibler, "Trideset let zadrudnega dela," *Zadruga* 8–10 (1913): 231. "Nova posojilnica v Litiji," *Domovina*, August 25, 1894, 4.

40 SI AS 444, Imenik društvenikov, 21, 22.

41 Jurij Perovšek, "Schulze-Delitzscheva zadrudnogospodarska doktrina kot liberalni odgovor na socialno vprašanje v 19. stoletju," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 37, No. 1 (1997): 22

42 SI AS 444, *Pravila okrajne posojilnice v Litiji*, 1, 4.

Table 1: Relationship between mortgage and personal loans of the District Credit Cooperative Litija

	new mortgage loans	repaid mortgage loans	mortgage loans at the end of the year	new personal loans	repaid personal loans	personal loans at the end of the year
1896	65	0	183	17	9	30
1897	42	16	209	9	11	28
1898	45	22	232	17	12	33
1904	80	10	488	17	15	22
1905	110	21	529	23	10	33
1906	128	21	585	14	15	30
1907	107	24	606	26	12	42
1908	94	31	610	22	10	47
1909	104	32	621	25	10	56
1910	148	36	637	23	19	52

Source: SI AS 444, Poročilo in računski sklep za drugo upravno leto 1896. SI AS 444, Poročilo in računski sklep okrajne posojilnice v Litiji, registrovane zadruge z neomejenim poroštvom za tretje upravno leto 1897. SI AS 444, Poročilo in računski sklep za četrto upravno leto 1898. SI AS 444, Konto posojil 1904–1910.

The District Credit Cooperative Litija was active in mortgage and personal loans; borrowers, mostly farmers from the Litija surrounding area or more precisely the judicial area, could obtain a loan for “valuable documents, things of small and large value, goods and mortgages.”⁴³ Ivan Lapajne, the main initiator of the credit cooperative in Litija, was in favour of private loans. However, he felt that in an area where there were no functioning savings banks, it was justified to work with mortgage loans from credit cooperatives.⁴⁴ Since, as mentioned above, there was no savings bank in the district administration of Litija and the District Credit Cooperative was the largest in the area, it is not surprising that its credit policy was based on mortgage loans. As can be seen from Table 1 above, the number of personal loans was negligible.

The second year, 1896, the second year of a credit cooperative in Litija in 1896, for which data has been preserved, will serve as an example. There are sixty membership forms from 1896, which contain data on the applicant and the value of the property, the type, the amount and the requested and granted credit. The analysis of the list of new members or loan applicants shows that applicants from almost all municipalities, i.e. from seventeen, were represented. Only three were not among the new borrowers, namely from Moravče, Kotredež and Ržišče, which were close to the three different credit cooperatives mentioned above. As expected, Litija stands out with ten, followed

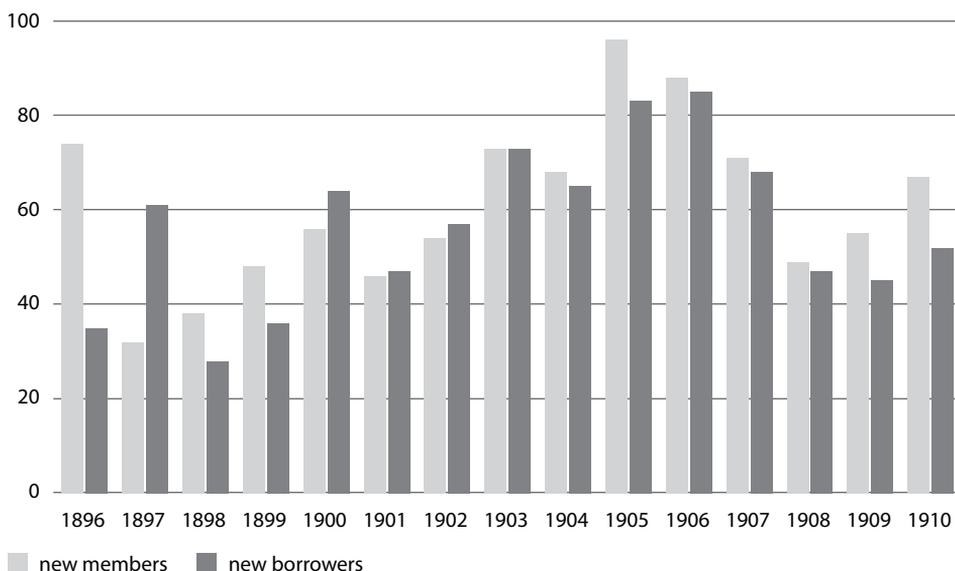
43 SI AS 444, *Pravila okrajne posojilnice v Litiji*, 2, 3.

44 Ivan Lapajne, *Slovenski posojilničar. Drugi, poporavljeni in pomnoženi natis Navoda o snovanju in poslovanju slovenskih posojilnic* (Krško: Založil pisatelj, 1907), 5.

by three other rural areas such as Šentlambert with seven, Trebeljevo with six and Šmartno with seven. In 1896, in addition to the district credit cooperatives, three other credit cooperatives were operating on the territory of the Litija judicial district, namely in Zagorje, Moravče and Sv. Križ pri Litiji (today Gabrovka).⁴⁵

The value of land used as collateral for mortgage loans ranged from 1,000 to 20,000 crowns.⁴⁶ Most of the estates, i.e. almost 92 per cent, were worth less than 10,000 crowns, and 60 per cent of these only up to 5,000 crowns. Of the total of sixty estates for which we have data, only one had a value of 20,000 crowns.⁴⁷ The lack of data makes it difficult to estimate the value of the land. Nevertheless, we can place it in the following context: the monthly income of workers was between 50 and 200 crowns, while clerks received between 200 and 800 crowns per month. If we convert the income of a worker with the highest monthly income, who earned 2400 crowns per year, his annual earnings reached a higher value of a quarter of lands in the Litija district. However, if we consider that the highest-paid clerk earned just under 10,000 crowns per year, his annual income was higher than 92 per cent of the value of the estates in this region. From this, we can conclude that the value of the agricultural land of the borrowers of the credit cooperative in Litija was extremely low.⁴⁸

Chart 1: Ratio of new members of credit unions to new borrowers



Source: SI AS 444, Okrajna posojilnica v Litiji, registrovana zadruga z neomejeno zavezo. Računski zaključek za XVI. upravno leto 1910

⁴⁵ SI AS 444, Pristopni listi.

⁴⁶ Austria-Hungary introduced a gold currency with the reform of 1892 when crowns were introduced. The guildens were finally withdrawn from circulation in 1900. The exchange took place as follows: One gulden was worth two crowns. – Pančur, *V pričakovanju stabilnega denarnega sistema*, 263–71.

⁴⁷ SI AS 444, Pristopni listi.

⁴⁸ Kresal, *Zgodovina socialne in gospodarske politike*, 317.

The archival sources show that the number of members of the loan fund mainly increased during the period covered by the article. Membership was a prerequisite for obtaining a loan, as there is also a correlation between the number of new members of the credit cooperative and the number of new borrowers. The dynamics in the acquisition of new members was to a large extent directly related to the increase in the number of new loans, as Chart 1 above shows.

Conclusion

The abolition of serfdom led to the full ownership of peasants. The dissolution of the old system in the Habsburg Monarchy was one of the lasting achievements of the short-lived Constituent Assembly of the 1848 Revolution. This process brought new opportunities and challenges. Farmers entered the path of financial inclusion, and the question arose as to how farmers could be given access to financial resources. The solution to the emerging situation was found through the creation and development of financial networks. This was also the case in the province of Carniola in the second half of the 19th century. The credit policy of these institutions had to solve the problem of the lack of, or inaccessibility to, financial resources for the lower classes. The savings banks focused more on the cities and the urban environment, so the situation of the rural population was only improved by the creation of credit cooperatives. The credit cooperative managed to collect a large amount of small savings, which it then distributed in the form of cheap loans to farmers.

The District Credit Cooperative Litija was a Schultze-Delitzsch-type credit cooperative founded on the initiative of the Celje Cooperative Association. Until 1894, there was no other financial institution in the Litija district. This gap was filled by The District Credit Cooperative Litija. The network of credit cooperatives grew slowly but steadily. By 1910, eleven credit cooperatives had been established in Litija juridical district. Even though that the credit cooperative in Litija was located in the centre of the district administration and although it formed a network of credit cooperatives, farmers all over the area benefited from its loans.

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Nataša Henig Mišič

MIKROFINANČNI POSREDNIKI IN KREDITIRANJE PODEŽELJA NA KRANJSKEM PRED LETOM 1914: ŠTUDIJA PRIMERA OKRAJNE POSOJILNICE LITIJA

POVZETEK

Reforme zemljiškega posestva in odprava tlačanstva v habsburški monarhiji leta 1848 so močno vplivale na tradicionalno življenje v drugi polovici 19. stoletja. Kmetje so postali lastniki zemlje, ki so jo obdelovali in je postala ključnega pomena njihova vključenost v tržno in denarno gospodarstvo. S tem se je spremenil tudi njihov vpliv na politični, socialni in ekonomski položaj. Sprva so bili obremenjeni z odškodninami, ki so jih morali plačevati nekdanjim fevdalcem in veleposestnikom. Hkrati je bilo finančno vključevanje povezano z odpravo tlačanstva in posledično z močnim prezadolževanjem podeželskega prebivalstva. Z vidika socialnega in gospodarskega položja je bila njihova pozicija dodatno otežena s sprejetjem zakona o dedovanju in obveznem deležu leta 1868, ki je spodbudil drobljenje že tako majhnih posesti.

Razvoj inštitucij mikrofinančnega posredništva, kot so bile hranilnice in kreditne zadruge, je bil bistveni predpogoj za proces finančnega vključevanja kmetov. Poleg tega so te ustanove razvile kreditne storitve za podeželsko prebivalstvo. Posebej so bila pomembna osebna posojila, ki so jih razvile kreditne zadruge, saj so bila obrestne mere kreditov dostopne gmotnemu položaju kmetov.

Raziskava ponuja nova spoznanja in primerja dve različni vrsti mikrofinančnih posrednikov ter njihovo vlogo in vpliv na ekonomski in finančni položaj kmečkega prebivalstva pred začetkom prve svetovne vojne. Članek se osredotoča na kreditno politiko omenjenih finančnih ustanov. Raziskuje, kako so kmetje dobili kredit ter kako in v kolikšni meri so lahko odplačevali svoje obveznosti. Posebna pozornost je namenjena analizi učinkovitosti dveh vrst hipotekarnih in osebnih posojil.

Okrajna posojilnica Litija je bila kreditna zadruga tipa Schultze-Delitzsch, ustanovljena na pobudo Celjske zadružne zveze. Do leta 1894 v tem okraju ni bilo nobenega drugega denarnega zavoda, to vrzel pa je še istega leta zapolnila Okrajna posojilnica Litija. Mreža kreditnih zadrug se je počasi, a vztrajno povečevala. Do leta 1910 je bilo v sodnem okraju Litija sicer ustanovljenih enajst kreditnih zadrug, vendar je litijska posojilnica kljub temu obdržala primat. S sedežem v središču okrajnega glavarstva je kljub konkurenčnim zadrugam nudila kmetom posojila, ki so jih s pridom uporabljali za poplačilo upnikov.

Miroslav Radivojević*

Land Tenure Reforms in the Area of Leskovac after the Treaty of Berlin (1878–1882)**

IZVLEČEK

REFORME PRAVIC DO ZEMLJIŠKE POSESTI NA OBMOČJU LESKOVCA PO BERLINSKI POGODBI (1878–1882)

Po podpisu Berlinske pogodbe (1878) je območje Leskovca postalo del Srbije. S propadom Osmanskega cesarstva so se izselili tudi muslimanski prebivalci in zapustili svoje posesti. Zapuščena zemljišča so prevzeli lokalni kristjani, ki so bili s prejšnjimi lastniki v fevdalnih odnosih. Prispevek se osredotoča na politiko srbske vlade v zvezi z vprašanji lastništva in odškodnin muslimanskim posestnikom. Predstavljeni so tudi konkretni primeri pravnih sporov glede lastništva zemljišč med lokalnimi Srbi in nekdanjimi lastniki. Raziskane so primerjave med različnimi političnimi in družbenimi strukturami pred Berlinsko pogodbo in po njej. V prispevku je osvetljen tudi nov gospodarski položaj kmetov po koncu fevdalnega sistema. Z analizo neobjavljenih in objavljenih dokumentov ter periodičnega tiska in literature prispevek prinaša nova spoznanja in poglede pri preučevanju podeželske zgodovine Srbije in jugovzhodne Evrope v 19. stoletju.

Ključne besede: Leskovac, pravice do zemljiške posesti, muslimanska lastnina, agrarni odnosi, Srbija

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ABSTRACT

After the Treaty of Berlin (1878), the area of Leskovac became a part of Serbia. With the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Muslim population also departed leaving their properties. Abandoned lands were taken by the local Christians, who had been in feudal relationships with previous owners. The article follows the politics of the Serbian government regarding the issues of ownership and compensation to Muslim landowners. Furthermore, concrete cases of land possession legal disputes between local Serbs and the former proprietors will be presented. The research compares different political and social structures before and after the Treaty of Berlin. Also, it points out the peasants' new economic situation after the liberation from the feudal system. Analysing the unpublished and published documents, with the help of periodicals and literature, the article provides the new insights and views into the studies of the rural history of Serbia and Southeastern Europe in the 19th century

Keywords: Leskovac, land tenure, Muslim property, agrarian relations, Serbia

Introduction

The purpose of the article is to deal with the almost unexplored theme of agrarian relations in the regions annexed to the Principality of Serbia by the decisions of the Berlin Congress, using the example of Leskovac county of Niš district from 1878 to 1882. Due to the complexity of the studied phenomenon and the lack of literature on the issue, the process is generally followed until its conclusion in 1907, serving as a guide for future research. The objectives of the paper, which stem from the review of the previous state of agrarian relations in a broader context, are to observe the status of former Muslim properties in new circumstances, analyse the legal framework and its practical implementation, and follow the logical epilogue of the process – solving the issue of agrarian debt in the Kingdom of Serbia. In the research and writing process the traditional historiographical method is used, involving work on both unpublished and published sources, including critiquing, analysing, and synthesis into a written text, utilising existing literature. The article is structured according to a combined chronological-thematic principle.

During the 19th century in Southeastern Europe existed numerous variations in the land tenure system. This territory belonged to different Catholic-Western and Orthodox-Byzantine-Ottoman political and social zones, but there were similarities, as well as significant differences from region to region. In certain areas/countries of both systems, until the end of the First World War predominated large estates, cultivated by peasants as labourers (as was the case in Romania and Hungary proper), thereby the feudal system was maintained. On the other hand, the Military Border

and civilian Croatia in the Habsburg Monarchy predominantly featured freeholds, while Greece initiated a gradual but highly effective agrarian reform starting in 1871. The case of the autonomous province of Ottoman Empire, the Principality of Serbia, was very specific.

With the provisions of the »Second« (1830) and »Third« (1833) sultan's *Hatisherifs*, the feudal relations between the peasants and the Turkish owners ended, and a single tributary tax was introduced for the Principality of Serbia. Numerous feudal obligations remained, which the peasants fulfilled through the Serbian authorities. The final abolition of feudalism and the introduction of a proportional general tax did not take long. This occurred in 1835. Throughout this process, ownership relations were left untouched, although Serbia compensated Turkish owners for their property at a »decent price.« Prince Miloš Obrenović adhered to the principle that the land belongs to those who cultivate it, yet this did not guarantee the inalienable rights of the peasants. Full ownership was established by the *Turkish Constitution* (the »Fourth« *Hatisherif*) of 1838 and the *Land Restitution Law* the following year.¹ Consequently, Serbia became a country of free peasants, attracting significant immigration and bolstering the desire for liberation among Serbs in neighboring provinces.

The nearly simultaneous reforms in the Ottoman Empire were not as successful. The formal introduction of equality for all the citizens and the proclaimed abolition of the timar system² by *Hatisherif of Gilkhana* in 1839 actually led to the deterioration of the position of the Christians. All due to the circumstances of the government's weakness in certain areas. In the Niš sanjak, to which the Leskovac kaza³ belonged, sipahis were abolished in 1845, and the collection of tithes was taken over by the Ottoman state. Since the government did not have enough capacity to implement it, they left the collection of levies to tenants, which caused significant abuses at the expense of taxpayers. In addition to the newly introduced state property tax (*vergia*) and tithe, the »raja« also received a number of additional levies.

The abolition of sipahis did not lead to the abolition of chifliks, which were also called »gospodarluci« (the lands of lords, lordships) in the Niš sanjak, but the opposite process took place. The former sipahis tried to impose themselves as chiflik-sahibis, ie. they took advantage of the malfunction of the system and often violently seized large estates and even entire villages making their private possessions. This worsened the position of the Christians, as the landowners increased their share of the tribute, up to the half in certain cases. There were also the series of other abuses, such as taking part of the lands as the complete property of the lord, using free labour for its

1 Gábor Demeter, *Agrarian Transformations in Southeastern Europe (from the late 18th century to World War II)* (Sofia: Institute for Historical Studies, 2017). Radoš Ljušić, *Kneževina Srbija 1830–1839* (Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 2004), 16, 17, 47–75. Bojana Miljković Katić, *Poljoprivreda Kneževine Srbije (1834–1867)* (Beograd: Istorijski institut, 2014), 23–26. Olga Srdanović-Barać, *Srpska agrarna revolucija i poljoprivreda od Kočine krajine do kraja prve vlade Kneza Miloša (1788–1839)* (Beograd: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 1980), 133–41, 235–53.

2 Conditional enjoyment of state lands by sipahis, who in turn performed military service in the cavalry.

3 The Ottoman Empire was structured into administrative units, ranging from larger to smaller entities: vilayets, sanjaks, kazas, and nahiyes.

cultivation (so-called “paraspor”), additional levies, disenfranchisement, violence, etc. Peasants were placed in an almost unbearable position, which not only increased the number of complaints, but also created a suitable ground for rebellions and uprisings.

In order to prevent unrest, an act known in historiography as the *Leskovac law* was proclaimed in 1859. The document was translated and promulgated in the Serbian language the following year, and remained in force until the annexation of the Leskovac region to the Principality of Serbia (1878). The *Law* defines the rights and obligations of peasants and landowners. Chiftchis (peasants) were obliged to give one-ninth to the chiflik-sahibis, and the free labour (kuluk) was forbidden; with the only additional provision of yield from a certain part of the estate to the landlord in the name of »rent« – paraspor. The land cultivated by the peasants was defined as their inalienable heritage – they were guaranteed possession and yield. The relations between chifchis and chiflik-sahibis in that way became public law. Since then, state authorities have guaranteed their respect, which, due to their weakness, did not mean that there were no abuses on the spot.⁴

On the eve of the Liberation, in the 1870s, about 10,500 Muslim and 21,000 male Christian residents lived in the Leskovac kaza of the Niš sanjak. Although the ratio was 1:2, the Serbs were in an unenviable socio-economic position. The prevalence of the chiflik form of land ownership in the area of Leskovac, is vividly evidenced by the fact that in Porečje, one of its regions, only two completely free villages were found in 1878: Rudare and Veliko Trnjane; while 22 were »gospodarluci«: Donja and Gornja Jajina, Kukolovce, Drvodolja, Presečina, Radonjica, Šainovac, Strojkovce, Nakrivanj, Čukljenik, Beli Potok, Vučje, Žabljanje, Brza, Gorina, Bunuša, Todorovce, Miroševce, Bukova Glava, Drvodolja, Šišince and Slavujevce.⁵

4 Sergije Dimitrijević, *Agrarni odnosi za vreme Turaka u Leskovačkom kraju* (Leskovac: Narodni muzej, 1951). Miloš Jagodić, “Međunarodni aspekt agrarnog pitanja u Srbiji (1880–1882),” in Miloš Jagodić (ed.), *Pirot – od turske kasa-be do modernog grada, preko Berlina i Versaja*. Zbornik radova (Pirot: Istorijski arhiv, 2018), 85, 86. Miloš Jagodić, “Prilog proučavanju agrarnih odnosa u Niškom sandžaku sredinom 19. veka,” *Srpske studije* 8 (2017): 312–19. Branislav M. Nedeljковиć, *Istorija baštinske svojine u Novoj Srbiji od kraja 18 veka do 1931* (Beograd: Izdavačko i knjižarsko preduzeće Geca Kon, 1936), 227–69. Aleksandar M. Savić, *Kneževina Srbija i Osmansko carstvo (1839–1858): doktorska disertacija* (Beograd: Univerzitet u Beogradu, Filozofski fakultet, 2021), 96, 119, 20. Milovan Spasić, “Podatci o agrarnim odnosima hrišćana u oslobođenim krajevima, okruga topličkog i vranjskog, za vreme turske vladavine,” *Glasnik Srpskog učenog društva* 71 (1890): 219–29. Vladimir Stojančević, *Leskovac i leskovačka nahija u XIX veku (1804–1878)* (Leskovac: Biblioteka Narodnog muzeja, 1987), 155–60. Yücel Terzibaşoğlu, “Landed Estates, Rural Commons and Collective Agriculture in Ottoman Niş and Leskofçe in the Nineteenth Century,” *Turkish Historical Review* 13 (2022): 343–71, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18775462-bja10036>. Dragoljub Trajković, “Oko Leskovačkog zakona od 27. zilkade 1275. godine,” *Leskovački zbornik* 4 (1964): 137–41. Milenko S. Filipović, “Agrarno-pravni odnosi zvani paraspor ili paraspor,” *Leskovački zbornik* 5 (1965): 9–11. Uroš S. Šešum, *Srbija i Stara Srbija (1804–1839)* (Beograd: Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Beogradu, 2017).

5 Miroslav R. Đorđević, “Inostrani komentari zakona o uređenju agrarnih odnosa u novooslobođenim krajevima Srbije od 1880. godine,” *Leskovački zbornik* 18 (1978): 70. Jovan V. Jovanović, “Iz istorije agrarne svojine u Leskovačkom porečju,” *Leskovački zbornik* 1 (1961): 32. Jovan V. Jovanović, “Poslednje age i begovi u Leskovačkom porečju,” *Leskovački zbornik* 3 (1963): 143–50. Vidosava Nikolić–Stojančević, *Leskovac i oslobođeni krajevi Srbije 1877–1878. godine. Etničke, demografske, socijalno-ekonomske i kulturne prilike* (Leskovac: Biblioteka Narodnog muzeja, 1975), 9–14.

In the New State

The above clearly illustrates why the Christian population eagerly awaited for “the freedom”. That happened in 1877/1878 when the area of Leskovac was liberated, during the Second Serbian-Turkish War, largely due to local uprisings. The Muslim population mostly fled in a hurry, leaving behind houses, personal belongings, movable and immovable property. Although the *Law on the arrangement of freed areas* from January 1878 provided equality regarding the civil rights to the population of all recognized religions, they did not return – the process of emigration and partial Christianisation continued. This legal act enabled the introduction of the judicial system in the new regions of the Principality of Serbia, which also aimed to resolve disputes in complicated property relations between former *chifchis* and *chiflik-sahibis*, mostly refugees. The temporary government in this area, pending international decision on annexation, was organized in the form of the *Leskovac administration*. One of its many tasks was the protection and inventory of the remaining property and belongings of the Muslims; part of which, primarily food, was needed for the use of the Serbian army, others were to be sold, and third were to be stored in warehouses. Part of the food left behind by the Ottoman state, religious authorities and subjects was also given to the poor citizens, Christians and Muslims.

The aforementioned inventory included the determination of the form of land ownership and its classification. To coordinate the work and resolve complex agrarian relations in the new regions of the Principality of Serbia, the *Commission for leasing Turkish estates* was established, headed by Milovan Spasić. A significant move by the state, in the context of property relations, was the decision from the end of February 1878 to lease former state, *waqf*, and Muslim refugee properties in the form of an auction. The exception was land owned by lords or *chiflik-sahibis*, whether they stayed in Serbia or left. The peasants were supposed to continue with its previous usage, under conditions that would be later determined by a legislative act. Therefore, it was important for the state that the land is cultivated; that its subjects have the means to pay taxes and surcharges in cash, in conditions of strong depopulation of new regions caused by the emigration of the Muslim population. Regardless, the economic position of the Christian population improved greatly, since instead of many levies under the Ottomans, there were only the above fiscal monetary obligations.⁶

Leasing properties in Leskovac and its surroundings encountered certain difficulties at the beginning, due to the lack of manpower in the *Administration*, as well as

6 DAS, MF-E, 1878, Folder I, row 62; F. X, r. 6; MF-A, 1879, F. V, r. 222, Referat o zakupljivanju vakupskih, državnih i dobara onih Turaka, koji su odbegli ili se iselili; P.O, Box 64. Suzana Rajić, *Spoljna politika Srbije. Između očekivanja i realnosti 1868–1878* (Beograd: Srpska književna zadruga, 2015). Jagodić, “Međunarodni aspekt agrarnog pitanja,” 86. Irena Kolaj Ristanović, *Status vakufskih dobara u Kneževini Srbiji (1878–1882). Prilog proučavanju osmanske baštine* (Beograd: Filip Višnjić, Društvo za urbanu istoriju, 2020), 137–74. Nikolić–Stojančević, *Leskovac i oslobođeni krajevi*, 26–38, 47–61, 68, 71–82, 89–112, 181–98. Stojančević, *Leskovac i leskovačka nahija*, 202–25. Stojančević, “Otkup vakufskih imanja u Leskovcu posle oslobođenja 1878. godine,” *Leskovački zbornik* 12 (1972): 135–37. Slobodanka Stojičić, *Agrarno pitanje u novooslobođenim krajevima Srbije posle srpsko-turskih ratova 1878–1907. Pravni i politički aspekt* (Leskovac: Biblioteka Narodnog muzeja, 1987), 19, 20.

the general lack of money among the population. During this work, according to the orders of the higher authorities, it was taken into account that it was about the right of ownership of the Muslim refugees over houses, shops, land, vineyards, meadows, mills, etc. Those who returned had only the obligation to prove their ownership, which would get them the return of goods and rental funds, or only the latter; with a deduction of state costs (most often 5%). As for the chiflik-sahibis, in case of confirmation of property rights, they have still recognized the share agreed with chifchis (tenth, fifth, third, half). The seized harvest from the previous year, according to the decision of the authorities, was not compensated. The return of the Muslims and the return of the property into their hands caused a certain dissatisfaction among the Christian population in the Leskovac area, complaints and demands for their eviction. In some places, there was an open refusal of the peasants to pay their feudal obligations.

This did not stop the authorities, according to the instructions of the government, generally following the stated rules. The confirmation is the case of a certain Murat Adrović, to whom the property in Leskovac was returned (16 small shops), together with the lease for the past period. On the other hand, at the end of 1878, Sulejman H. Mustafić complained that the inhabitants of the Jašunja municipality were holding his land and would not pay rent. He couldn't submit the translated deeds and was refused until the submission of valid papers or the meeting of the *Commission for the examination of agrarian relations*, which was supposed to resolve the disputed issues.⁷ Some estates of Muslims with debts went to auctions, which were publicly published in the official newspaper of the Principality - *Srpske novine*. A similar thing happened with a property whose owner died without a will. A public call was made for the heirs to come forward or they would lose their right to it.⁸

In the first months of Serbian rule, there were no fully defined rules on the property of Muslim refugees. However, despite the series of provisional measures and the resolution of disputed issues in progress, as can be seen, the observance of certain principles is noticeable. An example of this is the attitude towards ownership of property and the necessity of its proper use. The Principality of Serbia, as a matter of principle, held onto property rights, without entering into the treatment of how they were established. Accepting the decisions of the Berlin Congress (Article 39) only confirmed the protection of private property and the possibility of the Muslim population to keep immovable property on the territory of the Serbian state, while the issue of the arrangement of former state and waqf property should have become the subject of the interstate commission's work with Ottoman Empire. The second principle, not to allow the property to fall into disrepair or neglect, was reflected in the system of leases and permission for peasants to continue cultivating the estates of the lords/

7 DAS, MF-A, 1879, F. III, r. 47; F. V, r. 222, 224; F. XII, r. 32; F. XVI, r. 41; F. XVII, r. 9. Nikolić-Stojančević, *Leskovac i oslobođeni krajevi*, 88, 96. In 1879, the Muslim refugees complained to the ambassadors of the Great powers in Constantinople and the Porte about the impossibility of freely disposing of the property, its leasing and the difficulties in proving the right of ownership. – Jagodić, "Međunarodni aspekt agrarnog pitanja," 87, 88. Đorđević, "Inostrani komentari zakona o urednju agrarnih odnosa," 59.

8 *Srpske novine* 1878, 654, 669, 761, 859.

chiflik-sahibis. In the Leskovac area, due to the aforementioned lack of staff and financial resources among farmers for leasing, for part of the property (personally owned by a Muslim and the former “paraspor”), the *Administration* prescribed an obligation to give in kind, which would be used for its or the needs of the army.⁹ However, during 1878, there was a delay in the lease of certain vineyards and land on which barley, wheat, corn, rye and hemp had previously been sown – vegetation had already begun in earnest. The second problem arose in the village of Vinarce, during the summer of that year, when the inhabitants refused to give a third of the yield, according to the previous principle under the Ottomans. Their example was followed by the peasants of the surrounding countryside, by delaying the delivery of the harvest. In that case, the army intervened and forced the people of Vinarce to hand over the rent.

In Leskovac and its area, for the state, waqf and property without a proven right of ownership or for which no one applied, leasing auctions were also held in 1878 and the following years, until the final solution of any individual ownership issue. From year to year, the government became more and more skilled in leasing and established detailed and clear rules. The in-kind compensation in the harvest was still used for the army, administration and public administration bodies, such as the post office; but also sold at the expense of the state treasury, i.e. when issuing houses, taverns, shops and mills, as well as when it came to fees for grazing or forest cutting, it immediately entered the treasury.¹⁰ In the latter case, some buildings were used to accommodate soldiers, administrative offices and officials' apartments. Poor families, also, settled in some houses in Leskovac, which the local administration tolerated, on condition that they repaired them.¹¹ It was specific the case of a certain Turk, Mehmed Effendi, who stood up and protected local Serbs from violence right before the liberation, helped establish a new government, and did »other favors« for the Serbian army. The *Leskovac administration* gave him to use an abandoned house, as well as the shop of one of the refugees, as a meeting space for the remaining loyal Muslims. In order to support his family, he was also given a third of the harvest of one estate.¹² The Serbian authorities tried to ensure that the property and the land did not remain empty, but that each received its purpose.

As for colonisation as one of the phenomena in the Newly liberated regions, there were not many abandoned villages in Leskovac country. Two of them were Barje and

9 On the contrary, the local authorities adhered to the position that all the land would be leased by wealthy individuals. They would then give it to the peasants for half or a third, and thus the »tenants of the tithe« from the Ottoman period would be retained, which would not be opportune for the state. – DAS, MF-A, 1879, F. V, r. 222.

10 During 1878, the income from the issued state property was estimated at around 1,500, while in kind from the property fully owned by the refugee Turks up to 40,000 imperial ducats should have been received. Also, 65,600 were obtained from the rented houses, out of a possible 1,300,000 imperial groschen, if all were rented out. – DAS, MF-A, 1879, F. V, r. 222.

11 DAS, MF-A, 1879, F. V, r. 222; 1880, F. VI, r. 114; 1881, F. XIII, p. 58; F. XIV, r. 60; F. XVI, r. 130; 1882, F. XIII, r. 102. Jagodić, “Međunarodni aspekt agrarnog pitanja,” 86. Stojičić, *Agrarno pitanje*, 16–18, 20, 21, 130. Stojičić, “Međunarodni, ekonomski, politički i pravni aspekt agrarnog pitanja u novooslobođenim krajevima Srbije posle srpsko-turskih ratova. Dokumenta - II deo,” *Leskovački zbornik* 21 (1981): 7. Radoš Trebješanin, “Leskovac posle oslobođenja 1877. god,” *Leskovački zbornik* 18 (1978): 281, 282.

12 DAS, MF-A, 1881, F. XII, r. 88.

Igrište, previously inhabited by Albanians, which were completely replaced by settlers, as well as partially neighboring Slavujevce. About thirty poor families, mostly from the vicinity of Vlasotince, Crna Trava and Zaplanje, settled on the Albanian part of Donji Brijanje. It is assumed that something similar happened on the Albanian estates in Podrimac. Soon, these two villages were moved to the Jablanica srez of the Toplica district, where colonisation had a much wider scope.¹³

Legal Solutions and Opposition to Them

A very complex legal situation and many specifics in the agrarian relations of the four districts (Niš, Pirot, Vranje and Toplica) assigned to Serbia by the decisions of the Congress of Berlin, forced the government in Belgrade to enact the *Law on Commissions to examine property relations* in January 1879. According to it, two commissions were formed, of which the one for the Niš and Pirot districts was in charge of the area of Leskovac. On the spot, they questioned the residents, individual owners and chiflik-sahibis, assessed yields, checked land deeds, and also carried out individual measurements of the land for the sake of illustration. The commissions also determined that the laws were not respected on the ground during Ottoman times. Their analysis and previous experiences of the administrative authorities served the Serbian government as the basis for the *Law on the Regulation of agrarian relations in the Newly liberated territories*, which was adopted by the *National assembly* on February 15, 1880. It prescribed rules for the regulation of property relations, but it did not deal with completely private, but with the only disputed – divided property, which it also legally defined. In that, a distinction was made between a) the lordships (gospodar-luci), which the peasants held and worked in the sense of heritage - without the right to be expelled from them, and for that they gave him a duty or a ninth of the produce; and b) chifliks on which the Christians as settlers gave to chiflik-sahibis (owners) a different yield ratio, depending on the mutual agreement. Peasants who cultivated the mentioned land for at least one year in the first, i.e. continuously for at least ten years until the arrival of the Serbian government in the second case; were declared the owners, with compensation to the previous beneficiaries of those estates. If the chifchis stayed on the property for less than a decade, the chiflik-sahibis was forced to first offer and eventually cede at the local price, in addition to the house, garden and land the size of five days ploughing per tax head. The former chiflik-sahibis had the right to dispose of the rest of the property without any restrictions.

According to the *Law*, redemption could be done by agreement between interested parties, at any price. If an agreement could not be reached, the value of the property

13 DAS, MF-E, 1879, F. XVII, r. 8; 1880, F. I, r. 34; 1881, F. X, r. 5. Jagodić, *Naseljavanje Kneževine Srbije 1861–1880* (Beograd: Istorijski institut, 2004), 131–44. Jovanović, "Leskovačko porečje. Antropogeografska i sociološka studija," in Borisav Čeliković (ed.), *Dubočica. Naselja. Poreklo stanovništva. Običaji* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 2019), 83, 84. Jovanović, "Leskovačko polje i Babička gora. Istorijsko-privredna i etnografsko-sociološka istraživanja," in *Dubočica*, 713.

had to be determined by the average annual income for seven years if the levy was in money and eight years for levies in kind. This had to be done by: (i) assessment of the *State agrarian commission* for each district, within one year after the passing of the *Law*; (ii) court experts in the case of litigation regarding ownership rights at the district courts after the expiration of two year after commissions work. The latter referred to the fact that the manner in which the property was acquired was not entered into, and proving and contesting the right to land ownership was left to the courts. Until the payment of the redemption, the owner of the property was entitled to all (feudal) fees from the property. The law defined the division, partition of redemption and acquisition of ownership rights of individuals, in cases of collective chifchis relationship. The possibility of payment or redemption in kind in five annual instalments, with legal interest, is foreseen. The best case for the peasants was definitely carried by Article 32 - that after two years they become owners without compensation if the previous owner of the right of possession does not appear.¹⁴

The population's expectations that the ownership of the land they cultivated, with the release from Ottoman rule and the abolition of feudal relations, would actually come/return to their hands were definitely not fulfilled. Through the parliamentary debate on the *Law on the Regulation of agrarian relations*, the thesis of representatives of the opposition parties and deputies from the Newly liberated regions was that it legally confirmed in a large number of cases the violent usurpation of property from the last decades of Ottoman rule in four districts. Deputies Miloš Milojević and Ranko Tajić particularly emphasized the illegal way in which many deeds of land ownership were acquired, as well as the aggressive actions of chiflik-sahibis. Their colleagues underlined the unfairness of the legal solution towards the population of the liberated regions, which could be put in an unenviable economic position, and gave specific examples of abuses under Ottoman rule. Thus, in Grdelica, the husbands of the female descendants of the former sipahis »with pistols« imposed themselves as lords.

The government majority, on the other hand, defended the text of the proposal by referring to international obligations and compensation rights of private property owners. Prime minister and Minister of Foreign affairs Jovan Ristić vividly explained how when the army enters a foreign country, it conquers public rights, not private ones. According to him, the government would like to hand over all property to its new citizens, but due to the decisions of the Berlin Congress, its "hands were tied". The third point of view had international weight. The Muslim owners from the new regions, who had previously on the spot and through the international diplomatic network shown an interest in solving the issue of their property, asked the Assembly to change the legal proposal and to prescribe a significantly higher fee for the purchase, as well as the inclusion of »paraspur«, forests and pastures in the property for which redemption is possible. Upon adoption of the *Law on the Regulation of agrarian*

14 DAS, MF-A, 1879, F. V, r. 222. Stojičić, "Međunarodni, ekonomski, politički i pravni aspekt agrarnog pitanja II," 8–13, 16. Jagodić, "Međunarodni aspekt agrarnog pitanja," 86, 87. Nedeljković, *Istorija baštinske svojine u Novoj Srbiji*, 273–89. Stojičić, *Agrarno pitanje*, 21–27.

relations, the Ottoman Empire strongly protested against it, holding that it violated the letter of Article 39 of the Treaty of Berlin, which talks about the property rights of Muslims. There are indications that the Ottoman government even advised its subjects not to participate in the work of the agrarian commissions. Its initiative for the Great powers to act collectively to abolish this act, as a means for covert expropriation of the private possessions of Ottoman citizens, despite several interventions, was not successful.¹⁵

The pressure had an impact primarily on the other side, on the Serbian government, which was afraid of such a scenario. Because of that, it additionally ordered the commissions to act strictly according to the Law. The action of lawyer Sulejman Zumberović, a Turk from Leskovac, and a legal representative in numerous agrarian disputes, was taken particularly seriously. During the summer of 1881, on behalf of allegedly 5,000 Muslims from the Leskovac region, he submitted protests to the ambassadors of the Great Powers in Constantinople, as well as to foreign representatives and the authorities in Belgrade, against the unrealistically low valuations of property in the Newly liberated regions.¹⁶ In order to prevent further international momentum of that action, the Serbian government sent a delegate, the judge of the Court of appeal Dimitrije Marinković – the latter Minister of justice and Internal affairs – to the new regions, for the purpose of stronger control and supervision over the work of the commissions. Among other things, in October of the same year, he witnessed the demolition of a large number of Turkish houses in Leskovac; of which the timber was sold at an auction and went to the state treasury, without payment to the owners. The explanations that they were prone to fall or located on the street regulation lines in the town did not seem convincing.¹⁷ Marinković gave instructions that the mentioned action should be carried out in compliance with the legal procedure, with the issuance of documents, the right to appeal, and compensation. Regarding the non-handing over the right of property in the Leskovac area to Muslims, he ordered the local authorities to do or issue a certificate for why not doing so. In his reports, the government's plenipotentiary also noted the leasing of Turkish properties as an example of the improper handling of local authorities in the process of proving ownership rights and in disagreement with the orders of the state authorities.¹⁸

New attempts by the Porte and some representatives of the Muslims the following year, following the same recipe, in which mentioned Sulejman Zumberović from Leskovac appeared as the initiator among others, were again rejected due to the

15 MF-A, 1879, F. V, r. 222. Jagodić, "Međunarodni aspekt agrarnog pitanja," 89–91. Stojičić, "Međunarodni, ekonomski, politički i pravni aspekt agrarnog pitanja II," 13–29. Danijel Radović, *Jovan Ristić (1829–1899): biografija srpskog državnika* (Prometej: Novi Sad, 2023), 430, 431. Đorđević, "Inostrani komentari zakona o uređenju agrarnih odnosa," 59–75. Compare with: Đorđević, *Evropa i jug Srbije posle Berlinskog kongresa* (Leskovac: Narodni muzej, 1992). Stojičić, *Agrarno pitanje*, 27–34.

16 Zumberović particularly complained about the commission's work in two Leskovac villages, Šainovac and Presečina, where the value of the property was allegedly cut in half. – DAS, MF-Z, 1883.

17 Actually, that happened in the first few months of the Serbian administration. There are reports that the army demolished more than a hundred houses and damaged the others significantly. Despite the orders of the High Command and the civil authorities, it was difficult to stop soldiers from doing it. – MF-A, 1879, F. V, r. 222.

18 DAS, MF-A, 1881, F. IX, r. 114. Đorđević, *Evropa i jug Srbije*, 39, 40, 44–47.

insufficient interest of the Powers to take a collective stand on this complex issue. The adoption of the *Law on agrarian loan* and the conclusion of foreign loans to compensate Muslim owners in November 1882 put an end to any further controversy about the need for international intervention. Concurrently, that law also helped the population of the new regions. The ransom that the peasants had to pay for the land was taken over by the state treasury, which made Serbia a creditor to the population in the Newly liberated regions, which had to pay the agrarian debt in equal annual or semi-annual instalments over a period of 15 to 25 years, with interest not greater than the one under which the state borrowed money abroad. For this purpose, a special *Agrarian loan fund* was to be formed in the *Serbian National loan administration*, in which all money from debtors, as well as from properties sold at auction in case of irregular payment, was to be deposited.¹⁹

On the Ground

There were numerous difficulties in the application of legal solutions on the spot. One of them was the doubtful deeds of Muslims for possessions over forests and pastures, which had not been possible even under Ottoman law, since it had been a common property. Then, some Turks stole cattle and many movables from the peasants while moving away from their properties, so it was necessary to take compensation into account during the redemption. In both cases, the state reacted and gave appropriate instructions to the courts. Gornje Sinkovce is the proof that these instructions were followed, showing in 1882 the claims of the peasants according to the police censuses were deducted from the total debt owed to the lord Mustafa Suljković. Immediately at the beginning the agrarian commissions arose also the question of the representative's power of attorney. The government in Belgrade was of the opinion that it would not recognize documents certified by Ottoman local authorities. Powers of attorney could only be issued by the Serbian police and judicial authorities, or by its Legation in Constantinople. Deeds and extracts from the central heritage book of the Ottoman Empire were also taken into consideration. Municipal certificates and witness statements and were not recognized – until 1888 when they were allowed under certain conditions. The recommendation was for the owners to come to Serbia with their attorney and get the necessary document notarised there.²⁰

In cases where the beneficial owner of the property was not present or lacked valid documents with the attorney, the agrarian commissions made decisions without it. Therefore, in the following period, it happened that many decisions were reviewed by

19 DAS, MF-Z, 1883. Branko Peruničić (ed.), *Zulumni aga i begova u Kosovskom vilajetu* (Beograd: Nova knjiga 1989), 48–51. Stojičić, “Međunarodni, ekonomski, politički i pravni aspekt II,” 34–36. IV, *Leskovački zbornik* 23 (1983): 4–7. Stojičić, *Agrarno pitanje*, 41–50. Đorđević, *Evropa i jug Srbije*, 47–53. Jagodić, “Međunarodni aspekt agrarnog pitanja,” 91–95.

20 DAS, MF-A, 1880, F. VI, p. 114; F. IX, r. 114. Stojičić, “Međunarodni, ekonomski, politički i pravni aspekt III,” *Leskovački zbornik* 22 (1982): 23–25, 30–32; IV, 7–13, 54, 55. Stojičić, *Agrarno pitanje*, 50, 51.

the II department of the Niš's District Court in Leskovac, as the competent authority. This was also encouraged by the Serbian government, which sent instructions to the courts that in all cases of delayed power of attorney, in which a repetition of the court procedure is requested, it should be reviewed. Also, due to the diversity of court decisions in agrarian disputes in the new regions, appeals to the Court of cassation have been made possible since 1887, according to the regulations of civil court procedure. However, assessments for some lands in area of Leskovac immediately became legally binding, such for example those for the properties in Brestovac of a certain Mehmed Bey from Niš, and Mehmed Fuad Bey from Leskovac in Turekovac, properties in Miroševce, Šainovac, Šišince, Bogojevce, Vlase and Kamenica, Priboj and other places, all resolved during 1881.²¹ A very favourable case befell a certain Stanko from the village of Zoljevo, to whom the former lord Avda, as a sign of gratitude for transporting him with his belongings during the panic eviction in 1877, gave deeds to a mill and land.²²

The problem arose on the part of the peasants, who after a year or two could no longer pay the ransom. According to the above *Law on agrarian loan*, the debt was settled by the state. Such a decision was not final, and it has waited for a decree on the interest, length and amount of repayment instalments, as well as the eventual division of the inheritance among individuals. Due to untimely notifications and delay in the decision on the amount of interest under the mentioned *Law*, at the end of 1883 there was confusion regarding the collection of claims. Certain villages paid according to the decisions of the agrarian commissions through the local authorities to the *Ministry of finance*, with the old interest rate, even though their debt was paid by the *National loan administration*. It also happened that money was deposited into the account of Muslim owners who had not applied for redemption. An example is the residents of the village of Bukova Glava in Leskovac area, who managed to pay the entire debt by 1883, without even knowing the whereabouts of their former lord, Mahmut Mustarić.²³

The settlement of disputed questions about ownership and compensation, between former feudal lords and peasants lasted several years and caused a huge amount of work for the judiciary. In the Leskovac region, the II department of the Niš district court decided on numerous cases, with a wide range of disputed issues. For the sake of illustration, only a few will be mentioned. For the estates of Mahmud bey Durmišević and Husein bey Azis Begović in Jašunja, the translated powers of attorney for the representatives at the agrarian commission were not submitted in time in 1881. The revision of the valuation was done four years later, when, according to the assessment carried out by going out into the field, along with the confirmation of the absolute ownership of the peasants, the compensation of (feudal) income from the

21 DAS, MF-Z, 1883; 1884. Stojičić, "Međunarodni, ekonomski, politički i pravni aspekt II," 36–39; III, 44, 45; IV, 7–9, 65–68. Stojičić, "Drugo odeljenje suda okruga niškog sa sedištem u Leskovcu," *Leskovački zbornik* 14 (1974): 177–86. Stojičić, *Agrarno pitanje*, 50–52, 158, 159. Đorđević, *Evropa i jug Srbije*, 49, 50. Nedeljković, *Istorija baštinske svojine u Novoj Srbiji*, 289–91.

22 Jovanović, "Leskovačko polje i Babička gora," 623.

23 DAS, MF-Z, 1883.

estate for the mentioned period was also included in the purchase price of the property. The verdicts coincided – nominal a term of five years and 6%, divided among the new owners, also in Kutleš 1884. A new expertise assessment was also carried out in Radonjica, Razgojna, Čifluk Razgojski and Strojkovce, where there were even nine lords or chifluk-sahibis. In all the mentioned cases, the awarded sum was paid from the funds of the *Agrarian loan fund*, which indebted the peasants by placing a mortgage on their property.

In some litigations, there were changes in the scope of property holdings. The previous decision of the agrarian commission from 1881 was annulled for the property of Ismail Bey Husein Pašić in Velika Kopašnica, and in the regular court proceedings in 1886, a new verdict was determined, with a supplemented list of assets and the total amount. The peasants needed to nominal pay it back within five years, with an interest rate of 6% annual interest, actually the state assumed to foot it from the *Agrarian loan fund*. The expertise found an additional 120 dunums of Husein Zajma Sali Zajimović and his wife Atidja land in Donja Slatina, for which the peasants had to give the feudal obligations in money until October 1884, when the verdict was passed. New property assessments were also evaluated in Beli Potok.²⁴ The case of the villages of Badince, Dupljane, Brejanovce, Miroševce, Gornje Stopanje and Donje Sinkovce testifies that there was not always expertise and litigation in cases of disputed land ownership. In the period from 1883 to 1885, the inhabitants of these places reached a settlement with the former lords. They hand over the ownership of all the lands to them, at the agreed purchase price.²⁵ The mentioned »best case« for the peasants happened in Beli Potok, Todorovce, Presečina, Kutleš and Razgojna, where certians Zair and Omer, Jašar, Mula Alija, Ibrahim bey Takogliya and Sait Zaimović did not appear at all with property claims.²⁶ The settlement of disputes in the Leskovac region was prolonged in many cases, such as the new dispute in Badince, which was processed in 1888.²⁷ The Serbian government also continued to give instructions for disputed issues. In 1889 it warned that Muslim properties could not be sold for the purpose of executing court cases if there is no certificate of the debtor's ownership; as well as about the appearance of false powers of attorney. In February 1891, the local authorities were informed that the deadline for reporting disputes regarding economic and chiflik-sahibis properties had expired in 1884, except for property fully owned by Muslims.²⁸

A specific phenomenon in the agrarian relations in the Newly liberated regions of Serbia were Christian feudal lords, rich people who bought properties from Muslims: a) during the Ottoman rule, the so-called »baptized lords«, b) just before the end of it or when Muslims left this area at low prices, correctly counting on the higher

24 Stojičić, "Međunarodni, ekonomski, politički i pravni aspekt I," *Leskovački zbornik* 20 (1980): 280–86; II, 68–71; 86–96; III, 8–10, 14–16, 23–25.

25 DAS, MF-A, 1879, F. V, r. 222. Stojičić, "Međunarodni, ekonomski, politički i pravni aspekt II," 37–39, 60–63; III, 26–28, 48–50; IV, 43–46, 59, 60; V, *Leskovački zbornik* 25 (1985): 534, 535; VI, *Leskovački zbornik* 26 (1986): 39, 40.

26 Jovanović, "Poslednje age i begovi," 145. Stojičić, "Međunarodni, ekonomski, politički i pravni aspekt II," 95; III, 16.

27 Stojičić, "Međunarodni, ekonomski, politički i pravni aspekt III," 3–5. Jovanović, "Leskovačko porečje," 82, 191.

28 Stojičić, "Međunarodni, ekonomski, politički i pravni aspekt IV," 13–17, 28, 29.

regular value afterward (among them were civil servants and officials of agrarian commissions). In 1878, the Serbian government itself allowed the possibility of buying Turkish estates by local subjects, with the only recommendation that they pay attention to the validity of ownership rights.²⁹ Among the »baptized lords«, there were individuals who had treated the peasants worse than the Turks. An example is the merchant Neško Mitrović, who was complained about by the villagers from Vučje, in the vicinity of Leskovac. He had several estates in this area. It is evidenced by his dispute with the peasants of Nakrivanjski Čifluk for ownership of land, a mill, a tavern and three houses. After the judges went to the field in 1883, they had to pay him 400 imperial ducats for redemption. In Bogojevac, the lordship was in the name of local merchant Petar Živković, and in Gornji Bunibrod of Kosta Ilić from Vlasotince.

Among the mentioned “baptized lords” were Stojan Mladenović, a merchant from Leskovac, who kept a certain part of the property in the village of Razgojna, as well as Grigorije and Žiško Kostić, with chifliks in Strojkovac. According to the court rulings from the same year, it can be seen that the latter village had two more Serbian lords - a certain Gligorije Kocić and Jorgač Kostić (also appears in the nearby Presečina, Nakrivanj and Čukljenik), whose heirs have also compensated the value of the property, with uncollected income from the previous period. The same nominal principle of interest of 6% in five years was applied, as with Muslim owners’ disputes, and actually paid from the *Agrarian loan fund*. In nearby Žabljane, the estate of a certain Sulje Alilović was bought in 1884 by Pirče Dimitrijević, a tailor from Leskovac, who asked the peasants to move out of it. A characteristic case was the purchase of land from Turkish lords after 1878 in Vinarce and Zalužje, which was carried out by Jews from Leskovac, certain Musan and Avram. Finally, there was a smaller number of Muslims who kept part of their former properties and managed them mainly through representatives and intermediaries – there were about thirty in Leskovac 1885.³⁰

Epilogue

The Principality of Serbia found complicated property-legal relations in the Newly liberated lands. From 1878 to 1882, it did a lot of work on their solution. In the mentioned period, the state determined the situation on the ground, defined the provisional principles of work, then the legal framework for regulation, agrarian commissions made assessments and made decisions on the amount of debt, and in 1882, litigation proceedings regarding disputed possessions began. The final step in that process was the adoption of the *Law on agrarian loan*. Payments to the state, however, were irregular in many

²⁹ DAS, MF-A, 1879, F V, r. 222.

³⁰ Ibidem. DAS MF-Z, 1883; 1884. Stojičić, “Međunarodni, ekonomski, politički i pravni aspekt I,” 278–80; II, 19, 21, 69, 70; 73–78, 91–96; IV, 19, 20. Jovanović, “Poslednje age i begovi,” 144, 145. Jovanović, “Leskovačko polje i Babička gora,” 513, 615. Vidosava Stojančević, “Leskovac i leskovački kraj u prvim godinama posle oslobođenja od Turaka,” *Leskovački zbornik* 18 (1978): 145, 146, 164–95. Stojičić, *Agrarno pitanje*, 18, 19, 36, 38–41. Trebješani, “Leskovac posle oslobođenja,” 282, 283.

cases. In March 1890, *the National assembly* passed an amendment to the *Law on agrarian loan*, according to which, for easier collection, the entire sum of the debt could be divided among individual owners, according to the proportion of the land that belonged to each. It was possible by the request of the residents or wherever it seemed necessary. At the same time, applying for the *Agrarian loan* was limited until May 13, 1890.³¹

The introduction of the money system in the village brought many problems for the people accustomed to in-kind levies. Already in the first year after the completion of the work of the agrarian commissions, a certain number of peasants could not pay the instalments for the purchase of the land. The *Law on agrarian loan* (1882) somewhat alleviated their position and delayed their decline. But, after some time some owners had to sell their property due to debts and became landless – again servants of rich landlords. Some estimates are that there were more than 40 such cases in Leskovac county. Some of them were a certain Đorđe Ristić from Radonjica, who was “forced” to sell his property to Leskovac merchant Nikola H. Milenković. Mita Pop-Stankova from Golema Njiva, families Tačini and Bikini in Grajevac, and some families in Donji Bunibrod also fell into debt. By buying or through bidding on auctions the land of agrarian debtor’s Jovan Ćosić in Strojkovce and Šainovac, Milan Tonkić in Brza, and certain Dorka Čuljković acquired larger estates. They were requests to the *National assembly*, from the villages of Jašunje or Razgojna (1887 and 1888), that due to the impossibility of repayment, the state should make concessions, so that the population would not resort to alienating their property. The answer in both cases was that the *Law on agrarian loan* had already provided enough relief.³² The government considered that it had already done enough for the peasants in the regions liberated in 1878.

Changes took place with the arrival of the People’s Radical Party in power in the country, which previously was the most opposed to the legal solutions of liberals and progressives. According to the *Law on the repayment of Agrarian loan* in 1891, the peasants were forgiven all interest from the previous period but also allowed to give in kind for repayment. Thus, peasants from villages in the Leskovac area, such as Beli Potok, according to the letter of this *Law* achieved reprogramming of the debt. In addition to the forgiveness of interest, they were given a 25-year term and semi-annual interest rate of 4.25% for the payment of the remaining obligations. The next step was made with amendments to that *Law* in 1902. With it all interest was again forgiven, a one-time depreciation of 2% was introduced on the remaining amount of the debt, and a deadline of 20 years was given for the payment of only the principal debt. The final step in the liquidation of the agrarian problem took place in 1907 when the state forgave the remaining amount of loans to all the remaining 14.000 debtors. In addition, the state returned a third of the price to peasants who sold their properties due to agrarian debt and were left without the required legal minimum of lands.³³

31 Stojičić, “Međunarodni, ekonomski, politički i pravni aspekt II,” 39; IV, 25–29. Stojičić, *Agrarno pitanje*, 55–59.

32 Stojičić, “Međunarodni, ekonomski, politički i pravni aspekt IV,” 22–24; V, 11, 12. Stojičić, *Agrarno pitanje*, 52, 53. Jovanović, “Poslednje age i begovi,” 146, 148. Jovanović, “Iz istorije agrarne svojine u Leskovačkom porečju,” 32. Jovanović, “Leskovačko porečje,” 82, 169. Jovanović, “Leskovačko polje i Babička gora,” 520, 548, 576.

33 DAS, MF-Z, 1891. Jovanović, “Poslednje age i begovi,” 146, 148. Stojičić, “Međunarodni, ekonomski, politički i pravni aspekt IV,” 1–5; V, 514–34; VI, 3–30. Stojičić, *Agrarno pitanje*, 55–126.

Conclusion

The population in the regions liberated from Ottoman rule in 1877/1878 expected, following the example of the previous reform in the Principality of Serbia in the 1830s, that with the abolition of feudal relations they would attain full ownership of the cultivated land. That, however, did not happen. Serbia respected private property rights, thereby avoiding international interference in its newly recognized independence, despite the irregularities and violence through which Muslim owners had previously acquired lands in a significant number of cases. With the liberation, the social status of Christians has significantly improved. As for their economic positions, similar to the various specifics of agrarian relations, there was a wide spectrum of scenarios concerning what happened to the peasants. About 20 years after annexation, the government's decision to forgive the remaining debts and partially compensate for the sale of property finally resolved the agrarian issue in four new districts of Serbia. A little more than a century later, the importance of land relations in the Leskovac area is still evident through the presence of villages with names from the history of agrarian relations, such as Nakrivanjski Čifluk, Bunuški Čifluk and Čifluk Razgojnski, along with numerous local toponyms.

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- DAS – Državni arhiv Srbije:
 - MF-A – Ministarstvo finansija, Administrativno odeljenje.
 - MF-E – Ministarstvo finansija, Ekonomno odeljenje.
 - MF-Z – Ministarstvo finansija, Uprava državnih dugova.
 - P.O – Pokloni i otkupi.

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Miroslav Radivojević

REFORME PRAVIC DO ZEMLJIŠKE POSESTI NA OBMOČJU LESKOVCA PO BERLINSKI POGODBI (1878–1882)

IZVLEČEK

Območje Leskovca je bilo osvobojeno leta 1877/78 med drugo srbsko-turško vojno. Muslimansko prebivalstvo je večinoma bežalo v naglici in za seboj pustilo hiše, osebne predmete ter premično in nepremično premoženje. V prvih mesecih srbske vladavine za to premoženje ni bilo povsem jasnih pravil. Kljub vrsti začasnih ukrepov in napredku pri reševanju sporov pa je mogoče opaziti upoštevanje nekaterih načel. Primer tega je odnos do lastništva nad posestjo in nujnosti njene ustrezne uporabe. Kneževina Srbija je načeloma ohranila lastninske pravice, ne da bi se ukvarjala s tem, kako so bile vzpostavljene. Drugo načelo – da posest ne sme propasti ali se zanemariti – se je izražalo v sistemu zakupov in dovoljenj kmetom, da še naprej obdelujejo posestva fevdalcev/čitluk-sahibij. Zaradi zelo zapletenega pravnega položaja in številnih posebnosti v agrarnih odnosih štirih okrožij (Niš, Pirot, Vranje in Toplica), ki so v skladu z odločitvami Berlinskega kongresa pripadla Srbiji, je morala vlada v Beogradu januarja 1879 sprejeti *Zakon o ustanovitvi komisij za preučitev lastninskih razmerij*. V skladu s tem zakonom sta bili ustanovljeni dve komisiji, pri čemer je bila komisija za okrožji

Niš in Pirot pristojna tudi za območje Leskovca. Na podlagi analize, ki sta jo opravili komisiji, in predhodnih izkušenj upravnih organov je srbska vlada oblikovala *Zakon o ureditvi agrarnih odnosov na osvobojenih ozemljih*, ki ga je narodna skupščina sprejela 15. februarja 1880. Naslednji korak je vključeval sprejetje *Zakona o agrarnem posojilu* in sklenitev tujih posojil za poplačilo odškodnine muslimanskim lastnikom novembra 1882, s čimer so se končale vse nadaljnje razprave glede potrebe po mednarodnem posredovanju. Medtem so agrarne komisije pripravile ocene in odločale o višini dolga, leta 1882 pa so se začeli sodni postopki v zvezi s spornimi posestmi. Reševanje sporov med nekdanjimi fevdalci in kmeti glede lastništva in odškodnin je trajalo več let in je zelo obremenilo sodstvo. Uvedba denarnega sistema v vaseh je ljudem, vajenim dajatev v naravi, povzročila številne težave. *Zakon o agrarnem posojilu* je nekoliko olajšal njihov položaj in upočasnil njihov propad. Sčasoma pa so morali nekateri lastniki zaradi dolgov prodati svojo posest, tako da so ostali brez zemlje in so se morali spet udinjati bogatim posestnikom. Po več spremembah *Zakona o ureditvi agrarnih odnosov* in *Zakona o agrarnem posojilu* ter sprejetju novega *Zakona o vračilu agrarnega posojila* iz leta 1891 in njegovih spremembah iz leta 1902 je bil zadnji korak pri reševanju agrarnega problema narejen leta 1907, ko je država vsem preostalim 14.000 dolžnikom odpisala preostali znesek posojil.

Robert Devetak*

“The cause of our poverty is colonia.” The Colonate System in the County of Gorizia and Gradisca during the Austro-Hungarian Empire**

IZVLEČEK

»VZROK NAŠE REVŠČINE JE KOLONSTVO.«
KOLONSKI SISTEM NA GORIŠKEM IN GRADIŠKEM
V OBDOBJU AVSTRO-OGRSKE

Prispevek obravnava kolonski sistem – posebno obliko zemljiške odvisnosti, ki se je ohranila še skoraj stoletje po odpravi fevdalnih razmerij leta 1848. Šlo je za civilnopravno razmerje, za katero je bilo značilno, da so večinoma revne kmečke družine, ki niso imele v lasti nepremičnin, na podlagi pogodbe najele zemljišče, hišo ali celotno kmetijo v zakup, najpogosteje od plemiških družin ali bogatih kmečkih veleposestnikov. Sistem je spominjal na tlačanskega in je med koloni prehajal iz roda v rod. Kolonske družine je potiskal na družbeni rob in v revščino. V okviru habsburške države je bil uveljavljen tudi na območju dežele Goriške in Gradiške, predvsem v zahodnih predelih, ki jih je poseljevalo večinoma furlansko prebivalstvo. V prispevku bodo predstavljene splošne značilnosti sistema na prehodu iz 19. v 20. stoletje in poskusi oblasti, da bi ga formalnopravno ukinile.

Ključne besede: Goriška in Gradiška, kolonski sistem, gospodarske razmere, kmetijstvo, revščina, Avstro-Ogrska

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the colonate system – a specific form of land dependency that persisted for almost a century following the abolition of feudal relations in 1848. It was a civil law relationship that involved mostly poor peasant families who did not own property, leasing land, a house, or an entire estate based on a contract, most often from noble families or wealthy rural landlords. The system resembled serfdom and was passed down from generation to generation between the coloni. It pushed colonate families to the margins of society and into poverty. The system persisted in the Habsburg monarchy, notably in the region of Gorizia and Gradisca, especially in the western parts. This paper will present the general features of the system, as it existed at the turn of the 19th century, as well as the attempts of the authorities to formally regulate it.

Keywords: County of Gorizia and Gradisca, colonate system, economic conditions, agriculture, poverty, Austria-Hungary

Introduction

In the decades preceding the First World War, the economic situation in the County of Gorizia and Gradisca was characterised by various factors that influenced the everyday socio-economic landscape of the countryside. Among the more peculiar features was the colonate system – a form of land dependency that went on to survive the abolition of feudal relations in 1848 by almost a century.¹ It was particularly characteristic of the western parts of the County, inhabited mainly by the Friulian-speaking population. It was a civil-law relationship characterised by the leasing of land, a house, or an entire estate based on a contract (either oral or written), mostly by poor peasant families who did not own property. The owners of these properties were most often former feudal, noble families, rich landlords, the bourgeoisie, or ecclesiastical offices. The system resembled serfdom and was passed down from generation to generation among the coloni. It pushed colonate families to the social margins and into poverty – they were one of the most socially deprived groups in the County. Families lived in harsh and inadequate conditions, leading to physical and psychological problems, the spread of infectious

1 For more details on the colonate system on the western edge of Slovene territory in the 19th and 20th centuries, see: Peter Stres, "Oris kolonata v slovenskem delu dežele Goriško-Gradiščanske do konca prve svetovne vojne," *Goriški letnik: zbornik Goriškega muzeja*, No. 12/13 (1987): 175–203. Peter Stres, "Oris kolonata na Goriškem od konca I. svetovne vojne do leta 1947," *Goriški letnik: zbornik Goriškega muzeja*, No. 15/16 (1989): 69–106. Peter Stres, "Odprava kolonata na Goriškem (1947–1955)," *Goriški letnik: zbornik Goriškega muzeja*, No. 35 (2011) 167–96. Sergij Vilfan, "Izročilo o kolonatu v Goriških Brdih," *Etnolog: glasnik Slovenskega etnografskega muzeja* 1 (1992): 137–50. Recent works include: Tanja Gomiršek, "Vrste zakupnih pogodb v Goriških brdih v prvi polovici 19. stoletja," *Zgodovinski časopis* 71, No. 1/2 (2017): 164–85.

diseases and often premature death. The system had a determinative impact on the local economic and social situation, which was marked by pellagra and the mass emigration of the colonate population to other parts of the country and abroad. The emergence of mass media (newspapers), democratisation (the expansion of suffrage), and the establishment of charitable structures from the end of the 19th century onwards brought the issue into public discourse. The political authorities were confronted with demands to abolish the colonate system. This paper will outline the general features of the system at the transition from the 19th to the 20th century. The first part will focus on the socio-economic consequences of the colonate system before the First World War, especially in the Slovene-speaking part of Gorizia and Gradisca. The second part will give a more detailed description of the attempts of local and state authorities to legally abolish the colonate system.

The County of Gorizia and Gradisca and Its Economic Characteristics in the Decades before the First World War

Gorizia and Gradisca was one of the 18 provinces that made up the Cisleithanian part of Austria-Hungary. It was included in the administrative-political unit of the Austrian Littoral (Österreichische Küstenland), whose seat was in Trieste.² It was one of the smaller provinces, but it was geographically very diverse, stretching south to north from the Adriatic Sea to the eastern Alpine peaks. In addition to its geography, the region was also defined by its ethnic diversity. In 1910, the population of the region numbered 260,000,³ including Slovenes, Friulians,⁴ Italians, Germans⁵ and Jews.⁶ The Italian and partly German communities in particular held a dominant position in politics, administration, education and the economy, significantly shaping the social image of the County, irrespective of its ethnic structure, which provoked opposition from the Slovene majority. As a result, at the turn of the 20th century, national topics and conflicts were an everyday feature, especially those between the Slovene and Italian communities.⁷

Agriculture was the dominant sector of the economy in the period Austria-Hungary, with arable farming, animal husbandry and forestry being the main industries. The

2 For more on the administrative-political situation and territorial features of Gorizia and Gradisca, see: Branko Marušič, *Pregled politične zgodovine Slovencev na Goriškem: 1848–1899* (Nova Gorica: Goriški muzej, 2005), 29–37.

3 Ibidem, 45. In 1910, according to the population census, which collected data on spoken languages, 62% of the population was Slovene-, 36% Italian-, and 2% German-speaking.

4 In many cases, the Friulian community was equated with and belonged to the Italian community during this time.

5 Matic Batič, “Mislimo sicer nemško, čutimo nemško, a nikomur ne bomo zamerili njegovega drugačnega mišljenja.” *Nemški goriški list Görzer Wochenblatt* in njegova politična usmeritev,” *Zgodovinski časopis* 77, No. 1/2 (2023): 88–115.

6 Renato Podbersič, *Jerusalem ob Soči: judovska skupnost na Goriškem od 1867 do danes* (Ljubljana: Študijski center za narodno spravo; Gorica: Goriška Mohorjeva družba; Maribor: Center judovske kulturne dediščine Sinagoga Maribor, 2017).

7 Branko Marušič, *Sosed o sosedu: prispevki k zgodovini slovensko-italijanskega sožitja* (Trst: ZIT, 2012), 9–42. Robert Devetak, “Razvoj slovenske prisotnosti v goriškem javnem prostoru pred prvo svetovno vojno,” *Zgodovinski časopis* 77, No. 3/4 (2023): 380–404.

best agricultural conditions were in the lowland, south-western part of the County, where, in addition to the favourable geographical location, the climate was suitable for developing specialised sectors such as viticulture, fruit-growing, and even rice-growing in the coastal lagoons.⁸ Despite the relatively favourable climate, agriculture was plagued by a number of structural problems – uncompetitive and poorly educated farmers, the slow introduction of technical innovations, indebtedness, poverty, and significant land fragmentation.⁹ All this resulted in a poor standard of living and a mass exodus from the County to other centres and abroad.¹⁰ In addition, major crafts and industry were badly developed and confined to the major centres or urban areas. It was only in the beginning of the 20th century that more intensive growth began. The capital of the County, Gorizia, had only around 30,000 inhabitants at that time and was economically overshadowed by the much larger and more important city of Trieste.¹¹

Main Aspects of the Colonate System in Gorizia and Gradisca

The social and economic situation in the flat and hilly part of the County was strongly influenced by the presence of the colonate system, which was first mentioned in the 16th century¹² and remained in Gorizia region until 1947, when the area was partitioned between Italy and Yugoslavia.¹³ Before the First World War, the colonate system was present in certain parts of the Slovene territory, specifically the Gorizia Hills (*Goriška brda, Collio*), Istria, parts of the Vipava Valley and Karst.¹⁴ It also extended to other territories of Austria-Hungary, including parts of Croatian Istria, Dalmatia and Tirol.¹⁵ In 1902, there were more than 400 colonate farms in the territory of Gorizia and Gradisca, where the Slovene population lived.¹⁶ This form of land dependence originated in Italy¹⁷ and was not covered by the abolition of feudal relations in 1848, because the coloni were legally-speaking free, albeit for the most part very poor, without significant assets and

8 Branko Marušič, "Prispevki k poznavanju gospodarskih razmer na Goriškem v 19. in v začetku 20. stoletja," in Darja Skrt (ed.), *Aleksandrinke* (Nova Gorica: Goriški muzej, 2014), 59–72.

9 Alberto Luchitta, *La Camera di Commercio di Gorizia 1850–2000: uomini e lavoro in 150 anni di storia* (Gorizia: Libreria Editrice Goriziana, 2001), 49–51. Robert Devetak, "Gospodarska kriza na Goriškem in Gradiškem v letu 1879 ter ukrepi oblasti in dobrodelnih institucij za njeno reševanje," in Petra Kolenc et al. (eds.), *Marušičev zbornik: zgodovinsko-zahodnega roba: prof. dr. Branku Marušiču ob 80-letnici* (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2019), 281–99.

10 Aleksej Kalc, "Migration movements in Goriška in the time of Aleksandrinke," in Mirjam Milharčič Hladnik (ed.), *From Slovenia to Egypt: Aleksandrinke's Trans-Mediterranean Domestic Workers' Migration and National Imagination* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, cop. 2015), 49–71.

11 Marušič, "Prispevki k poznavanju," 68.

12 Vojko Pavlin, "Primer uveljavljanja kupnega prava in kolonata na Goriškem 16. stoletja," *Goriški letnik: zbornik Goriškega muzeja*, No. 28 (2001): 289–93.

13 Stres, "Oris kolonata v slovenskem," 175.

14 Vilfan, "Izročilo o kolonatu," 141.

15 Gomiršek, "Vrste zakupnih pogodb," 165.

16 Vilfan, "Izročilo o kolonatu," 141.

17 Sergij Vilfan, "Agrarna premoženjska razmerja," in Pavle Blaznik et al. (eds.), *Gospodarska in družbena zgodovina Slovencev. Zgodovina agrarnih panog* (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1980), 426, 427.

contractually tied to wealthy landlord families, who in certain areas owned large swathes of arable land. The system resembled serfdom and was often passed down from generation to generation between the coloni. The coloni cultivated the farmland. As sharecroppers, they were expected to send the landowners payment in the form of crops.¹⁸ The contracts, which varied slightly according to time, place and the parties involved, were fixed in time, usually for a period of between one and three years, and were renewable, with the landowners having the final say.¹⁹ This also put the coloni in a distinctly subordinate position. Landlords chose to use these types of contracts because they gave them more leverage over the coloni than they otherwise would have had if they had hired ordinary workers.²⁰ The colonate contracts in force in the 1870s typically required the coloni to give the landowners two-thirds of the wine crop, plus a certain amount of fruit (plums, cherries, and grapes). Towards the end of the 19th century, rapid technological progress and faster transport brought changes, since it made fruit more commercially attractive. As a result, its share in contracts increased.²¹ In addition, part of the obligations was paid in cash and part in unpaid work on the owner's other land (fields, meadows, vineyards, forests). Despite clearly-defined terms, landowners would frequently decide to cancel contracts.²² The *Soča* newspaper wrote the following: "If the landlord is not satisfied with the colono, he dismisses him at the end of the year and the colono has to hit the road with his wife and children. The condition of the coloni is very harsh."²³ The contractual land dependency limited mobility and negatively affected the ability of the coloni to access complementary sources of income, such as small crafts or transportation. In addition, landowners extracted labour from the coloni on their land and protected their interests.²⁴

While such contracts were criticised by the public, no changes were made until the end of the 19th century. At the time, newspapers regularly published opinion pieces on the subject:

"The Friulian landlord has a lot of property, but he cannot cultivate it himself, so he rents it out to poor people and gets them to work for him. The conditions are bloody. Every year the colono must give him more than half of the total produce; he must sell all the wine to the master at the lowest price, he must do all of the work, and even cultivate his vineyard, which he has kept for his private use."²⁵

Landowners resisted changes to the system because it provided them with a high income and, in many cases, greater political power. This type of land ownership allowed active political participation and, in line with the electoral system of the time, inclusion in the

18 Stres, "Oris kolonata v slovenskem," 179, 180. Furio Bianco, "L'armonia sociale nelle campagne. Economia agricola e questione colonica nella Principesca Contea di Gorizia e Gradisca tra ,800 e ,900," in Furio Bianco et al. (eds.), *Economia e società nel Goriziano tra ,800 e ,900: il ruolo della Camera di Commercio (1850–1915)* (Gorizia: Edizioni della Laguna, 1991), 44–66.

19 Vilfan, "Izročilo o kolonatu," 139.

20 Stres, "Oris kolonata v slovenskem," 178.

21 Gomiršek, "Vrste zakupnih pogodb," 167.

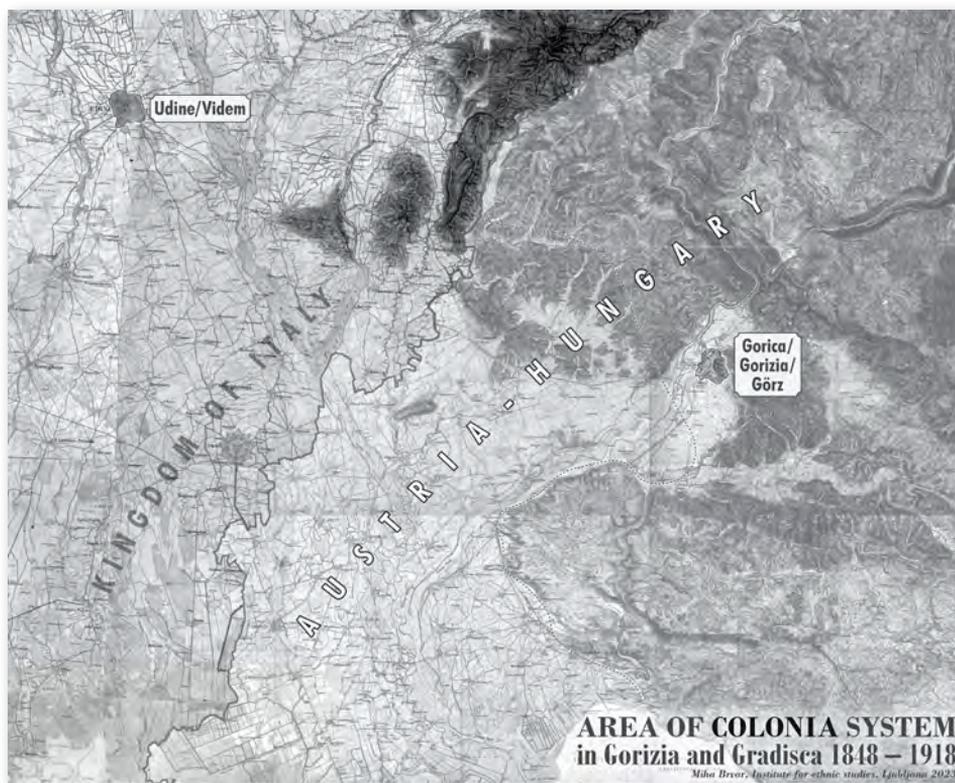
22 Stres, "Oris kolonata v slovenskem," 179.

23 "Furlanski koloni," *Soča*, 24. 7. 1885, 1.

24 Aleksej Kalc, "Selitvena gibanja ob zahodnih mejah slovenskega etničnega prostora: teme in problemi," *Annales* 10 (1997): 199, 200.

25 "Na Furlanskem," *Soča*, 16. 4. 1874, 1.

Figure 1: The distribution of the colonate system in the County of Gorizia and Gradisca



Author of the map: Miha Brvar

landlord curia²⁶ at regional level.²⁷ On the other hand, the system pushed colonate families to the margins of society and into poverty. An anonymous correspondent in the *Gorizia* newspaper wrote in 1900:

"If you walk for a long time in Friuli, you can see hundreds upon hundreds of diligent hands, working the vast fields. When you enquire: 'To whom does this vast field belong?', they will give you two or three names, one count and two barons, or vice versa. These are the owners, these are the lords, while everyone else are coloni, a kind of tenant farmers, and their subordinates, the 'sottani'²⁸ – the workers, who are, of course, the most numerous. The owner, the baron or count, profits the most from the lands, because he has to live like a count or baron (?!); after him comes the colono, or tenant, who also prefers to live well rather than poorly – and third comes the sottano, or worker, who has only enough to breathe. Most of these workers are married and usually have many children. Their daily wage or salary is 50 to 80 pennies a day, and with this the worker has to support himself, his wife, and, if necessary, six to eight children."²⁹

26 Vasilij Melik, *Volitve na Slovenskem: 1861–1918* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1965), 42–49.

27 Vilfan, "Izročilo o kolonatu," 140.

28 *Ibid.*, 142. Sottano was the Italian term used to denote the poorest of the coloni.

29 "Pelagra v Furlaniji," *Gorica*, 19. 6. 1900, 3.

The Colonnate System as a Social Issue

The system put colonate families in a particularly risky position in the event of emergencies linked to economic crises, natural disasters, and other social upheavals. This was aggravated by poor education and an inability or refusal to adapt to new economic and social trends.³⁰ Poor education often affected entire colonates, who, due to the lack of resources and time, did not even receive primary education, despite it being compulsory by law.³¹ Landowners were also opposed to any kind of schooling, since they saw educated and literate peasants as lazy.³² In 1874, in an article entitled *In Friuli*, Štefan Širok³³ pointed out the following: “In the intellectual sense, the peasantry is completely neglected, and has not the slightest desire for education and general knowledge. This goes so far as to make them hate schools, and not only do they not send their sons to the town schools, but they are enemies of the local schools.”³⁴ Poor education significantly impacted the farmers’ ability to introduce novel economic solutions, tools, varieties and fertilisers, making the environment uncompetitive and reducing crop quality.³⁵ The colonate system itself also had a negative impact on the development of the area, since the lack of financial resources hindered the uptake of new, advanced farming techniques.³⁶ However, the (lack of) motivation of the coloni to perform work, which was neither properly valued, appreciated or paid, also had an effect on productivity and crop quantity. This type of farming has been regarded as a distinct failure in terms of productivity, as the coloni’s disinterest has often manifested as resistance against the landowners, especially when the latter exploited the system.³⁷ “The Friulian peasant has nothing else on his mind but how to deceive his master and how to cheat him in a contract. But these contracts are also outrageous; they leave the poor peasant with almost no personal freedom.”³⁸ The rents set by the landlords were unreasonably high. At the same time, they themselves set the price of the produce, which was considerably lower than the market price.³⁹

Many landowners did not invest in housing and colonate families did not have the means to cope with poor and inadequate living conditions.

30 Peter Štih, “Kmečko prebivalstvo v grofijah Goriška in Gradiščanska je sicer delavno, vendar zelo revno –: poročilo dvornega vojnega sveta o socialnem in gospodarskem stanju na Goriškem in Gradiščanskem iz leta 1770,” in Petra Kolenc (ed.), *Marušičev zbornik: zbornik prispevkov v počastitev 70-letnice prof. dr. Branka Marušiča* (Nova Gorica: Goriški muzej, 2010): 327.

31 Tanja Gomiršek, “Pismenost kmečkega prebivalstva Goriških brd v 19. stoletju,” *Kronika* 67, No. 1 (2019): 91–104.

32 Vilfan, “Izročilo o kolonatu,” 147.

33 Branko Marušič, “Kaj so Slovenci v 19. stoletju vedeli o Furlanih in kako so Furlane spoznavali?,” *Izvestje Raziskovalne postaje ZRC SAZU v Novi Gorici*, 2015, No. 12, 15, 16.

34 Štefan Širok, “Na Furlanskem,” *Soča*, 16. 4. 1874, 1.

35 Devetak, “Razvoj osnovnega šolstva in vplivi delovanja učiteljev na gospodarski razvoj sodnega okraja Kanal v obdobju Avstro-Ogrske,” *Goriški letnik: zbornik Goriškega muzeja*, No. 41 (2017): 208–12. Kalc, “Selitvena gibanja,” 200.

36 Tanja Gomiršek, “Spremembe na področju agrarnih panog v jugovzhodnem delu Goriških brd v 19. stoletju,” *Kronika* 59, No. 2 (2011): 280.

37 Stres, “Oris kolonata v slovenskem,” 181.

38 Širok, “Na Furlanskem,” *Soča*, 16. 4. 1874, 2.

39 Gomiršek, “Vrste zakupnih pogodb,” 171.

"Almost everywhere this system has been introduced, one sees poor, dilapidated brick-buildings, whose individual buildings are not only badly positioned, but also low and cramped; and, being windowless, they lack even the necessary light and healthy air. /.../ Let us look a little more closely at the colono house. It consists almost without exception of two rooms. Below is the horribly smoke-stained kitchen, which has no windows. The floor resembles the surface of a wavy sea. The house door is wide open in winter and summer. Here, light comes into the kitchen, but there is also a vent for the dense smoke that billows in a torrential cloud through the kitchen. This place is the farmer's living room, dining room, food store, granary and often cellar. Above the kitchen is the so-called attic, a dark, almost airless room. There is no sign of windows here either; usually there is a hole in the wall through which a cat can barely crawl. But even these holes are usually hermetically sealed. Year after year, the colonate – numbering 8–12 heads – sleeps in these suffocating rooms. The attic is not only used as a bedroom, but also for storing grain, which is partly scattered on the floor or hung from the roof beams. The attic serves as a bedroom and a granary at the same time."⁴⁰

This situation negatively impacted health and hygiene conditions, leading to serious and chronic diseases (e.g. pneumonia, tuberculosis) and premature death.⁴¹

Pellagra, which struck the Friuli plain in the second half of the 19th century, was inseparably linked to the colonate system and the farmers' poor diet. The disease is a form of hypovitaminosis, caused by niacin (vitamin B3) deficiency, the result of an excessive and monotonous maize-based diet. It typically mainly occurred in spring and lasted until the end of summer. It manifested as physical changes to the skin, gastrointestinal tract, and brain. The most pronounced initial symptoms of the disease were fatigue, loss of appetite, indigestion, insomnia and skin lesions, especially on the limbs and around the neck.⁴² Left untreated, the disease resulted in diarrhoea, dermatitis, dementia and psychological problems (anxiety, depression, hallucinations),⁴³ with mortality rates of up to 70%.⁴⁴ The disease affected the lowest classes in particular, including colonate families. Their inadequate dietary habits, stemming from the system of outsourcing crops, a lack of financial resources, and poor living conditions, led to the frequent and rapid spread of the disease. The climate and geography of Gorizia and Gradisca favoured maize as the main crop. At the turn of the 20th century, a third of the County's total arable land was devoted to maize.⁴⁵ Most of it was grown in the flat, lowland part of Friuli, which offered the best growing conditions for this type of grain. Landowners and coloni devoted more and more land to maize because of its

40 "Iz Št. Petra," *Soča*, 17. 11. 1882, 2.

41 Rachel Fuchs, *Gender and Poverty in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 177.

42 Monica Ginnaio, "Pellagra in Late Nineteenth Century Italy: Effects of a Deficiency Disease," *Population*, No. 3 (2011): 588.

43 *Ibid.*, 588, 589.

44 Kenneth Kiple (ed.), *The Cambridge World History of Human Disease* (Cambridge; New York; Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 918.

45 Vlado Valenčič, "Kulturne rastline," in Pavle Blaznik et al. (eds.), *Gospodarska in družbena zgodovina Slovencev: [enciklopedična obravnava po panogah]. Zgodovina agrarnih panog. Zv. 1, Agrarno gospodarstvo* (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1970), 265–67.

profitability, since railway connections and steamships made it easier and cheaper to transport to more distant parts of the country or abroad.⁴⁶ The resulting increase in maize production altered the diet of the local population, especially the poorer segments of society.

“Polenta in the morning, polenta at midday, polenta in the evening; polenta in the spring, polenta in the summer, polenta in the autumn, polenta in the winter – in a word: polenta – without end or place – this is the only food of the Friulian worker. But if only this polenta was made of healthy corn flour!!! In fact, Friuli produces the most maize, because it is the most prolific and, consequently, the cheapest food for the local population. A colono or tenant gives his workers corn instead of money.”⁴⁷

This system further tied the poor to maize, making the pellagra situation even worse. Poorly processed maize was particularly problematic, as farmers often sold their best crops to make more money, while poorer quality maize, including rotten stock, was used at home to make flour.⁴⁸ The situation was further worsened by poor harvests, as natural disasters led to crop failures, which greatly increased dependence on maize.⁴⁹ In his book *The Noble County of Gorizia and Gradisca (Poknežena grofija Goriška in Gradiščanska)*, the Gorizia historian Simon Rutar states that as much as 25% of the population, especially people from the lower classes, were affected by pellagra in some parts of the Friulian plain in the early 1890s.⁵⁰ During this period, up to 90% of the sufferers were rural workers or farmers.⁵¹ In the 1880s, the disease developed into an endemic outbreak, killing hundreds of people, mainly women, children and the elderly, and sending many more to psychiatric or ordinary hospitals for long-term treatment.⁵²

Poor living conditions, exploitation by landlords, and pellagra forced the population to leave their homes *en masse* and emigrate to other parts of the country, Europe, and to other continents, especially South and later North America.⁵³ In the colonate system, home abandonment became widespread as early as the 1870s and only intensified in the ensuing decades.⁵⁴ Friulian emigration was also a frequent topic in newspapers: “The rumour has broken out again that many of our Friulian inhabitants want to move to America. In Bruma, a suburb of the town of Gradisca, 18 families are preparing to make the long journey across the Ocean. In the Cormons district, the number of people intending to move to the Argentine has risen to 1000, mostly peasants (*coloni*) and their families.”⁵⁵ In 1887, the *Gospodarski list* stated:

46 See: Marušič, “Prispevki k poznavanju,” 59–72.

47 “Pelagra v Furlaniji,” *Gorica*, 19. 6. 1900, 3.

48 Ibid.

49 “Na Furlanskem,” *Edinosti*, September 21, 1887, 3.

50 Simon Rutar, *Poknežena grofija Goriška in Gradiščanska* (Nova Gorica: Jutro, 1997), 70.

51 Martin Cilenšek, *Naše škodljive rastline v podobi in besedi* (Celovec: Družba sv. Mohorja, 1892–1896), 274.

52 Robert Devetak, “Hči glada in mati umobola: bolezen pelagra in njeno preprečevanje na Goriškem in Gradiškem v obdobju Avstro-Ogrske,” *Zgodovina za vse* 27, No. 1 (2020): 5–15.

53 Aleksej Kalc, “Vidiki razvoja prebivalstva Goriške-Gradiške v 19. stoletju in do prve svetovne vojne,” *Acta Histriae* 21, No. 4 (2013): 697, 698.

54 For more on emigration, see: Kalc, “Migration Movements,” 49–71.

55 “Emigracija,” *Soča*, 29. 8. 1879, 4.

Figure 2: An example of a peasant house in the Friulian part of Gorizia and Gradisca. At the end of the 19th century, dwellings were often still covered with thatch, without flooring, separate rooms, proper ventilation, heating and access to light.



Source: Giuseppe Caprin, *Pianure friulane: seguito ai libri Marine Istriane - Lagune di Grado* (Trieste: Stabilimento Artistico G. Caprin, 1892), 249

“Our landlords have lost all hope for a better future, that they are all dejected and have neither the means nor the courage to rise from their helplessness, and that the coloni – to escape the poverty and the terrible torments of the pellagra – are preparing to migrate in whole crowds to the other side of the Ocean; and this would deprive our County of hundreds of able hands, who desire nothing more earnestly than to be able to keep themselves strong, and to continue to cultivate their native soil, and, if need be, to defend it faithfully.”⁵⁶

Before the First World War, thousands of people left the areas where the colonate system operated to find a better life elsewhere.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ “Naša reva,” *Gospodarski list*, October 14, 1887, 74.

⁵⁷ Kalc, “Selitvena gibanja,” 199–201.

Figure 3: The traditional clothing of the rural population in the Furlan part of Gorizia and Gradisca



Source: Caprin, *Pianure friulane*, 9

The Colonate System as a Political Issue

Before the First World War, the most widespread mass medium was the newspaper, which actively monitored and highlighted the poor conditions of the coloni in the County.⁵⁸ From the very start (the 1860s), reports started appearing in various newspapers. Later on, coverage and warnings intensified and gradually became politicised. This was mainly due to the gradual democratisation and extension of voting rights. This brought the issue of the colonate system into the public arena, followed by increasing calls for action by the political authorities. Until the end of the 19th century, warnings about the poor situation were relatively rare, although there are examples

⁵⁸ On the development of newspapers, see: Smilja Amon and Karmen Erjavec, *Slovensko časopisno izročilo 1: od začetka do 1918* (Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, Založba FDV, 2011), 71, 72.

of attempts to address the situation through political action. An anonymous author, writing in the *Glas* newspaper, pointed this out and presented the system as one of the main reasons for the poor social conditions in the area:

"The third cause of our poverty is the colonate system, and this cause cannot be helped except by some energetic state action, like in Poland and Russia following the 1831 uprising. The inhabitants of Gorizia Hills are thus for the most part the slaves, both in body and mind, of the Gorizian and other barons and landowners."⁵⁹

The provincial and state parliamentary political system, which had been developing in the Habsburg monarchy since 1859, had not yet shown much interest in solving such economic problems in the early years. This was mainly due to the relative exclusivity of the right to vote, which until the end of the 19th century was limited to only a small percentage of the population.⁶⁰ It was the political and democratic changes that finally brought the issue of tackling the colonate system to the surface. The main shift came with the gradual extension and then introduction of universal suffrage for adult men in 1907. This gave the right to vote to a wider section of society, including those from the lower classes. Political parties had to become much more proactive and base their programmes on different foundations and themes capable of bringing larger masses of potential voters to their cause.⁶¹ The social problems of the impoverished population, who was now able to vote and engage politically, became part of everyday politics. This included the colonate system, which became a political issue and a subject of party and ideological struggles.⁶² The shift in political discourse can be identified in the press quickly after the change in electoral law.

The Slovene political landscape in the County was shaped at the beginning of the 20th century mainly by two political camps – a liberal one within the National Progressive Party (*Narodno napredna stranka* – NPP) and a conservative one within Unity (*Sloga*), later the All-Slovene People's Party (*Vseslovenska ljudska stranka* – SPP), which was founded in 1907.⁶³ Their success in the provincial and state elections between 1907 and 1913 was mixed. Seeking a better result at the ballot box, they were active in the countryside, raising various issues related to the state of agriculture and the rural population.⁶⁴ On both the Slovene and Italian sides, the Christian Social Group, which was part of the conservative camp, was the most active on the issue of the colonate system. Among the Italian provincial politicians, the leader of the Christian Socialists, the priest Luigi Faidutti, was the most concerned with the status of the colonate families. He based his political programme to a large extent on issues relating to social welfare measures and the improvement of the living conditions in the Friulian countryside.⁶⁵ In addition to the

59 "Iz Brd," *Glas*, October 8, 1875, 3.

60 Melik, *Volitve na Slovenskem*, 5–9.

61 Selišnik, "Zborovanja na Kranjskem v letih 1900–1913 in razmerja moči: 'Ako hočemo biti zmagovavci moramo poučevati ljudstvo po shodih ---'," *Zgodovinski časopis* 67, No. 1/2 (2013): 86–109.

62 Stres, "Oris kolonata v slovenskem," 181–201.

63 Melik, *Volitve na Slovenskem*, 276–80.

64 Robert Devetak, *Društveno življenje na Kanalskem v času Avstro-Ogrske* (Nova Gorica: Goriški muzej, 2016), 117–28.

65 Marušič, *Pregled politične zgodovine*, 332, 333.

Italian Catholic camp, some Slovene politicians also included support for the *coloni* in their political programme after 1907. The most vocal advocate of change on the Slovene side was Josip Fon, a lawyer who often called for a solution to the issue in his numerous speeches, petitions and legislative proposals. In December 1908, he called on the country's leading political decision-makers to take action, stressing, among other things, that "our *coloni* believe that they deserve greater respect for their legitimate wishes and that the government, understanding its own interest, should begin a greater auxiliary action in their favour."⁶⁶ The political mobilisation of the Catholic camp is indicated by the increasing number of newspaper articles which have pointed to the importance of political action focusing on the *colonate* system. Thus, as early as the summer of 1907, the newspaper *Primorski list*, which was part of the SPP, published a series of articles calling for the organisation and political mobilisation of the *coloni*.⁶⁷ An unidentified correspondent from Gorizia Hills also called on political representatives to advocate change and improvement of the *coloni*' situation: "The first step towards this must be the liberation of the *coloni*. For this reason, we call on all our elected representatives to take a firm stand on this issue and not to give up - as we certainly are not giving up - until our rights have been granted."⁶⁸ From the summer of 1907 onwards, the SPP began to organise a number of rallies in the Slovene countryside, where the *coloni* were present, and addressed the issue in its political programme. In this way, it was able to win support among the local population and, as a result, a better electoral result. However, support at the top of the party fluctuated and often depended on other circumstances and interests.⁶⁹

While the Slovene catholic political camp actively fought for change and improvement in the social status of *colonate* families, the Slovene liberal camp addressed the issue to a lesser extent, while acknowledging the negative consequences of the *colonate* system.⁷⁰ It is evident from newspaper reports and public meetings that its political representatives tried to play down its significance and minimised its negative consequences in the countryside. Above all, they tried to present it as an "Italian" issue that had little to do with the Slovene territory and the population living there.⁷¹ This view was partly the result of an intense cultural and ideological struggle between the Catholic and Liberal camps and partly due to the mutual support the NPP and the Slovene landlords offered one another. The ideological struggle, which affected political and everyday life, extended to the economy and, more specifically, to the *colonate* question, which took on substantial political significance. The rallies, organised by political opponents from the Catholic camp, were presented in the liberal press as unsuccessful, with the aim of creating a negative atmosphere in the local environment and causing friction with the landowners.⁷² It was precisely the link with the latter that was an important element in

66 "Govor državnega posl. Fona," *Gorica*, December 19, 1908, 2.

67 "Iz Brd," *Primorski list*, July 1, 1907, 3.

68 "Iz Brd," *Primorski list*, July 25, 1907, 3.

69 Stres, "Oris kolonata v slovenskem," 197.

70 *Ibid.*, 197.

71 "Naši koloni ali: vsakemu svoje!," *Soča*, March 17, 1908, 1.

72 "Koloni," *Soča*, October 31, 1908, 2.

the work of the NPP. The party acted as a bulwark for the interests of the landowners, who did not want to see changes that would have negatively affected their economic status and power.⁷³ This is evident from the newspaper reports, with articles focusing on criticising the Catholic camp's handling of the issue and warning the coloni not to unite and resist the landowners. At the same time, they emphasised dialogue between landlords and tenants. Examples of this kind can be found in the newspapers of the day.

"The colonia question must be resolved in a way that is right for the coloni and the landlords. Or whoever wants to do good for the coloni must not incite them, because by doing so he only harms them. We are told that there are many quarrels in Gorizia Hills between the coloni and the landlords, which are certainly not in the best interests of the coloni. The Slovene clericals are only irritating, but they are not taking any real steps to settle the colonate question as soon as possible and for the better."⁷⁴

The attitude of the NPP to the question is particularly telling in a longer article written in the Isonzo newspaper by a prominent member of the party, the landlord Franc Kocijančič, who first stressed that he was not opposed to the coloni, but at the same time presented their dependence on the landlords as a positive thing, describing them as incapable of acting independently:

"When talking about the colonate, the landlord is the head and the coloni are the hands; and herein lies the reason why the colono has no autonomy, that he carries on his work in a purely mechanical way, falling headlong into idleness, seeking solace and diversion in drink, and thus multiplying his misery. If coloni of this kind, and they are in the majority, say, among the 'justified malcontents', were to be helped by creating overnight conditions favourable to them, the result would be that they would become wasteful and would, in time, fall into even greater hardship and misery than they are already in."⁷⁵

The Social Democratic camp also drew attention to the problem, but since the Gorizia Yugoslav Social Democratic Party (*Jugoslovanska socialdemokratska stranka*) had no political representatives in either the Gorizia Regional Assembly or the State Parliament, its manoeuvrability to actively address the problem was limited and its action was mainly focused on warnings in the newspapers and in the public space, especially at rallies. The most active of the Gorizia Social Democrats on the issue of the colonate system were the lawyer Henrik Tuma and Jože Srebrnič, who tried to bring the coloni under the umbrella of the party through active field work and appeals, but were not very successful due to the low interest of the party and other substantive goals. The party focused its efforts mainly on urban areas and expanded its network among industrial workers.⁷⁶

73 Stres, "Oris kolonata v slovenskem," 193–97.

74 "Koloni," *Soča*, October 31, 1908, 2.

75 Franc Kocijančič, "Kolonsko vprašanje," *Soča*, March 1, 1910, 1.

76 Stres, "Oris kolonata v slovenskem," 201, 202.

Political Action and Attempts to Change the System

The politicisation of the colonia system has brought with it, albeit slowly, systemic regulation and attempts to improve the rural population system. The provincial political parties helped the poorest colonate families with (relatively modest) financial support.⁷⁷ Political parties, and in particular some individual political representatives, have also become active. The most involved Slovene politician was the previously mentioned Fon, who also participated in the drafting of legislative solutions. The coloni recognised his activities and thanked him in the *Primorski list* at the beginning of 1908 for all the efforts he had made in the National Assembly to solve their social difficulties.⁷⁸ Faidutti was even more active. As early as the summer of 1907, he prepared a special memorandum for the government on the basis of an analysis of the colonate contracts, outlining the history and the main features of the system. The memorandum attracted interest among the political parties in the National Assembly in Vienna, especially the Social Democrats, and the government showed its willingness to regulate and improve the status of the coloni.⁷⁹ This provided the basis for further, more active work in this direction. The efforts took two forms – at the local level, where political actors wanted to mobilise the coloni and organise them to take collective action, and at national level (within the National Assembly and the sectoral ministries). From 1908 onwards, the Slovene and Italian Christian Social Groups organised several rallies for the coloni in the Friulian Lowlands and in Gorizia Hills, where speakers presented their plans and measures to improve the situation. At the same time, the coloni were able to publicly raise their concerns and draw attention to their plight. One of the largest rallies was held in Medana in February 1908, attended by around 300 people.⁸⁰ The coloni participated actively, organising their own events and setting up a special association to look after their interests.⁸¹ The first proposal for a united action within the association was mentioned in the newspapers as early as 1901, when *Primorski list* published a series of three articles signed by “several coloni from Gorizia Hills.”⁸² The articles described the socio-economic situation in Gorizia Hills, focusing on the difficulties of the coloni. As a solution to improve the situation, they proposed the creation of an association to fight for their interests:

“Everything is moving, everything is uniting, everything is progressing! The workers have united, the various artisans have united, the craftsmen have united to help each other with their common strength. Only the poor coloni (tenants) have not yet united anywhere. /.../ It must not and cannot be like this anymore! Get a grip and unite!”⁸³

The appeal was not supported at that time and it remained until the beginning of 1909, when the Union of Slovene Coloni (*Zveza slovenskih kolonov*) was established. The

77 “Za slovenske kolone,” *Novi čas*, May 8, 1914, 5.

78 “Zahvala veleblagorodnemu gospodu državnemu poslancu Josipu Fonu,” *Primorski list*, January 28, 1908, 2.

79 Stres, “Oris kolonata v slovenskem,” 183.

80 “Shod v Medani,” *Gorica*, February 25, 1908, 1.

81 Stres, “Oris kolonata v slovenskem,” 191.

82 “Iz Brd,” *Primorski list*, February 7, 1901, 3, 4; *Primorski list*, February 14, 1901, 3; *Primorski list*, February 28, 1901, 3.

83 “Iz Brd,” *Primorski list*, February 7, 1901, 3, 4.

central points of its programme were: "1. Control of colonate contracts; 2. Interest-free loans against amortisation for land purchases; 3. Credit lending in all our municipalities; and 4. Restriction of speculations in land purchases."⁸⁴ It was established in collaboration with the SPP, with Fon serving as President, and by May 1909 about 300 coloni had joined. The main purpose of the Union was to provide the membership with information about the political activities of the SPP for change, education and social assistance to alleviate the living conditions of the coloni.⁸⁵ The newspapers, the main mass media at that time, also played an important role in the mobilisation of the coloni. Here again the Catholic camp was the most active, promoting the party newsletter *Primorski List* as the main medium for informing the coloni. This is evident in one of the appeals in this newspaper:

"If you want to advance, dear coloni, you must: 1. Take care of your organisation, which is in the County of Gorizia: 'The Union of Slovene Coloni'. All Slovene coloni to the last should join this association! There is strength in unity. 2. Educate yourself. For this purpose, it is necessary that every colono subscribes to the *Primorski list*, which is the newsletter of the coloni association. 3. Live according to the teachings of the Holy Faith and educate your children in this spirit. Christian righteous living is every man's greatest asset and the best dowry for his children. 4. Beware of drunkenness and extravagance. Thrift is the greatest safeguard for a colono in times of distress and persecution. 5. Demand the redress of injustice everywhere."⁸⁶

The newspaper's activities can be understood both in the direction of helping the coloni and in the direction of their political mobilisation in support of the SPP. These different forms of public action gave the coloni a voice in the society and, with the support of some political representatives, have helped them to promote their demands for change.

Faidutti's and Fon's work in Vienna brought the issue to the state level – to the National Assembly and to the government, where the colonate system was discussed on several occasions. The government side responded to the appeals and information presented in Vienna and sent a special envoy, Hermann Schullern,⁸⁷ to Gorizia and Gradisca. In early April 1908, he visited several places in Friuli and the Gorizia Hills and met with local political representatives, landowners and coloni. On the basis of the discussions, a review of the colonate contracts and his *in situ* findings, he drew up a memorandum which he submitted to the National Assembly Commission in June 1908, followed the next year by a text published in his book *Das Kolonat in Görz und Gradisca, in Istrien in Dalmatien und in Tirol*, in which he specifically dealt with the Friulian and Slovene parts of the County.⁸⁸ He pointed to the poor living conditions

84 "Zveza slovenskih kolonov," *Gorica*, January 26, 1909, 2.

85 "Odborove seje ‚Zveze slov. kolonov,“ *Primorski list*, October 10, 1912, 3, 4.

86 "Dolžnost slovenskih kolonov," *Primorski list*, January 18, 1912, 1.

87 Elisabeth Lebensaft, "Schullern zu Schratzenhofen Hermann von," in Peter Csendes (ed.), *Österreichisches biographisches Lexikon: 1815–1950* (Wien: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1999), 331, 332.

88 Hermann Schullern, *Das Kolonat in Görz und Gradisca, in Istrien, in Dalmatien und in Tirol: dargestellt auf Grund einer im Auftrage des k. k. Ackerbauministeriums im Frühling 1908 vorgenommenen Bereitung diser Länder* (Wien: K. K. Hof und Staatsdruckerei, 1908), 4–15.

the colonate families, especially in the swampy, flat areas of the County, and to the frequent mistreatment of tenants by landlords.⁸⁹ The report was the basis for further action on the matter. In early 1909, Faidutti also presented the problem to Emperor Franz Joseph at a reception who gave his approval for the issue to be resolved.⁹⁰ In the following years, legislation was gradually drafted with the participation of the provincial and state authorities. The first draft was prepared in mid-1909 by the Ministry of Agriculture, with the participation of Gorizia's members of the National Assembly, but the process dragged on for another five years, greatly influenced by the balance of political power in Gorizia and Gradisca, where the Italian Liberal camp played a dominant role, refusing to change the law because of its collaboration with the landlords.⁹¹ At the same time, those opposed to the change – especially the landowners, who feared that they would lose their privileges and economic power – campaigned, lobbied and blocked these efforts.⁹² The changes were slow, and even in April 1911, an unnamed *Soča* correspondent could only paraphrase authors who had raised the issue in previous years. “The worst sign of the agricultural situation in the County of Gorizia and Gradisca is the colonia system.”⁹³ The breakthrough only came in 1913, when the political cards in Gorizia and Gradisca were reshuffled. After the elections, a new provincial government was formed, with the Italian Christian Socialists in the strongest position, which accelerated the drafting of the law. It was drafted and adopted at the end of May 1914, with the help of the government departments.⁹⁴ It did not abolish the colonate system, but it provided a number of measures to make life easier for colonate families. The emphasis was on preventing landowners from abusing the system. It regulated the rights and duties of both parties involved. It provided for the supervision of colonate contracts, which were fixed at six years (a motion proposing nine years was defeated) and had to be in writing. It also provided for greater legal protection for coloni, penalties in cases of abuse, and maximum quantities of produce to be given to landowners in both ordinary and extraordinary circumstances.⁹⁵ “After the abolition of slavery, this was one of the most humane acts in our County. A colono was in the true sense – a slave of his landlord, who treated him as he pleased. This law, however, arranged a decent relationship between the two human beings.”⁹⁶ The Slovene newspapers in Gorizia only noted the passing of the law, but did not elaborate on its content, which was likely due to the events of the summer months leading up to the global conflict.⁹⁷ The Law was translated into Slovene and printed in the form of a booklet, which was distributed among the colonate families by the

89 Stres, “Oris kolonata v slovenskem,” 186.

90 Ibid., 188.

91 Ibid., 197.

92 Ibid., 195, 196.

93 “50 let delovanja našega deželnega zbora,” *Soča*, April 11, 1911, 1.

94 “Gesetz vom 24. Mai 1914, wirksam für die gefürstete Grafschaft Görz und Gradisca über den Kolonatsvertrag,” *Gesetze und Verordnungen der Landesbehörden für das österreichisch-illirische Küstenland*, No. 21, 195–202.

95 Stres, “Oris kolonata v slovenskem,” 198–201.

96 Andrej Gabršček, *Goriški Slovenci: narodne, kulturne, politične in gospodarske črtice: Knj. II: Od leta 1901 do 1924* (Ljubljana: Tiskarna Slovenija, 1934), 451.

97 “Kolonski zakon,” *Goriški list*, May 28, 1914, 3.

Union of Slovene Coloni, in order to make it easier for the rural environment to get acquainted with the new provisions.⁹⁸ It was due to enter into force on 12 November 1915, but its implementation was prevented by the First World War, which began two months after the law passed. Colonate families were hit hard by the war soon after it started, as they struggled to access the basic living necessities because of the high cost and shortages.⁹⁹ Many men were conscripted and took part in the fighting, leaving children, women and the elderly to tend the farmlands. The Union of Slovene Coloni also drew attention to the difficult situation in the newspapers, adding appeals for aid and measures to ease the conditions among the worst affected.¹⁰⁰ The military conflict between Austria-Hungary and Italy, which took place in May 1915, finally pushed the solution aside. The area where the colonate system was in force became a battlefield, with opposing sides fighting for more than two years without any significant shifts in the front line. The area was largely destroyed and evacuated.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

The colonate system had a profound impact on the social and economic landscape of parts of Gorizia and Gradisca for several centuries. Thousands of people in the Friulian part of the region, the Gorizia Hills and parts of the Vipava Valley were dependent on various, often wealthy, landowners, who in many cases exploited such practices due to poor legislative protection and control. Colonate families were among the poorest people in the County, without real estate and significant assets, and were fully dependent on the conditions imposed by landowners. As a result, they were particularly exposed to economic crises, the lack of education and various diseases. The complexity of such contracts survived the abolition of feudal relations in 1848. As a result of the myriad abuses, many coloni saw their only solution in emigrating and seeking a better life abroad. It was only gradual democratisation, the establishment of political institutions at different levels, and the social shifts of the second half of the 19th century that spurred both local and state political decision-makers to face up to the problem. The road to a solution was arduous, characterised by pressures, as well as political and ideological tensions. Legislative changes, in the form of a special law on the colonate contract, were only adopted just before the outbreak of the First World War. Due to the ensuing collapse of the state, they did not bring about significant changes in the long term. It should be mentioned that the new legislation did not abolish the relations, but merely regulated them. The colonate system remained in the Gorizia Hills for more than three decades and was only abolished after the Second World War.¹⁰²

98 "Za kolone," *Goriški list*, December 3, 1914, 3.

99 Robert Devetak, "Prehrana in aprovizacija na Goriškem in Gradiškem ob začetku prve svetovne vojne," *Goriški letnik: zbornik Goriškega muzeja*, No. 39/40 (2016): 134–42.

100 "Gibanje med kolonskim ljudstvom," *Goriški list*, December 24, 1914, 2.

101 Petra Svoljšak, "Gorica, prekleto in sveto mesto med dvema ognjema," *Kronika* 60, No. 1 (2012): 79–94.

102 Stres, "Oris kolonata na Goriškem," 98–106.

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Robert Devetak

**»VZROK NAŠE REVŠČINE JE KOLONSTVO.«
KOLONSKI SISTEM NA GORIŠKEM IN GRADIŠKEM
V OBDOBJU AVSTRO-OGRSKE**

POVZETEK

Prispevek obravnava sistem kolonata – eno od posebnih oblik zemljiške odvisnosti, ki se je ohranila še skoraj stoletje po odpravi fevdalnih razmerij leta 1848. V okviru habsburške države je bil razširjen tudi na območju dežele Goriške in Gradiške, predvsem v zahodnih predelih, ki jih je poseljevalo večinoma furlansko prebivalstvo. Šlo je civilnopravno razmerje, za katero je bilo značilno, da so večinoma revne kmečke družine, ki niso imele v lasti nepremičnin, na podlagi pogodbe zakupile zemljišče, hišo ali celotno kmetijo, najpogosteje od plemiških družin ali bogatih kmečkih veleposestnikov. Šlo je za sistem obdelave polj, sadovnjakov in vinogradov v dogovoru med zemljiškimi lastniki in koloni. Sistem je spominjal na tlačanskega in je med koloni prehajal iz roda v rod. Zemljiški lastniki so v številnih primerih najemnike izkoriščali zaradi pomanjkanja zakonodajne zaščite in nadzora. Kolonske družine so bile zaradi tega potisnjene na družbeni rob in v revščino – šlo je za eno od socialno najbolj ogroženih skupin prebivalstva. Družine so živele v slabih in neprimernih razmerah, kar je povzročalo širjenje nalezljivih bolezni in velikokrat prezgodnje smrti. Posledice sistema so pomembno vplivale na lokalne gospodarske in družbene razmere, ki so bile zaznamovane z boleznijo pelagra in množičnim izseljevanjem kolonskega prebivalstva v druge dele države ter v tujino. S pojavom množičnih medijev (časopisja), z demokratizacijo (širitvijo volilne pravice) in vzpostavljanjem dobrodelnih struktur je bila problematika deležna pozornosti širše družbe, ki je od konca 19. stoletja dalje vse pogosteje pozivala politične oblasti, da bi ukinile kolonski sistem. Pot k ureditvi razmer je bila dolga, pogojena z odporom in pritiski zemljiških lastnikov ter s političnimi in ideološkimi trenji. Zakonodajne spremembe – v obliki posebnega zakona o kolonski pogodbi – so bile sprejete šele leta 1914, neposredno pred začetkom prve svetovne vojne, in zaradi razpada države dolgoročno niso dosegle ključnih sprememb. Pri tem lahko poudarimo, da nova zakonodaja ni ukinila razmerja, temveč ga je le regulirala. Kolonski sistem je ostal v Goriških brdih prisoten še več kot tri desetletja in je bil ukinjen šele po drugi svetovni vojni.

Suicide as a Historical Phenomenon: Introduction to the Thematic Section / Samomor kot historični fenomen: uvod v tematski sklop

There are probably not many things that mark people more than the fact that they are transient. The division between life and death, between Eros and Thanatos, is as old as humanity itself, and while dying and death are exceedingly common themes, suicide has nevertheless been given a particular place and has had different connotations in various cultural contexts over the centuries. The thematic section at hand presents the studies from the project titled *Sin, shame, symptom: suicide and its perceptions in Slovenia (1850–2000)*, financed by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (research core funding No. J6-3123), covering the period from the second half of the 19th century to the modern period, when suicide victims became viewed as patients and were no longer perceived as criminals and sinners. In the period starting with the formal decriminalisation of suicide and coinciding with the birth of modern statistics – which, for the first time in history, calculated statistically verifiable, demonstrable, and, within specific environments, constant rates of suicide – the perception of suicide changed. No longer deemed a sin, a rebellion against the Creator, and a criminal act, it initially became regarded as “the most intimate act” until it started to primarily represent a reflection of crises and societal circumstances. Suicide was perceived as an issue at the intersection of the sacred and the secular, of the philosophical, sociological, and medical spheres, of the urban and rural domains, while lawyers, doctors, sociologists, theologians, and others dealt with it from their perspectives.

In Slovenia, suicide has received a lot of attention, mainly because the suicide rate in the territory of today’s Slovenia has increased enormously in just a single century – from three suicides per 100,000 inhabitants, as recorded in the 1873 statistics, to more than 35 (and even more than 60 in some parts of the country) in the final decades of the 20th century. However, it has so far been treated mainly from the medical (especially psychiatric), forensic, psychological, and suicidological points of view, while the historical aspects of the issue have not yet been examined more thoroughly. In contemporary interdisciplinary research that seeks to reveal the origins of today’s

truths about the suicide phenomenon, analyse how these truths have been shaped over time, and demonstrate how these truths and beliefs have been reflected in everyday life, society, legislation, and people's behaviour, the historical perspective has nevertheless proved indispensable.

The contributions by Irena Selišnik, Urška Bratož, Jelena Seferović, and Meta Remec focus – each from its own perspective – on the period between the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century when suicide stopped being perceived as a sin and became a symptom of degeneration that undermined the vitality of the nation and its power to resist the challenges of the historical moment. In addition to the multitude of the infirm, “the blind, the deaf, the idiots, the insane, the epileptics”, and the declining birth rates, suicide was perceived as a symptom of the deteriorating health of the nation and a harbinger of its imminent demise.¹ Suicide was seen as a sign of the deficient self-control and moral character of the deceased. Irena Selišnik focuses on the question of how suicide was perceived by Slovenian society during the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, drawing on autobiographical sources of the suicide victims as well as their family members, friends, and family, whose world was irreparably affected by these deaths. The issues of the contextualisation of suicide and the interpretations of its causes and triggers were also addressed by Urška Bratož and Jelena Seferović, whose studies allow for a comparison between the Slovenian situation and the neighbouring countries. Urška Bratož focuses on the media discourse and the social image of suicide at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, especially in the case of Trieste as a prominent Austrian urban centre, where the increasing suicidality trend became more notable at least from the 1870s, while Jelena Seferović's article analyses the media and medical discourse as well as the medical records of psychiatric patients. Seferović, Bratož, and Selišnik have successfully assembled various fragments to present life stories that cannot be captured by statistics alone, demonstrating how the statements about the causes of suicide provided by the family members, eyewitnesses, media, and doctors differed according to the gender, social status, and even political affiliation of the deceased. In that period, the majority of the population was poorly literate, which is why they rarely left behind any written records of their lives and even less about their deaths. As only a few farewell letters were written, the interpretation of the causes was left to others. Meta Remec analysed suicide cases from the judicial records of the Celje and Maribor District Courts and a few specific examples from the Trbovlje Local Court in the first half of the 20th century. Her analysis reveals that court materials, police reports, and statements of witnesses and relatives represent previously filtered sources that express the pain, hurt, and anger of the witnesses, who most often tried to clear their names or point at potential culprits for the tragic death. By relying on such sources, we can learn more about the witness than the person who committed suicide, which is a significant drawback at first sight. However, these sources can also prove extremely valuable, as

1 Samuel Alexander Kenny Strahan, *Suicide and Insanity: A Physiological and Sociological Study* (London: S. Sonnenschein & Co., 1984), 72.

they reflect the attitudes towards suicide and the cultural climate in different periods and settings, along with the tabooisation and stigmatisation that still accompanied suicide. Moreover, as these authors' analyses have revealed, these sources can also shed light on the social, economic, religious, and regional specificities and indirectly point to related themes such as women's position in the family and society, the prevalence of domestic and sexual violence, etc.

Historiography, which can thus shed light on the origins of today's beliefs and practices, can also provide another perspective on a phenomenon under consideration – for example, the prevailing Western view of suicide as a tragic accident and a tragedy that could and should be prevented by all means. The fact that the phenomenon of suicide used to be perceived in various ways in different societies – that it was not always seen as a shame and a tragedy but also an act of honour and courage – is often overlooked.² This can be gleaned from Ivan Smiljanić's analysis dealing with the concept of heroic suicide among Yugoslav and especially Slovenian Partisans during World War II and with the attitude towards these deaths after the war when they were formally recognised and consequently glorified and celebrated as heroic acts and the ultimate self-sacrifice. His analysis also reveals the embarrassment involved, as this concept raised difficult moral questions, such as the unacceptability of suicide from the point of view of Marxist ethics, the (in)appropriateness of one's actions during crises, and the limits of personal freedom.

According to the analyses, the people who, for whatever reason, "took their fate into their own hands" were granted only partial autonomy throughout the period under consideration, as it was deemed that unambiguous correlations existed between public and intimate crises. Each time, poor social conditions, recurrent economic crises, frequent changes in the state and ideological frameworks, feelings of insecurity associated with these factors, and, in particular, seminal events such as the two World Wars and the 1991 Slovenian Independence War, supposedly led to inevitable "suicide epidemics". However, according to the studies in this thematic section, when crises were real and tangible, their perceptions were often artificially created and fuelled, especially by sensationalist newspapers and various political actors. In line with the thesis of William I. Thomas and Dorothy Swaine Thomas³ that "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences", society perceived the crisis regarding the alleged increase in the number of suicides as a real and threatening situation and a sign of an impending catastrophe. This is evident both from the analyses of Matteo Perissinotto, who focused on female suicide in Trieste in the period immediately after World War I, characterised by political, social, and economic insecurity, and Marko Zajc, who focused on the period from the 1960s until the collapse of Yugoslavia. During that time, the idea of Slovenians as a "suicide nation" formed in the intellectual and political discourse, and it seemed that the authorities repeatedly used the sense of crisis

2 Cf. Maurice Pinguet, *Voluntary Death in Japan* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

3 William I. Thomas and Dorothy Swaine Thomas, *The Child in America: Behavior Problems and Programs* (New York: Knopf, 1928), 571, 572.

associated with the phenomenon of suicide to call for closing the ranks, disciplining individuals, and reckoning with external and internal opponents, thus legitimising their regime. Zajc, who examines how intellectuals used or rejected this idea in their discussions and how they adapted expert debates and statistics to their political agendas, as well as the other authors, who analyse media discourse in different timeframes, reveal how changes in the general public's attitudes towards suicide were reflected. In their contributions, Nuša Zadavec Šedivy, Polonca Borko, Vanja Gomboc, Vita Poštuvan, Jure Gračner, Asja Flamiš, and Adelisa Huskić focus mainly on the changes in the way the media reported on the phenomenon. These authors have demonstrated that the sensationalism revealed by Matteo Perissinotto, Jelena Seferović, and Urška Bratož in their analyses was, in the second half of the 20th century, finally joined by the first attempts to raise awareness and report on the necessity of suicide prevention, followed by the development of public health paradigm. Their findings show that, despite the gradual shift from predominantly provocative to more preventive reporting on suicide, the public's desire for "blood" and gruesome details of individual deaths never really subsided, while the democratisation and liberalisation of the media space during the 1990s also entailed tabloidisation and consequently brought about new challenges in asserting the public interest and social accountability in suicide reporting.

The completed studies have proven that suicide represents an excellent case study for the changes in values, thinking, discourses, and actions. The articles raise questions that require further in-depth reflection and a distinctly interdisciplinary approach in the future: to what extent was suicidality a self-fulfilling prophecy; to what extent did fears of a suicide epidemic generate the increase in suicidality; and were they, therefore, a contingency realised through people's mindsets and expectations.⁴ In many ways, the articles in this thematic section contribute to the knowledge about the suicide phenomenon and the structural changes in Slovenian society during the 20th century while also comparing the development in Slovenia and the neighbouring regions. All these complex questions, which remain a research challenge for the future, include issues like the impact of the glorification and heroisation of certain suicides vs. the fear that suicidality might be "hereditary" (at the individual level, within families, and at the level of entire nations) and the influence of persistent negative and catastrophic discourses, e.g. that Slovenians are a suicidal nation.

Verjetno je le malo reči, ki človeka zaznamujejo močneje kot dejstvo, da je minljiv. Razpetost med življenjem in smrtjo, med erosom in tanatosom, je stara kot človeštvo samo, pri čemer je, ob siceršnjem zelo pogostem tematiziranju umiranja in smrti, samomor vendarle imel prav poseben položaj in je skozi stoletja v različnih kulturnih okoljih

4 Michael Biggs, "Prophecy, Self-Fulfilling/Self-Defeating," in Byron Kaldis (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Philosophy and the Social Sciences*, Vol 2 (London etc: SAGE Publications, 2013), 766. James Watson and Anne Hill, *Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies* (Self-fulfilling prophecy) (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 268.

imel različne konotacije. Tokratni tematski sklop prinaša študije, ki so nastale v okviru projekta *Sin, shame, symptom: suicide and its perceptions in Slovenia (1850–2000)* financed by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (research core funding No. J6-3123) in obsegajo čas od druge polovice 19. stoletja do sodobnosti, ko se je samomorilec spremenil iz kriminalca in grešnika v bolnika. V obdobju, ki se je začelo s formalno dekriminizacijo samomora in je sovpadlo z rojstvom moderne statistike, ki je prvič v zgodovini izračunala statistično preverljive, dokazljive in znotraj določenih okolij konstantne stopnje samomorilnosti, je samomor iz greha, upora proti Stvarniku in kaznivega dejanja postal sprva »najbolj intimno dejanje«, nato pa predvsem odsev kriz in ogledalo razmer v družbi. Samomor je bil dojet kot problem na presečišču svetega in posvetnega, filozofskega, sociološkega in medicinskega, urbanega in ruralnega, z njim pa so se vsak s svojega zornega kota ukvarjali pravniki, zdravniki, sociologi, teologi in še kdo.

Samomor je bil na Slovenskem deležen veliko pozornosti predvsem zaradi dejstva, da se je stopnja samomorilnosti na območju današnje Slovenije v dobrem stoletju izjemno povišala – s treh samomorov na 100.000 prebivalcev, kolikor je po statistikah znašala leta 1873, se je povzpela na več kot 35 (v posameznih delih države pa celo na več kot 60) v zadnjih desetletjih 20. stoletja, vendar je bil do sedaj obravnavan predvsem z vidika medicinske (zlasti psihiatrične), forenzične, psihološke in suicidološke stroke, historični vidik problematike pa še ni doživel temeljitejše obdelave. V sodobnih interdisciplinarnih raziskavah, ki želijo odkriti izvor današnjih resnic o fenomenu samomora, analizirati načine, s katerimi so se te oblikovale skozi čas, in pokazati, kako so se te resnice in prepričanja odražali v vsakdanjem življenju, družbi, zakonodaji in v vedenju ljudi, pa se je historična perspektiva izkazala za nepogrešljivo.

Prispevki Irene Selišnik, Urške Bratož, Jelene Seferović in Mete Remec se vsak s svoje perspektive osredotočajo na obrobje konca 19. in prve polovice 20. stoletja, ko je samomor iz greha postal znak degeneriranosti, ki spodkopava vitalnost naroda in njegovo odpornost proti izzivom, ki jih je prinašal zgodovinski trenutek – poleg množice betežnežev, »slepih, gluhih, idiotskih, norih, epileptikov« in padanja natalitete je bil samomor namreč dojet kot simptom slabšanja zdravja naroda in znanilec njegovega skorajšnjega propada.⁵ Samomor je bil pojmovan kot znak pomanjkanja samonadzora in nezadostnega moralnega značaja pokojnika. Irena Selišnik se osredotoča na vprašanje, kako je slovenska družba druge polovice 19. in prve polovice 20. stoletja dojemala samomor, pri čemer se naslanja na avtobiografske vire oseb, ki so umrle zaradi samomora, in pokojnikovih družinskih članov, prijateljev in družine, v katerih svet so te smrti nepopravljivo zarezale. Z vprašanjem kontekstualizacije samomora, interpretacijami vzrokov in povodov za ta korak sta se ukvarjali tudi Urška Bratož in Jelena Seferović, katerih študiji omogočata primerjavo slovenskih razmer z razmerami v sosednjih deželah. Urška Bratož se osredinja na medijski diskurz in družbeno podobo samomora ob koncu 19. in v začetku 20. stoletja, predvsem na primeru Trsta kot velikega avstrijskega urbanega centra, kjer je bil trend naraščanja samomorilnosti

5 Strahan, *Suicide and Insanity*, 72.

opazneje viden vsaj od sedemdesetih let 19. stoletja, članek Jelene Seferović pa ponuja analizo medijskega in medicinskega diskurza ter zdravstvenih kartotek psihiatričnih pacientov. Seferović, Bratož in Selišnik so prikažejo razlike, ki so jih tako družinski člani in očitvidci kot mediji in zdravniki izražali pri navajanju vzrokov za samomor glede na spol, socialni status ter celo politično pripadnost pokojnika oziroma pokojnice, in preko različnih drobcev stkejo življenjske zgodbe, ki jih zgolj statistike ne morejo zajeti. V času, ko je bil velik del populacije slabo pismen ter o svojem življenju, še manj pa o smrti, ni zapuščal pisnih dokumentov in ko so poslovilna pisma zapuščali le redki, so interpretacijo vzrokov prepustili drugim. Kot pokaže analiza Mete Remec, ki se ukvarja s primeri obravnave samomorov v sodnih spisih Okrožnega sodišča v Celju, Okrožnega sodišča v Mariboru ter posameznih primerov z Okrajnega sodišča v Trbovljah iz prve polovice 20. stoletja, opiranje na sodno gradivo, policijske zapisnike, izjave prič in sorodnikov pomeni opiranje na že filtrirane vire, v katerih se izražajo bolečina, prizadetost ter jeza priče in v katerih poskušajo največkrat oprati lastno ime ali pokazati na potencialnega krivca za tragično smrt. Tako lahko več izvemo o priči kot pa o osebi, ki je naredila samomor, kar je na prvi pogled pomembna pomanjkljivost, dejansko pa se tudi ti viri izkažejo za izjemno dragocene, saj odslkavajo odnos do samomora v različnih obdobjih in okoljih ter vsakokratno kulturno ozračje, tabuizacijo in stigmatizacijo, ki je še vedno spremljala samomor. Še več, kot pokažejo analize teh avtoric, lahko ti viri obenem osvetlijo tudi socialne, ekonomske, religiozne in regionalne posebnosti ter posredno pokažejo tudi na povezane tematike, kot je na primer položaj ženske v družini in družbi, razširjenost družinskega in spolnega nasilja itd.

Zgodovinopisje, ki lahko tako osvetli izvor današnjih prepričanj in praks, pa lahko ponudi tudi drugo perspektivo na obravnavani fenomen: denimo na prevladujoč zahodni pogled na samomor kot tragično nesrečo in tragedijo, ki bi jo bilo mogoče in treba na vsak način preprečiti. Pogosto je spregledano dejstvo, da je bil (v preteklosti) fenomen samomora v različnih družbah različno dojeman, da ni bil vedno sramota in tragedija, ampak tudi dejanje časti in poguma.⁶ To je vidno iz analize Ivana Smiljanića, ki se ukvarja s konceptom herojskega samomora med jugoslovanskimi in zlasti slovenskimi partizani med drugo svetovno vojno ter odnosom do teh smrti po vojni, ko jim je bil formalno priznan status herojskega dejanja in vrhovnega samožrtvovanja, ki je bil posledično poveličevan in opevan, prikaže pa tudi s tem povezane zadrege, saj je odpiral zahtevna moralna vprašanja, kot je nesprejemljivost samomora z vidika marksistične etike, (ne)ustreznosti ravnanj posameznika v kriznih situacijah in mej osebne svobode.

Analize so pokazale, da so posamezniku, ki je iz takšnega ali drugačnega razloga »vzel usodo v svoje roke«, v vsem obravnavanem obdobju priznavali le delno avtonomijo, saj naj bi med javno in intimno krizo obstajale nedvoumne korelacije. Slabe socialne razmere, ponavljajoče se ekonomske krize, pogoste spremembe v državnih in ideoloških okvirih in s temi dejavniki povezani občutki negotovosti, zlasti pa prelomni dogodki, kot so bile obe svetovni vojni ter osamosvojitvena vojna leta 1991, naj bi vsakokrat znova neizogibno vodili v »epidemije samomorov«. Kot nakazujejo študije v tem tematskem

6 Cf. Pinguet, *Voluntary Death in Japan*.

sklopu, pa so bile ob realnih in otipljivih krizah predstave o teh tudi pogosto umetno ustvarjene in so jih podpihovali predvsem senzacionalistični časopisi, pa tudi različni politični akterji. V skladu s tezo Williama I. Thomasa in Dorothy Swaine Thomas,⁷ da »če ljudje definirajo situacije kot resnične, so slednje resnične v svojih posledicah«, je družba zaznala krizo v zvezi z domnevno rastjo števila samomorov kot resnično in grozeče stanje ter znamenje bližajoče se katastrofe. To je očitno tako iz analiz Mattea Perissinotta, ki se je posvetil samomoru žensk v Trstu v obdobju neposredno po prvi svetovni vojni, zaznamovanem s politično, socialno in ekonomsko negotovostjo, kot tudi Marka Zajca, ki se je posvetil obdobju od šestdesetih let do razpada Jugoslavije, ko se je v intelektualnem in političnem diskurzu oblikovala ideja o Slovencih kot »naciji samomorilcev«, ko se zdi, da je vsakokratna oblast občutek krize, povezan s fenomenom samomora, uporabila za pozive k strnjenju vrst, discipliniranju posameznikov, za obračunavanje z zunanjimi in notranjimi nasprotniki ter s tem legitimacijo lastnega režima. Tako Zajc, ki preučuje, kako so intelektualci to idejo uporabili ali zavrnili v svojih razpravah in kako so prilagodili strokovne razprave in statistične podatke svojim političnim agendam, kot drugi avtorji, ki ponujajo analize vsakokratnega medijskega diskurza, prikazujejo, kako so se izražale spremembe v stališčih splošne javnosti do samomora. Nuša Zadavec Šedivy, Polonca Borko, Vanja Gomboc, Vita Poštuvan, Jure Gračner, Asja Flamiš in Adelisa Huskić so v svojih prispevkih pozorni zlasti na spremembe v načinu medijskega poročanja. Omenjeni avtorji prikažejo, da se je senzacionalizem, ki je na primer razviden iz analiz Mattea Perissinotta, Jelene Seferović in Urške Bratož, v drugi polovici 20. stoletja vendarle začel prepletati s prvimi poskusi osveščanja in poročanja o nujnosti preprečevanja samomora ter posledično z razvojem javnozdravstvene paradigme. Njihove ugotovitve kažejo, da kljub postopnemu prehodu od pretežno provokativnega k bolj preventivnemu poročanju o samomorih želja javnosti »po krvi« in grozljivih podrobnostih posameznih smrti očitno ni nikoli zares izzvenela in da sta demokratizacija in liberalizacija medijskega prostora v devetdesetih letih prinesla tudi tabloidizacijo medijev in s tem nove izzive pri uveljavljanju javnega interesa in družbene odgovornosti pri poročanju o samomoru.

V izvedenih raziskavah se je samomor izkazal za odlično študijo primera za premike na področju vrednot, mišljenja, diskurzov, in ravnanj. Članki nedvomno odpirajo vprašanja, ki terjajo poglobljen premislek in izrazito interdisciplinaren pristop tudi v prihodnje: do kakšne mere je bila samomorilnost samouresničujoča se prerokba, do kakšne mere so strahovi o epidemiji samomora generirali rast samomorilnosti in so bili torej kontingenca, ki se je uresničevala z načinom razmišljanja in pričakovanji ljudi.⁸ Članki v tem tematskem sklopu v mnogočem prispevajo k vedenju tako o samem fenomenu samomora kot o strukturnih spremembah v slovenski družbi 20. stoletja in ponujajo primerjavo med razvojem na Slovenskem z razvojem v sosednjih regijah. Kompleksna vprašanja o tem, kakšen je bil po eni strani vpliv povelečevanja in heroizacije nekaterih samomorov ter po drugi strani strahu pred »dednostjo«

7 Thomas and Swaine Thomas, *The Child in America*, 571, 572.

8 Biggs, »Prophecy, Self-Fulfilling/Self-Defeating«, in Kaldis (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Philosophy and the Social Sciences*, 766. Watson and Hill, *Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies* (Self-fulfilling prophecy), 268.

samomorilnosti, na individualni ravni, znotraj posameznih družin in tudi na ravni celotnih narodov, ter kakšen vpliv je imelo ponavljanje negativnega in katastrofičnega diskurza, denimo da smo Slovenci samomorilni narod, vsekakor ostajajo raziskovalni izziv za prihodnost.

Meta Remec

Jelena Seferović*

Perspectives on Suicide: Bosnian and Herzegovinian and Croatian Views from the 1880s to the 1930s**

IZVLEČEK

POGLEDI NA SAMOMOR: MNENJA V BOSNI IN HERCEGOVINI TER NA HRVAŠKEM OD OSEMDESETIH LET 19. STOLETJA DO TRIDESETIH LET 20. STOLETJA

Samomor je izjemno zapletena tema, na katero vplivajo številni dejavniki, ki vključujejo biološke, biokemične, kulturne, sociološke, medosebne, psihološke, filozofske, zavestne in nezavedne komponente. Iz pregleda novinarskih objav, bolniških kartotek iz hrvaških psihiatričnih ustanov in znanstvenih razprav o samomoru v medicinski literaturi iz obdobja od osemdesetih let 19. stoletja do tridesetih let 20. stoletja je razvidno, da se pogledi novinarjev in psihiatrov iz tistega obdobja precej razlikujejo glede opredeljevanja razlogov za poskuse samomora. Odsotnost doslednih razlag poudarja nedoumljivost skrajne odločitve posameznika, da si vzame življenje. Čeprav so številni strokovnjaki in laiki trdili, da poznajo natančne motive za samomor, so nekateri še vedno iskali razlago v nezemeljskih silah ali posameznikih z nadnaravnimi močmi. Za bolj poglobljeno razumevanje samomora je zaradi njegove večplastne narave v osnovi potreben pretanjen in celovit pristop, ki vključuje različne discipline in poglede.

Ključne besede: zgodovina samomora, samomorilno vedenje, poskusi samomora, časopisne zgodbe o samomoru, Hrvaška, Bosna in Hercegovina

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of suicide is a profoundly intricate topic, influenced by a myriad of factors encompassing biological, biochemical, cultural, sociological, interpersonal, psychological, philosophical, conscious, and unconscious components. The examination of press publications, patient records from Croatian psychiatric institutions, and scholarly discourse on suicide in the medical literature from the period between the 1880s and the 1930s reveal that among the diverse perspectives of journalists and psychiatrists of that era, there are notable variations in terms of defining the reasons for suicide attempts. The absence of consistent explanations underscores the enigmatic nature of the ultimate resolution to end one's life. Although numerous experts and laypeople have claimed to know the exact motives behind someone resorting to suicide, some have continued to look for an explanation in otherworldly forces or individuals with supernatural powers. In essence, the multifaceted nature of suicide necessitates a nuanced and comprehensive approach, integrating various disciplines and perspectives to attain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

Keywords: history of suicide, suicidal behaviours, suicide attempts, newspaper stories about suicide, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Introduction

The endeavour to identify the factors influencing suicides and suicide attempts is a topic of many scientific publications across various disciplines. The interpretations of this complex phenomenon are based on various theories that are undeniably scientifically based.¹ Nevertheless, the question remains how certain can we be about the reasons why someone decides to resort to suicide? Some of the common factors mentioned as suicide triggers include material poverty, financial problems, relationship conflicts, the loss of loved ones, and other stressors in people's lives. Various suicide methods exist, and each suicide or suicide attempt is an individual and unique process, regardless of the widespread stereotypes. The frequently mentioned common suicide methods included poisoning, hanging, the use of cold weapons and firearms,

1 Ulrich Schnyder, Ladislav Valach, Kathrin Bichsel and Konrad Michel, "Attempted Suicide: Do We Understand the Patients' Reasons?," *General Hospital Psychiatry* 21(1) (1999): 62–69, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0163834398000644?fr=RR-1&ref=cra_js_challenge (May 1, 2024). Matt Wray, Cynthia Colen and Bernice Pescosolido, "The Sociology of Suicide," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 37 (2011): 505–28, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Matt-Wray/publication/228173911_The_Sociology_of_Suicide/links/00b49516580f38289c000000/The-Sociology-of-Suicide.pdf (May 1, 2024). James Staples and Tom Widger, "Situating Suicide as an Anthropological Problem: Ethnographic Approaches to Understanding Self-Harm and Self-Inflicted Death," *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*, 36 (2012): 183–203, <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s11013-012-9255-1.pdf> (May 1, 2024).

and drowning.² The phenomenon of suicide is subject to gender stereotyping, which often leads to unfair prejudices, such as claims that women attempt suicide only for attention or use less deadly methods because of their “weaker” nature.³

In their theories on suicide, some experts have even tried to distinguish between justified and unjustified suicides or suicide attempts. Thus, they actually took on the role of arbiters in determining the validity of these reasons and made moral judgments. In line with the perspectives of Islam and Christianity, the religions present in Bosnia and Herzegovina or the areas included in the present research, the only one who can make the final decision on an individual’s life and death is God or Allah. These religious beliefs point to the transcendental power and authority over life and death, entrusting people’s fate to God.⁴

Newspaper reporting on attempted and completed suicides plays a vital role in shaping society’s opinions on these decisions. Changes in ethical journalism practices have led to a more subtle approach to suicide reporting. The earlier practices of describing explicit details and circumstances surrounding suicides are no longer acceptable, as they could encourage others to make similar decisions. Today, journalists respect ethical journalism guidelines and emphasise empathy towards those who commit suicide.⁵

This article encompasses all the previously mentioned aspects of analysing suicides and suicide attempts, taking into consideration the newspaper articles from Bosnian-Herzegovinian newspapers, medical theories, and personal testimonies of psychiatric patients who have survived such an act. The emphasis is placed on the period between the 1880s and the 1930s, with a single exception: the interpretation of a failed suicide attempt from 1951. This is because of the lack of similar examples from the period that this article otherwise focuses on.

The motivation to critically examine the phenomenon in question stems from the fact that the author of this article came across a newspaper article concluding with the statement that “some people claim that nothing can be understood without consulting a Gypsy.”⁶ The article was about the suicide of a young man from Jasenjan, a village in Herzegovina near Mostar, who hanged himself from a pear tree in 1899. Some locals claimed he did this because his stepmother and father had mistreated him, while oth-

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- 2 Meerae Lim, Sang Uk Lee and Jong-Ik Park, “Differences in Suicide Methods Used Between Suicide Attempters and Suicide Completers,” *International Journal of Mental Health Systems* 8(54) (2014), <https://ijmhs.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1752-4458-8-54#citeas> (May 3, 2024). Kairo Kolves, Matthew McDonough, David Crompton and Diego de Leo, “Choice of a Suicide Method: Trends and Characteristics,” *Psychiatry Research* 260 (2018): 67–74, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0165178117307667n> (May 5, 2024).
 - 3 Silvia Canetto, Sara Sakinofsky and Isaac Sakinofsky, “The Gender Paradox in Suicide,” *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behaviour* 28(1) (1998): 1–23, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Silvia-Canetto/publication/13720598_The_Gender_Paradox_in_Suicide/links/59dd78c20f7e9b53c1979730/The-Gender-Paradox-in-Suicide.pdf (May 6, 2024).
 - 4 Nooria Mehraby, “Suicide: Its Pathway, Perception and Prevention Amongst Muslims,” *Psychotherapy in Australia* 11(2) (2005): 60–65, <https://search.informit.org/doi/abs/10.3316/informit.546604879663452> (May 2, 2024). John Warwick Montgomery, *The Suicide of Christian Theology* (New Reformation Publication, 2015).
 - 5 Sallyanne Duncan, *Reporting Suicide Responsibility: A Force for Good*. 3rd Edition (Routledge, 2023).
 - 6 “Svaštice – Samoubojstvo,” *Osvit*, May 12, 1899.

ers said he hanged himself because his father had refused to give him Easter eggs. In any case, the villagers believed that nothing would be resolved until they consulted a Gypsy – that is, someone allegedly well-versed in the supernatural could provide their insight into the situation. Of course, like everyone else, Gypsies cannot know for certain why someone had decided to end their own life. Nevertheless, the need to consult them suggests that no logical explanation may be sufficient to fully explain the reasons why someone attempts suicide or actually manages to take their own life. It is essential to delve deeper into the underlying factors and complexities of such situations to gain a more comprehensive understanding. Considering multiple perspectives and various factors is crucial in unravelling the intricacies of people's thoughts and actions. By acknowledging the limitations of logical reasoning alone and recognising the importance of exploring diverse viewpoints, we can better address the complexities of human behaviour, including the tragic act of suicide.

The Journalistic Viewpoint

Some recent scientific publications highlight an increase in the number of suicide reports in the press over the past decades.⁷ However, they do not specify the historical period that the numbers are compared to. Indeed, the research conducted as part of this project has shown the opposite. The analysis of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian newspapers *Jugoslavenski list*⁸ and *Sarajevski list*⁹ from the 1880s to the beginning of the 1920s has revealed many examples of journalistic reports on suicides. In this contribution, only some of these representative articles will be presented and interpreted. Their comparison to today's journalistic reporting on suicide reveals a noticeable, significant level of explicitness and naturalism in the descriptions of the potential reasons and the state of the suicide victims' bodies. The following example represents one of the many cases collected during this research.

“He hanged himself. The report from Travnik indicates that last year, on 17 November, Simo Đurić from Prečani left his village to gather firewood. On his way back home with the wood, he saw his neighbour, Jovo Mirković, hanging from a birch branch. He immediately

7 Thomas Niederkrotenthaler, Marlies Braun, Jane Pirkis, Benedikt Till, Steven Stack, Mark Sinyor, Ulrich S. Tran, Martin Voracek, Qijin Cheng, Florian Arendt, Sebastian Scherr, Paul S. F. Yip and Matthew J. Spittal, “Association Between Suicide Reporting in the Media and Suicide: Systematic Review and Meta-analysis,” *BMJ: British Medical Journal (Online)* 368 (2022): 1, <https://www.bmj.com/content/368/bmj.m575> (May 3, 2024).

8 *Jugoslavenski list*, a Croatian political and general newspaper, was regularly published in Sarajevo every day except for Sundays and holidays. Its first edition was published on November 23, 1918, and it ceased publication on May 9, 1941. – Franjo Topić, “Hrvatski tisak u BiH od početka do 1941. Godine,” *Vrhbosnensia: časopis za teološka i međureligijska pitanja* 7(2) (2003): 479, <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/425597> (May 4, 2024).

9 *Sarajevski list* started coming out after the cessation of “*Bosansko-hercegovačko novine*”, the first official newspaper in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It continued the numbering and year of the previous newspaper but changed its name for practical reasons, as it needed to include both Latin and Cyrillic scripts. The first issue of the newspaper was published on 3 August 1881. Initially, it came out every three days, while later, it became a daily newspaper published every day except for Sundays and holidays. – Đorđe Pejanović, *Bibliografija štampe Bosne i Hercegovine: 1850–1941* (Sarajevo: “Veselin Masleša”, 1961).

told this to Mare, Jovo's wife, and R. Crnjak, who had lived with his son-in-law for some time. The authorities were notified immediately. Both of Jovo's ears and the flesh around them had been eaten, his eyes gouged out, and his fingers nibbled on. During the investigation, it was discovered that Jovo had lived quite miserably and meagrely, supporting himself and his wife through day labour. He was otherwise very moral and loyal to his wife, though somewhat simple-minded and easily manipulated by others. After the body was reportedly examined in the presence of Jovo's brother Nikola, the neighbours, and the local religious leader, it was ordered for him to be buried.¹⁰

During the period covered by this research, the Werther effect, a concept coined by the sociologist David P. Phillips in 1974¹¹, was not well known. Although this concept was not recognised as such for a long time, the adverse effects of public elaborations on suicides were written about even before they received any official definition. Almost a century after the first edition of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's novel "The Sorrows of Young Werther" and just as long before the formalisation of the Werther effect in 1885, the author of an article published in the Croatian Catholic weekly *Zagrebački katolički list*¹² wrote about the appearance of this phenomenon as follows.

"Throughout Germany, especially in Vienna, suicides happen so often that they have become strikingly apparent to everyone. People are racking their brains trying to identify the cause of this great evil. It is a wonder that this moral plague has not nearly reached such dimensions in Slavic cities. Therefore, we could suspect the reasons include excessive education, which German and French literature spreads in society."¹³

In the last two decades of the 19th and the first two of the 20th century, the influence of newspapers and literature on the occurrence of suicides and their contribution to the normalisation of suicide through their content was already well understood. Nevertheless, this trend continued. It was followed by the Bosnian and Herzegovinian journalists of that time, whose suicide reports were researched as part of this project. However, it is possible that, back then, their influence was not as prominent as today, particularly due to the limited availability of newspapers, few sales outlets, and the widespread poverty that prevented a significant portion of the population from being

10 "Mali vjesnik – Objesio se," *Sarajevski list*, February 9, 1900.

11 In response to the Werther effect, the mental health and suicide prevention organisations worldwide, including the World Health Organization, have developed guidelines for responsible media reporting on suicides. These guidelines include specific recommendations on reducing contagion effects, such as avoiding sensationalism and detailed descriptions of suicide methods. – Jan Domaradzki, "The Werther Effect, the Papageno Effect or No Effect? A Literature Review," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18(5) (2021): 2396, <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/18/5/2396> (May 4, 2024). Francesco J. Acosta, Carlos J. Rodriguez, Maria R. Cejas, Yolanda Ramallo-Farina, Helena Fernandez-Garcimartin, "Suicide Coverage in the Digital Press Media: Adherence to World Health Organization Guidelines and Effectiveness of Different Interventions Aimed at Media Professionals," *Health Communication* 35(13) (2020): 16231632, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2019.1654176> (May 4, 2024).

12 *Zagrebački katolički list* is the original name of the Catholic weekly *Katolički list*, published between January 4, 1877 and May 3, 1945 by the Zagreb Archdiocese. – *Katolički list* – *Wikipedija*, https://hr.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katoli%C4%8Dki_list (July 17, 2024).

13 Pregled samoubojstvah. *Zagrebački katolički list*, "Overview of Suicides," 7 July 1855.

able to afford even the basic necessities.¹⁴ Vlado Puljiz,¹⁵ citing parts of the book “Kako živi narod: život u pasivnim krajevima” by Rudolf Bičanić, an economist and expert on the rural conditions in the passive regions of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1930s, vividly illustrates these circumstances. Bičanić emphasised: “There is one fact without which the economic life of passive regions cannot be understood: the spectre of hunger hovers over them!”¹⁶ Another reason is that illiteracy was considerable in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the time, further reducing the influence of newspaper articles.¹⁷ In short, the detailed reporting on the specific events and situations, such as the conditions in which the bodies of suicide victims were found, was probably not as significant as it would be today. Given the limited access to information and fewer people who could read, the influence of journalism was not as strong as it is nowadays when the media is much more accessible and can reach a larger number of people worldwide.

To return to the case of Jovo from Travnik. When discussing the attempts at explaining the reasons for suicides, we can notice certain speculations. Initially, it was suggested that poverty could be a crucial factor, while later, it was emphasised that Jovo was mentally unstable and under the influence of other people. In the relevant literature on suicide, it is possible to find various scientifically supported theories associating motivations for suicide with material poverty, submissiveness, and mental health of the perpetrators.¹⁸ In other words, journalistic conclusions can now even be supported by scientific evidence. However, the question arises whether we can truly comprehend the truth about Jovo’s motive for suicide, or is the truth just a subjective interpretation that can vary depending on the circumstances and perspectives of the observer? The goal of this contribution is not to deny or challenge the results of numerous scientific studies on the causes of suicide¹⁹ but rather to underline the potential limitations of

14 Vlado Puljiz, “Prilike u Hercegovini i spašavanje gladne djece u Prvom svjetskom ratu (Osvrt na socijalne i gospodarske prilike, uzroke gladi i ulogu hrvatskih organizacija u spašavanju hercegovačko djece),” in *Fra Didak Buntić – čovjek i djelo*, ed. Stipe Tadić and Marinko Šakota (Zagreb: Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar, 2009).

15 Ibidem, 192.

16 Rudolf Bičanić was a Croatian economist and researcher who specialised in studying the rural conditions in the Croatian and Bosnian and Herzegovinian countryside during the 1930s. His research work titled “Kako živi narod: život u pasivnim krajevima” provided valuable insights into the local population’s socio-economic conditions and way of life. Bičanić was known for his analytical approach and detailed studies of the peasant communities, and he gained a reputation as an expert in rural sociology. – Vlado Puljiz, “Seljaštvo u radovima Rudolfa Bičanića,” *Socijologija sela* 34(1–2) (1996): 97–103, (May 3, 2024).

17 Hana Younis, “Otvaranje i rad muslimanskih čitaonica u manjim mjestima Bosne i Hercegovine početkom 20. stoljeća,” *Bosniaca: časopis Nacionalne i univerzitetske biblioteke Bosne i Hercegovine* 26(26) (2021): 89, 90.

18 Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Reprint (New York: Free Press, 1897 [1951]). Steven Stack, “Suicide: A 15-Year Review of the Sociological Literature. Part I: Cultural and Economic Factors,” *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behaviour* 30(2) (2000): 155, 156, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Steven-Stack/publication/12431188_Suicide_A_15-Year_Review_of_the_Sociological_Literature_Part_I_Cultural_and_Economic_Factors/links/61d0b3c3e669ee0f5c7dad9b/Suicide-A-15-Year-Review-of-the-Sociological-Literature-Part-I-Cultural-and-Economic-Factors.pdf (June 1, 2024).

19 Rory C. O’ Connor, “Towards an Integrated Motivational-Volitional Model of Suicidal Behaviour,” in Rory O’ Connor, Stephen Platt and Jacki Gordon (eds.), *International Handbooks of Mental Health: Research, Policy and Practice*. Online (John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2011), 181–98, <http://ndl.ethernet.edu.et/bitstream/123456789/28339/2/161.pdf.pdf#page=187> (June 1, 2024). David E. Klonsky and May Alexis, “The Three-Step Theory (3ST): A New Theory of Suicide Rooted in the ‘Ideation-to-Action’ Framework,” *International Journal of Cognitive Therapy* 8(2) (2015):

our understanding and depth of knowledge when it comes to suicidal thoughts and acts. It is vital to recognise that while scientific research provides valuable insights into the complex factors influencing suicide, there may still be elements that remain elusive or subjective. Understanding the intricacies of suicidal behaviour requires a nuanced approach that takes into account individual circumstances, mental health factors, societal influences, and personal motivations. Therefore, while scientific studies offer the relevant knowledge, there is also a need for ongoing reflection and consideration of the multifaceted nature of suicide. By acknowledging the complexity of suicidal behaviour and motivations, we can strive to provide more comprehensive support, prevention, and intervention strategies that address the diverse needs of at-risk individuals.

Through the example of a suicide reported in the *Sarajevski list* newspaper in 1884, which follows below, the question arises whether we can understand and are willing to accept a situation in which a person has firmly decided to commit suicide without the possibility of preventing it. It is important to note that this is a newspaper report whose sources and methodology of gathering information are not clearly defined. It is unknown whether the journalist spoke with the hospital's medical staff or based his conclusions on the specific data mentioned in the article. Therefore, the question arises to what extent these journalistic reports are credible and based on facts.

“He drowned. Sarajevo beggar Salija Bošnjak (Muhamedovac) recently jumped from the Emperor's Bridge into the river Miljacka to drown himself. Due to the low water level, he had to push his head under the surface, where he held it until he fainted. However, two people managed to pull him out of the river and save him from death. When asked why he wanted to drown himself, Salija replied that he had been overcome by misfortune and hunger. He was taken to the Vakuf Hospital, where he kept stating he would still drown himself as soon as he got the chance – which he in fact did. Yesterday, he slipped away from the hospital and went to the goat's bridge, where he indeed drowned in the river Miljacka.”²⁰

At this point, the intention is not to diminish the professionalism of journalism in the past but to encourage reflection on the accuracy and objectivity of news about suicides and their sensationalistic approach. Reporting on suicides in the past differs from the present in terms of the graphic descriptions of the bodies of suicide victims and the ways these acts were carried out. On the other hand, the practice of revealing names and surnames and specifying the locations where bodies were found, which was once common, would now be considered a gross violation of journalistic ethics (which does not mean journalists always adhere to these rules!). Today, the emphasis is on the importance of a sensitive approach to this topic, the respect for the privacy and dignity of the deceased and their family, and a careful choice of words to avoid encouraging further suicides. Nowadays, journalists have a greater responsibility and face potential legal consequences if they do not adhere to the journalistic ethics standards when

114–29, <https://www.suicidepreventiecentrum.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/The-Three-Step-Theory-3ST-A-New-Theory-of-Suicide.pdf> (June 1, 2024).

20 “Mali vjesnik – Utopio se,” *Sarajevski list*, August 13, 1884.

reporting on this topic.²¹ In some countries in the 1930s, reporting on suicides was allegedly prohibited. This claim was made by the Croatian doctor Ivo Stančić-Rokotov in one of his articles on suicides.²² However, as he did not specify which countries he was referring to, we can only trust his words. In the article, Stančić-Rokotov cautions that in the press, suicides are “analysed in impossible detail” and believes this represents a “temptation for those who contemplate it.” Furthermore, he adds: “It would not hurt if something was done in that direction here as well because these reports make absolutely no sense.” In conclusion, he argues that “the audience does not really like to read extensively and in-depth about it, as it only seems exciting, while in reality, nobody benefits from these articles.”

In the following example from 1884, the journalist did not make any definitive claims about the motives for the deceased person’s suicide, unlike in most cases examined in this study. Specifically, he stated that “there is a suspicion” that the man had resorted to suicide out of fear because he had not been able to “give an account of the alms collected”.

“Body Found. On Sunday morning, a bloodied corpse of a middle-aged man was found in the city park near the exit towards Skerličeva street [...] The body was identified as the painter Svetozar Jerković from Himzarova street No. 1. It is suspected that Jerković committed suicide out of fear that he could not account for the alms collected for the committee aiding the victims in Serbia. The committee had already called on him several times to do so, and on Saturday, he was given the final warning. A knife, determined to be Jerković’s property, was found next to the body. The deceased was taken to the County Hospital for autopsy, and the police department continues the investigation.”²³

Epistemologically, when there is doubt about the assertion that something has indeed been done, an individual is encouraged to gather further information and find evidence to confirm or refute that assertion. Doubt is a part of the process of developing critical thinking and the ability to distinguish true claims from those not supported by evidence.²⁴

Therefore, someone expressing doubt about something that has occurred, such as a suicide, can result in a further investigation, discussion, and analysis to reliably confirm the truth or falsehood of that assertion. Newspaper articles, both in the past and present, often provide only partial information about suicides, as journalists are not experts in mental health and may overlook essential psychological and social factors or interpret them inadequately. Although newspaper articles can provide a contextual framework for understanding suicides, they are often insufficient for any deeper analyses of the motivations for such acts.²⁵

21 Richard Keeble, *Ethics for Journalists*. 2nd Edition (Routledge, 2008), <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9780203698822/ethics-journalists-richard-keeble> (May 5, 2024).

22 Ivo Stančić - Rokotov, “Samoubojstvo u Zagrebu: Statistički pregled za god. 1931-1935,” *Liječnički vjesnik: glasilo hrvatskog liječničkog zbora* 59(3) (1937): 97, <https://library.foi.hr/dbook/cas.php?B=1&item=S01101&godina=1937&broj=00003&page=97> (May 19, 2024).

23 “Svaštice – Pronađeno tijelo,” *Jugoslavenski list*, March 18, 1919.

24 Harvey Siegel, *Education’s Epistemology: Rationality, Diversity, and Critical Thinking* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

25 Benedikt Till, Teresa A. Wild, Florian Arendt, Sebastian Scherr, S. and Thomas Niederkrotenthaler, “Associations of Tabloid Newspaper Use with Endorsement of Suicide Myths, Suicide-related Knowledge, and Stigmatizing Attitudes

Expert Perspectives on Suicide

As an act of self-destruction, suicide represents a profound existential theme. Through the lens of different cultures, beliefs, and scientific perspectives, people throughout history have tried to give meaning and explain the motivations behind it. Suicide has been – and still is – interpreted in various ways, taking into account the moral, religious, social, and psychological perspectives.²⁶ Interpreting suicide from various perspectives not only provides insight into the individual motives and circumstances leading to this ultimate decision but also raises questions about morality, free will, suffering, and the search for meaning in life. Suicide remains an intriguing topic that prompts us to reflect on eternal questions of life, death, and human tragedy.²⁷

The positivist approach to life in the context of the medical interpretation of suicide at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries was influenced by the belief in scientific explanations and the idea that natural laws governed human behaviour. At the time, medical experts viewed suicide as unnatural because they believed human behaviour could be explained by biological, psychological, and social factors rather than purely as a result of individual choice or willpower.²⁸ They considered suicide to be an anomaly because it deviated from the standard patterns of behaviour and established social norms. They believed that individuals who had resorted to suicide were not in their right state of mind and were suffering from underlying mental health issues that had led them to take their own lives. This belief stemmed from the positivist view that human behaviour could be studied and understood through scientific methods and that suicide was a symptom of an underlying psychological disorder rather than a rational decision.²⁹

In one of his expert articles, the Croatian doctor mentioned in the previous chapter explained the act of suicide as follows, drawing on the positivism theories by Stančić-Rokotov: “On the contrary, suicide is a lack of self-preservation instinct resulting from extraordinary circumstances or more often from psychopathological conditions.”³⁰ His theory implies that people have a survival instinct that prevents them from hurting or killing themselves. In other words, when someone commits suicide, it can be considered that this instinct is lacking or that suicidal behaviour goes against natural laws.

Toward Suicidal Individuals,” *Crisis* 39(6) (2018): 428–39, <https://econtent.hogrefe.com/doi/10.1027/0227-5910/a000516> (May 8, 2024).

- 26 Scott J Fitzpatrick, “Re-moralizing the Suicide Debate,” *Journal of Bioethic Inquiry* 11(2) (2014): 223–32, <https://philpapers.org/rec/FITRTS-3> (May 22, 2024).
- 27 Jack D. Douglas, *The Social Meaning of Suicide* (Princeton University Press, 1967), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13x0ts2> (May 22, 2024). Erminia Colucci and David Lester, *Suicide and Culture* (Hogrefe Publishing, 2013).
- 28 Paulo Drinot, “Madness, Neurasthneia, and ‘Modernity’: Medico-legal and Popular Interpretations of Suicide in Early Twentieth-Century Lima,” *Latin American Research Review* 39(2) (2004): 89–112, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1555402> (May 22, 2024). Denys DeCatanzaro, “Human Suicide: A Biological Perspective,” *Cambridge University Press*, 3(2) (2010): 265–72, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/behavioral-and-brain-sciences/article/abs/human-suicide-a-biological-perspective/3DF3B0106F0265AB9FC9022C64AB2FFC> (May 22 2024).
- 29 Jerry Jacobs, “A Phenomenological Approach to the Study of Suicide,” *Journal of Death and Dying* 4(2) (1972): 400–04, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.2190/7M3X-95J1-V0JG-F8Q2?journalCode=omea> (May 10, 2024).
- 30 Stančić - Rokotov, “Samoubojstvo u Zagrebu,” 97.

Both in Bosnia and Herzegovina³¹ and Croatia, the social atmosphere at the time, affected by religious dogmas, contributed to the reinforcement of the positivist outlook on suicide and the condemnation of this act. Such an approach could surely not have helped provide any support to individuals experiencing suicidal thoughts nor contribute to the potential prevention of this act. For example, in one of the more popular Croatian Catholic magazines, *Katolički list*, an article was published as early as 1886, explicitly stating that it was forbidden for a person to commit suicide. In the words of the author: “Every beast loves its life, even if it cannot express this. Why else does it shy away from man, or flee from the hunter [...] And a man who can understand the purpose of life rationally, to whom knowledge and intellect clearly tell that they did not give themselves life, knows that he must not take it from himself.”³²

This quote reflects the idea that according to Catholic and Christian beliefs, people and animals possess a natural survival instinct that guides them towards preserving their own lives. This perspective emphasised the importance of appreciating and respecting life and the principle that no one should willingly take their own life, as this violates the natural law.³³ Religious sciences view life as a gift from God and consider God the owner of life, as he is believed to have created man and given him life and purpose. According to religious teachings, God is the source of perfection, love, and goodness, and people believe that their lives are in God’s hands and that God provides them with guidance on how to live a fulfilling life.³⁴ Nevertheless, cases of suicide have also been recorded among priests. Such was the case of the suicide of the Orthodox priest Vaso Odavić in Lugu in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian region of Trebinje in 1889. According to the records, Odavić passed away after stabbing himself in the left side of his chest with a knife in his house on 21 December of the previous year.³⁵ That same year, the *Sarajevski list* newspaper mentioned the suicide of a Capuchin friar in the Capuchin church in Osijek. The thirty-four-year-old man reportedly hanged himself for unknown reasons in a disturbed mental state. Consequently, the church was desecrated and temporarily closed but was soon reopened after a blessing.³⁶ Given that the article is partly based on the archival materials collected in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian archives, where the majority of the population is of Islamic faith, it is vital to clarify how suicide is approached in Islam. In Islam, suicide is considered a major sin because

31 “Listak - O samoubojstvu,” *Sarajevski list*, March 8, 1907. In an article about health conditions in Sarajevo, published in the “Sarajevski list” newspaper in 1907, it was emphasised that the lack of regular record-keeping of deaths and the absence of autopsies stem from the fact that people trust in religious authorities and practice traditional religious rites after death.

32 “Samokrv,” *Katolički list*, 29, July 19, 1866.

33 Stanislaw Adamiak and Jan Dohnalik, “The Prohibition of Suicide and Its Theological Rationale in Catholic Moral and Canonical Tradition: Origins and Development,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 62 (2023), 3820–33, <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s> (May 6, 2024).

34 John Potter, “Is Suicide the Unforgivable Sin? Understanding Suicide, Stigma, and Salvation through Two Christian Perspectives,” *Religions* 12(11) (2021): 987, https://media.proquest.com/media/hms/PFT/1/cnkbL?_s=TaFqGxpeYriFjCQWjBRj%2FktbsCc%3D (May 7, 2024).

35 “Mali vjesnik – Samoubistvo sveštenika,” *Sarajevski list*, February 3, 1889.

36 “Mali vjesnik – Samoubijstvo kapucina,” *Sarajevski list*, May 6, 1889.

only Allah decides on life and death, and believers are encouraged to rely on His mercy.³⁷ In the context of the present research, no case of suicidal behaviour has been identified among Muslim religious leaders.

Ivo Glavan, a Croatian physician and assistant at the neurological-psychiatric department of the Zakladna Hospital in Zagreb in 1929, also wrote about suicides, focusing on the question of justifications for committing this act or the lack thereof. In his analyses, he clearly emphasised the possibility of justifying this act if the suicide was motivated by specific circumstances, such as material poverty. For him, for example, “unrequited love is a banal motive” for taking one’s life. Glavan believed that unrequited love should not be accepted as a valid reason for suicidal behaviour, as it is a subjective emotional situation lacking any objective basis.³⁸ Considering the frequent association of this motive with women and their perception as emotionally vulnerable or weaker beings, we can conclude that this phenomenon did not escape the influence of gender stereotypes. Although gender stereotyping of suicide was certainly present, some findings partially refute it. When analysing a statistical overview of suicides from 1931 to 1935 in Zagreb, Stančić-Rokotov highlights that in 1934, the number of female suicides exceeded that of the male suicides.³⁹ Although most statistics until then showed a higher number of suicides in men, it is clear that this was not always the case. Nevertheless, Stančić-Rokotov, like Glavan, argued that the higher number of male suicides stems from the assumption that women were physically and emotionally weaker and less energetic than men and that they more often chose less successful suicide methods. However, it is important to note that not all failed suicide attempts were likely reported, so it cannot be definitively stated how many such cases occurred among women and men at the beginning of the 20th century. In an article from 1919, published in the *Jugoslavenski list* newspaper, the author warned that only a small number of suicide attempts were reported to the police. The author stated that a doctor was immediately called to remove the risk without informing the authorities. This suggests that the true extent of suicide attempts, especially among women, may have been underestimated. The author stressed the need for more accurate reporting and monitoring of suicide attempts to effectively address and prevent such tragic outcomes.⁴⁰

In the context of the discussion on the gender stereotyping of suicide, it is essential to highlight Glavan’s conclusions,⁴¹ stating that “It is clear that women choose the means of suicide that do not guarantee a certain death. Instead, they often need to draw attention to themselves, which corresponds to their motive. A man, when he decides

37 Robin Edward Gearing and Dana Alonzo, “Religion and Suicide: New Findings,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 57(6) (2018): 2478–99, <https://www.iecj.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/religion-and-suicide.pdf> (May 6, 2024).

38 Ivo Glavan, “Problem samoubijstva,” *Liječnički vjesnik: glasilo Hrvatskoga liječničkog zbora* 51(9) (1929): 448, <https://library.foi.hr/dbook/cas.php?B=1&item=S01101&godina=1929&broj=00009&page=442> (May 18, 2024).

39 Stančić - Rokotov, “Samoubojstvo u Zagrebu,” 97.

40 “Epidemija samoubojstva,” *Jugoslavenski list*, June 23, 1919.

41 Glavan, “Problem samoubijstva,” 445.

to take such a step, chooses a method that corresponds to his masculine character, as well as one that is effective.” However, are women really always averse to the “masculine” methods of taking their lives? The following case definitely refutes his claim. From the following article from 1904, published in the *Sarajevski list* newspaper, it is evident that Glavan’s theories were debatable.

“On the 23rd of this month, we received a message from Mostar. That morning, a certain Agata Zeljina, a maid often reprimanded by her masters for her poor behaviour, met her death in the swift waters of the Neretva by jumping onto the rocks just below the new bridge. The waves and the force of the mighty waters pulled her into an eternal grave somewhere among the rocks at the bottom of the river, from where dead bodies rarely resurface.”⁴²

Suicide is a deeply personal act that often remains unexplained to others, often motivated by a complex web of internal emotions, thoughts, and life circumstances of the person at the moment of the decision.⁴³ Consider the case of the maid who was overwhelmed by the pressure from her superiors to the point where she believed that suicide was her only way out. What exactly was going on in her mind that led to such a radical act? Was the decision impulsive or well planned and thought out? The answers to these questions remain unclear and difficult to fully understand, especially after all this time. Regardless of the potential expert analyses or assessments, there will always be a level of mystery and incomprehensibility to the act of suicide.

What Do Individuals Who Have Attempted Suicide Say about Their Motivation?

This chapter will focus on the testimonies of individuals hospitalised due to suicidal attempts in two Croatian psychiatric hospitals in the first part of the 20th century: the Neuropsychiatric Hospital “Dr Ivan Barbot” Popovača and the Psychiatry Department of the Royal State Hospital in Pakrac.⁴⁴

Their explanations of the motivations for such actions will help us to better understand the internal struggles and emotions that led people to self-destruction.

42 “Mali vjesnik – Utopljenica,” *Sarajevski list*, March 3, 1904.

43 Jeanne Marecek and Chandanie Senadheera, “I Drank It to Put an End to Me’: Narrating Girls’ Suicide and Self-harm in Sri Lanka,” *Indian Sociology* 42(1–2) (2012): 53–82, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/006996671104600204> (May 6, 2024). Yvonne Bergmans, Evelyn Gordon and Rahel Eynan, “Surviving Moment to Moment: The Experience of Living in a State of Ambivalence for Those With Recurrent Suicide Attempts,” *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice* 90(4) (2017): 433–648, https://www.suicideinfo.ca/wp-content/uploads/gravity_forms/6-191a85f36ce9e20de2e2fa3869197735/2018/06/Surviving-moment-to-moment-the-experience-of-living-in-a-state-of-ambivalence_oa.pdf (May 10, 2024).

44 These two psychiatric hospitals were chosen precisely because they are both located closer to the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, and psychiatric patients from there were often hospitalised in the psychiatric hospitals in Pakrac and Popovača. Since the hospital in Popovača opened as late as 1934, there were no cases of suicide attempts that could be referenced from the time period of the suicide cases documented in the newspaper articles interpreted in the previous two chapters.

By analysing their testimonies, an attempt will be made to illuminate the factors that were crucial for their suicide attempts. After examining the journalistic approach to suicide and the views of experts on this phenomenon, it was considered important to give voice to those who have truly been on the brink of such an act. In other words, the individuals who have personally experienced suicidal thoughts and feelings best understand their motives and circumstances that led them to take that step.

Before delving into this topic, it is vital to keep in mind that the majority of individuals whose cases were discovered in the analysed psychiatric documentation did not actually know why they had attempted suicide, or provided nonsensical answers when asked about their reasons. There are many different reasons why some people attempt suicide, and some of these can be extremely complex and difficult to identify or understand, even for the person who attempted it. This underscores the need for caution when drawing firm conclusions about the motives behind suicidal behaviour.

One of the cases from the personal documentation of patients treated at the psychiatric ward of the General Hospital in Pakrac supports this statement. It involved a thirty-year-old female farmer from the eastern Croatian countryside, hospitalised in 1915 with a diagnosis of melancholia. According to her personal file, the patient was married and lived happily with her husband and children until her husband was arrested and sentenced to fifteen years in prison. Afterwards, she and her children moved to her sister's house, and until April 1915, her mental health was stable. The following is an excerpt from the psychiatric notes:

“At the beginning of April, she became somewhat silent. According to her still unmarried sister and her daughter-in-law, she came down from the attic one day with her hair down and told them she wanted to hang herself. When they asked her why, she did not say anything but remained silent. She took a knife and pulled it towards herself with a cry but did not hurt herself. The two relatives went to the attic and found a rope tied to a beam. The next day, they took her for an examination, but nothing conclusive was determined except for a major mental depression.”⁴⁵

When faced with painful emotional wounds, our consciousness can become clouded and distorted, leading to a lack of clarity. In those moments, when a sense of helplessness overwhelms us, we may lose control over our actions, and suicidal thoughts and behaviours become a way of escaping that state. However, after “waking up” from that state of mind, we may be confronted with an inability to understand or define the reasons behind such actions. In many cases, the motivation for such behaviour remains hidden, both to ourselves and others.⁴⁶

45 Psychiatry Department of the Royal State Hospital in Pakrac. Patient files, 1915.

46 Troy Johnson and Holly Tomren, “Helplessness, Hopelessness, and Despair: Identifying the Precursors to Indian Youth Suicide,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23(3) (1999): 287–301, <https://escholarship.org/content/qt7p1610nf/qt7p1610nf.pdf> (May 25, 2024). Alexander J. Millner, Samuel J. Gershman, Aaron M. Bornstein, Hanneke E. M. den Ouden, Catherine R. Glenn, Jaclyn C. Kearns, Brian P. Marx and Terence M. Keane, “Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviours Are Associated With an Increased Decision-Making Bias for Active Responses to Escape Aversive States,” *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 128(2) (2019): 106–18, https://nocklab.fas.harvard.edu/files/nocklab/files/millner_et_al._2019.pdf (May 23, 2024).

After a suicide attempt, individuals may suffer from event-related amnesia or dissociative symptoms that prevent them from thinking clearly and recalling details. Additionally, it is possible that the person was not fully aware of their thoughts or motives at the moment of the suicide attempt, which can lead to a lack of clarity when trying to specify the reasons for their actions. The emotional and psychological pain leading to the incident can be so intense that the person may be unable to rationally or clearly articulate their inner motivations.⁴⁷

In some cases, it was only after several unsuccessful suicide attempts that the patient was able (or willing) to discuss the reasons that motivated them to take that step. It is sometimes questionable whether someone is unable or unwilling to discuss this topic. The following case dates back to 1951, outside the time frame covered by this article. However, due to its uniqueness and rarity, it is highlighted here. The case revolves around a twenty-four-year-old civil servant from an urban area in central Croatia who was hospitalised at the psychiatric ward in Pakrac in 1953, following previous hospitalisation at the Hospital for Mental Illness “Vrapče” and the Neuropsychiatric Hospital “Dr. Ivan Barbot” Popovača. He was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, divorced and childless. His father had been treated twice at the psychiatric ward at the Hospital Sv. Duh in Zagreb, while his siblings did not exhibit any known symptoms of mental illness. He first attempted suicide in 1951 by swallowing quicksilver in the mortuary at the cemetery, where gravediggers found him unconscious and transported him to the hospital for treatment. After recovering, about 10–12 days later, he attempted suicide again by jumping out of a first-floor window. The records in his file from the spring of 1951 indicate that, when asked about his disillusionment with life, he cited two main reasons: “One is disappointment with marriage, even though he claims to have married purely for speculative reasons, and the other is disagreement with the current order [...] In the end, he says he no longer thinks about suicide and has come to terms with his fate, willing to remain in the hospital for as long as necessary.” However, shortly after this statement, a psychiatrist’s note contradicts this, stating that he is “mildly depressed and ironic towards himself and his surroundings, clearly disillusioned and embittered by his fate.”⁴⁸ Is it possible to assess which claim is true, or are both valid? Should we believe the patient, who claimed he had made peace with his fate and had no suicidal thoughts, or should we rely on the assessment of his psychiatrist, who, after interviewing the patient, still maintained that he was embittered by his fate? How many interpretations can we draw about the patient’s mental state and his assessment of suicidal intentions? How do we reconcile the patient’s statement of acceptance with his psychiatrist’s observation of bitterness

47 Alexander E. Wong, Shrija R. Dirghangi and Shelly R. Hart, “Self-concept Clarity Mediates the Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences on Adult Suicide Behaviour, Depression, Loneliness, Perceived Stress, and Life Distress,” *Self and Identity* 18(3) (2018): 247–66, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15298868.2018.1439096> (May 28 2024). Michael J. Bostwick, Chaitana Pabbati, Jennifer R. Geske and Alastair J. McKean, “Suicide Attempt as a Risk Factor for Completed Suicide: Even More Lethal Than We Knew,” *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 173(11) (2016), 1094–1100, <https://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ajp.2016.15070854> (May 28, 2024).

48 Psychiatry Departement of the Royal State Hospital in Pakrac. Patient files, 1951.

and depression? Can we trust the patient's self-reporting, or should we prioritise the psychiatrist's clinical evaluation?

For example, based on the medical report, it is possible to conclude that the primary reason for the following suicide attempt was the patient's relocation to another school for further education. However, when asked why he attempted suicide several times, he responded he did not know. The case involves a twenty-five-year-old transferred from Sarajevo's psychiatric department to the Neuropsychiatric Hospital "Dr. Ivan Barbot" in Popovača. This young man attempted suicide several times, though ultimately, he regretted it. Regarding this patient, a farmer from the Montenegrin countryside, it is crucial to highlight that the first signs of his mental disorder appeared in 1929 when he attempted to enrol in the third grade of a teacher's college quite far from his home. As soon as he arrived, he immediately attempted suicide by cutting his left arm. Afterwards, he became agitated and restless but still wanted to do something. Upon his admission to a hospital in Sarajevo in 1932, from where he was transferred to the abovementioned Croatian neuropsychiatric hospital in 1934, the following was noted:

"He responded readily and coherently to the inquiries. He says he does not know why they brought him here and considers himself healthy. He admits to attempting suicide three times but does not know the reason why. Smiling, he says he tried to hang himself the third time but could not go through with it and regrets the attempt. He often responds with his typical 'I don't know.'⁴⁹

However, it is essential to acknowledge the impact of stigma when investigating the motives behind suicide attempts or suicide itself, as it makes understanding the phenomenon more difficult. Stigmatisation can lead individuals to avoid openly discussing the reasons for their suicide attempts due to fear of adverse reactions and societal judgment. It can evoke feelings of shame, guilt, and rejection. People often fear being viewed as weak or unsuccessful if they admit to suicide attempts or suicidal thoughts.⁵⁰ It is difficult to argue whether a young twenty-four-year-old honestly did not know why he attempted suicide multiple times or if he had deeper reasons that he did not want to reveal to the doctor. The statements of those who have attempted suicide are valuable for understanding these actions, just like the insights from the fields of humanities, social sciences, and medicine, based on numerous studies of motivations for suicidal behaviour. Furthermore, journalistic reports, although sometimes uncertain due to their unreliable sources of information, can enrich the understanding of motivations behind such actions in their own way. Ultimately, considering multiple perspectives is crucial for obtaining a comprehensive picture of this complex issue. Collectively, various approaches, such as scientific research, medical knowledge,

49 HR-DASK-161.2.: Hospital for mental illnesses in Popovača. Patient files, 1934.

50 Adelino A. G. Pereira and Francisco M. S. Cardoso, "Stigmatising Attitudes Towards Suicide by Gender and Age," *CES Psicología* 12(1) (2019): 3–16, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327190334_Stigmatising_Attitudes_Towards_Suicide_by_Gender_and_Age/link/5b7f26b3a6fdcc5f8b6371f5/download?_tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0U0FGFnZSI6InB1YmxyY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxyY2F0aW9uIn19 (June 1, 2024).

and journalistic reports, can contribute to understanding the motivations for suicidal behaviour and provide deeper insights into the internal processes and circumstances leading to such acts.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of Bosnian-Herzegovinian journalistic reports on suicides and the medical theses on this phenomenon, dating from the 1880s to the 1930s, it was established that the reasons for committing suicide are diverse and conditioned by various circumstances. Journalists would often explicitly describe methods of suicide attempts and completions, provide naturalistic depictions of the bodies of the individuals who died by suicide, and confidently draw conclusions regarding the reasons for the emergence of suicidal thoughts and the motivations behind the decision to commit suicide. Criticisms from the public emerged due to the sensationalistic approach of journalists that encouraged the development of suicidal behaviour. This style of reporting was criticised because of the perception that it could inspire others to engage in similar actions. Meanwhile, to understand and explain this complex phenomenon, medical theses approached suicide using objective and scientific research methods, analysing factors such as social environment, gender, economic conditions, social connections, and the individuals' mental health. As these theses tended to assess the reasons for suicide in relation to the prevailing moral, social, and cultural values of the time, some of them considered certain suicides unjustified and condemned them. On the other hand, patients who survived suicide attempts and were treated in Croatian psychiatric hospitals near the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina were unable or unwilling to identify the factors that had led them to such a decision. From all of the above, it can be inferred that suicide attempts and completions can be interpreted from various professional and non-professional perspectives. To draw precise conclusions about the motivations behind these actions, our limitations in terms of understanding and researching the human psyche should be taken into account.

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Jelena Seferović

POGLEDI NA SAMOMOR: MNENJA V BOSNI IN HERCEGOVINI TER NA HRVAŠKEM OD OSEMDESETIH LET 19. STOLETJA DO TRIDESETIH LET 20. STOLETJA

POVZETEK

Za boljše razumevanje kompleksne narave samomora in poskusov samomora si prizadevajo različne znanstvene discipline. Na razvoj samomorilnih idej in dejanj vplivajo številni elementi, od bioloških vplivov do psihosocialnih dejavnikov ter od zavestnih razmišljanj do podzavestnih kognitivnih in senzoričnih procesov. Analiza ustreznih zgodovinskih virov, novinarskih poročil o samomorih s konca 19. in začetka 20. stoletja ter takratnih medicinskih doktrin, ki so temeljile na pozitivističnih načelih, razkriva, da so bili zagovorniki teh teorij trdno prepričani o vzročnih dejavnikih samomora. Kljub prizadevanjem za jasne razlage vzrokov samomorov in poskusov samomora ta pojav ostaja skrivnosten. To dokazujejo pričevanja posameznikov, ki so poskušali narediti samomor, in razkrivajo, da tudi oni ne razumejo razlogov za to odločitev ali pa o njih ne želijo govoriti. Ker nimamo popolnega vpogleda v vzroke za takšne odločitve, to navsezadnje poudarja, da smo pri razumevanju motivov, na katerih temeljijo samomorilna dejanja, omejeni.

Urška Bratož*

Suicide in the Austrian Littoral at the Turn of the 20th Century**

IZVLEČEK

SAMOMOR V AVSTRIJSKEM PRIMORJU NA PRELOMU 19. IN 20. STOLETJA

Prispevek skuša razbrati družbeno podobo samomora ob koncu 19. in na začetku 20. stoletja, predvsem na primeru Trsta kot velikega avstrijskega urbanega centra, kjer je bil trend naraščanja samomorilnosti opazneje viden vsaj od sedemdesetih let 19. stoletja. Ob zaznavanju naraščajoče prisotnosti samomora v družbi je bilo mogoče opazovati, kaj so z različnih koncev Evrope prinašala razmišljanja o samomoru iz zadnje četrtine 19. stoletja, od Morsellijeve študije preko Masaryka do Durkheima, obenem pa, kako so diskurzi okrog samomora odstirali nekoliko širšo sliko družbe, skupaj z njenimi strahovi (pred družbenimi problemi in spremembami, ne nazadnje pa pred potencialno grožnjo imitativnega efekta, ki naj bi ga s poročanjem o samomorih ustvarjal dnevni tisk).

Časopisni diskurz je običajno sledil znanstvenim objavam svojega časa, sočasna opažanja o množičnosti samomorov so se potrjevala skozi statistične analize in medicinske, sociološke, filozofske ter druge razprave, obenem pa so odpirala tudi mnoge druge družbene problematike, s katerimi je bilo samomor v urbanem prostoru mogoče povezati (alkoholizem, rast proletariata, revščina, spreminjanje vrednot idr.). Vse to je sooblikovalo javno razpravo o samomoru kot problemu moderne družbe, s poudarkom na (velikih) mestih, saj je bila problematika samomorov tam veliko bolj izrazita kot v manjših neindustrijskih mestih ali na podeželju Avstrijskega primorja.

Ključne besede: samomor, mesta, Trst, Koper, modernizacija, 1870–1910, Avstro-Ogrska

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ABSTRACT

The paper seeks to examine the social image of suicide at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, focusing on the case of Trieste as a major Austrian urban centre, where the suicide rates were visibly increasing from at least the 1870s onwards. The perception of the growing presence of suicide in society made it possible to observe the reflections on suicide from the last quarter of the 19th century, originating from different parts of Europe (Morselli, Masaryk, Durkheim), and at the same time how the discourses around suicide shed light on a somewhat broader picture of society, including its fears (of social problems and change, not least the potential threat of the imitative effect that the daily press was believed to create by reporting on suicides).

The newspaper discourse usually followed the scientific publications of the time, and the contemporaneous observations on the mass of suicides were confirmed through statistical analyses and medical, sociological, philosophical, and other debates, while raising many other social issues with which suicide in urban areas could be linked (alcoholism, the growth of the proletariat, poverty, changing values, etc.). All these factors shaped the public debate on suicide as a problem of modern society, with an emphasis on (big) cities, where the problem of suicide was much more pronounced than in smaller, non-industrial towns, or in the countryside of the Austrian Littoral.

Key words: suicide, cities, Trieste, Koper, modernisation, 1870-1910, Austria-Hungary

Introduction

During the late decades of the 19th century, as suicide rates in Trieste rose, controversy surrounding this topic appeared to intensify, with statistical and scientific discussions seeking to frame the phenomenon within parameters that could explain the observed increase in the city. These reflections were reported in the daily press, allowing the broader public to follow the scholarly debates that developed particularly from the last quarter of the 19th century onwards. The eye-catching headlines read “L’epidemia suicida”¹ and “La mania suicida”;² notably eloquent was a comment in

1 *L’Indipendente*, June 26, 1912. See also Remec, who observed that this was the terminology used to refer to the large number of suicides particularly in the first post-war period and likely motivated by the Spanish flu epidemics of the time (Meta Remec, “Epidemija samomorov?: odmevi na naraščanje stopnje samomorilnosti na Slovenskem v 19. in 20. stoletju,” *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 63, No. 1 (2023): 8-41). Long before that, Neumann-Spallart had mentioned the “very appropriate and frequently used expression suicide epidemics”, stating that it graphically illustrated how elements of a miasmatic infection float around like spores and fungi in the air in societies affected by suicidal tendencies. At a certain point, these societies are gripped by this infection and individuals fall acutely ill, i.e., commit suicide (F. X. Neumann-Spallart, “Ueber den Selbstmord,” *Statistische Monatschrift* VII (1881): 314).

2 *L’Indipendente*, June 12, 1893. *L’Indipendente* was an irredentist newspaper published in Trieste between 1877 and 1923, primarily targeting the intelligentsia and the social elite. – *L’Indipendente*, <http://www.atlantegrandeguerra.it/portfolio/lindipendente/>.

Edinost: “Yesterday we reported three suicides, today we report two. Few issues of our newspaper are free from the sad headline ‘Suicide’ or ‘Attempted suicide’; however, having to record five suicides in two days - that has never happened to us before.”³ For at least a decade now, it had been impossible to open a newspaper, of any nation, without encountering a mention of suicide somewhere,⁴ and with the topic constantly filling newspaper pages, the impression was that it had become a common and completely normal occurrence.

Statistics for the municipality of Trieste provided by Pierpaolo Luzzatto-Fegiz show that suicide rates increased markedly during the period from the last decade of the 19th century to the early years of the 20th century, particularly among the male population. Between 1875 and 1922, the suicide rate in Trieste doubled for men and increased nearly fivefold for women, with the numbers among the male population reaching their peak in 1911, and among females in 1920⁵ (see Chart 1). According to certain data,⁶ the general trends in the Austrian Littoral in the first three years of the 20th century⁷ showed a particularly high suicide rate in the municipality of Trieste, with 32-45 suicide cases per 100,000 inhabitants, while the figures were much lower in Istria (7-9) and Gorizia, and the lowest in Dalmatia (see Chart 2).

A brief comparison of the city of Trieste as an urban area, the town of Koper as “semi-urban”, and the Koper countryside (Bertoki) as a rural environment shows that smaller urban centres and rural areas never reached the massive suicide rates observed in the cities. In the late 19th century, the incidence of suicide in the municipality of Koper (which encompassed the town and its suburban rural strip) was sporadic (a maximum of 3 cases per year in a population of around 8,000), as can be gleaned from several official statistical sources documenting causes of death (cumulative data gathered from the annual health reports produced by the municipal administration⁸).

3 *Edinost*, May 27, 1904.

4 *L'Indipendente*, August 16, 1892.

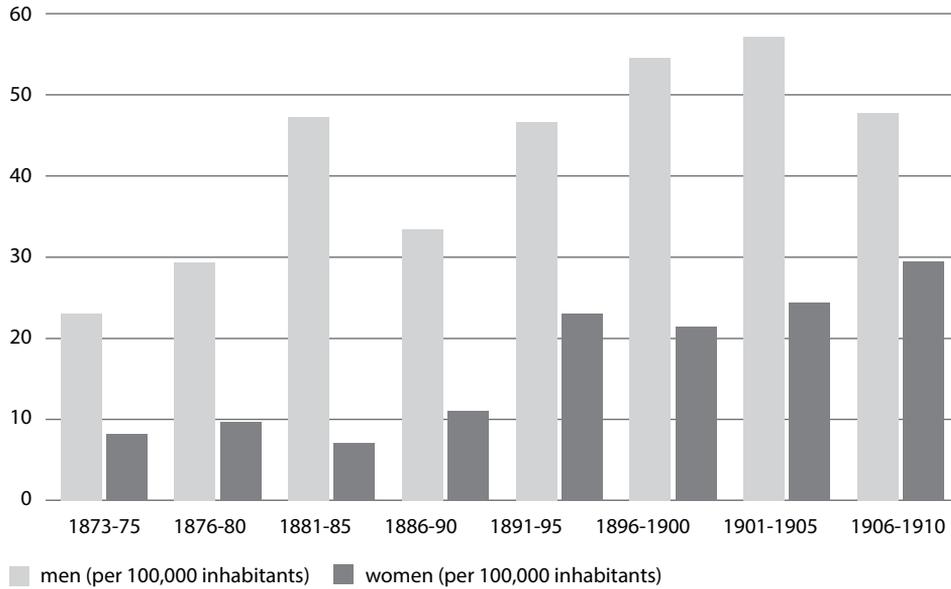
5 Pierpaolo Luzzatto-Fegiz, *La popolazione di Trieste (1875–1928)* (Trieste: La editoriale libreria, 1929), 71. This fact sparked new debates around the issue of female suicide, its causes, and gender-based perceptions in the first post-war period, which were elaborated in detail by Matteo Perissinotto, “Perché le donne si uccidono? Analisi dei suicidi femminili a Trieste nel primo dopoguerra (1918-1922),” *DEP*, 50 (2023): 1–26.

6 Guido Timeus, “Contributo allo studio sulla diffusione dell'alcoolismo nella città di Trieste,” *Bollettino della Società adriatica di scienze naturali in Trieste* 24 (1908): 76.

7 Data for the 1870s show a somewhat different picture, with 11-17 cases per 100,000 inhabitants for Trieste and environs, and 2-7 cases per 100,000 inhabitants for Istria (Eduard Bratassevič, “Die Selbstmorde in Oesterreich 1873–1877 in Vergleichung zu jenen in Preussen, England, Frankreich, Russland und Italien,” *Statistische Monatsschrift* 4 (1878): 429–33. Remeč, “Epidemija samomorov?”). For data related to the 1819-1872 period, see Platter, Ueber den Selbstmord.

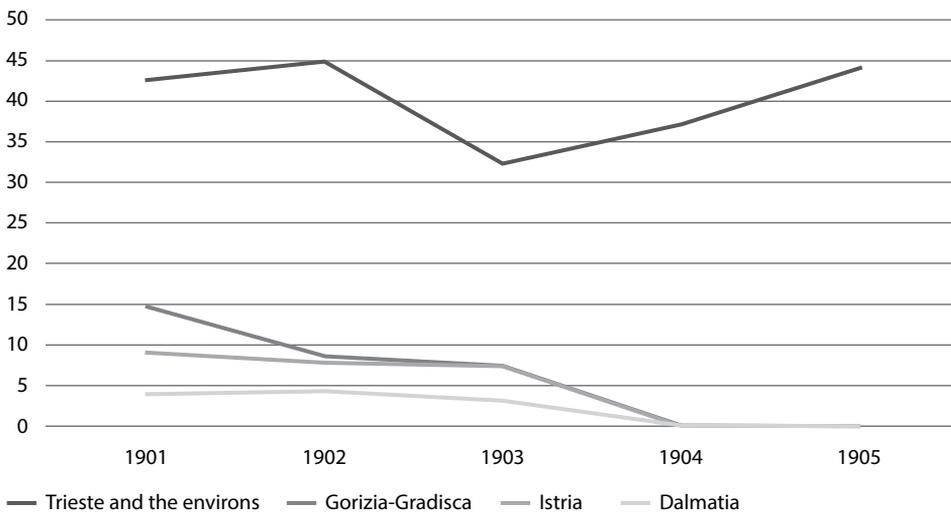
8 See for example SI PAK 6, Box 233, f. 793/XIV (1889); Box 241, f. 580/XIV (1891); Box 249, f. 1070/XIV (1893), Box 253, f. 539/XIV (1894); Box 274, f. 63/XIV (1899). Municipal data for the beginning of the 20th century are incomplete or missing, with civil registers recording 11 cases of suicide between 1900 and 1906, only one of them being female. Parish death registers, which represent in fact the only source for determining the suicide rate in rural areas, clearly indicated the - extremely rare - cases of suicide (most often as “suicidium” or “autochiria”), but it is impossible to know whether in certain cases they could have been covered up and recorded, for example, as accidents.

Chart 1: Suicide rates for the municipality of Trieste



Source: Luzzatto-Fegiz, *La popolazione di Trieste*

Chart 2: Suicide rates (per 100,000 inhabitants)



Source: Timeus, "Contributo allo studio"

Further on, the data that animated the scientific, statistical, and newspaper debates will be presented in detail and, of course, in the knowledge that statistics were not merely neutral collections of data (which has existed at least since Douglas questioned the reliability of official suicide statistics given the subjectivity of the reporters, the tendency to conceal suicides primarily within the family and the local community, and the limitation to mostly urban environments⁹). At the same time, contemporary discourses and ideas about suicide will be observed, and largely linked to perceptions of the developing world at the turn of the 20th century, as is evident in the case of Trieste.¹⁰

The city of Trieste is an interesting place to analyse. By the 19th century it had grown to become a large urban centre, the maritime capital of the Austrian Littoral, and an industrial hub attracting masses of foreign workers; but towards the end of the century, it was already experiencing crises (e.g., in 1873), and the imperial era of the city gradually came to an end after 1891, when customs duties were abolished. The Austrian government introduced this measure as part of its plan for economic rehabilitation and promotion of industrial development, a project which involved Trieste, since the borders of the customs area also encompassed the territory of its municipality. The local industry related to port and shipbuilding activities increased, generating greater needs for labour from traditional workforce pools (Friuli, Istria, the Gorizia region, and Carniola). This, naturally, resulted in a substantial increase in population through immigration; from 155,471 inhabitants in 1890, the Trieste population rose to 247,471 inhabitants in 1913.¹¹ As the proletariat grew, so did the issue of pauperisation.¹² Trieste made efforts to tackle the “challenges of modernisation” in various ways, but frequently struggled to provide adequate living conditions, health care facilities, and other essential services to meet the needs of its increasing population.

Urbanisation, Modernisation, Dissolution of Traditional Values, and Suicide

In 1879, Enrico A. Morselli (1852-1929), an Italian psychiatrist and anthropologist, published a baseline study on suicide (as a social phenomenon) relying on comparative statistics (*Il suicidio: saggio di statistica morale comparata*, 1879), in which he stated that suicide is particularly prevalent in areas “where people live agglomerated, [where] life’s difficulties, competition, poverty, and emigration are on the increase, and deeper and

9 See Remec, “Epidemija samomorov?,” 10. Jack Douglas, *The Social Meanings of Suicide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

10 A comparison of data for Trieste with those for various cities of the Kingdom of Italy in 1904 shows Trieste registering the highest suicide rate with 14.3 per 1,000 deaths, higher than Venice (6.7), Milan (8.9), and Bologna (13.4). – Timeus, “Contributo allo studio,” 77.

11 Lucio Fabi, *La carità dei ricchi: povertà e assistenza nella Trieste laica e asburgica del XIX secolo* (Milano: F. Angeli, 1984), 195, 196. See also Luzzatto-Fegiz, *La popolazione di Trieste*, 17, 18.

12 See, for example, Fabi, *La carità dei ricchi*. Marina Cattaruzza, *La formazione del proletariato urbano: Immigrati, operai di mestiere, donne a Trieste dalla metà del secolo XIX alla prima guerra mondiale* (Torino: Tommaso Musolini, 1979).

more harmful are the effects of economic disruptions.”¹³ He identified several factors with lesser or greater potential to influence suicide rates: in addition to cosmic and natural influences, he maintained that there were ethno-demographic factors, social factors (e.g., religion, culture, ethics, economic position, life in an urban environment), as well as biological conditions, social circumstances (e.g., age, sex, occupation, marital and social status), and psychological factors that could lead to suicide.

His work was influenced by the political and social contexts of post-unification Italy, where stressing the homogeneity of the Italian states¹⁴ was particularly important - namely, in the newly consolidated Kingdom of Italy, suicide rates (along with statistics related to crime and illiteracy) were interpreted as symptoms of a crisis of civilisation in the country.¹⁵

Morselli's work on suicide, which earned him the position of assistant professor at the psychiatric clinic in Pavia, was an immediate success and even drew the attention of Émile Durkheim, who used part of Morselli's statistical analyses as the empirical foundation for his well-known sociological study on suicide published in 1897. Durkheim's main argument was that suicide is not only an individual act, but also a socially conditioned act, dependent “on forces outside the individual.”¹⁶ This idea was not entirely new. Six years before Durkheim's book, Neumann-Spallart, who had compiled previous writings on suicide, summarised in the *Statistische Monatsschrift* journal the concept that suicide is one of those mass social phenomena shaped by general socio-physical influences experienced by an entire population, yet at the same time dependent on the free will and psychological state of each its individual.¹⁷

In the final decades of the 19th century, many scholars, inspired as much by Morselli's study (1879) as by the works of the Czech politician, sociologist, and philosopher Tomáš G. Masaryk (*Der Selbstmord als Sociale Massenerscheinung der Modernen Civilisation*, 1881), stressed the strong connection between the modern era and the increasing incidence of suicide (which they attempted to demonstrate through statistics and argued using medical rhetoric).

One of the key points in Morselli's work as well as in the writings of other contemporary authors with different theoretical backgrounds was that suicide, even at the turn of the 20th century, was a consequence of modernisation and an altered way of life, of an excess of sensory stimuli, of “a hectic urban life, fast means of transportation and communication, increased brainwork, women's growing intellectual activity, and the heightened pace of work.”¹⁸ It was believed that urban suicide rates were higher because there was “more misery and more despondency, with less encouragement of

13 Enrico Morselli, *Il suicidio: saggio di statistica morale comparata* (Milano, 1879), 261.

14 Morselli always paid particular attention to alleged ethnic-based variations in suicide tendencies.

15 Maria Teresa Brancaccio, “The Fatal Tendency of Civilized Society’: Enrico Morselli's Suicide, Moral Statistics, and Positivism in Italy.” *Journal of Social History* 46, No. 3 (Spring 2013): 702. For more about Morselli's and some other Italian studies from that time, see also Ty Geltmaker, *Tired of living: Suicide in Italy from National Unification to World War I, 1860–1915* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 27 ff.

16 Émile Durkheim, *Samomor. Prepoved incesta in njeni izviri* (Ljubljana: Studia Humanitatis, 1992), 22.

17 Neumann-Spallart, “Ueber den Selbstmord,” 314.

18 Jessica Slijkhuis and Harry Oosterhuis, “Paralysed with fears and worries’: neurasthenia as a gender-specific disease of civilization,” *History of Psychiatry* 24, No. 1 (2013): 81.

restraint” in urban environments. Morselli further argued that the incidence of suicide (which he referred to as the “deadly disease of civilised peoples”) was higher in cities because the struggle for survival there was more intense.¹⁹

French statistician Alfred Legoyt (1881) also wondered why suicide rates tended to be higher in cities, and argued that in urban areas, news of suicide travelled fast, while in the countryside, where the settlements were more dispersed, it was easier to conceal the cause of deaths or more difficult to verify them. Legoyt also contended that cities exhibited a culture of excess, such as alcohol abuse (which played a significant role in suicide), were inhabited by more people of more open and liberal views (who accounted for a large part of suicides), had higher rates of unemployment and homelessness, and a greater prevalence of various “moral infections”. Among the more general motives for suicide was, in his opinion, particularly indifference in religious matters.²⁰

As we can read in a newspaper comment from that period, growing up in a world affected by the processes of modernisation was believed to afflict people even as children:

“This modern child, born of restless and anxious people, often brought up in an environment of irritating nervousness and languid melancholy, who sees too much, this child has now acquired a precocious simplicity, a premature intuition (...) The modern child reads too many picture books and has hands on too many newspapers. When his father stolidly speaks about suicide, when his uncle mocks religion, he pricks his ears. This is why the modern child can grow miserable more easily.”²¹

Even in the decades afterwards, many observations led to similar conclusions, that the number of suicides was gradually rising presumably because of increasing individualism, particularly in urban environments; add to that

“the hectic pace of life in modern cities, which are indeed great centres of culture, but they deprive man of any intimate contact with divine nature (...) that haste to live, that prevailing eagerness for pleasure in big, noisy, tumultuous, stifling cities that make us forgetful of ourselves and of higher purposes, transforming - as Lombardo Radice would say - us people into ‘individuals.’”²²

It was claimed that suicide had become an ordinary, common thing

“encompassing all, from the callow youth who takes his own life because of a silly frivolity, to the decrepit old man who accelerates his [natural] death because he can no longer enjoy himself (...) Suicide is now a necessity. This generation, intelligent yet floundering, sceptical, epileptic, full of crazy aspirations, and pervaded by an incessant fever of pleasure, smiles to suicide just as peacefully as a sick man does to the elixir that should give him relief and restore his strength.”²³

19 Howard I. Kushner, “Suicide, Gender, and the Fear of Modernity,” in John Weaver and David Wright (eds.), *Histories of Suicide. International Perspectives on Self-destruction in the Modern World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 25, 26. Cf. Morselli, *Il suicidio*. For Masaryk’s and Durkheim’s arguments related to this topic, see also Remeč, “Epidemija samomorov?”

20 Alfred Legoyt, *Le suicide ancien et moderne. Étude historique, philosophique et statistique* (Paris: Drouin, 1881), 198, 199.

21 Matilde Serao, “I bimbi,” *Il Piccolo*, November 27, 1885.

22 *L’Indipendente*, June 26, 1912.

23 *L’Indipendente*, February 7, 1891.

Like Morselli, T. G. Masaryk argued that the suicide rate is directly proportional to social complexity: he maintained that the decline in religiosity resulting from the dismantling of the traditional social system is the root cause of modern “suicide epidemics”. In Masaryk’s view, suicide was “the fruit of progress, of education, of civilisation”²⁴ or at least a consequence of the disintegration of a unified worldview.²⁵ Durkheim, for example, associated higher suicide rates with too strong (or too feeble) social integration, and his typification of suicide included “anomic” and “egoistic” suicides, which he believed were most characteristic of modern society.²⁶

These and similar ideas partly reverberated in Slovene lands. Aleš Ušeničnik, one of the most important Slovene theologians and philosophers and the leading philosophical ideologist of Slovene clericalism in the first half of the 20th century, spoke out against so-called liberalism, particularly because of its atheist nature and its demands for the separation of Church and State, which would weaken the influence of religion in society. He devoted an article to suicide in the newspaper *Čas* (1908), in which he summarised the prevalent conservative ideas of the time, such as the claim that suicides were more common in cities as these were particularly dangerous from a moral point of view: “Unbridled sexual drive, in particular, with its delusions and diseases is responsible for many, many suicides. In cities, the highest share of female suicides is represented by young women living outside the family setting and succumbing to the temptations of big city life. And the number of suicides among the divorcees is even higher.”²⁷ The desire was, manifestly, to preserve traditional values, family life, marriage, for the “primary causes of suicide” were said to be “alcoholism, sexual excesses and, particularly, the overwhelming hunger for enjoyment and the resulting feeling of surfeit, the disgust and revulsion toward life. “But the ultimate reason must be that which, besides modern hyperculture, greatly intensified this hunger, and that is faithlessness” or atheism as the absence of belief in the afterlife.²⁸ The modern man was thus said to be losing his footing, for scepticism had “shaken the foundations of the Christian worldview - and, again, the numbers of suicide are rising; now more than ever, suicide is turning into big social epidemics.”²⁹

It is in this same context that we can interpret 19th-century ideas promoting traditional family values as the best protection against self-destruction.³⁰ Women, being more engaged in traditional roles, were considered more “resistant” to suicide. Potentially more problematic were those who started moving to areas outside the private sphere,

24 Howard I. Kushner, “Suicide, Gender, and the Fear of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Medical and Social Thought,” *Journal of Social History* 26, No. 3 (Spring, 1993): 466, 467.

25 Neumann-Spallart, “Ueber den Selbstmord.”

26 Cf. Victor Bailey, *This Rash Act. Suicide Across Life Cycle in the Victorian City* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 17.

27 Aleš Ušeničnik, “Samomor,” *Čas* 2, No. 6 (1908): 295. Similar thoughts appeared elsewhere in the Slovene press, for example, in the *Kmetijske in rokodelske novice* of 23 June 1875 (“The present time of liberalism is full of suicides every day ...”), or the *Slovenec* of 4 June 1874 (“modern democratisation” as the cause of numerous crimes, including suicides), etc. At times, we can also find more radical “criminalisation” of suicides in the Catholic press (except for those resulting from, say, mental illness), for example: “Suicide is one of the most terrible vices and evils with which man closes the door to his own penance. It is also the ugliest, most disgusting savagery by which the suicide defiles and brings indelible shame upon themselves and undying grief upon their close ones.” - *Zgodnja Danica*, August 11, 1876.

28 Ušeničnik, “Samomor,” 297.

29 Ibidem.

30 Kushner, “Suicide, Gender, and the Fear of Modernity,” 27.

including working women, who had to earn their own living. It was believed that these circumstances could lead them to mental conditions, such as nervousness, which in some cases ended in suicide. We can read about it in a section of a longer treatise about “nervousness” authored by Edvard Šavnik (1852-1931), a Slovene physician from Kranj:

“Female labour is largely in a most unfavourable relationship to female physical strength and health. In addition to dangers to life and health to which female factory workers are exposed there is also the risk that the overtaxing and gruelling factory labour, so unsuited to their anatomy, may drive them to nervous strain, which is often the initiator of physical and mental illnesses.”³¹

It was claimed women could avoid these anxious feelings by remaining in the circle of their traditional vocation, within the realm of family.

Reportedly, some 6% to 7% of attempted or completed suicides recorded in Trieste between 1903 and 1905 - among women as well as men - were associated with mental illness, but it would be more accurate to add to these the suicide attempts or cases caused by sadness (which in some instances, hypothetically, could have been induced by depression). These ranged between 11% and 20% in men, and 16% and 23% in women, in the same period.³² As can be observed in the crime and accident sections of Trieste newspapers, the vocabulary used in relation to suicide cases or attempts was frequently linked to mental pathology:³³ “They say that a person who tries to kill themselves or kills themselves is not of sane mind,” was one of such commentaries.³⁴ Individual cases of suicide were linked, for example, to “nervousness” or neurasthenia,³⁵ hypochondria,³⁶ even “postpartum fever”, which could nowadays be understood as postpartum depression,³⁷ and other psychopathological conditions.

Neurasthenia,³⁸ in particular, as a “terrible manifestation of modern life”³⁹ carried a special connotation, and the discourse on the subject became even more intense during the interwar period.⁴⁰ P. Drinot, who examined this issue in a non-European environment, observed that the term neurasthenia often appeared in the sense of “incapacity to deal with a modern and fast-changing world.”⁴¹ This inability to cope with the burdens of a dynamic world was said to be typical of certain age brackets in both sexes.

31 *Slovenski narod*, September 1, 1877, O nervoznosti.

32 *Timeus*, “Contributo allo studio.”

33 Terms such as “feeble minded”, “the poor man’s head is spinning”, “crazy attempt”, “signs of madness”, etc. were used.

34 *Edinost*, January 5, 1904.

35 E.g., *Edinost*, October 19, 1905; May 27, 1904, etc.

36 E.g., *Edinost*, May 13, 1905.

37 E.g., *Edinost*, March 3, 1904.

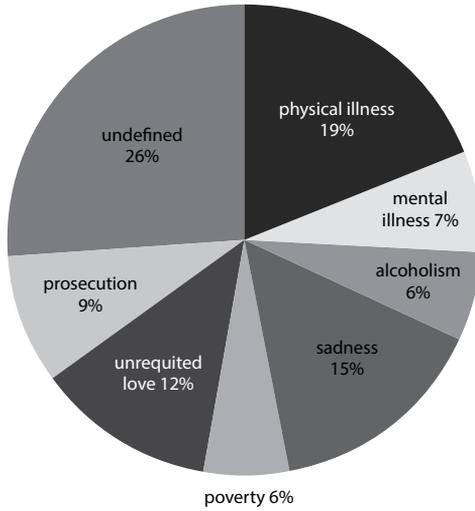
38 See on this, for example, George Beard, “Neurasthenia (nervous exhaustion) as a cause of inebriety.” *Quarterly Journal of Inebriety*, September 1879 (defined as a consequence of an impaired functionality of the nervous system, characterised, for one, by bouts of depression, and potentially leading to *inebriety* or even *insanity*), and contemporary treatises in the edited volume of conference proceedings *Cultures of Neurasthenia from Beard to the First World War*. - Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra and Roy Porter, *Cultures of Neurasthenia from Beard to the First World War* (Amsterdam, New York, 2001).

39 *Timeus*, “Contributo allo studio,” 75.

40 See Matteo Perissinotto, “‘In a moment of supreme discomfort.’ An analysis of female suicides through the press in Trieste in the post-war transition (1918-1922)” [in press], 2024.

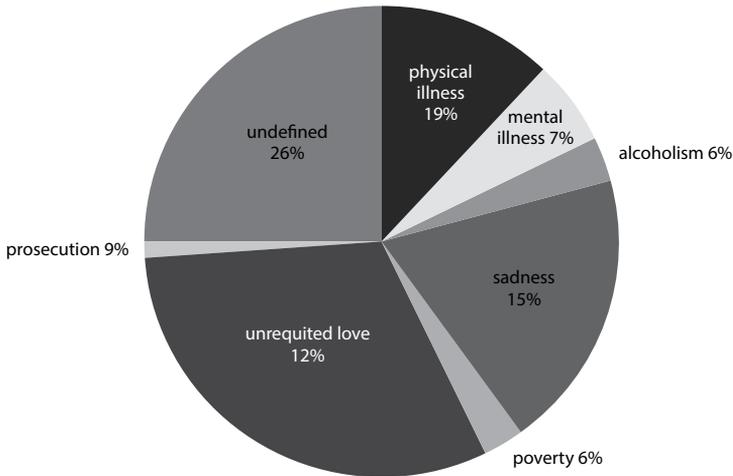
41 Paulo Drinot, “Madness, Neurasthenia, and ‘Modernity’: Medico-legal and Popular Interpretations of Suicide in Early Twentieth-Century Lima,” *Latin American Research Review* 39, No. 2 (June 2004): 95.

Chart 3: Motives for attempted/completed suicides (men): Trieste, 1903-1905



Source: Timeus, "Contributo allo studio"

Chart 4: Motives for attempted/completed suicides (women): Trieste, 1903-1905



Source: Timeus, "Contributo allo studio"

Šavnik wrote of this: “Between the ages of 20 and 40, man fights for income, property, name and fortune, he also has to endure the greater share of unpleasant influences from the outside world and survive many mental struggles, all the while being at risk of losing balance between the body and soul; between the ages of 40 and 50, the woman undergoes the climacteric phase and often experiences widowhood, too, which forces her to be more involved with the world than is appropriate to her nature; in these periods, characterised by particular tendency to nervousness, both sexes should be even more careful not to let their nerves begin to ail.”⁴² Morselli, too, believed that women were more likely to commit suicide because of “physical” causes (illnesses, including mental), and men because of the difficulties in facing life problems.⁴³ Although gender difference is classified as “biologically” conditioned in his work, his opinion also reflects social normative influences, such as a clear division of gender roles, positing the afflicted women in the private sphere and imposing certain expectations on the role of men in society.

Suicide in Trieste at the Beginning of the 20th Century

A Trieste-born chemist and dietitian, Guido Timeus,⁴⁴ who was familiar with Morselli’s work, addressed the incidence of suicide within a larger treatise on the issue of alcoholism, which he examined from several points of view (analysing the consumption of alcohol in Trieste, the correlations between alcohol and mortality and those between alcohol and suicide⁴⁵). His findings were disseminated among the broader public through lectures, such as one held in 1907 by Dr. Guglielmo de Pastrovich⁴⁶ at the seat of the Medical Association (*Associazione medica*).⁴⁷ De Pastrovich had spoken on the topic already in 1903, in what was described as “one of the liveliest debates” in the series of public discussions organised by the Minerva Society from Trieste.⁴⁸

Timeus’s analysis of suicide incidence in Trieste was based on official data and the suicide records published in the newspaper *Il Piccolo* (which he claimed were in

⁴² *Slovenski narod*, August 30, 1877, O nervoznosti.

⁴³ Morselli, *Il suicidio*, 299.

⁴⁴ Timeus (1869-1953) was employed at the Trieste Public Health/Hygiene Office (*Civico Fiscato*) from the end of the 19th century onwards. He was in charge of food control, particularly of imported goods transported by sea, and of public health in the field of nutrition (*Guido Timeus*, <https://www.boegan.it/2015/03/guido-timeus/>). In this context, he also published studies dealing with the problem of alcoholism in Trieste of that time.

⁴⁵ According to his data, about 6% of male suicides and 3% of female suicides recorded between 1903 and 1905 were related to alcohol abuse. The occupational groups with the highest rate of alcohol-related suicides were manual labourers and porters (Timeus, “Contributo allo studio”).

⁴⁶ De Pastrovich (1876-1927) was a psychiatrist from Trieste and later the director of the Trieste psychiatric hospital (*Guglielmo, De Pastrovich*, <https://www.aspi.unimib.it/collections/entity/detail/292/>). He personally conducted clinical observations in the hospital (from 1900 through 1906), studying patients admitted with mental health issues, including those who had attempted suicide. He reported 70 cases of (mostly male) individuals trying to take their own lives merely due to inebriety and “a blind self-destructive impulse” triggered by alcohol (*L’Indipendente*, October 16 and 17, 1907).

⁴⁷ *L’Indipendente*, October 16 and 17, 1907.

⁴⁸ *L’Indipendente*, April 21, 1903.

complete agreement with the official data) for the period 1903-1905, when 201 cases of completed and 188 cases of attempted suicide were registered.⁴⁹ His study is interesting because it is not merely a count of suicide cases, but a qualitative analysis of them (conducted at the narrow level of the city) according to cause, method, sex, age, occupation, and time of occurrence (month). Despite the study being methodologically flawed, as it is not entirely clear whether it presents a credible picture or merely reflects the contemporary newspaper coverage,⁵⁰ some of the highlights are nevertheless telling.

Timeus's findings lead to the main motives for suicide (with around a quarter of them undefinable); the principal causes in men were physical illness and sadness (with alcoholism and prosecution also registering slightly elevated shares); in women, they were sadness and unreciprocated love (Charts 3 and 4). In terms of suicide method, poisoning (with carbolic acid/phenol standing out as the prevalent means used)⁵¹ accounted for the greatest share in both sexes; firearms registered a significant share in men (likely in connection to military service), and all other methods were also more prominently featured in men than in women (Charts 5 and 6).

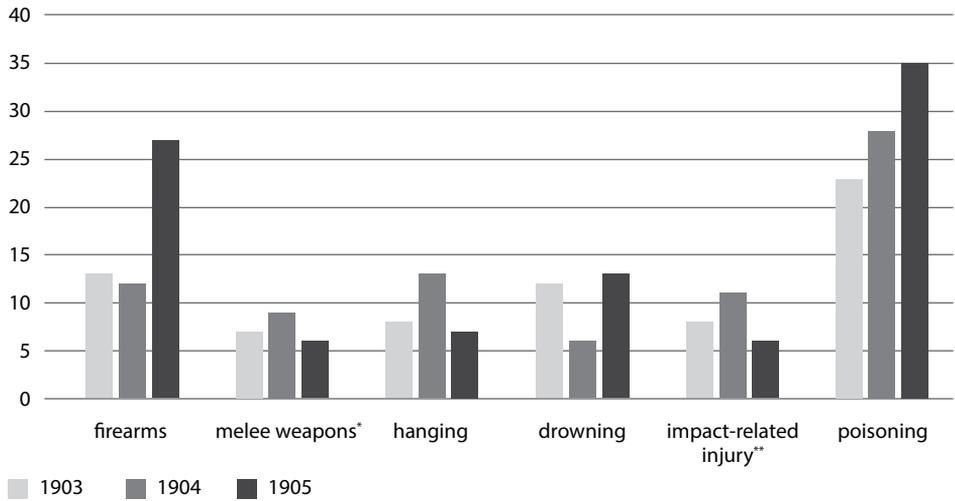
Correlations between motives for suicide and age indicate that individuals under the age of 30 or even under 20, most commonly committed suicide because of sadness, unrequited love, mental illness, as well as prosecution by authorities or fear of it. In the age group of 20 to 40 years, the prevalent reason was sadness, but also physical illness; the latter was even more pronounced in the age group of 50 to 60 years, when it was frequently accompanied by mental illness. While between 1903 and 1905, most deaths by suicide or suicidal attempts were registered in the 20-30 age group in both men and women (31% and 39%, respectively), the share of female population under 20 years of age was conspicuous as well (20%). The percentages for the age groups of 30 to 50 years were also similar for both sexes, with men displaying a more prominent share of individuals over 50 (Charts 7 and 8). It should be noted that the number of suicides recorded for the city could be misleading, for (at least according to newspaper reports) there were several cases of people who chose Trieste as the setting for their fatal act and journeyed in from elsewhere.

49 Timeus, "Contributo allo studio," 63. Although these data are aggregated, it is interesting to note the relationship between failed and fatal suicide attempts varying by gender: suicide attempts were fatal in 49-59% of cases among men, and in 37-53% of cases among women, with an upward trend exhibited in both groups.

50 Timeus originally listed the completed and attempted suicides as separate categories, but the data were later merged. Of course, these data are never entirely consistent with the actual situation, given that cases of completed suicide can frequently go unrecorded and that attempted suicides are registered even more sparingly, as they often remain concealed within an individual's private sphere.

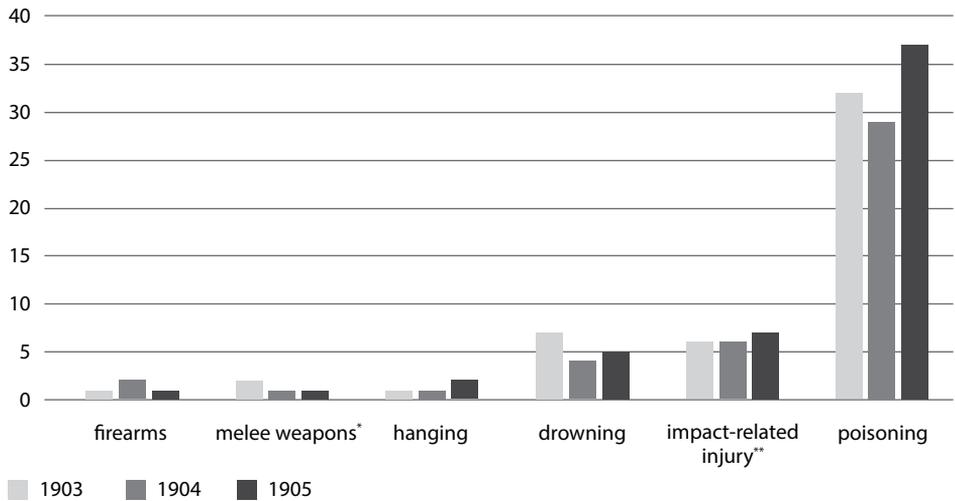
51 From the second third of the 19th century onwards, chemical substances were increasingly used as disinfectants in the event of infectious diseases, particularly cholera, but also smallpox and measles. They were easily accessible, which undoubtedly contributed to their use in suicides. Carbolic acid, for example, was employed for medical and veterinary purposes, as well as in agriculture.

Chart 5: Suicide (attempt) method – men



Source: Timeus, "Contributo allo studio"

Chart 6: Suicide (attempt) method – women

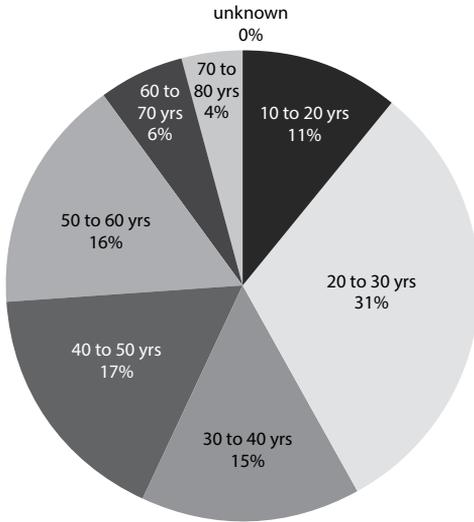


Source: Timeus, "Contributo allo studio"

* Blade and blunt hand-weapons.

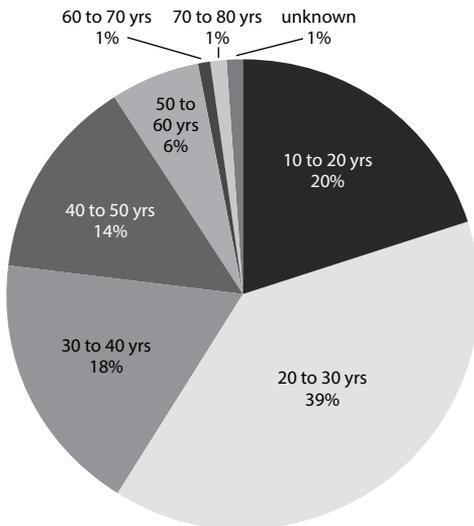
** Following collision with a vehicle, jumping from height.

Chart 7: Male suicide (attempts) by age between 1903 and 1905



Source: Timeus, "Contributo allo studio"

Chart 8: Female suicide (attempts) by age between 1903 and 1905



Source: Timeus, "Contributo allo studio"

Newspaper reports of individuals driven to suicide by poverty or incurable disease sounded more forgiving than of those who took their lives because of “unreciprocated love”, as M. Perissinotto showed for the interwar period.⁵² The rhetoric that proffered suffering among the reasons for suicide was reflected in phrases such as “unfortunate man”, “poor man/woman”, “pitiful girl”, “poor wretch”, “suffering has imposed on him”, “he/she is suffering from an incurable disease”, “poor soul” and the like, and there are several cases when misery⁵³ or poverty⁵⁴ were suggested as explicit causes for the suicide. Also, when the person taking their own life left behind a family, the impression is sometimes that the understanding or justification of the suicidal act was greater if the person in this difficult, “unbearable” situation was a man. A case in point was that of a 49-year-old man afflicted by illness who decided to end his life by hanging himself, leaving behind a wife and three children; the newspaper, in addition to reporting his death, published the deceased’s alleged suicide note, in which he begged his wife’s forgiveness, and which evoked compassion among the readers.⁵⁵ In another instance, it reported of a 52-year-old man from Friuli who committed suicide by gas suffocation, because in Trieste, where he had moved for work, he could not find a job, and the paper wrote that “misery pushed him into death,” although through this act the deceased widowed his wife and orphaned his children who lived in his home town.⁵⁶ In contrast, when reporting deaths of women who took their lives and left behind a family, the tendency was to suggest they should feel guilty for doing that: “... she committed suicide with no regard for the pain she would be inflicting on her husband and children,”⁵⁷ was said about a 41-year-old woman from the Trieste quarter of Rojan, who ended her life by ingesting carbolic acid after accompanying her terminally ill husband to hospital.

The link between poverty and suicide was also stressed by Timeus,⁵⁸ who noticed the number of suicides rise at the beginning or end of month, which he associated with the salary that the workers would receive. He established that 1%-8% suicides in men were brought on by poverty and 2%-5% in women (in the period between 1903 and 1905); nevertheless, he failed to take into account one key element: the civil status of the suicides. In fact, it was clear from newspaper reports that these voluntary deaths were also importantly linked to marital status (widowhood, unmarried), as such circumstances had an impact on an individual’s economic situation, increasing their existential hardship,⁵⁹ which could in part explain the slightly

52 See Perissinotto, “In a moment of supreme discomfort.”

53 E.g., *Edinost*, April 2, 1905.

54 E.g., *Edinost*, April 25, 1905.

55 *Edinost*, September 27, 1905.

56 *Edinost*, January 30, 1904.

57 *Edinost*, February 8, 1905.

58 Timeus, “Contributo allo studio,” 75.

59 For these issues, see Dragica Čeč (“Podobe starosti v začetku 19. stoletja,” in Mojca Šorn (ed.), *Starost - izzivi zgodovinskega raziskovanja* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2017), 11–33), who shows, in regard to the example of early 19th century Ljubljana, that widowed and unmarried persons represented the majority of welfare recipients, with women as the prevalent group by gender (also because of reservations in demonstrating sympathy and solidarity for men, Čeč, “Podobe starosti,” 12ff).

elevated suicide rate among elderly men.⁶⁰ At the same time, one cannot ignore the general economic crisis in Trieste at the time; an analysis of the cost of living in Trieste, for example, confirms its marked increase in the very first years of the 20th century.⁶¹ Among occupations presumed to be more prone to suicide in Timeus's study were self-employed persons, day labourers, and servants in women, and workers and field hand in men.⁶²

The Press and Alleged Incitement to Suicide

Some recent studies⁶³ cite the daily press as one of the possible factors motivating suicide (in the sense of the Werther effect, when a certain type of reporting can give rise to imitation⁶⁴). I. Smiljanić, who analysed the press coverage of suicides in connection with economic deprivation, noted that the Slovene liberal and conservative (Catholic) press covered the topic of suicides in different ways. While liberal newspapers reported suicide news frequently and sometimes cynically, Catholic newspapers featured it more sparingly (to avoid its potentially detrimental effect on the readership), but a lack of respect for the deceased and even mockery of people who committed (or attempted) suicide could often be observed. In short, both liberal and Catholic press treated this act in markedly negative and judgmental tones.⁶⁵

Daily press engaged in sensationalistic journalism (an overview of the newspapers *Edinost*⁶⁶ and *Il Piccolo*⁶⁷ in the 1903-1905 period can confirm that; see also Perissinotto, who examined the Italian press in Trieste during the interwar period⁶⁸),

60 There were several cases of suicide recorded in Koper between 1900 and 1906 involving widowers and unmarried men aged 50 or older (KDA, Koper Death Register, 1900-1912).

61 Mario Alberti, *Il costo della vita, i salari e le paghe a Trieste nell'ultimo quarto di secolo* (Trieste: E. Vram, 1911).

62 Timeus, "Contributo allo studio," 65, 66, 69, 74.

63 E.g., Manina Mestas, Florian Arendt, "Suicide Reporting in the Nineteenth Century. Large-Scale Descriptive Content Analysis of Austrian Newspapers," *Media History* 29, No. 3 (2022): 305–20. Florian Arendt, "The Press and Suicides in the 19th Century: Investigating Possible Imitative Effects in Five Territories of the Austro-Hungarian Empire." *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying* 81, No. 3 (2018): 424–35.

64 The Catholic newspaper *Čas* wrote about the impact of sensationalist reporting in 1907, for example, when it drew attention to the findings of sociologist Eugène Rostand that detailed descriptions of crimes can lead to imitation ("Časopisje in zločini," *Čas*, October 1, 1907, 480). A special treatise about the negative impact of the press on suicide rates was written by Bozzini as early as 1894 (Generoso Bozzini, *Contagio morale: il suicidio e la stampa*. Cerignola, 1894).

65 Ivan Smiljanić, "Konkurzi, samomor, žalosten je pogled na trgovsko polje: gospodarski polom kot vzrok za samomor na Slovenskem pod Avstro-Ogrsko in prvo Jugoslavijo," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 63, No. 1 (2023): 50. See also M. Kristan, who analysed the coverage by the newspapers *Slovenec* and *Slovenski narod* between 1883 and 1885. Maja Kristan, "Samomori, pogrešani, umrli," in Katja Vodopivec (ed.), *Deviacije na Slovenskem pred sto leti* (Ljubljana: RSS, 1987), 283-95.

66 It was published as a political journal of Slovenes in Trieste between 1876 and 1928, and as a daily newspaper in the period under analysis.

67 *Il Piccolo* was published between 1881 and 1919. Although seeking to be apolitical, it was pro-Italian and supported liberal-national views, but focussed primarily on reporting news from the city, the neighbouring towns, and the international arena for a broad and diverse readership. – *Il Piccolo* <https://www.atlantegrandeguerra.it/portfolio/il-piccolo/>.

68 Perissinotto, "In a moment of supreme discomfort."

citing the suicide method, personal details of the deceased, including name, sex, age, occupation or residence (street), and often even the presumed cause for the suicide.

Although the news items about suicides were typically brief (and did not contain photographs), reports of suicides in the last decades of the 19th and in the early 20th centuries graphically described the circumstances of the act and contained a series of personal data/elements that enabled identification and compromised the privacy of the victims or their families. In truth, the press mostly reported of ordinary people or well-known individuals from outside the local area, and less frequently of representatives of the upper classes.⁶⁹ It should be noted that much of the information featured in sensationalistic press was inaccurate, deficient, or downright false,⁷⁰ as the papers themselves would sometimes admit, printing corrections to previous news⁷¹ and laying the blame for the mistakes on private sources.⁷²

But the problem of sensationalist reporting of suicides was acknowledged even before the turn of the 20th century; several papers devoted their editorials to this issue, cautioning against a glorification of suicide through long and detailed daily reports that explored every aspect of it and could give the suicidal act the false impression of facility or effortlessness.⁷³ The criticism was frequently directed at the press itself.

We can thus read: “Not only is the suicide described as if the journalist had been present at the act and inhumanly allowed it to happen before their very eyes, which, luckily, is untrue, but the sad hero is stripped down to his shirt before the public, while a crude psychology attempts to lay bare his soul as well, and sordid sentimentalism runs riot in reproducing the sorrowful exclamations of the relatives, the regrets, the comments, with such contradiction between one newspaper and another that their comparison reveals it is all fruit of imagination. And as if it hadn’t been enough talking about it one day, the papers revisit it the next day with even more detailed and more intimate news; anticipating the funeral arrangements, so that in people’s curiosity the notion may grow into a small event and they can write about it at even more length”⁷⁴ Legoyt, too, believed that much of the blame for suicides lay with the press “thoughtlessly advertising natural facts to feed unhealthy curiosity.”⁷⁵

In a debate on this very topic, Generoso Bozzini warned against the dangerous effects of imitation and argued that eliminating suicide news from their death notices section would be an honourable thing for the papers to do. He believed that journalism had an important mission and should not be reduced to “an accurate - too accurate - photograph of everyday life with all its torments, mistakes, and misery; rather, it should be a training ground for noble ideas and even nobler sentiments, and never a reckless school of perversion and aberration.”⁷⁶ A year before that, an anonymous

69 Cf. *ibid.*

70 Cf. Smiljanić, “Konkurzi, samomor,” 49.

71 E.g., *Edinost*, May 27, 1904.

72 E.g., *Edinost*, May 31, 1904.

73 *L'Indipendente*, August 3, 1898.

74 *Ibid.*

75 Legoyt, *Le suicide ancien et moderne*, 199.

76 Bozzini, *Contagio morale*, 9 and 12.

physician had written to *L'Indipendente* with similar ideas, suggesting that the newspaper desks should deliberately turn down stories about suicides.⁷⁷

Bozzini further believed that “among certain social classes, such as prisoners and soldiers, the imitative instinct is creating veritable epidemics⁷⁸ that often spread due to wild publicity triggered by the irresponsible advertising of ‘suicide.’”⁷⁹ Moreover, he felt that the effect of imitation was perilous for those who, “caught up in the fever of fame, which they believe they can achieve in this way and which would otherwise elude them, derive pleasure in the thought that their name, their letters, the story of their life so rapidly divulged will rescue them, for an hour, a day, from the obscurity in which they would have otherwise remained forever.”⁸⁰ But no such debates, of course, managed to persuade the newspapers to stop reporting on suicides, and the practice continued for several decades.⁸¹

Conclusion

The case of Trieste as a large Austrian urban centre, one of the largest in the country, shows the suicide rate rising sharply even before the First World War, with an upward trend evident (at least according to the records) from the 1870s onwards. Over the next three decades, the number of suicides in the municipality of Trieste more than doubled for both men and women,⁸² which strongly affected the average registered in the Austrian Littoral compared to other crown lands. Following the increasing occurrence of suicides in society in the last quarter of the 19th century, it is possible to observe the results generated by reflections on suicide from all across Europe, from Morselli’s study to those of Masaryk and Durkheim, to mention only the most prominent. While all those studies saw suicide as a phenomenon affected by social factors, and thus tried to explain it as scientifically as possible, using statistical analyses, the more modern approaches to studying the history of suicide seek to reformulate the classical positivist approach so as to include structural factors, but also the ways social factors are reflected within the realm of individual experience and meanings that social actors attach to events (this criticism sees suicide as a product of official categorisations and argues that the latter are also affected by the cultural interpretations or per-

77 *L'Indipendente*, June 12, 1893.

78 For suicide among the military, see in particular Filip Čuček, “Vojaški samomori v Avstriji od srede 19. stoletja do prve svetovne vojne (z nekaj slovenskimi primeri),” *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 63, 3 (2023): 117–34. The *Edinost* (20 February 1903) reported on a session of the National Assembly that discussed the alarming numbers of suicide in the Austrian army, attributing them to the inappropriate way the soldiers were treated. The civil registers of Koper from before the end of the 19th century contain several records of soldiers under the age of 30 committing suicide by firearm (KDA, Koper Death Register, 1875–1899), and more than a few cases of suicide in the early 20th century, among prisoners and prison guards; imitative suicide cannot be ruled out in the case of two prison guards taking their own lives in May 1901 (KDA, Koper Death Register, 1900–1912).

79 Bozzini, *Contagio morale*, 7. Similarly Morselli, *Il suicidio*, 433.

80 Bozzini, *Contagio morale*, 11.

81 As shown by Perissinotto (“In a moment of supreme discomfort”) for the first post-war period.

82 Luzzatto-Fegiz, *La popolazione di Trieste*, with Timeus, “Contributo allo studio,” making similar findings.

ceptions of the actors).⁸³ Although self-perceptions are much more difficult to trace in the case of suicide, the data on Trieste adumbrate the socio-cultural meanings that were ascribed to suicide in a certain era and allow us to observe how the discourses around suicide reveal a somewhat broader picture of society, including its fears (of societal problems, of change, encroachment of new/different values, etc.).

The media discourse usually followed the scientific publications of its time, the simultaneous observations about the multitude of suicides were confirmed by statistical analyses as well as medical, sociological, philosophical and other treatises, while at the same time raising numerous other social issues to which suicide in urban areas could be linked (alcoholism, growth of the proletariat, poverty, changing values or potential threats to the traditional value system, and the like). All this informed the public debate on suicide as a problem of modern society – particularly as manifest in large cities, where suicide represented a much more burning issue than in smaller non-industrial towns or in the country (as demonstrated by the case of Koper).

A few examples have been used to illustrate the image of suicide as reflected in both Slovene and Italian presses, which were influenced by similar ideologies. On the one side, the phenomenon was portrayed as an inevitable result of unfavourable economic conditions or economic hardship in which (usually) representatives of the proletariat would find themselves, or of a dead-end situation brought on by a severe or incurable illness. Suicide could also be medicalised, considered a neurological consequence of certain mental illnesses or conditions. On the other hand, it was perceived to be a result of the corruptive effects of modern lifestyle and values (e.g., individualism, hedonism, materialism, atheism, etc.) that were supplanting the safety of the traditional embrace of family and social life – and it was in this view that it was most severely condemned. Not least, the ways in which society could attempt to alleviate the problem and prevent suicides included addressing the potential imitative effect that daily newspapers allegedly had with their death notices. Our aim, however, was not to determine the actual impact of the press on suicide, of course, but rather to observe the discourse that developed in popular science and media and other circles around the influence of daily press on suicide incidence. In these cases, it seems, the criticism was directed at the social factors fuelling the rising suicide rate, suggesting – in line with the sociological doctrines of the time – that rather than the individual committing suicide, society as a whole was in need of an intervention.

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⁸³ See Bailey, *This Rash Act*, 15, 16.

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Urška Bratož

SAMOMOR V AVSTRIJSKEM PRIMORJU NA PRELOMU 19. IN 20. STOLETJA

POVZETEK

Prispevek opazuje družbeno podobo samomora ob koncu 19. in na začetku 20. stoletja, predvsem na primeru Trsta kot velikega mestnega središča, kjer je bil trend naraščanja samomorilnosti opazneje viden vsaj od sedemdesetih let 19. stoletja. Ob zaznavanju naraščajoče prisotnosti samomora v družbi so tudi v ta prostor prihajale razne evropske razprave o samomoru, od Morsellijeve in Masarykove do Durkheimove študije, diskurzi okrog samomora pa so hkrati odstirali nekoliko širšo sliko družbe, vključno z njenimi strahovi pred družbenimi problemi in spremembami.

Časopisni diskurz je običajno sledil znanstvenim objavam svojega časa, opažanja o množičnosti samomorov so se potrjevala skozi statistične analize in medicinske, sociološke, filozofske ter druge razprave, obenem pa so odpirala tudi mnoge druge družbene problematike, s katerimi je bilo samomor v urbanem prostoru mogoče povezati (alkoholizem, rast proletariata, revščina, preoblikovanje vrednot idr.). Vse to je sooblikovalo javno razpravo o samomoru kot problemu moderne družbe, posebej večjih mest, saj je bila samomorilnost tam veliko bolj izrazita kot v manjših neindustrijskih mestih ali na podeželju Avstrijskega primorja.

Primeri iz dnevnega tiska in poljudnoznanstvenih razprav razkrivajo raznolike podobe samomora. Na eni strani je bil prikazan kot neizogibna posledica neugodnih ekonomskih razmer oziroma finančne stiske, v kateri se je znašel (običajno) predstavnik proletariata, ali pa brezizhodnega položaja posameznika zaradi hude in neozdravljive bolezni. Samomor je lahko bil tudi medikaliziran kot nevrolška posledica določene psihične bolezni ali stanja. Na drugi strani pa je bil dojet kot posledica kvarnega učinka moderne življenja in vrednot (na primer individualizma, hedonizma, materializma, ateizma ipd.), ki so izpodrivale varnost tradicionalnega objema družinskega in družbenega življenja, in v taki obliki je bil tudi najbolj obsojan. Med načini, kako bi bilo to problematiko (ki je bila razumljena kot družbeno pogojena) mogoče zmanjšati ali preprečiti, je bilo tudi vprašanje potencialnega imitativnega efekta, ki naj bi ga na pojavljanje samomorov imel zlasti dnevni tisk s črno kroniko.

Matteo Perissinotto*

“In a moment of supreme discomfort.” An Analysis of Female Suicides Through the Press in Trieste in the Post-war Transition (1918-1922)**

IZVLEČEK

»V TRENUTKU SKRAJNE STISKE.«
ANALIZA SAMOMOROV MED ŽENSKAMI NA PODLAGI
TRŽAŠKEGA TISKA V POVOJNEM OBDOBJU (1918–1922)

Cilj tega prispevka je z vidika spola raziskati pojav samomorov med ženskami v Trstu in prehodnem obdobju po prvi svetovni vojni (1918–1922) na podlagi člankov v lokalnem tisku. To je bilo obdobje nenadnih političnih, upravnih in gospodarskih sprememb. Poleg tega se je upanje na boljšo prihodnost prepletalo s tesnobo zaradi vse večje revščine in nebrzdanega nasilja, ki je pustošilo po mestu. Leta 1920 je v Trstu število samomorov med ženskami prvič preseglo število samomorov med moškimi. Na podlagi sodb v tisku so bile opredeljene tri makro kategorije, v katere lahko uvrstimo samomore: razumljivi (“comprese”) samomori ali poskusi samomorov, ki so veljali za družbeno sprejemljive ali vsaj upravičene, kadar so bili povezani z ekonomskimi razlogi, zdravjem ali žalovanjem za člani družine; samomori, ki so veljali za povezane z “lahkomiselnimi motivi” in jih je meščanska morala obsojala, ker so bili povezani z ljubezenskimi zadevami in družinskimi spori; in,

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nazadnje, samomori spolnih delavk (prostitutk), ki so jih odkrito kritizirali, saj so veljali za naravno in fiziološko posledico življenja v bordelih.

Ključne besede: Julijska krajina, Trst, prehodno obdobje, samomor, spol

ABSTRACT

The aim of this essay is to investigate from a gender perspective, through articles in the local press, the phenomenon of female suicides in Trieste during the transitional phase following WWI (1918-1922). This was due to a period of abrupt changes: political, administrative, and economic. In addition, hope for a better future and anxiety had been dashed with the increase in poverty and the rampant violence that swept through the city. In Trieste in 1920 for the first time the number of female suicides exceeded the number of male suicides. Based on the judgments made in the press, three macro categories have been identified into which we can place the suicides: the "comprese" (understood) that committed or attempted suicides were considered to be socially acceptable, or at least justified, in so far as that they related to economic reasons, health or familial grief; those considered to be linked to "frivolous motives" and condemned by bourgeois morality because they were connected to matters of romance and family conflict; and finally, those of sex workers (prostitute), about whom open criticisms were put forward, as they were seen as a natural and physiological consequence of life in the brothels.

Keywords: Julian March, Trieste, Transition, Suicide, Gender

Introduction

Scanning through the pages of *Il Piccolo*¹ – Trieste's irredentist-oriented and after 1921 pro-National Bloc main daily newspaper – one notes the constant reports regarding suicide in the city.² Such events became so common that already by the beginning

1 *Il Piccolo* was founded in 1881 by Teodoro Mayer, irredentist, freemason and senator of the Kingdom of Italy in 1920. Upon Italy's entry into the war against Austria-Hungary, the newspaper headquarters were destroyed by a portion of the Triestine population, which saw them as a symbol of Italianess. Publication resumed on 20 November 1919. The suicide reports were often published on page two, in the "Cronaca della città" (Chronicle of the city), and from 1920, with the intensification of the phenomenon, they were sometimes reported in special columns. – Silvana Monti Orel, *I giornali triestini dal 1863 al 1902. Società e cultura di Trieste attraverso 576 quotidiani e periodici analizzati e descritti nel loro contesto storico* (Trieste: LINT, 1976). Cesare Pagnini, *I giornali di Trieste dalle origini al 1959* (Milan: Centro Studi, 1959).

2 On the phase of post-war transition in the Julian March, see among others: Elio Apih, *Italia, Fascismo e Antifascismo nella Venezia Giulia (1918–1943)*. *Ricerche storiche* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1966). Angelo Visintin, *L'Italia a Trieste. L'operato del governo militare italiano nella Venezia Giulia (1918–19)* (Gorizia: LEG, 2000). Marta Verginella,

of 1923, the statistician Pierpaolo Luzzatto-Fegiz³ published the article "Osservazioni statistiche sul fenomeno del suicidio nella città di Trieste" (Statistical observations of the suicide phenomenon in the city of Trieste), which found that in the immediate post-war period, a rapid increase in suicides was being registered in the Julian city.⁴ In addition, he notes how in 1921 the number of female suicides surpassed those of men in absolute terms for the first time.⁵

This article analyses female suicides in post-war Trieste. The aim of this article is to analyse the interpretations of contemporary observers on the phenomenon, particularly in the local press. In reporting the news, journalists did not limit themselves to the description of the facts, but provided information on the alleged motivations that had driven people to suicide, often accompanied by moral and ethical judgments, to justify or condemn the act in the eyes of readers. The phenomenon attracted so much attention from contemporaries that newspapers devoted specific columns to it. For example, "Gli stanchi della vita" (The Weary of Life) appeared on the second page of the periodical – which was devoted to the city chronicle. Almost always, these articles had a very similar structure, providing a great deal of detail about the suicide and the motivations behind the act.

This article, thus, uses periodicals to examine the journalists' perception of the facts and their narration of the cases of deaths by suicide as well as suicide attempts. To this end, the article reconstructs the cultural climate of the era which was marked by post-war turmoil, economic depression, and widespread anxiety⁶. It also offers an opportunity to link political perspective, gender, and suicide from different cultural and political contexts which are shown through the various contemporary newspapers examined.⁷ The article teases out the medical discourse in particular, showing how it was employed to confirm old stereotypes on the nature and behaviour of women.⁸ A clear gendered view of the suicide phenomenon emerges from the press, in which femininity was perceived as the main cause of women's weakness in life.

Three categories of female suicides will, therefore, be examined. I have identified these categories according to the judgements made by the press at the time: the

"Political activism of Slovene women in Venezia Giulia after World War I and the rise of fascism: from autonomy to subordination," *Acta Histriae* 26, No. 4 (2018): 1041–62.

- 3 Livia Linda Rondini, "Pierpaolo Luzzatto-Fegiz," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 66 (2006), [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pierpaolo-luzzatto-fegiz_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pierpaolo-luzzatto-fegiz_(Dizionario-Biografico)), accessed 4 June 2024.
- 4 Pierpaolo Luzzatto-Fegiz, "Osservazioni Statistiche sul fenomeno del suicidio nella città di Trieste," *Bollettino dell'Ufficio del Lavoro e della Statistica del Comune di Trieste* 42, No. 4 (February 1923): 7–11.
- 5 Matteo Perissinotto, "Perché le donne si uccidono? Analisi dei suicidi femminili a Trieste nel primo dopoguerra (1918–1922)," *DEP* 50 (2023): 1–26, https://www.unive.it/pag/fileadmin/user_upload/dipartimenti/DSLCC/documenti/DEP/n50/02_Perissinotto.pdf, accessed 4 June 2024.
- 6 Maura Hametz, "Anxious »Italians«: Security and Welfare in the Upper Adriatic, 1918–1924," *Annales* 32, No. 4 (2022): 591–602.
- 7 George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985).
- 8 Olive Anderson, *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 224. Maria Teresa Brancaccio, "The Fatal Tendency of Civilized Society": Enrico Morselli's Suicide, Moral Statistics, and Postivism in Italy," *Journal of Social History* 46, No. 3 (2013): 700–15.

“*comprese*” (understood) committed or attempted suicides that were considered to be socially acceptable, or at least justified, in so far as that they related to economic reasons, health or familial grief; those considered to be linked to “frivolous motives” and condemned by bourgeois morality because they were connected to matters of romance and family conflict; and finally, those of sex workers (*prostitute*), about whom open criticisms were put forward, as they were seen as a natural and physiological consequence of life in the brothels.

Moreover, according to the commentators of the time, female suicides were attributed to the particular psychological and emotional condition of women who – having been perceived as weaker to men – manifested forms of “nevastia” and other degenerations of the nervous system, considered to be prodromes of suicide.⁹ This innate weakness, perceived to be intrinsic to the female sex, made them more vulnerable in moments of crisis and incapable of coping with life’s adversities. Such a narrative emerges particularly in the reports relating to suicide attempts, often by young women in love, in which it was often portrayed as a gesture to attract attention or to vindicate oneself against loved ones or a lover.

In Trieste, the increase in suicide cases lasted from the summer of 1920 through to the end of 1922.¹⁰ This period coincided with the beginning of an economic crisis in Trieste’s port and with the end of the first wave of subsidies given to local businesses.¹¹ Hopes for post-war prosperity and peace were dashed with the post-war crisis, which saw unemployment, rents and the cost of living rise, and a housing crisis emerge.

For Trieste, like in all the territories of the former Central Powers,¹² the post-war period was one of distinct tension and violence. The summer of 1920 was marked by the fire of Narodni Dom, an event seen at the time as the “baptism of fire of fascism”¹³: an act that, tied to other attacks against the Slovenian and Croatian minorities and the labour movement, and the destruction of the socialist headquarters and of the printing press of the periodical *Il Lavoratore* months later, represented just one of the first violent disturbances that marked life in Trieste during these fateful months. In addition to the *squadrista* operation, one must add the socialist and communist responses

9 Mary Gibson, *Born to crime. Cesare Lombroso and the Origin of Biological Criminology* (Wesport, CT: Praeger, 2002). Silvano Montaldo, *Donne delinquenti. Il genere e la nascita della criminologia* (Rome: Carrocci, 2019).

10 Florian Arendt, “The Press and Suicides in the 19th Century: Investigating Possible Imitative Effects in Five Territories of the Austro-Hungarian Empire,” *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying* 81, No. 3 (2020): 424–43. Hannes Leidingner, “Die Selbstmordepidemie: Zur Zunahme von Suizidfällen in der Zwischenkriegszeit,” in Wolfgang Kos (ed.), *Kampf um die Stadt: Politik, Kunst und Alltag um 1930* (Wien: Czernin, 2010), 215–19. Zdravka Jelaska, “Types and forms of violence in Split between the two World Wars,” *Acta Histriae* 10, No. 2 (2002): 391–410. Milan Radošević, “Tired of Life: Suicides in the Province of Istria during Italian Administration between the Two World Wars,” *Problemi sjevnog Jadrana* 16 (2017): 79–102.

11 Giulio Sapelli, *Trieste italiana. Mito e destino economico* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1990). Giulio Mellinato, “La decadenza del sistema industriale giuliano,” in Istituto regionale per la storia del movimento di liberazione nel Friuli-Venezia Giulia (ed.), *Friuli e Venezia Giulia. Storia del '900* (Gorizia: LEG, 1997), 273–84.

12 Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End* (London: Allen Lane, 2016).

13 Apih, *Italia, fascismo e antifascismo nella Venezia Giulia*. Giulia Albanese, David Bidussa and Jacopo Perazzolli, *Siamo stati fascisti. Il laboratorio dell'antidemocrazia. Italia 1900–1922* (Milan: Fondazione Gian Giacomo Feltrinelli 2020). Borut Klabjan and Gorazd Bajc, *Battesimo di Fuoco. L'incendio del Narodni Dom di Trieste e l'Europa adriatica nel XX secolo. Storia e memoria* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2023). Marco Bresciani, “The Battle for Post-Habsburg Trieste: State Transition, Social Unrest and Political Radicalism (1918–1923),” *Austrian History Yearbook* (2021): 182–200.

with strikes and attacks on production sites, as well as clashes with the Italian authorities. Trieste was not only grappling with political and economic issues in the post-war period. Situated on the border, this war-torn city with strong migratory movements, refugees, returning veterans and the wounded, was a society deeply divided by nationalism and struck by a food and health crisis (i. e. Spanish flu). While the causes of each suicide cases are too complex and individual to explain merely by looking at the post-war crisis in Trieste, the historical context lurked in the background of many cases.¹⁴

Analyses of the post-war suicide phenomenon in Trieste must therefore take into account the complexity of the post-war period.¹⁵ As shown by Marzio Barbagli, years of economic depression and disorder, in which there was no prospect of improving one's actual conditions, were periods in which the phenomenon tends to intensify.¹⁶ Indeed, as noted by Luzzatto-Fegiz who analysed data from 1873 to 1922, a record amount of 118 suicides was reached in 1920 (5.4 suicides per 10,000 inhabitants).¹⁷ Significant increase in suicides took place also in 1891, corresponding to the closure of the free port and the start of the industrialization phase of the city, phenomena that had a considerable impact on the everyday life of the poorest strata of the population, while in the decade between 1891-1900, the frequency of female suicides also began to rise.¹⁸ During the war, as Émile Durkheim suggested, there was, instead, a net reduction in the phenomenon, due to "the rise of social integration", or the need on the part of individuals to react to a common danger and the opportunity to attribute the cause of one's discontent to an external enemy.¹⁹ During the post-war period, the rates grew once again, until 1920 and 1921 when, for the first time in post-war Trieste, the number of female suicides surpassed that of men: 53 men and 56 women, the frequency was 4.57 suicides per 10,000 inhabitants (4.83 for men, 4.61 for women).²⁰ This figure drew attention from analysts, due to the fact that it was usually men who killed themselves more often than women. As noted by Luzzatto-Fegiz, if we compare the 1873-1875 average with the 1919-1922 average, we find that in half a century the frequency of suicides increased among males by 112% and among females by 475%.²¹

Having observed this, the Triestine data is quite distinct from the Austrian data. In 1921 in Trieste, more women took their lives, whereas Austrian men killed themselves 2.1 times more than women that year, and Italian men 2.8.²² In the Weimar Republic,

14 Motivations behind suicide are complex, and they depend on a great number of factors. According to the framework put forward by Barbagli, one can take their life "for or against people", meaning that they are either altruistic or selfish acts, and one can carry out the act to harm others or as a means of struggle. – Maurizio Barbagli, *Congedarsi dal mondo. Il suicidio in Occidente e in Oriente* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009), 383–85.

15 Ibidem, 188–98.

16 Ibid., 216, 217.

17 Luzzatto-Fegiz, "Osservazioni Statistiche sul fenomeno del suicidio nella città di Trieste," 7, 8.

18 Ibid.

19 Émile Durkheim, *Le Suicide. Étude de sociologie* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1897).

20 Luzzatto-Fegiz, "Osservazioni Statistiche sul fenomeno del suicidio nella città di Trieste," 7. According to the 1921 population census, there were about 238,000 inhabitants in Trieste and about 111 women for every 100 men. Cfr. "I risultati del censimento di Trieste," *Il Piccolo*, 8 June 1922.

21 Luzzatto-Fegiz, "Osservazioni Statistiche sul fenomeno del suicidio nella città di Trieste."

22 Barbagli, *Congedarsi dal mondo*, 209. Norbert Ortmayr, "Selbstmord in Österreich 1819–1988," *Zeitgeschichte* 17, No. 5 (1989–1990): 209–25, 213.

which was also affected by a severe economic and political crisis, the rates of female suicides rose after the end of the war, yet the ratio women to men was 1 to 2.²³ The data presented here demonstrates how the Triestine tendency was entirely exceptional.

Representations and Interpretations of Suicide in the Triestine Press

The articles covering suicide cases often reported, in full, the given name, surname, age, profession, and also the address of the suicide victim. Even when only the initials were given, it was easy for acquaintances, friends and neighbours to identify them, thus exposing them to society's judgement and commentary. In the descriptions of cases which aroused greater interest by the public, strong and engaging terms were used, sensationalized and suggestive stories were constructed. Journalists even invented dialogues, often in dialect, between the suicide victim and their relatives or those who were present before committing the act, to lend more pathos to the report²⁴ – almost as if to simultaneously stoke and satisfy a morbid curiosity. An important role in the reconstruction of the lives of those in question was played by neighbours and relatives who often provided information to the press regarding the suicide victim's last days through the practice of gossip.²⁵ However, at other times, it was the authorities and doctors who provided information to the journalists. According to the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse of the World Health Organization, "media reporting of suicide cases can lead to subsequent, additional, suicidal behaviours."²⁶ Thus, the so-called "Werther effect" would exist – that is, the tendency to imitate suicidal behaviours and actions learned through the press, especially when they involve celebrities, or give vivid details and information including how and where. Although this conclusion is not unanimous in the scientific world and should also be studied in relation to other factors, it is evident that the press of the time applied criteria that are now considered inappropriate.²⁷

The use of details by the press were much more accurate when the cases came from working-class or impoverished neighbourhoods – that is, when they involved the poorest strata of the population. Meanwhile, details and often also moral commentary were absent if they concerned suicides of noted figures and members of the city's bourgeoisie. It could also be presumed that, considering the almost total absence of news relative to suicide attempts of young women from the middle and upper classes,

23 Christian Goeschel, *Suicide in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 13–18.

24 Articles on suicides fall, at least partially, into the canon of "fait divers", cfr. Roland Barthes, "Struttura del fatto di cronaca," in *Saggi critici* (Turin: Einaudi, 1966), 230–38. "Fait divers, fait d'histoire," *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 38, No. 4 (1983).

25 Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, "Neighbourhood Social Change in West European Cities: Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries," *International Review of Social History* 38, No. 1 (1993): 1–30.

26 World Health Organization & International Association for Suicide Prevention, *Preventing suicide: A resource for media professionals, 2017 update*, <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/258814>, accessed 4 June 2024.

27 David P. Phillips, "The influence of Suggestion on Suicide: Substantive and Theoretical Implications of the Werther Effect," *American Sociological Review* 39 (1974): 340–54.

that these remained confined within the familial sphere, or in any case that they were not published by the press.

A special case concerns the suicide attempts of servants – young, lonely women with little hope of finding another job, who often came from areas that became part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and who suffered from displacement, as revealed from psychiatric sources.²⁸ These were women who, while belonging to the working class, worked for, and lived with, middle-and-upper-class families. Such was the case of Luigia M., age twenty, who, after being fired, turned on the gas in an attempt to kill herself from asphyxiation.²⁹ Her mistress declared that this was the third attempt that had been made in the one day. Commenting on the news, the journalist added: "it is not unlikely that the wretch wanted to die because she had been abandoned by a soldier with whom she was in love and who was the cause of her dismissal." Additionally, in this case we are faced with the difficulty of identifying the true cause of suicide which was probably due to a combination of economic, social and emotional reasons. The repeated tendency to trace the deaths of servants back to sorrows and situations outside the working environment was encouraged by the statements of the employers, who, on the one hand, wanted to protect their image, not wanting to appear as too demanding or strict, and on the other hand, were anxious to place the blame for the act on the employee, stressing her "moral corruption," particularly through the telling of her private life.³⁰ It is also interesting to note that in a climate of high political and national tensions, the nationality of those involved in suicides was never mentioned.

Unlike their female equivalent, reports on male suicide rarely included moral judgement. In April 1921, *Il Piccolo* asked what could be at the root of such a worrying phenomenon: "particular post-war conditions? Widespread neuroses, aggravated by the new conditions of living? A phenomenon that merely carries the numerical value of a simple percentage given the population density in Trieste?"³¹ Building from these questions, the commentator then sought to present reasons for the suicide cases that turned out to be only subjective approximations:

"To draw apodictic conclusions – as our magistrates say – from these findings? To say that today's humanity throws life away at the first obstacle? To affirm this, one would need to assume a general physiological integrity which unfortunately cannot be brought into play. So? Spring; exaltation of the brains; false concepts of life; little philosophy; sick nerves... The field of hypotheses is boundless."³²

28 Ana Cergol Paradiž and Petra Testen Koren, "The Excluded amongst the Excluded? Trst/Trieste and (Slovene) Servants after the First World War," *Acta Histriae* 29, No. 4 (2021): 887–920. Dagmar Wernitznig, "The Madwoman in the Cellar: Trauma and Gender After Both World Wars — A Field Study of Psychiatric Files," *On_Culture: The Open Journal for the Study of Culture* 11 (2021), http://geb.uni-giessen.de/geb/volltexte/2021/16173/pdf/On_Culture_11_Wernitznig.pdf, accessed 4 June 2024.

29 "Licenziata dai padroni tenta di morire," *Il Piccolo*, 7 January 1920.

30 "La confessione prima del suicidio," *Il Piccolo*, 13 March 1920. A.S. 17-year-old servant to the Engel family, head of Assicurazioni Generali. The girl attempted suicide by swallowing carbolic acid. A. recounted that she was upset because while she was beating the carpet it fell out of the window and was stolen. The journalist argues that this is an excuse because the real motivation was to be found in the "thwarted affections she was having with a soldier."

31 "Il fascino della morte. Un "record" lugubre," *Il Piccolo*, 13 April 1921.

32 Ibid.

The article then put forth an assessment of the legitimacy of the act, or the lack thereof – “two lone cases, out of six, could be justified by a relative balance between determinants and resolute intentions.”³³ It then underlined how often the suicide was caused by an erroneous and pessimistic view of reality, which should be seen with different eyes: “the world – it is said – is a comedy. Too many people insist on making it a tragedy!.” Thus, there was some reflection on the link between the post-war situation with its radical social and economic changes, and the increase in suicides. However, this hypothesis was not investigated by the reporter, but was simplistically used to explain how “the tragedy” that people insisted on seeing in reality exacerbated what the medical profession of the time called the disturbances of the nervous system, the “morbid nervousness of the post-war period,” believed to be the root cause of the new wave of suicide.³⁴

The so-called “*nevrastenia*,” in fact appeared with a certain persistence in the reports on suicide deaths and attempts of young women. The article went on to also attempt a definition of the malady: “the word *nevrastenia* embraces a field so vast that any definition that seeks to set absolute terms would be a risk.” At the time, medicine identified *nevrastenia* on the basis of turmoil of the soul, so much so that the suicide reports published in the socialist periodical, *Il Lavoratore*, referred on numerous occasions to the “century of the *nevrastenici*.”³⁵ In an interview a few days before, a doctor stated that: “we live in the age of the *nevrastenici*. All of us, in a more or less acute form, are affected by this malady. After all, how can we escape, if this is the malady of our historical period?”³⁶ While “nervous diseases” were also considered a cause for male suicide, the press stressed its role in female suicides in particular and insisted, in accordance with common medical knowledge, that women were predisposed to such pathologies. The debate on hysteria developed in medical circles throughout the 19th century. There were those who saw female hysteria as related to the uterus and the frustration of sexual desire, and those who argued that it was related to the different conformation of the brain and social tasks, such as childcare, which increased the chances of women suffering from this type of disorder. All, however, agreed that it was a typically female disease that developed mainly in the poorer sections of the population because they were more prone to everyday difficulties.³⁷ Later studies have demonstrated how schizophrenia and bipolar disorders are distributed among the genders equally, while depression affects women two times more than men, and clinical depression four times more.³⁸ Despite the higher risk of suicide among people diagnosed with depression, women still end their lives less than men.³⁹ Medical knowl-

33 Ibid.

34 “La corsa alla morte continua...,” *Il Piccolo*, 7 June 1921.

35 “Il secolo dei *nevrastenici*. Tentato suicidio,” *Il Lavoratore*, 27 May 1920.

36 “Arrivati in buon punto,” *Il Lavoratore*, 24 November 1920.

37 Montaldo, *Donne delinquenti*, 90–95.

38 Barbagli, *Congedarsi dal mondo*, 208.

39 Durkheim had already negated a correlation between “*nevrastenia*” and suicide in his study *Le Suicide*, pointing out how there were more women than men in hospices for the mentally ill, but that men died of suicide four times more than women.

edge and prejudices rooted in the beginning of the twentieth century can explain why expressions such as "in a moment of supreme discomfort" or "she did not have the strength of spirit to overcome the situation" were used in reports on female suicides, when instead suicide is often the final outcome of a long and considered process.

The socialist press usually reported suicide cases much less frequently than *Il Piccolo*. Unlike *Il Piccolo's* medical discourse, the socialist press interpreted suicides as the result of the population's economic and social struggles: "When a human being is brought to the limit of their pain threshold and no longer sees another way to soothe the atrocious torment; when in their torturous path there is an obstacle that they cannot avoid and they feel as though they lack the strength to try to overcome it: then, in their infinite fatigue they find a little bit of energy to surpass their pain and set off into the unknown."⁴⁰ The newspaper saw the phenomenon as a consequence of the capitalist system that exploited the proletariat to the point that it saw death as the only escape from the suffering of life.

Even *La Coda del Diavolo*, a local satirical periodical commenting on the abnormal increase in suicides in the city, stated "Men kill themselves out of misery, women out of love."⁴¹ According to the periodical, the two were connected since men, even if in love, could not afford a relationship, let alone a marriage, given the conditions in which they lived due to the economic crisis in the city and, especially, the commercial port.

The fascist newspaper, *Il Popolo di Trieste*, tended to mock the women who attempted suicide, titling the articles with quips of questionable taste, such as, for example: "Bagno al Molo Audace" (A dip at Audace pier), "Beata gioventù" (Blessed Youth) and "Voleva lavarsi le budella"⁴² (She wanted to wash her guts out), or calling Lysol, the poison most used in suicides, above all those attributed to emotional motives, "purgante dei dolori" (purgative of pain).⁴³ In addition, *Il Popolo* claimed that the "suicide epidemic" mostly affected the "gentler sex, or the weaker sex, call it what you will,"⁴⁴ thereby, attributing the reasons that led them to take their own lives to the alleged congenital weakness of women. In contrast, their coverage of male suicide endowed the act with an aura of nobility and attributed it to a profound feeling.

The "comprese": the sick, new mothers, the poor and widows

Women who attempted or died from suicide due to motives tied to the inability to take care of themselves or due to too much pain were treated with relative empathy in the pages of the local newspapers. Such women were mostly at an advanced age, widowed, mothers of dead soldiers, or afflicted with incurable diseases.

40 "Morire, dormire, forse sognare," *Il Lavoratore*, 21 February 1922.

41 Jean, "Trieste città dei suicide," *La Coda del Diavolo. Giornale Politico Satirico* 180, 15 March 1922.

42 *Il Popolo di Trieste* respectively: "Bagni al Molo Audace," 12 April 1921. "Come stanca la vita!," 3 June 1921. "Benedetta gioventù! ...," 11 June 1921. "Voleva lavarsi le budella," 24 August 1921.

43 "Il purgante dei dolori ...," *Il Popolo di Trieste*, 14 June 1921.

44 "...E la corsa riprende!," *Il Popolo di Trieste*, 11 August 1921.

Maria B., age fifty-eight, was separated and had no one who cared for her. For a month she had been “tormented by an illness [...]. Since then, she had a sad sensation that her existence was useless: alone, sick, without any attachment whatsoever, loveless...,” she decided to go to her loved ones’ tomb to kill herself with morphine.⁴⁵ In addition to illness, suicide resulting from a disability condition, and thus, from constant dependence on others, also evoked understanding in columnists.⁴⁶

Women who took their own lives postpartum received sympathy and compassion. According to a very widespread vulgate, childbirth could render women “excited” and out of control, incapable of having a rational view of reality.⁴⁷ This had been a deeply rooted view since the eighteenth century, even among doctors, who believed that among the possible consequences of childbirth was “puerperal mania,” an illness which affected the minds of women, provoking states of alienation which rendered them dangerous to both themselves and their children.⁴⁸

Public opinion deemed the suicide of widows and mothers who had lost their husbands or sons in the war as morally justified. The uncertainties of the post-war period and the painful news that arrived well after the conflict, together with the process of mourning that was confined to the domestic sphere, were often the cause of this type of suicide. In Trieste, almost everyone had fought with the Austro-Hungarian army, while celebrations and public memory were reserved for the “irredentists,” namely those who had deserted and enrolled as army volunteers for the Kingdom of Italy.⁴⁹ The emotional toll from such a loss was often accompanied by grave economic consequences. The survivors often had to rely on public welfare or war pensions.

Even if their husbands survived, such women could find themselves as the primary breadwinners and in squalid poverty. This was the case of Giustina P., age twenty-four, summarised as follows by *Il Piccolo*: “the terrible tragedy of the breadless was unfolding in the young woman’s soul with a haunting intensity,” so much so that it drove her to take her own life.⁵⁰ The lack of money and bread was exacerbated by rising housing costs, due to both rampant inflation and the constant increase in population. Teresa P., for example, had found herself working to provide for her children, but the money was not sufficient, and debts arose. Her landlord brought her to court to serve her with an eviction order. She had announced her intention to commit suicide if she was evicted, a proposition she carried out.⁵¹

45 “Si veste di nero e va avvelenarsi sopra una tomba,” *Il Piccolo*, 5 February 1922.

46 “Il drammatico suicidio di una giovane,” *Il Popolo di Trieste*, 19 November 1921.

47 “Tragico suicidio,” *Il Piccolo*, 9 April 1920.

48 Nadia Maria Filippini, *Generare, partorire, nascere. Una storia dall'antichità alla provetta* (Rome: Viella, 2017), 228–32. Cfr. “Il dramma di una sventurata. Vuol gettarsi con la sua creaturina sotto il treno,” *Il Piccolo*, 2 December 1922.

49 Borut Klabjan, “Hasburg Fantasies: Sites of Memory in Trieste/Trst/Triest from the Fin de Siècle to the Present,” in Borut Klabjan (ed.), *Borderlands of memory: Adriatic and Central European perspectives* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019), 61–89.

50 “Drammi dell'esistenza,” *Il Piccolo*, 13 July 1921.

51 “Una povera donna s'impicca perché riceve l'ordine di soggio,” *Il Piccolo*, 22 August 1922.

For futile motives: the "sorrows of the heart" and "family troubles"

Suicide attempts tied to romantic disappointments undoubtedly represent the most analysed matter in newspaper articles on the topic. The newspapers denounced them as the most foolish and naïve, and judged them as the folly of young Triestine women, who were ill-equipped to face the difficulties of life.

There were several cases which involved Italian soldiers who, after courting and promising to marry a woman, had returned to their regions of origin at the end of their military service where they no longer maintained contact or announced that they already had a family.⁵² What emerges from the newspapers is rather the concern of how this phenomenon affected the youngest in particular because – as *Il Piccolo* reminded – “at eighteen you can’t have any other serious worries on your mind.”⁵³ Likewise, the socialist periodical *Il Lavoratore* analysed the case as such:

“In the post-war era, young women are exhibiting very dangerous psychological characteristics. A study on the topic would be extremely interesting and instructive. The primary cause of this spiritual shift in girls is to be found mainly in the moral decline that afflicts all social classes today, whereas once it was the prerogative of the aristocracy alone. The suicides of sixteen-year-old girls are very common in these times. A naive love believed to be eternal that vanishes, is now a reason for fatal and tragic despair. The solution? Suicide.”⁵⁴

Here, too, reports of male and female suicides diverged. Women were presented as misguided youths unaware of the man’s true intentions, unable to protect themselves from any further relationships, or too young to understand the pains of love. Instead, when it was the man who took his own life, the female became the young seductress, a provocateur who had made herself too desirable. Various periodicals told of how these women, after reading the news of the suicide in the newspaper, went in tears to her beloved, regretting having left him.⁵⁵

An interesting and comprehensive analysis on the phenomenon of suicide “for reasons of love” can be found in the editorial of *Il Piccolo* of 22 May 1921, titled “Perché le donne si uccidono?” (Why Do Women Kill Themselves?), in which it was argued that the reason for the “inconstancy, restlessness and inconsistency” of women had only one origin: love.⁵⁶ While men could have had several valid reasons for taking their own lives, the journalist identified three fundamental reasons for the high rate of female suicides: sentimentality, reading and family upbringing.

The war, *Il Piccolo* explained, had lowered “the value attached to life,” and this had led to a “loss of all moral values, of inhibitory energies, from which comes a thirst for an intense life, for pleasure, for wantonness to forget and forget oneself.” Moreover, readers were given a possible explanation for this particular “spiritual restlessness” of

52 “I suicidi. La morte di una signora con acido fenico,” *Il Piccolo*, 8 March 1920.

53 “La corsa alla morte. Il gesto folle di quattro stanchi della vita,” *Il Piccolo*, 12 April 1921.

54 “Amori precoci,” *Il Lavoratore*, 9 October 1921.

55 “Per l’amore di Faustina,” *Il Lavoratore*, 31 October 1920.

56 “Perché le donne si uccidono?,” *Il Piccolo*, 22 May 1921.

Triestine women: “beneath the gaiety of the Triestine woman is her apparent thoughtlessness, behind which lurks a great sensitivity, at times morbid, a sensitivity which was sharpened by the material pains to which she was subjected for more than four years of war, and from the overwhelming thrill that accompanies the consecration of victory and liberation.” That is, this sensitivity led her to experience deep love, and strong disillusionment when this love failed.

The finger was then pointed at the reading of youths: “our youths” – explained *Il Piccolo* – “read too much and read badly. The worst is when they begin excessively reading early, at twelve or thirteen”; further, they read books that are against the common morality, in particular romance books, this then collides with harsh reality, and in the end the weaker in the relationship – the young woman – kills herself. *Il Piccolo* argued that reading had devastating effects on women, accustoming them from the most tender age to a fantastical life divorced from reality. This idea precisely came from the representation of female suicide in literature. Represented as avid readers, as noted by Gabriele Scalessa: “a male-authorial approach to female suicide in the late nineteenth century rarely went separate from a cultural frame including a series of commonplaces.”⁵⁷ It was also a popular idea at the time that literature influenced behaviour, especially in “degenerate subjects.”⁵⁸

The third factor identified by the columnist in the Triestine daily related to family upbringing which, according to the periodical, left young people without supervision too early and thus, unprepared for the difficulties of life. If this was the interpretation provided by the main local daily, the fascist newspaper, *Il Popolo di Trieste*, often dealt with the subject, referring to “sorrows of the heart” as “petty motives,” highlighting the recklessness of those who “throw their lives away” for reasons considered so insubstantial.⁵⁹ According to the publication, among women “there is vanity,” often the desire for a little “attention” to attract a man’s focus and intimidate him.⁶⁰

Public opinion also condemned women who committed suicide due to “family troubles.” Suicide following “arguments” included marital squabbles, domestic violence and lobbying for control of the romantic relationships of daughters on the parts of fathers, as well as all the other motivations connected to the rupture of moral codes.

In the matters of marital life and family violence, little can be inferred from the suicide reports, but it is clear how the *jus corrigendi* of the husband and the father was considered a right and a duty, which was justified by the press but within certain limits – not, for example, in the case where the husband’s violence put the wife in hospital.⁶¹ If violence against one’s loved ones did not exceed these limits, it was then referred to as “violent bickering,” which, in any case, was considered legitimate and thus, was not

57 Gabriele Scalessa, “Representations of Suicide in Italian Narratives from the 1860s to the Early Twentieth Century,” in Paolo L. Bernardini and Anita Virga (eds.), *Voglio morire! Suicide in Italian Literature, Culture, and Society 1789–1919* (Newcastle upon Tyne; Cambridge Scholars, 2013), 161–65.

58 Ty Geltmaker, *Tired of Living: Suicide in Italy from National Unification to World War I, 1860–1915* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 65–67.

59 “Tentato suicidio,” *Il Popolo di Trieste*, June 25, 1921.

60 “Quattro assetate di acido fenico,” *Il Popolo di Trieste*, September 13, 1921.

61 Marco Cavina, *Il padre spodestato. L'autorità paterna dall'antichità ad oggi* (Rome; Bari: Laterza, 2007).

considered to be a trigger for suicide attempts. The motives were instead identified as family troubles or as the consequence of "a quarrel more serious than the others."⁶² While this "reductionist" perspective was fairly widespread in the liberal press, the socialist newspaper, *Il Lavoratore*, distanced itself from it, remaining faithful to the structuralist view of social problems, pointing out that male violence was a product of poverty and consequent alcohol abuse.⁶³

As young girls' arguments with their parents often addressed moral issues, readers read such suicide reports from an educational point of view. Anna Z., an 18-year-old seamstress that, as *Il Piccolo* reported, drank carbolic acid after yet another rebuke from her parents, who did not want the girl to be absent from home for too long.⁶⁴ She needed special attention from the family because she was, as defined by the press, "belluccia" (good-looking). Such control was not limited to the family, but society as well, so much so that seventeen-year-old Valeria F. was rescued after having thrown herself from a height of three metres because of "family matters due to rumours about her morality."⁶⁵ Other times, motives spurred by "decorum and honour" were mentioned in the articles, without ever specifying what they were precisely, but suggesting that they had to do with rumours about illegitimate love affairs, which affected the honour of the woman and therefore, that of the family, as the former was primarily responsible for the education of her daughters. In these cases, too, the periodical, *Il Popolo di Trieste*, tended to minimise, claiming that quarrels between family members always ended with reconciliation, making suicide unnecessary.⁶⁶

"Tired of the lives they led": the suicides of sex workers

For the press, the suicide of sex workers stemmed from their profession's nature and was the only way out of the lifestyle it engendered.⁶⁷ The descriptions of the motives that led sex workers to suicide often had a didactic intent, aimed at demonstrating how unavoidable it was to take one's own life or to resign oneself to not being able to escape from that underworld. Journalistic analyses maintained that the lives of these women could not be happy and full like that of other girls their age. This is the case of Vittoria D.:

"[...] disgraced, at 20 she descended to the lowest step on the social ladder. Even these kinds of women who, with fierce irony, are called cheerful, sometimes feel pain for the abjectness in which they have fallen and despair of themselves, of the future, of everything.

62 "Tentato suicidio," *Il Lavoratore*, September 25, 1920.

63 "La tormentata," *Il Lavoratore*, 30 December 1919.

64 "La disperazione di una sartina," *Il Piccolo*, 4 March 1920.

65 "Tentato suicidio," *Il Piccolo*, 15 May 1920.

66 "Piccole tragedie," *Il Popolo di Trieste*, 2 August 1921.

67 For the Triestine context at that time, see: Nancy M. Wingfield, "Venereal Disease, War, and Continuity in the Regulation of Prostitution: Late Imperial Adriatic Austria and Italy's New Provinces," *Acta Histriae* 21, No. 4 (2013): 773–90.

It was precisely in one of these moments of supreme despair that Vittoria D., while passing through via Felice Venezian, took out of her pocket a bottle containing Lysol and drank its contents.”⁶⁸

This system was also condemned in the columns of *Il Lavoratore* which, writing on the relationship between the madams of the “sarcastically called *pleasure houses*”, and the sex workers, demonstrated how some of the suicide cases were precisely attributable to economic problems derived from this dependent relationship, completely designed to impede the girls’ freedom to leave the brothel.⁶⁹ Alongside economic considerations, the press also dwelled on the false illusions created by men who promised to marry these women. According to the newspapers, the life of the brothel induced several sex workers to delude themselves into thinking that they had found a man who would save them from sex work, but the harsh reality that these men only wanted to take advantage of the woman and extract sexual favours was eventually revealed. When the sex workers became aware of this – the press maintained – disillusionment followed, along with the choice to take their own lives.

The socialist press condemned society for these women’s impossible redemption. In the columns of *Il Lavoratore*, this was how the story of Agnese L. was told: “She had already been that which she never should have been: a seller of pleasure. But at that age, no matter how corrupt a woman is, she always conserves something noble in the depth of her soul. And one fine day this something may even be called love.”⁷⁰ When she fell in love, she vowed to change her life, “[e]specially because she felt like a mother. And she dreamed of redeeming herself through motherhood and love.” However, two guards arrested her because she had torn up the compulsory health booklet for sex workers, thus, violating the law: “There the unfortunate woman understood that this barbaric... civilisation does not admit redemption of any kind, that all dreams and chimeras vanish and that life for those who are children of the road holds only pain.”

In some cases, there was no mention of the profession of the suicide victim, although it was clear to the reader through the article itself who was being talked about: Ermenegilda S., aged twenty-one, “followed the example of many others, who, having reached the dregs of suffering, find no other salvation than suicide.”⁷¹ Affected by a “severe celtic illness” (syphilis), she had locked herself in her room and had taken carbolic acid. After her cries, some friends rushed to the scene, but they could not save her. As this article excerpt showed, the press often referred to the solidarity among sex workers in brothels; the newspapers told how they were always the first to provide aid and call the doctors.

The report of the suicide of Giuseppina U., age twenty-six, from Descla/Deskle, a town in the Gorizia area who had moved there to work in a pastry shop, is interesting.⁷² The article in *Il Piccolo* wrote of the path that had led a “mature peasant girl” from

68 “Tentato suicidio,” *Il Lavoratore*, 7 March 1920.

69 “Tentato suicidio,” *Il Lavoratore*, 26 February 1920.

70 “L’irredenta. Tentato suicidio,” *Il Lavoratore*, 7 April 1920.

71 “La misera fine di una giovane donna,” *Il Piccolo*, 19 May 1920.

72 “Si toglie la vita gettandosi nell’Isonzo,” *Il Piccolo*, 4 January 1921.

honest work to prostitution with soldiers and patrons of the bar where she worked. The woman was described as "comely":

"easy-hearted she lent herself to the flattery of her suitors, she was not slow in giving herself to the cheerful and carefree life, passing from the caresses of one lover, to the tenderness of the other, with that gay light-heartedness which forms the hallmark of the woman accustomed to the hardness of family life, of a rustic and burdensome environment. Life suddenly became free and apparently better."⁷³

The theme of the risk of the moral perversion of women from the countryside coming into contact with the city is recurrent in the press consulted. The articles insisted, once again with a paternalistic tone, on the dangerous illusions felt by these country women in being able to live freely in the city. This consideration was probably due to the high rates of immigration from Venezia Giulia as well as from the Kingdom of Italy in Trieste in the early post-war period.⁷⁴

Conclusions

The period of administrative and state transition, together with the economic crisis and political violence, was the background against which to place this "suicide epidemic" in Trieste in the immediate post-war period. For the first and last time, there were more women committing suicide in the city than men.

According to public opinion, not all suicides were equal; there was no clear moral/religious judgement on the act, but its legitimacy varied from case to case and from subject to subject. For example, the *mater dolorosa* and the sick woman were represented antithetically to the young woman in love and the sex worker. Thus, not everyone received the same treatment and the same legitimacy regarding the decision to take their life. However, in every case, female suicide attempts and deaths received a more harsh and judgmental reception than male ones.

There was also a class difference. Most of the reports, especially on suicide attempts, were concentrated in the poorest and most deprived neighbourhoods of the city, where the news did not remain confined to the family sphere but travelled quickly from word of mouth among neighbours. This pervasiveness also made it difficult for those who had attempted suicide to return to their daily lives as serenely as possible: everyone knew everything about everyone, social control was very strong and made women feel judged on the legitimacy of their decisions, especially if poor and alone.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Apih, *Italia, Fascismo e Antifascismo nella Venezia Giulia*, 40.

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Matteo Perissinotto

»V TRENUTKU SKRAJNE STISKE.«
**ANALIZA SAMOMOROV MED ŽENSKAMI NA PODLAGI
TRŽAŠKEGA TISKA V POVOJNEM OBDOBJU (1918–1922)**

POVZETEK

V Trstu je bilo v prehodnem obdobju po koncu prve svetovne vojne prvič in edinkrat (odkar se sistematično zbirajo podatki) zabeleženo večje število samomorov med ženskami kot med moškimi. Podatki so bili tako presenetljivi, da je statistik Pierpaolo Luzzatto-Fegiz v začetku leta 1923 objavil članek "*Osservazioni statistiche sul fenomeno del suicidio nella città di Trieste*" (Statistično opazovanje pojava samomora v mestu Trst), v katerem je ugotovil, da je bilo v obdobju takoj po vojni v tem mestu zabeleženo strmo povečanje števila samomorov. Ta pojav je naredil tak vtis na sodobnike, da je bil vedno znova tema lokalnega tiska, ki ni poročal le o novicah in nekaterih statističnih podatkih, temveč je v uvodnikih in anketah tudi predlagal nekatere razlage. Ti članki vsebujejo pomembne informacije o mentaliteti, vplivu sodobnega medicinskega znanja in odzivih družbe na ta pojav. Zelo zanimive se zdijo tudi moralne sodbe posameznih primerov, ki nam, če jih umestimo v širši kontekst, ponujajo lestvico sodb in "sprejemljivosti" ali nesprejemljivosti samomorov na podlagi pripisanih motivov. Seveda ne moremo analizirati motivov za vsak samomor, saj je teh pogosto več in je nemogoče ugotoviti en sam vzrok, lahko pa ugotavljamo trende in analiziramo njihovo predstavitev v tisku. Prehodno obdobje v upravnem in državnem smislu, ki sta ga spremljala gospodarska kriza in politično nasilje, vsekakor predstavlja ozadje, v katerega je mogoče umestiti "epidemijo samomorov" v Trstu v obdobju takoj po vojni.

Na podlagi sodb v tisku so bile opredeljene tri makro kategorije, v katere lahko uvrstimo samomore: "razumljivi" samomori ali poskusi samomorov, ki so veljali za družbeno sprejemljive ali vsaj upravičene, kadar so bili povezani z ekonomskimi razlogi, zdravjem ali žalovanjem za člani družine; samomori, ki so veljali za povezane z "lahkomiselnimi motivi" in jih je meščanska morala obsojala, ker so bili povezani z ljubezenskimi zadevami in družinskimi spori; in, nazadnje, samomori spolnih delavk (prostitutk), ki so jih odkrito kritizirali, saj so veljali za naravno in fiziološko posledico življenja v bordelih.

Irena Selišnik*

Suicide in the Perception of the Slovene Society from the 19th Century up to World War II**

IZVLEČEK

DOJEMANJE SAMOMORA V SLOVENSKI DRUŽBI OD 19. STOLETJA DO 2. SVETOVNE VOJNE

Članek se ukvarja z vprašanjem, kako je slovenska družba dojemala samomor v drugi polovici 19. in prvi polovici 20. stoletja. Posebna pozornost je namenjena vprašanju, kako so avtobiografski viri obravnavali temo samomora in kako je bila predstavljena v kontekstu čustvenega režima tistega obdobja. Pri tem so v ospredju razlogi ali motivi za samomore, omenjeni v spominih in pismih, žrtve samomorov in način, kako so samomore opisovali njihovi sodobniki, družinski člani ali prijatelji. Kot se je izkazalo, so bili samomori kontekstualizirani na zelo različne načine glede na spol, družbeni razred ali politično pripadnost, motivi zanje pa so vključevali najrazličnejše razloge.

Ključne besede: samomor, spol, družbeni razred, 19. stoletje, srednji razred, intelektualci, položaj žrtve

ABSTRACT

The article addresses the question of how suicide was perceived by Slovenian society of the second half in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. It pays particular attention to the question of how autobiographical sources addressed the topic of suicide and how the latter was presented in the context of the period's emotional regime. The contribution focuses

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on the reasons or motives for suicides mentioned in memoirs and letters, on the people who committed them, and on the mode in which suicides were described by the contemporaries, family members, or friends of those who committed them. As demonstrated, suicides were contextualised in various ways, depending on one's gender, social class, or political affiliation, while the motives for taking one's life included a plethora of reasons.

Keywords: suicide, gender, social class, the 19th century, the middle class, intellectuals, victimhood

Introduction

Despite the expedite modernisation Austrian intellectuals were plagued by pessimistic thoughts at the turn of the 19th century; the society was trapped into numerous contradictions, overcoming political crises but failing to find a definitive answer. It was well aware of the cul-de-sac of its political activity and sought solace in creativity. At times, many intellectuals and young politicians were surrounded by an air of melancholy, feeling discomfort and loss. The rise of individualism, with its advantages and disadvantages, including isolation and a sense of estrangement, furthered nihilism and pessimism.¹ This sense was no stranger to the Slovene society, which was marked by other dimensions of pessimism as well. As argued by Peter Vodopivec, in the final years before World War I, Slovenes experienced a very lively social and cultural development; however, the Slovene national leaders were imbued with worries associated with the Slovenes' emigration,² as well as problems linked with the lack of equality with other nations and the advancing Germanisation.³ At the same time, Slovene intellectuals were plagued by a general anxiety caused by the ongoing situation, the society's smallness and reticence.⁴ Many among them engaged in romantic contemplation on love and death or about being trapped between the reality and ideals, which evoked *Weltschmerz* and self-destructiveness. Slovene intellectuals addressed this in their literary texts, where suicide represents an extreme expression of the crisis of feeling. For instance, the protagonists of Ivan Hribar's⁵ poems or prose committed suicide in several texts. His poem *Jaka Življenjasit* (Jake Weary-of-Life) addresses the subject of suicide and depicts the life of a protagonist who wanted to take his own life on as many as four occasions.⁶ Zofka Kveder⁷ addressed the subject of

1 Jacques Le Rider, *Dunajska moderna in krize identitete* (Ljubljana: Studia Humanitatis, 2017), 42–45.

2 Peter Vodopivec, *Od Pohlinove slovnice do samostojne države* (Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2006), 127.

3 Vasilij Melik, *Slovinci 1848–1918. Razprave in članki* (Maribor: Litera, 2002), 648.

4 Izidor Cankar, "Gospodin Franjo," *Dom in svet* 27, No. 3-4 (1914): 126, 127.

5 Ivan Hribar (1851–1941), Slovene politician, diplomat and journalist. Between 1896 and 1910, he was the mayor of Ljubljana and greatly contributed to its rebuilding and modernisation after the 1895 earthquake.

6 Luka Koprivnik, *Ivan Hribar med politikom in književnikom: magistrsko delo* (Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta, 2022).

7 Zofka Kveder (1878–1926), was a writer, playwright, translator and journalist who wrote in Slovene and later in life also in Croatian. She is considered one of the first Slovene women writers and feminists.

suicide in a few literary works, including her first monograph, a collection of novelettes *Misterij žene* (The Mystery of a Woman) and her novel *Njeno življenje* (Her Life). A few Slovene intellectuals attempted to or, in fact, committed suicide. If this was the case, nineteenth-century periodicals did not fail to remember to bring this up, referring to it often as voluntary death, particularly in the interwar period this act was depicted in surprisingly great detail.⁸ In my article, I focus, first and foremost, on intellectuals of both genders, also due to the abundance of sources; consequently, I address primarily the perception of suicide in the middle-class society, which is complemented with few sources from the working-class milieu as well.

By surveying autobiographical and biographical sources, I seek to provide answers to the question of how the society of the period understood and contextualised suicide. In doing so, the article does not deal with a faithful reconstruction of actual experiences because every reminiscence is subject to self-deception or involuntary memory; by contrast, light is shed mainly on the narratology and the contextualisation of narratological universals.⁹ The representation of suicide in autobiographies is complemented with an overview of a few other archival sources, letters, and newspaper articles that reveal the protagonists' motives, the milieu, and the responses of the official discourses to suicide, as well as the emotional regimes of individuals who interpreted these events. Additionally, I analyse non-fictional autobiographies where the narrators' identity is clearly identifiable and there is no distance between the writing and the experiencing self.¹⁰ Usually written linearly and following a chronologically continual narrative from the birth to the later stages of life, these coherent "one's own life stories" provide an insight into an individual's perception of life in the social, economic, legal and other dimensions, which is the focal point of our interest,¹¹ i.e. how was the suicide discourse impacted by one's gender, social class and political convictions, as well as how the narrative was expressed in the socio-historical sense.

National Martyrs

Initially penned mostly by the Slovene bourgeoisie, in Slovene ethnic territory autobiography appeared in the second half of the 19th century and was subject to certain rules. In the interwar period, the authors adhered to the tradition of autobiographical writing that followed the guideline that the author's life journey must be at

8 Fran Göstl, "Bežkova bolezen in smrt," *Popotnik* 41, No. 12 (1920): 263, 264. Mrvoš, "Dr. Ivan Oražen," *Sokolski glasnik* 3, No. 5/6 (1921): 166. See also: Ivan Smiljanič, "Konkurzi, samomor, žalosten je pogled na trgovsko polje. Gospodarski polom kot vzrok za samomor na Slovenskem pod Avstro-Ogrsko in prvo Jugoslavijo," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 63, No. 1 (2023): 50, 54.

9 Alenka Koron, "Avtobiografija in naratologija: sodobne pripovednoteoretske kategorije v raziskavi avtobiografskih pripovedi," *Jezik in slovnica* 53, No. 3–4 (2008): 11, 12.

10 Alenka Koron, "Roman kot avtobiografija," in Miran Hladnik and Gregor Kocijan (eds.), *Slovenski roman* (Ljubljana: Center za slovenščino kot drugi/tuji jezik pri Oddelku za slovenistiko Filozofske fakultete, 2003), 192.

11 Urška Perenič. "Dnevnik kot literarnozgodovinski vir: Tagebuch 1844 Louise Crobath," *Slavistična revija* 67, No. 3 (2019): 429.

the forefront; it must be set in the context of a linear depiction of the development of the Slovene nation into a modern cultural and political society. The authors thus acted in the arena of the formation of a nation and presented themselves as the main players in the dramaturgical trajectory of the historic events.¹² Individuals' life journeys were assessed from the point of view of building a national political community. A similar narrative is seen in many other articles of the period, in which lives of prominent national fathers were evaluated on the occasion of important anniversaries or in obituaries. With nationality becoming a key value, everything was assessed through the same lens, i.e. a consistent story of nation building.¹³ However, in the period at hand suicide was not acceptable, particularly from the point of view of the Catholic Church and its moral coordinates. Moreover, the Church condemned suicide, which begs the question of how to thematise a suicide committed by somebody who belonged to the pantheon of political magnates of the period. So the question of how is the life of such political players to be justified and presented in Slovene national discourse was asked, especially for individuals who devoted their lives to the national community and then decided to end their "suffering" by committing suicide, which was intolerable from the religious standpoint, in a society where everyone conformed to the same religious and dogmatic views of the Church?¹⁴

A few cases shall be identified that are indicative of the then discourse that revolved around suicide; to begin with, we can turn our attention to the fringes of the Slovene space, to the Gorizian area, where Karel Lavrič (1818–1876) lived and worked. He was a prominent Gorizian politician who attempted suicide due to his unfulfilled romantic longing.¹⁵ Eventually, he took his own life; he committed suicide by inflicting gunshots, presumably due to his strained living conditions. He was a lawyer but did not have enough clients and suffered from a shortage of clients and poor health (melancholy).¹⁶ As early as in 1870s periodicals did not refrain from mentioning the end of his life journey. Voluntary death was mentioned in the obituaries; however, no judgements were passed regarding the mode of his passing. His death was presented as a syntagm of national martyrdom that he had experienced on account of the Italians. He was believed to have sacrificed himself for the Slovene nation or, to quote the periodical *Edinost*, "he died but he gave his spirit to the nation and the nation shall protect it as the most precious pearl!"¹⁷ More Catholic-oriented Carniolan periodicals mentioned his departure from the Catholic Church and his mental disease.¹⁸

12 Igor Grdina, "Avtobiografija pri Slovencih v drugi polovici 19. stoletja," *Slavistična revija* 40, No. 4 (1992): 342, 359.

13 Božidar Jezernik, *Nacionalizacija preteklosti* (Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani, 2013), 22, 23.

14 Jurij Perovšek, "Idejnopolitični in socialnogospodarski pogledi meščanskega tabora od devetdesetih let 19. stoletja do druge svetovne vojne na Slovenskem," in Jurij Perovšek and Mojca Šorn (eds.), *Narod-politika-država. Idejnopolitični značaj strank na Slovenskem od konca 19. do začetka 21. stoletja* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2020), 20.

15 Branko Marušič, *Doktor Karel Lavrič (1818–1876) in njegova doba* (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU, 2016), 29.

16 Marušič, *Doktor Karel Lavrič*, 151.

17 Adopted from: Marušič, *Doktor Karel Lavrič*, 151.

18 Adopted from: *Ibidem*, 148.

Martyrs for political ideals included not only fighters for the Slovene nation, but – later on, with the development of political differentiation – also fervent advocates of different ideas and political programmes. Here we can include the death of Ivan Štefe (1875–1919), a journalist who worked in the editorial board of the daily *Slovenec*. Štefe was an eager supporter of the SLS (Slovene People’s Party). In 1917, when the SLS split, he sided with Ivan Šušteršič and edited his periodical *Resnica*. Following the discontinuation of this periodical, he became unemployed, which led him to despair and voluntary death.¹⁹ His obituary in *Slovenec* called out his contemporaries for having drawn him into the net of illusion, which he appeared to have recognised at the end of his life. He mistake was believed to have stemmed from honesty and loyalty.²⁰ “His speech was a long confession, filled with burning remorse and accusations directed at those who had led him to his ruin.”²¹ Similarly, the unstable situation after World War I contributed to the suicide of Viktor Bežek (1860–1919). Bežek, an educator, “wore himself out due to his tireless activities and his relocation from Italian-occupied Gorizia.” He was believed to have been dealt the final blow by the injustice, when he was denied the position of a school inspector in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which had been promised to him. He felt “as if someone had hit him with a stick on his head” and “he, being an ambitious person, an enemy of idleness, was thrown mercilessly into inactivity [...]”.²² He fell victim to melancholy, a mental disease that reoccurred and could not be beaten even by physicians at Studenec. In the special issue of *Popotnik*, which was dedicated to Bežek, the psychiatrist and physician Fran Göstl wrote a piece, reflecting on Bežek’s life and suicide. He argued that “having been a highly educated man, Bežek saw no shame” in discussing his own mental disease and acknowledged that “unfortunately, this belief still prevails among the people and intellectuals.”²³ He had intended to commit suicide for quite a long time but was prevented from doing it by members of staff of one of Ljubljana’s hospitals; meanwhile, staff of another institution were not as diligent in monitoring him, which enabled him to proceed with his plan.²⁴

Political martyrs were present in other political camps as well, France Železnikar (1843–1903), a Social Democrat, was undoubtedly one of them. He was one of the most prominent leaders of the Ljubljana-based Delavsko izobraževalno društvo (Workers’ Educational Society); he stood trial as an anarchist and was sentenced to imprisonment in Klagenfurt in 1884 and returned from prison in 1892. Despite his sentence he continued with his activities in the Social-Democratic camp, which brought him new problems. Having been a garment-maker who tailored formal outfits, he did not have clients among the middle class because of his reputation, which led him to despair that ended in suicide. A fellow member of the Social Democratic Party argued that Železnikar’s life had been ruined by the injustice caused by the capitalist

19 Štefe, Ivan (1875–1919) – Slovenska biografija, slovenska-biografija.si, accessed on 8 July 2023.

20 IC, “Ivan Štefe,” *Slovenec*, February 8, 1919, 1.

21 Ibid.

22 A. Mikuš, “Nekaj spominov na prijatelja Bežka,” *Popotnik* 41, No. 12 (1920): 212.

23 Göstl, “Bežkova bolezen in smrt,” 263.

24 Ibid., 264.

society.²⁵ His burial was a workers' party event, the Internationale was sung and the police did not disperse the funeral attendees. Marcel Žorga, a labour activist, interpreted Železnikar's death through self-criticism of the party that had failed to notice the suffering among its ranks due to the disintegration of the community.²⁶

According to a few sources, Anton Tomšič (1842–1871), a member of the Liberal Party and editor of *Slovenski narod*, decided to take his own life as well, which points to the difficult position of those working in the media at the time. *Slovenski narod* was faced with severe financial difficulties in its initial period, it was operating at a loss and the financial responsibility was shouldered also by its editors. However, Vošnjak argues that this is not the only reason behind Tomšič's suicide because in the 1870s *Slovenski narod* was already firmly established; the other reason is said to have been love,²⁷ as well as the conservative Etbin Costa's joining as an editor.²⁸ Additionally, Tomšič is said to have suffered from incurable tuberculosis and sexual problems.²⁹ At the time of his death the rumours about Tomšič's suicide were denied and a démenti was published in *Slovenski narod*.³⁰ At the same time, Karel Lavrič's case is indicative of the fact that in the 1870s suicide was no longer considered to be a taboo.

Nevertheless, in the interwar period the press still avoided stating suicide as the cause of death in the case of a few central figures of the Slovene society. Doctor Ivan Oražen (1869–1921) was reported to have died due to an overdose of sleeping pills on the anniversary of his wife's death; according to some sources, he had a predisposition to suicide as he attempted to commit suicide already in his youth due to poverty.³¹ He never got over the death of his wife and was said to have suffered from "heart neurosis".³² Eulogists at his funeral highlighted another aspect of his suffering more than the grief for his wife. "Life had wounded him deeply [...] His strenuous effort for the national freedom and social justice was a constant in his life. Following the dissolution of the monarchy, he was exhausted from fighting against the regime, from hiding from its guards, from police following and prosecuting him."³³ Due to his faith in Yugoslavdom "he suffered his martyrdom and bore heroically his expulsion during the Great War."³⁴ At the time of his death the entire city of Ljubljana assumed that it was a suicide; however, his personal physician ordered to enter heart failure as the cause of death, so that he could be buried within the cemetery walls.³⁵ The periodicals of the period acted in the same way, stating stroke as the official cause of death.³⁶ His

25 Marcel Žorga, *Most* (Ljubljana: Slovenske železnice, 2015), 52.

26 Ibid., 53.

27 Josip Vošnjak, *Spomini* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1982), 230.

28 Damir Globočnik, "Prvi uredniki Slovenskega naroda," *Teorija in praksa* 55, No. 4 (2018): 825.

29 Jaroslav Dolar, "Anton Tomšič v Mariboru," *Kronika slovenskih mest* 3, No. 1 (1936): 38.

30 "Tomšičev pogreb," *Slovenski narod*, June 1, 1861, 3.

31 Josip Kopač, "O preteklih dneh," *Pod lipo* 2, No. 2 (1925): 30.

32 Mrvoš, "Dr. Ivan Oražen," 166.

33 Zvonka Zupanič Slavec, *Dr. Ivan Oražen; Oražnov dijaški dom*, <https://www.oražen.net/dr-ivan-oražen/>, accessed on 31 January 2024

34 "Govor brata Vladimira Ravnihara," *Sokolski glasnik* 3, No. 5/6 (1921): 184–86.

35 "Dr. Ivan Oražen."

36 Mrvoš, "Dr. Ivan Oražen," 166.

social status dictated such behaviour, which was quite different than in the case of a tailor by the name of Nučič, whose son remembered how he and his mother arrived late at his father's funeral because they had been given the wrong time. In the meantime, his father was buried in the field behind the mortuary along with other suicides.³⁷ By contrast, Ivan Oražen's funeral was one of the most noteworthy funerals Ljubljana has ever witnessed.

Probably the most famous martyr for the Slovene cause in the Slovene historiography was the liberal politician Ivan Hribar (1851–1941), who committed suicide at the age of ninety when the fascist troops occupied Ljubljana. He left a suicide note at home and with France Prešeren's poem *The Baptism on the Savica* in the pocket he got in deep in the river of Ljubljanica. His suicide was considered a true martyrdom and later also other national symbols were added as for example the idea that he drowned wrapped in a Yugoslav flag,³⁸

In the eyes of the contemporary Slovene society the only justified reason for being in despair over life for important political figures was thus associated with one's suffering for the nation; in turn, their suffering was linked with the national canonisation. This national canonisation was important for the introduction and advancement of the national project in the 19th century and, as argued by Marjan Dovič,³⁹ an individual's suffering or sacrifice for the community was one of the most important criteria for someone to be singled out as a "martyr". The concept of a victimhood or sacrifice was at the heart of the national movements and discourse.⁴⁰ In the national idea, which celebrates victimhood nationalism, religion and the nation formed a connection. Namely, the narration of the Roman Catholic martyr preceded nations in the Central European space and was, subsequently, taken on by the national movements. They adopted the concept of martyr in the political discourse and the notion of a martyr thus became a constituent part of the national discourse. By way of induction logic, victimhood nationalism passed from prominent figures to the entire nation. Martyrdom became a constituent part of the discourse of nation building. This was accompanied by the politicization of the collective trauma, which was an integral part of nationalism and its victimhood narration throughout Central Europe.⁴¹ Seemingly, along with the trauma narration, each nation in the Habsburg Monarchy had its own vision of the national discourse, which was at the same time used as an instrument to exert pressure on the authorities.⁴² In this context, martyrs were required in order to underline the (un) necessary victimhood or the act of sacrifice itself, where the line between martyrdom

37 Hinko Nučič, *Igralčeva kronika* (Ljubljana: Knjižnica mestnega gledališča, 1960), 46.

38 Zlata Hribar, "Košček slovenske zgodovine," in Irena Žmuc in Janja Rebolj (eds.), *"Homo sum ---": Ivan Hribar in njegova Ljubljana. Katalog ob razstavi Mestnega muzeja Ljubljana* (Ljubljana: Mestni muzej, 1997), 24. Igor Grdina, *Ivan Hribar: »jedini resnični radikal slovenski«* (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2010), 119, 120.

39 Marjan Dovič, "Model kanonizacije evropskih kulturnih svetnikov," *Primerjalna književnost* 35, No. 3 (2012): 73.

40 Carla Chargos, "Victim Among Martyrs? Czech Victimhood Nationalism during the First World War," *Central European Papers* 8, No. 1 (2020): 53.

41 Chargos, "Victim Among," 50; Adam B. Lerner, "The uses and abuses of victimhood nationalism in international politics," *European Journal of International Relations* 26, No. 1 (2020): 62–87.

42 *Ibid.*, 50.

as a religious symbol or victimhood of political struggle was sometimes blurred. At the same time and as already known, nationalism obtained an aura of secular religion in the 19th century.⁴³ Slovene periodicals featured texts similar to the following:

“Our national forces are on the rise, not on the wane; our martyrs’ blood bears fruit and we shall prove to Italians, our oppressors, may they be named Crispi or Pecci, to Germans and Hungarians that there is enough of us to stand up to these degenerates. If we perish, we perish as heroes, we do not die a disgraceful death as slaves. As long as we live we shall demand a loud and constant protection of our nationality, our language in the Church, schools, and in public offices.”⁴⁴

Personal stories of national men were part of this discourse. In the concept of national movement, each advocate of the Slovene nation was committed to idealism and to taking a difficult road, one that was riddled with problems.⁴⁵ It was this suffering that rehabilitated the person committing the shameful act of suicide. Deviations – such as was suicide in the bourgeois ethos – were forgiven in the context of the national victimhood.

Victims of Love

Prominent Slovene figures from the national movement who had committed suicide were depicted as heroes. They had fallen victim to the suffering for the emancipation of the Slovene nation; by contrast, a different discourse can be observed in the case of autobiographies of close relatives whose suicide did not arise from the struggles associated with the nation’s well-being. This is exemplified in the life story of Hinko Nučič, who addressed his father’s suicide in his autobiography. His father, a Ljubljana-based tailor, drowned in the river Ljubljanica; a sexually transmitted disease was believed to have led to a deep sense of despondency and disappointment at life. He stuck an umbrella in the riverbank of Ljubljana, with his elegant black overcoat and his hat hanging on it. His son and wife were reduced to severe poverty after his death. Hinko Nučič depicts his father’s suicide as an unavoidable course of events that could not have been prevented.⁴⁶ His father’s suicide is not the only one mentioned in his book. His cousin also took her own life after having been impregnated by a priest. She consumed poison that had been sold to her by Nučič himself, who was an apprentice in a shop. Poisoning was the most frequent mode of committing suicide by women in the Austrian monarchy.⁴⁷ This real-life event was portrayed in literary texts as well. *Slovenski narod* published a feuilleton that addresses the subject of an immoral priest who did not refrain from engaging in disreputable actions. The last installment of his story was confiscated; it is believed to have depicted the events associated with

43 Ibid., 53.

44 Melik, *Slovinci*, 546.

45 Igor Grdina, *Med kraljestvom in republiko duhov* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za civilizacijo in kulturo, 2013), 55.

46 Nučič, *Igralčeva kronika*, 46.

47 Hans Kuttelwascher, “Selbstmord und Selbstmordstatistik in Österreich,” *Statistische Monatsschrift* 17 (1912): 337.

his cousin. Nučič maintained that this story had been written by none other than Ivan Tavčar, who had depicted his cousin as the character of young Ljudmila. However, Miran Hladnik argues that sources hint at Miroslav Malovrh being the author of the short story entitled *Žrtev razmer: Zapiski kranjskega kaplana* (*A Victim of Circumstances: Writings by a Carniolan Chaplain*).⁴⁸ The reason behind the confiscation of the final chapter of the story that should have been published in *Slovenski narod* is in all likelihood not associated with suicide because suicides were mentioned in obituaries and newspaper reports. The confiscation took place on account of the link between the priest and the public ethic.

Of course, suicides committed by women are seen in autobiographies despite the Austrian statistics that indicated that men outnumber women significantly in this regard, which held good for Carniola as well.⁴⁹ Additionally, a woman's suicide was more often understood as an individual act that was associated with emotions, while male suicides were most often regarded as a barometer of the success of the nation's economy and welfare.⁵⁰ The description of the suicide committed by Vida Jeraj Hribar's mother differed significantly from that of Hinko Nučič's father. The details and the actual depiction of her suicide were omitted; however, the reasons for it were discussed. "My mother's heart was too broken at that point. She took her own life shortly thereafter."⁵¹ She mentioned that her mother, a poet Vida Jeraj (1860-1932) had died on the anniversary of her son's death and that "none of us who loved her judged her for having done this. She felt that she could not go on."⁵² Marja Boršnik contextualised the death of Vida Jeraj in a similar way and argues that she never got over the death of her son and that the "tiniest little thing" could lead to "an utterly distressing scene" that rarely transpired "without an agonising suicide attempt."⁵³ The alleged suicide of Zofka Kveder was interpreted in a very similar manner.

"She lost her physical strength, her spirit became worn out and her emotions numb. It was an incurable disease that ate away at any woman's life force: her love was wounded. [...] She was unwell. She received medical treatment for tuberculosis and nerves in Graz, at Topolšica, in Ljubljana, and at Preddvor. Her disease stemmed from deep mental turmoil that shook her womanly soul that was filled with love and selflessness. Her mental anguish and physical weakness were accompanied by financial woes. A single one of her daring aspirations persisted: her wish for resting in peace. She was writing three days before her death, she wrote to the Govekar in Ljubljana: ... Everything was too much. I would like to die. There are many good and noble people in the world, I am tired of everything and I long for peace. I feel it is close and I wish for eternal sleep."⁵⁴

48 Miran Hladnik, *Z romanom po strankarskem nasprotniku*, <https://slov.si/mh/malovrh2.html>, accessed on 1 February 2024.

49 Kuttelwascher, "Selbstmord und Selbstmordstatistik," 314.

50 Howard I. Kushner, "Women and Suicide in Historical Perspective," *Signs* 10, No. 3 (1985): 541.

51 Vida Jeraj Hribar, *Večerna sonata. Spomini z Dunaja, Pariza in Ljubljane 1902-1933* (Ljubljana: Založba Mladinska knjiga, 1992), 47.

52 *Ibid.*, 72.

53 Marja Boršnik, *Študije in fragmenti* (Maribor: Založba Obzorja, 1962), 98.

54 P.H., "Zofka Kveder-Demetrovičeva," *Ženski svet* 4, (1926), 400.

Women's suicide is thus interpreted particularly in the context of emotions and is, unlike that of men, associated with love and womanly soul; consequently, it is explained in a very essentialist way.⁵⁵ Similar explanations for women's suicides were given abroad. They were in line with gender roles, where men had jobs and women were supposed to be with their families. If there were deviations from the envisaged role, i.e. if women could not perform their social role as a mother or if their longing for love was not fulfilled, suicide occurred.⁵⁶ In this context wrote Zofka Kveder as well; the most frequently featured motive for suicide in her literary texts is unwanted pregnancy. In doing so, she criticises the role of a mother that women were expected to perform.⁵⁷ At the same time, it can be maintained that, at the time, relatives treated suicides with a considerable degree of lenience and understanding and that they had no particular reasons to keep silent on the matter.

A Few Additional Remarks on Suicide

It can be observed that suicide was not judged or linked with negative assessment; however, authors wanted to provide explanations. Additionally, the second half of the 19th century saw the Austrian space being marked by a fascination with death. Particularly the lower social strata regarded death by suicide as a way out or as an escape from pain. Apparently, a surprising number of Austrian intellectuals and their children committed suicide in the period between 1860 and 1938.⁵⁸ At the same time and much like elsewhere in Europe, this is the period of Romanticism (which was in Slovene ethnic territory extended up to 1900 with the period of romantic realism) that was characterised with the fascination with death and death had a significant impact on literature as well.⁵⁹ This movement in literature emphasised the idea of a suffering genius. Suffering was almost a constituent part of understanding of Romanticism; at the same time, it was Romanticism that once again put religion and religious doubt back into the focus of contemplation.⁶⁰ Many intellectuals wrote about suicide with empathy. Even so, the research on the phenomenon of suicide was conducted by a growing number of social scientists seeking to understand it. As early as in 1910 the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society organised a symposium on the subject. Sociologists and their findings emerged in Carniola and were followed by the most notable ideologists

55 For instance, experts interpreted suicide among men in the army as fear of punishment, weariness of life, debt, unwillingness to perform military service, insanity or mental disease, homesickness, inebriation, broken family relations, incurable disease, and wounded ambition. – Kuttelwascher, "Selbstmord und Selbstmordstatistik," 349.

56 Kushner, "Women and Suicide," 542.

57 Barbara Fužir, *Zofka Kveder kot razbijalka patriarhalnih vzorcev v literaturi s poudarkom na motivu telesnosti (v primerjavi z izbranimi avtoricami srednjeevropskega prostora na začetku 20. stoletja: diplomsko delo* (Maribor: Filozofska fakulteta, 2009), 46.

58 William M. Johnston, *Austrijski duh: intelektualna i društvena povijest 1848–1938* (Zagreb: Globus, 1993), 184.

59 Michelle Faubert and Nicole Reynolds, "Introduction: Romanticism and Suicide," *Literature Compass* 12, No. 12 (2015): 644.

60 Richard J. Evans, *The Pursuit of Power. Europe 1815–1914* (Jouve: Allen Lane, 2016), 450.

of the Roman Catholic Church, e.g. Aleš Ušeničnik. He argued in the periodical *Čas* that suicide is a consequence of the crisis of modern times. Inter alia, he mentioned alcoholism, the sexual instinct, the crisis of family, infidelity, scepticism and referred to other experts in the monarchy, e.g. T. Masaryk.⁶¹ In order to emphasise the crisis of religion, which he saw as the basic reason for the increased number of suicides in the society, Ušeničnik referred to a number of international authors that researched the social aspect of suicide. It is interesting to note that the liberal camp had similar thoughts on the subject at hand; in the interwar period the liberals argued that suicide spread in areas where the social sense disappeared, the selfishness grew and the fight for survival become increasingly more difficult.⁶² Reports about books that defended suicide and regarded it as a salvation were rarely seen on the pages of *Slovenski narod*.⁶³

Marija Kmet's autobiographical text that came into being in accordance with the narration of the crisis of religion, which prevailed in the media discourse, features a nihilistic view of the world by romanticising death. Her loneliness, her doubt in God was regarded as a consequence of her arrogance. Her pride was associated with the symptoms of liberalism, the right to divorce, and "free love." She was of the opinion that everything is nothing and, in her admiration of Dostoevsky, believed that freeing oneself through a suicide is the greatest power.⁶⁴ "They who seek the greatest freedom must have courage to kill themselves. Only they who dare to kill themselves, have recognised the secret of the deception. There is no freedom like it; this is it, there is nothing beyond that."⁶⁵ Suicide is the *leitmotif* of her book; it is a recurring theme on different pages and it is constantly in the backdrop. It gets defeated by means of a newly found optimism and, in the end, M. Kmet is redeemed by her repeated and newly found closeness to the Catholic religion.

Contemplating about suicide appears to have been quite present in the society of the period. For instance, Anica Gustinčič wrote in her memoir that she "upset her mother every night with her cry: Oh, If only I no longer woke up, if only I died tonight. My sigh for death was nothing but a wish for eroticism, for love."⁶⁶ Janez Trdina wrote about the forthcoming death and eroticism; namely, his first love drove away any doubt, contemplations about death or melancholy.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, Alojz Gradnik admitted to having had constant thoughts about suicide between 1907 and 1914 due to his poor health. His disease prevented him from engaging in any mental work and, consequently, he contemplated committing suicide up to 1914, when he had surgery in Padua.⁶⁸ Suicide was mentioned in letters of Slovene educated women as well. Ivanka Anžič Klemenčič wrote the following in the interwar period:

61 Aleš Ušeničnik, "Samomor," *Čas* 2, No. 6 (1908): 295. Andrej Veble, "Dijaštvo in socialno delo," *Čas* 4, No. 1–2 (1910): 77, also refers to him.

62 "Samomori med omladino," *Slovenski narod*, February 13, 1926, 1.

63 "Zagovor samomora in umora iz ljubezni do bližnjega," *Slovenski narod*, October 8, 1904, 5.

64 Marija Kmet, *Moja pota* (Groblje: Misijonske tiskarne, 1933), 38.

65 Ibid.

66 Anica Lokar, *Od Anice do Ane Antonovne* (Ljubljana: Založba Mladinska knjiga, 2002), 28.

67 Janez Trdina, *Zbrana dela. Tretja knjiga* (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1951), 484, 487.

68 Alojz Gradnik, *Zbrano delo. Peta knjiga* (Ljubljana: Litera, 2008), 367.

“In the evening, I found an isolated spot on the shore and saw a wild cavalcade. With a strange force, I was pulled in and invited by the waves; I had to tell myself that ending my own life would be the only smart thing to do because to me, and to others, life is useless – but I lack the courage. From this point onwards my respect for suicides will be even greater than thus far: from this you can learn that I am spiritually immoral.”⁶⁹

She was very close to the Catholic circles because worked at the editorial department of *Slovenec*. In this respect, her view was surprising and not in line the Catholic teachings. The moments of doubt and loneliness eclipsed the self-censorship in her confessions. The frequency of the motif of suicide in literature is probably indicative of the fact that intellectuals must have thought about suicide a great deal. As a motif, suicide appeared for the first time in the period of France Prešeren in the second half of the 19th century and became a fairly frequent occurrence in Slovene literature.⁷⁰ Consequently, a few authors were accused of glorifying suicide.⁷¹ All this indicates that in Carniola – not only elsewhere in Europe – self-destructive behaviour was associated with madness and that suicide was surrounded with a certain air of mystique as well. The depictions of Christian martyrs, who accepted death voluntarily in order to escape a dishonourable life or selfless ancient heroes coexisted with the depictions of unrequited lovers. At the same time, the sense of impending death is also an indicator of one’s sensibility and artistic soul, with which the majority of writing intellectuals identified.⁷²

Conclusion

Suicide was introduced into Slovene literature in the second half of the 19th century and this period saw its frequency increase, at least in Carniola. In the decade 1819–1828 a total of 81 suicides were recorded in Carniola and Carinthia; by contrast, 48 suicides were committed in Carniola in 1910 alone, 42 of which were committed by men and only 6 by women. An increase in the number of suicides began can be observed particularly between 1896 and 1900.⁷³ Naturally, the statistical data do not include all instances of suicide that occurred in Carniola because, as seen, physicians decided to hide the actual cause of death on many occasions. Nevertheless, suicide appears to have become a more frequent occurrence. Concurrently, the society’s attitude towards suicide changed, which is indicated by the intellectuals’ fascination with suicide; the characters in their literary texts chose this way of dying much more often than people in real life. Their interest in this subject should probably be understood in the context of the period that was marked by the rise of Romanticism.

69 Katja Mihurko, Primož Mlačnik and Ivana Zajc (eds.), *Ljubim lepa pisma. Dopisovanje avtoric slovenske moderne* (Nova Gorica: Založba Univerza v Novi Gorici, 2024), 197.

70 Zala Mele, *Prikaz samodestruktivnosti in samomora v izbranih delih slovenske pripovedne proze druge polovice 19. stoletja: diplomsko delo* (Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta, 2023), 13.

71 Dušan Moravec, *Pisma Frana Govekarja. Druga knjiga* (Ljubljana: Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, 1982), 27.

72 Lisa Lieberman, “Romanticism and the Culture of Suicide in Nineteenth-Century France,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33, No. 3 (1991): 611

73 Kuttelwascher, “Selbstmord und Selbstmordstatistik,” 292, 295.

Many circumstances, e.g. gender or social class, had a profound impact on the search for motif for suicide and interpretations thereof. Owing to the specificity of sources, it is difficult to address the differences between the countryside and the city. However, the available statistical data indicate that between 1896–1900 out of a total of 148 suicides that were recorded in Carniola 39 suicides or 27 percent were committed in Ljubljana, the capital of Carniola. At the time, Ljubljana's inhabitants represented 9 percent of Carniola's population.⁷⁴ In terms of the Austrian statistical data, suicide prevailed in the IV group of professions and occupations; this group consisted of the military, freelance professionals, pensioners, persons of private means and people without an occupation or profession. Consequently, the same could be concluded in the case of Carniola as well. In doing so, suicide would be associated particularly with the middle class and intellectual work.

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Irena Selišnik

DOJEMANJE SAMOMORA V SLOVENSKI DRUŽBI OD 19. STOLETJA DO 2. SVETOVNE VOJNE

POVZETEK

Članek se ukvarja z vprašanjem, kako je slovenska družba dojemala samomor v drugi polovici 19. in prvi polovici 20. stoletja. Avtorica na podlagi avtobiografskih virov raziskuje interpretacije in dojemanje sodobnikov tistega časa ter vprašanje, kako je bila kontekstualizacija odvisna od spola in družbenega razreda ter politične pripadnosti. Po avstrijskih statističnih podatkih se je na Kranjskem na prelomu 19. in 20. stoletja pogostost samomora povečala, pogosteje pa se je začel pojavljati tudi kot motiv v literarnih delih. Vse to kaže, da se je odnos družbe do samomora spremenil. Hkrati je intelektualce precej prevzel, saj so se liki v njihovih literarnih delih presenetljivo pogosto odločali za tako smrt, veliko bolj kot ljudje v resničnem življenju. Njihovo zanimanje za to temo je verjetno treba razumeti v kontekstu obdobja, ki ga je zaznamoval vzpon romantike. Občutek bližajoče se smrti je hkrati tudi kazalnik občutljivosti in umetniške duše, s katerima se je poistovetila večina intelektualcev, ki so se ukvarjali s pisanjem. Po drugi strani pa je bil samomor razumljen tudi kot posledica razkroja družbenih vrednot in modernizacije, kar so večinoma obravnavali katoliški avtorji. Na narativ o interpretaciji samomora sta pomembno vplivali kranjska politična kultura, za katero je bilo oblikovanje narodne skupnosti najpomembnejši cilj poteka zgodovine, in spolna vloga, ki takrat ni vključevala presoje pripisanih spolnih vlog.

Meta Remec*

Silent Witnesses: Micro-Historical Perspectives on Suicide in the Court Records of the First Half of the 20th Century**

IZVLEČEK

NEME PRIČE: MIKROZGODOVINSKI POGLED NA SAMOMOR V SODNIH SPISIH PRVE POLOVICE 20. STOLETJA

Članek na podlagi arhivskega gradiva Okrožnega sodišča v Celju, Okrožnega sodišča v Mariboru in posameznih primerov z Okrajnega sodišča v Trbovljah, ki so imela pristojnost na območjih z najvišjo stopnjo samomorilnosti v okviru Dravske banovine, obravnava primere samomora v prvi polovici 20. stoletja na mikroravni. Na podlagi posameznih primerov iz sodne prakse in časopisnih poročil osvetljuje socialne, ekonomske in regionalne razmere na obravnavanih območjih v prvi polovici 20. stoletja pa tudi položaj žensk v družbi ter razširjenost družinskega in spolnega nasilja. V obdobju, ko so naraščajoče stopnje samomorilnosti pripisovali posledicam prve svetovne vojne, vplivu ekonomske krize in alkoholizma, analizira prisotnost in postopno prevlado psihološkega in psihiatričnega diskurza v zvezi z določanjem vzrokov za posamezne primere samomorov. S pomočjo analize posameznih primerov prikaže odnos do samomora na podeželju ter sramoto in stigo, ki so jo družinski člani še vedno čutili ob samomoru sorodnika. Analizira tudi primere, ko samomorilca bodisi ni bilo mogoče identificirati ali ko truplo pokojnika ni bilo najdeno, ter primere samomorov zaradi strahu in/ali sramote zaradi zagrešenih kaznivih dejanj. Poleg tega posebno pozornost namenja fenomenu samomora žensk in znotraj tega ob primerih umora-samomora ter

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vlogi žensk pri tem analizira takratni medijski diskurz in prikaže potek preiskav takrat, ko ni bilo jasno, ali je smrt nastopila kot posledica samomora ali umora.

Ključne besede: samomor, socialna zgodovina, mikrozgodovina, sodni spisi, samomor žensk, umor-samomor, Dravska banovina

ABSTRACT

Based on the archival materials from the Celje and Maribor District Courts (Kreisgerichte) and the specific cases from the Trbovlje County Court (Bezirksgericht), referring to the areas with the highest suicide rates in the Drava Banate, this article examines suicide in the first half of the 20th century. Based on individual cases from judicial practice, as well as newspaper reports, the article sheds light on the social, economic and regional conditions in the considered areas in the first half of the 20th century, as well as the position of women in society and the prevalence of family and sexual violence. At the time when the increasing suicide rates were attributed to the aftermath of World War I, the effects of the economic crisis, and alcoholism, the article analyses the presence and gradual dominance of psychological and psychiatric discourse in determining the causes of individual suicides. By analysing the individual cases, the author presents the attitude towards suicide in rural areas – the shame and stigma still felt by the family members when a relative of theirs commits suicide. The author analyses cases where either the suicide could not be identified or when the corps of the deceased was not found, as well as cases of suicide due to fear and/or shame due to crimes committed. Furthermore, the article focuses on the phenomenon of female suicide and, in this context, on the examples of murder-suicide and the role of women in them, analyses the contemporaneous media discourse, and describes the course of the investigations in the cases where it was not clear whether the death had resulted from suicide or murder.

Keywords: suicide, social history, microhistory, court files, female suicide, murder-suicide, Drava Banate

Introduction

Suicide is an intriguing subject to study: at the crossroads of the secular and the sacral, the public and the private, the physical and the mental, it has been the subject of various interpretations since Durkheim and Masaryk. It is considered a problem to be solved, a death that can and must be prevented by all means, a stigma and a travesty for

the bereaved family, a sign of societal dysfunction; it has been tabooed, romanticised, and mystified.¹

Since the beginnings of the historiographical study of the phenomenon of suicide, research has often focused on the pivotal periods and historical turning points in the search for evidence of whether social upheavals can be considered causes and generators of increased suicide rates. One such period on which much of recent research has focused is the period following World War I. Robert Penn Warren, who focused on the impact of the Civil War on the American South, referred to the American Civil War as the “Great Alibi”, to which all social problems in the South could be attributed.² Did World War I also become a justification and excuse for poor economic conditions and everything that went wrong in society because it had “aroused the men’s lowest instincts”³ – including the rising levels of violence and suicide rates in society?⁴ It has been frequently stated that a “suicide epidemic”⁵ followed World War I and that this heralded the beginning of a “century of suicide”.⁶ However, with unreliable statistics, the question arises as to whether suicide truly became more frequent or whether such incidents were simply reported more often.⁷ It seems that people *choose* to be alarmed and that, more than suicide itself, what has actually changed was how the phenomenon was perceived and how it was thought and felt about.⁸

The present article, based on the archival materials from the Celje⁹ and Maribor District Courts (*Kreisgerichte*) and the individual cases from the Trbovlje County Court (*Bezirksgericht*), focuses on suicides from the first half of the 20th century on

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- 1 John Weaver and David Wright, ‘Introduction,’ in John Weaver and David Wright (eds.), *Histories of Suicide. International Perspectives on Self-Destruction in the Modern World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 3.
 - 2 David Silkenat, *Moments of Despair. Suicide, Divorce, & Debt in Civil War era North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 3–5. Robert Penn Warren, *Legacy of the Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press – Bison Books, 1998).
 - 3 SI PAM 1736, Eman Pertl (1907–1987), 34/2, Sodno-izvedenski spomini (dr. Ivan Jurečko). Mateja Ratej, *Vojna po vojni. Štajerske družine v dvajsetih letih 20. stoletja* (Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2016), 8.
 - 4 Meta Remec, ‘Vojak naj bo!’: nastanek in razkroj podobe popolnega vojaka v času prve svetovne vojne, *Zgodovina za vse* 27, No. 2 (2020): 5–24.
 - 5 Hannes Leidinger, ‘Die Selbstmordepidemie. Zur Zunahme von Suizidfällen in der Zwischenkriegszeit,’ Wolfgang Kos (ed.), *Kampf um die Stadt* (Wien: Wien Museum und Czernin Verlags, 2010), 215–19.
 - 6 Grigorij Čhartšvili, *Pisatelj in samomor* (Ljubljana: Literarno-umetniško društvo Literatura, 2017), 30–34.
 - 7 Silkenat, *Moments of Despair*, 29.
 - 8 Barbara Gates, *Victorian Suicide. Mad Crimes and Sad Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), xiii.
 - 9 The District Court in Celje was founded in 1849. At first it was called the *Regional Court of Celje* before it was renamed into “District court” in 1854. It had Jurisdiction on the area of the entire Lower Styria and included 22 judicial districts: Maribor, Gornja Radgona, Ljutomer, Lenart, Ormož, Ptuj, Lovrenc, Marenberg (Radlje ob Dravi), Celje, Vrnsko, Gornji Grad, Šmarje pri Jelšah, Podčetrtek, Slovenj Gradec, Šoštanj, Slovenska Bistrica, Konjice, Rogatec, Brežice, Sevnica, Kozje, Laško. Towards the end of the century, the territorial jurisdiction of the District Court in Celje decreased. The judicial districts of Gornja Radgona, Ljutomer, Marenberg (Radlje ob Drava), Maribor, Ormož, Ptuj, Slovenska Bistrica and Sv. Lenart v Slovenskih goricah has been assigned under the jurisdiction of the Maribor District Court in 1897. In 1919, after the annexation of Prekmurje to the newly formed Kingdom SHS, Maribor District court extended its jurisdiction to the judicial districts of Murska Sobota and Lendava. In the period between the two wars, the jurisdiction of the District Court in Celje included the judicial districts of Brežice, Celje, Gornji Grad, Konjice, Kozje, Laško, Radeče, Rogatec, Sevnica, Slovenj Gradec, Šmarje pri Jelšah, Šoštanj and Vrnsko. – Jelka Melik, *Kazensko sodstvo na Slovenskem: 1919–1929: s posebnim ozirom na arhivsko gradivo Deželnega sodišča v Ljubljani* (Ljubljana: Arhiv republike Slovenije, 1994), 26. Jelka Melik, *V imenu njegovega veličanstva kralja!: kazensko sodstvo v jugoslovanski Sloveniji v letih 1930–1941* (Ljubljana: Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 2000), 37–44.

the micro level. It also presents an analysis of the media discourse regarding the cases that found their way into the sensationalist daily newspapers. The region under consideration encompasses the entire former Lower Styria with its population of 600,000, representing half of the entire Drava Banate.¹⁰ Most of these people lived in the countryside and fell into the category of agricultural labourers, meaning that they owned between 0 and 5 ha of land at most and had to work as day labourers on larger farms to survive. In particular, the rural areas of Haloze and Slovenske gorice hills, which fell under the jurisdiction of the Maribor District Court, were characterised by extreme poverty, alcoholism, domestic and sexual violence, and disastrous social and hygienic conditions. The areas in question were simultaneously the regions with the highest suicide rates, differing from those in the rest of the Drava Banate.¹¹

Table 1: Suicide rate in the Drava Banate 1937–1939

Drava Banate	Population	Number of suicides	Number of suicides/ 100 000 inhabitants
1931-1935	1 144 298	225	19,4
	(in 1931)		
1937	1 191 000	291	24,4
1938	1 198 000	273	22,9
1939	1 198 000	310	26

Source: *Statistički godišnjak* 9, 1938–1939, No. 1, 111 and 124; *Statistički godišnjak* 10, 1940, No. 1, 95.

10 Drava Banate (*Dravska banovina* in Slovenian) was one of the nine administrative units of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia that existed between 1929 and 1941. It included the territories of the parts of former Austrian lands (Carniola, Lower Styria, Carinthia) and the Prekmurje region (a part of Hungary before 1918) that were incorporated into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes after 1918. Founded after the imposition of the “Six January Dictatorship” by King Alexander of Yugoslavia, was centred in Ljubljana and headed by a “Ban”, who was appointed by the King with the help of the Ban Council. – Cf. Jože Žontar, ‘Splošna okrajna uprava v Sloveniji v letih 1918 do 1941,’ *Arhivi* 26, No. 1 (2003): 133–38.

11 Mateja Ratej, *Rožengrunt. Žensko nasilje v štajerskih kočarskih družinah med svetovnima vojnama* (Ljubljana: Beletrina, 2023), 5, 6, 17, 35. Meta Remec, ‘Epidemija samomorov?: odmevi na naraščanje stopnje samomorilnosti na Slovenskem v 19. in 20. stoletju,’ *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 63, No. 1 (2023): 20, 21.

Table 2: Districts and cities in the Drava Banate with the highest suicide rate

District	Suicides 1931–1935	Average number of suicides/year	Population	Number of suicides / 100 000 inhabitants
Celje (surroundings)	65	13	60 383	21,5
Maribor- right shore	91	18,2	56 457	27,6
Maribor- left shore	68	13,6	56 022	24,3
Ptuj (surroundings)	102	20,4	71 443	28,5
Mesta				
Celje-city	22	4,5	7 568	59,5
Ljubljana- city	106	21,2	61 202	34,6
Maribor-city	80	16	33 700	47,5
Ptuj- city	10	2	4 221	47,4

Source: Pirc and Pirc, *Življenjska bilanca Slovenije v letih 1921–1935*, 62.

The examined archival materials cover both urban and rural suicides. As with the socio-historical research on other phenomena, the study of suicide in rural areas has proved to be a considerable methodological challenge.¹² In addition to the scarcity of sources, in smaller and more concentrated settings, a clear tendency to conceal suicide cases alongside entrenched habits, beliefs, and poor literacy can be observed. Most interviewees had difficulty expressing themselves, and only a few articulated their pain and the reasons for the fateful step, thus leaving the interpretation of the causes to others. Often, only those who wanted to punish someone by committing suicide usually wrote a few sentences or authorised others to pronounce the causes on their behalf.¹³ Court files often testify to the chaotic nature of the situation: in the countryside, those called upon to adjudicate on the causes of death and examine the deceased were often complete laymen who had nevertheless already adopted the psychiatric discourse that had clearly penetrated the rural areas as well. Indeed, even laymen would use terms such as *mental confusion* to determine the causes of suicide besides social reasons.¹⁴ Apart from the loss of social status, trauma, unhappy love,

12 Dragica Čeč, 'Starostniki na podeželju v 19. stoletju,' *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 64, No. 1 (2024): 142–60. Remec, 'Epidemija samomorov?,' 14. Bojan Pirc and Ivo Pirc, *Življenjska bilanca Slovenije* (Ljubljana: Higijenski zavod, 1937), 35, 62. Marjan Drnovšek, 'Vzroki za izseljevanje Slovencev v zadnjih dveh stoletjih,' *Drevesa* 8, No. 3 (2002): 10–13. Masaryk, *Suicide*, 30. Ferenc Moksony, 'Victims of Change or Victims of Backwardness? Suicide in Rural Hungary,' in György Lengyel in Zsolt Rostoványi (eds.), *The Small Transformation. Society, Economy and Politics in Hungary and the New European Architecture* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2001), 366–76.

13 Bailey, 'This Rash act,' 31. Čhartišvili, *Pisatelj in samomor*, 11.

14 Silkenat, *Moments of Despair*, 35. Weaver and Wright, Introduction, 10, 11. Čhartišvili, *Pisatelj in samomor*, 235. Rab Houston, 'The Medicalization of Suicide: Medicine and the Law in Scotland and England, circa 1750–1850,' in Weaver and Wright (eds.), *Histories of Suicide*, 92. Merrick, 'Death and Life in the Archives,' 80.

poverty, economic crisis, and shame,¹⁵ it was thought that men without any financial problems who enjoyed good relationships with their wives could only decide to commit suicide because they had gone mad.¹⁶ In any case, as Jeffrey Merrick vividly wrote, these were not people who killed themselves because they had read *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Montesquieu, Nietzsche, or later Camus.¹⁷

Based on micro-studies of individual suicide cases, the present article sheds light on the social conditions in the areas under consideration in the first half of the 20th century; outlines the gender, social, regional, national, and other relations; analyses the discourse of the media and experts in the fields of psychiatry and psychology; examines the procedures of criminological and forensic research; and considers the fear that prevailed in a society that perceived suicide as a symptom of decadence and social decay.

The micro-study of individual cases is not a matter of digging into the misfortunes of others, who have mostly been anonymised in the present study. Microhistorical studies based on archival materials reveal the patterns of thinking and attitudes towards suicide among ordinary people, the barely literate, who have left little trace of their lives. Forensic materials provide a glimpse into their lives, though most often through the eyes of witnesses and relatives, thus probably revealing more about the mindset of the survivors than about the deceased themselves. As in one court case records in which there are pages upon pages testifying to the pain of a mother who lost her only daughter who had received the “strictest moral upbringing” and seemed happy as she prepared for her marriage, and who was supposed to give her mother grandchildren and help out in her old age – but not a word exists from the girl herself.¹⁸

Women’s suicide, which was highlighted in the newspapers of the time as a particular problem and a phenomenon “adding to the tragedy of difficult situations,” represents a separate study subject.¹⁹ In the relevant materials, women appear as suicide victims who chose suicide mainly because of tarnished honour and unhappy love, while the court materials also portray them as the passive parts of couples in murder-suicide cases. Extremely jealous and controlling men, who resorted to violence even more frequently after World War I, would often end the violent relationships by murdering their partners (and occasionally their children) and then committing suicide themselves as a way of punishing the women for rejecting them or seeking to end the relationships.²⁰ The analysis establishes the role of women in the family and society and highlights the attitudes towards women who broke the moral rules, the prevalence of alcoholism, the impact of the economic crisis, etc.²¹

15 More about the alleged reasons for suicide: Silkenat, *Moments of Despair*, 36–37. Ivan Smiljanić, ‘Konkurzi, samomor, žalosten je pogled na trgovsko polje: gospodarski polom kot vzrok za samomor na Slovenskem pod Avstro-Ogrsko in prvo Jugoslavijo,’ *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 63, No. 1 (2023): 42–66. Hecht, *Stay*, 18.

16 ‘Samomor,’ *Novice*, 53, March 29, 1895, No. 13, 129.

17 Jeffrey Merrick, ‘Death and Life in the Archives: Patterns of and Attitudes to Suicide in Eighteenth-Century,’ in Weaver and Wright (eds.), *Histories of Suicide*, 78.

18 SI PAM 645, 3, 4400, Kzp X 516/37.

19 ‘Črna statistika Maribora,’ *Mariborski večernik Jutra* 2, January 7, 1928, No. 5, 1.

20 Cf. Ratej, *Vojna po vojni*. Remec, “Vojak naj bo!,” 5–24.

21 Ratej, *Rožengrunt*, 7.

Each of the analysed cases allows us to draw multifaceted conclusions. This is particularly true of the court cases relating to the attempts at covering up homicides and murders by suicide, where it is possible to observe when the relevant investigations began, who carried them out, and how the immediate community reacted to the interference of “strangers” from the outside world. The research also takes a look at the customs and rituals surrounding death: who undresses, washes, and dresses the corpses; how much time must elapse between death and burial; how the increasing use of post-mortem examinations of corpses was perceived; and so on. In an environment where witness statements were crucial in deciding whether a death resulted from suicide, accident, or violence, and where it was considered that “a man’s word of honour was quite enough”, inquests were often perceived as an interference and unwarranted intrusion into the people’s way of life.²²

The present analysis thus shows that, despite the efforts of the authorities to standardise and modernise the investigations and introduce new forensic science methods in these areas, the locals tended to remain set in their ways. However, not only the people but also the authorities were problematic in the field. While criminal investigators searched for fingerprints, analysed the murder weapons, examined and photographed the corpses, deaths, and crime scenes, made sketches of the locations where the bodies had been discovered, and addressed the issue of evidence preservation, the local police authorities nevertheless still acted arbitrarily. In the name of compassion for the families of the deceased, they would often deviate from the prescribed protocols, allow for quick burials without examining the bodies, and make judgements based on their own conscience and “common sense”.²³

Suicides Without Bodies and Nameless Suicide Victims

A cursory comparison with the daily newspapers of the time shows that the courts by no means dealt with all the suicide cases that occurred. They were mainly preoccupied with the incidents that, in one way or another, deviated from the average or cast doubt on the actual course of events. For the purposes of my research, I have extracted, from the materials of the abovementioned courts, 53 cases of suicides, attempted suicides, and alleged suicides that occurred during the period when the contemporaneous daily newspapers, particularly in Maribor and its surroundings, reported on the increasing “number of desperate people and their flight from life” and the alleged 80 % increase in the number of suicides. This was not considered surprising: “For years, the World War has beset humanity with the most terrible force – the low, terribly low cost of human life.” After the war, many of those who find everyday life unbearable and are unable to cope with their new situation have been forgotten.²⁴

22 E. g. SI PAM 645, 3, 5117.

23 Merrick, ‘Death and Life in the Archives,’ 75.

24 SI PAM 645, 3, 2616, Kzp IX 1228/31. Cf. Merrick, ‘Death and Life in the Archives,’ 76.

An analysis of the media discourse in the middle of the war shows that the newspapers published articles that added to the sense of anxiety by regularly and precisely reporting about all the suicides and fatal accidents and emphasising the catastrophic nature of the situation.²⁵ According to these statistics, suicide was considered the darkest chapter – the press reported that “the beginning of the suicide season was tragic,” that three suicides happened on the same day, and focused on all the other victims of “despair, or rather, of being tired of a hard life full of torment, struggles, and worries.”²⁶ The related suicides of family members and suicides “in clusters” were particularly concerning. “The suicide column has become a permanent feature, and its variety did not spoil the breakfast and lunch of the satisfied readers.” The authors of the articles hoped to stimulate a deep reflection. It was believed that the suicides were caused by a “terrible combination of misery, hunger, disease, and woe” that underlay the bleak figures.²⁷ The newspapers described every aspect of how the suicides were carried out, the state of the corpses, and even included the goriest details of suicides on railway tracks. Mothers, fathers, wives, and children who were spared the sight of mutilated corpses by the public authorities were then able to read about every single particularity in the newspapers.²⁸ The realisation that writing publicly about the particular cases in fact stimulated new ones like an avalanche was not taken into account: sensationalism and macabre curiosity prevailed.²⁹ The readers were genuinely interested and intrigued about the act itself, the state of the corpses as well as the motives leading to the incidents, but the concerned writers warned that the reasons given in the newspapers were mostly hollow and empty. They often included unhappy love, fear of punishment, mental confusion, anger, quarrelling, etc., when in fact, with very few exceptions, all suicides stemmed from unsustainable material conditions.³⁰

From the archival materials examined, it is evident that the courts dealt with suicides in which the identity of the deceased could not be established and when it was necessary to determine when all attempts at identification had been exhausted, who should bear the burial costs, who should take possession of the body, and what to do with the personal effects of the deceased. The other side of this coin were the alleged suicide victims whose bodies were never found, most often because they had sought their death in the river Drava or while temporarily working abroad. For the family members, this meant years of uncertainty and anxiety because, in the absence of closure, the wound remained open, and mourning never really ended. Economic difficulties were equally painful: since there was no formal inheritance, they were not

25 ‘Velika tragedija onemogočenega življenja,’ *Mariborski večernik Jutra* 3, January 14, 1929, No. 11, 2. Smiljanič, ‘Konkurzi, samomor, žalosten je pogled na trgovsko polje,’ 58.

26 ‘Črna statistika Maribora,’ *Mariborski večernik Jutra* 2, January 7, 1928, No. 5, 1. ‘Številke, ki mnogo govore...,’ *Mariborski večernik Jutra* 1, August 20, 1927, No. 90, 3.

27 ‘Mariborski in dnevni drobiž. Statistika samomorov in smrtnih nesreč v Mariboru,’ *Mariborski večernik Jutra* 3, November 6, 1929, No. 253, 2.

28 ‘Velika tragedija onemogočenega življenja,’ *Mariborski večernik Jutra* 3, January 14, 1929, No. 11, 2.

29 Silkenat, *Moments of Despair*, 12. SI PAM 645, 3, 4029, Kzp XI 1185/35.

30 Ian Marsh, *Suicide. Foucault, History and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 45, 46. Jennifer Michael Hecht, *Stay. A History of Suicide and the Arguments Against It* (New Haven and London: Yale University press, 2013), 150.

free to dispose of their possessions or get on with their lives. In times of mass emigration and work abroad, many family fathers and husbands would suddenly disappear and not send a word from America, sometimes because they were dead or because they committed suicide. It took years before a person could be declared dead, and the families had to demonstrate that they had made repeated and unsuccessful attempts to contact and locate the missing persons through various acquaintances and prove, either through witnesses or written evidence, that the missing persons had repeatedly expressed feelings of despair and suicidal ideation before their disappearance. The procedure was not particularly kind to the surviving family members: without a corpse, death was not pronounced – even, for example, in the case of Franc W., for whom several accidental witnesses stated that he had deliberately jumped into the river Drava on 5 March 1933, that he had not tried to save himself, and that he had been dragged towards the middle of the stream. He was only declared dead as late as 1940.³¹ Few people left farewell letters, like Johann W., who wrote to his wife:

“Dear wife! Forgive my offence this time. I shall see you on the Day of Judgement, for I shall soon be among the dead. Find someone else for yourself and do not have much to do with your brother. I owe 10 to Novak in Maribor. You have no other debts after me. Do not grieve, and do not think of me anymore. May God’s eternal bless you in everything you do, and I wish you happiness and good health. Do not let anyone read this letter. With a last kiss goodbye.”³²

Without a corpse, even that was not enough.³³ Ivan M., who was considered missing since 1907, i.e. for 12 years, also wrote a letter to his wife in which he stated that he would seek death in the river Sava because of his unemployment and general despair.³⁴ The wife of the missing Albert K., who had been missing since 1927, did not initiate the procedure for declaring him dead or divorcing him until 1940 when she received reliable information that he had jumped under a train years earlier, but the court nevertheless appointed a matrimonial defender who would ultimately decide whether or not the wife was entitled to a divorce. The wife testified that her husband was unemployed, desperate, borrowing money, and mortgaging the joint assets. The authorities were not particularly involved in these cases: the wife obtained information from where the husband had last been seen on her own. Even when she finally presented the court with evidence – a photograph of the body of a suicide victim who had jumped in front of a train years before, kept in the archives of the morgue in Podsused near Zagreb – this did not automatically mean the end of the proceedings. The case was only closed when the missing man’s mother confirmed the identity of the deceased.³⁵ However, most people were unable to obtain such hard evidence. A decade after the disappearance of Mihael R., who had worked as a miner in America for 13 years and

31 ‘Velika tragedija onemogočenega življenja,’ *Mariborski večernik Jutra* 3, January 14, 1929, No. 11, 2.

32 SI PAM 645, 6, 109, T 7/16.

33 SI PAM 645, 6, 2500, Og 47/39.

34 SI PAM 645, 6, 109, T 7/16.

35 SI PAM 645, 6, 267, T 113/19.

then returned home injured, desperate, and without any savings and livelihood, a relative initiated the proceedings. His testimony that Mihael R. had repeatedly mentioned that he was going to take his own life because he could no longer work due to his disability was finally enough for the cause of death to be listed as suicide.³⁶ Mihael F., who had been missing since 1920, was not declared dead until 1937, which certainly made it impossible for his wife to make a new life for herself. Living in constant uncertainty also meant that the family lived as if the missing man could return at any time.³⁷

The procedure for declaring a person dead was occasionally also initiated by the children of the deceased. Barbara H. was missing for 28 years: two months after giving birth to an illegitimate daughter, she disappeared after her parents had forbidden her to marry the child's father. Since her grandparents were already deceased and she could not count on her father's help, Barbara's daughter initiated the procedure to inherit her mother's share of the property and collect enough assets to marry. The daughter was convinced that her mother committed "suicide out of despair caused by her parents."³⁸

"He Punished Himself"

According to the files, many of the suicide victims chose death to avoid the shame of their actions. It is possible to analyse which actions were condemned to such a degree that it was no longer possible for the person who committed them to live with the weight of their guilt once they were revealed. For the 19-year-old hospital attendant Aloysia M., it was the "drastic violation of hospital rules," which the sources do not disclose in detail, that led to her dismissal and removal from the hospital;³⁹ for the accounts clerk Zdravko T., it was the fact that he had been caught misappropriating and misusing municipal funds;⁴⁰ and for the 54-year-old Elizabeta M., it was the fact that she and her daughter had been sentenced to 48 hours in prison for an offence which the sources do not disclose directly.⁴¹ In most of these cases, the experience of shame was personal, and it seems that people punished themselves much more harshly than they would ever be by those around them. Only in the case of the retired police superintendent Franc T., suspected of "desecrating school children," was the suspect's suicide described as an understandable choice, although it cannot be said that he was pre-judged and stigmatised. The newspapers that followed the case stressed on every occasion that the truth of the girls' statements had not yet been proven, that "he had not infected any child (with a venereal disease, [AN]) because he was not sick at all," and he "had not corrupted any child either." It was also repeated time and again that

³⁶ SI PAM 645, 6, 2509, Og 59/39.

³⁷ SI PAM 645, 6, 2349, Og 44/35.

³⁸ SI PAM 645, 6, 2384, Og 21/36.

³⁹ SI PAM 645, 6, 1540.

⁴⁰ SI PAM 635, 1, 1, 10416, 1594.

⁴¹ SI ZAC 98, 23, 2, 1338. Suicides because of guilt for fraud: 'Samomor zaradi defravdacije,' *Novice* 56, November 11, 1898, No. 45, 448. 'Župan-goljuf,' *Novice* 53, March 29, 1895, No. 13, 129.

the alleged perpetrator had been wounded in the head in the course of his duties, which had left him with permanent injuries, and that he could, therefore, definitely not be held responsible for his actions.⁴² The procedure, which forced the underage girls into a direct confrontation with the accused, was aimed both at addressing the man's actions to determine whether the schoolgirls might not also bear their share of the blame and determine the validity of the mitigating circumstances that could to some extent explain and justify his conduct. The family members who had endured the indignity of the investigation procedure, together with the accused, pointed out his suicidal tendencies and even his repeated suicide attempts. According to his daughter's explicit statement, she wished that the authorities would take action and admit him to an institution where he could have been supervised since, despite their best efforts, they had not been able to keep him under constant surveillance. The family pleaded with the local authorities to save him from himself by forcing him into a hospital or, at the very least, a prison where he would be supervised and could not commit suicide. They clearly failed. Franc T. one day disappeared: his body was found only a week later and was labelled a victim of insinuated accusation.⁴³

Contrary to these beliefs, suicides also occurred in institutions that could exercise complete control over individuals and the court also dealt with several problematic deaths of detainees and prisoners, whose deaths were problematic for various reasons. These people had been "entrusted" to the care of the state, which supposedly had the right and duty to exercise complete control over them. It was therefore crucial to establish where supervision had failed – whether some guard had been negligent in his work, and how, for example, a prisoner had gotten hold of the belt he had finally hanged himself with or how a prisoner could acquire the sharp object that he had cut himself with.⁴⁴ In a society where no one had the right to take their life, this applied even more strictly to prisoners: these deaths were a kind of escape, and by the prisoners' voluntary deaths, their victims were deprived of the satisfaction of knowing that they were being fairly punished. Rudolf M., who had been convicted of seven murders, committed suicide while awaiting trial, expecting to be sentenced to death by hanging. He wanted to avoid a public execution, as he did not want others to watch him dying and take pleasure in it. Therefore, he accepted the prospect of death but did not want it to become a public event. By choosing suicide, he took the satisfaction from his victims, and an investigation was launched into whether the guards could really not have prevented his action and whether it was possible to tighten the prison supervision, especially when prisoners in similar circumstances were involved.⁴⁵

Suicide was also common among prisoners who were not sentenced to death. Such was the case of Franc P., who was sentenced to twelve years in prison for felony

42 SI PAM 645, 3, 395, Vr VI 2116/20.

43 'Mariborski in dnevni drobiž. Izginil je,' *Mariborski večernik Jutra* 3, June 19, 1929, No. 137, 2. 'Samomor bivšega policijskega nadzornika,' *Jutro* 10, June 28, 1929, No. 149, 5. 'Prostovoljno v smrt,' *Mariborski večernik Jutra* 3, June 27, 1929, No. 144, 2.

44 SI PAM 645, 3, 1811, Vr IX 505/29.

45 SI PAM 645, 4, 1963, Preds 290/16/31; SI ZAC 609, 1, 27, 339.

robbery, during which he hit a victim three times with a “dung pick,” injuring his skull and fracturing several of his bones. Although he withdrew his initial confession that he had intended to murder the victim, he received several additional punishments, such as fasting, hard labour, and solitary confinement. His sad existence came to an end two years into his sentence: he left behind nothing but a hat, an old suit, trousers, an apron, and an empty wallet. The expenses for his funeral were covered by public funds, and no one attended his funeral.⁴⁶

In their statements, the guards would often describe the state of the prisoners in the days before their deaths. For example, the previously always nervous, restless, and sleepless prisoner, Josip H., had suddenly calmed down as if he had resigned himself to his fate. His decision to commit suicide was attributed more to his broken family relationships than to the length of his sentence and the prison conditions: the families often forgot about the prisoners, abandoned them, and did not assure them they could return to their families, even after the end of their sentence. Allegedly, many chose death because their marriages fell apart while they served their sentences.⁴⁷ During interrogations, guards were often invited to give their opinions on the causes of the suicides, and they used medical terminology for which they were definitely not competent. Without hesitation, the guards would state that a prisoner had committed suicide because of “mental confusion,” and those present did not question the accuracy of such unprofessional judgments.⁴⁸ The prison authorities expected a great deal from the guards, who were supposed to observe the prisoners very closely, note any changes in their behaviour or manner of expression, and talk to the inmates regularly. Prison doctors, however, considered certain prisoners to be more inclined to commit suicide than others. For example, the prisoner Johann L. was observed to have suicidal tendencies, which were said to stem from a skull deformity and alcoholism. Under suspicious circumstances, the guards were therefore entitled to physically restrain him, put him in a straitjacket, and then wait for the doctor who administered bromide, which finally calmed him down.⁴⁹ Suicidal tendencies and documented suicide attempts were grounds for refusing probation.⁵⁰

Female Suicide

Since the beginning of the suicide statistics, it was clear that, compared to men, fewer women resorted to suicide.⁵¹ Although the supposedly mentally and physically weaker women were considered more labile and prone to mental aberrations, they nevertheless proved to be more resistant to suicide than men. How was this possible?

46 SI PAM 645, 4, 1963, Preds 290/16/31.

47 SI PAM 682, 2, 5859.

48 SI PAM 645, 4, 1964, Preds 151/16/32.

49 SI ZAC 609, 1, 26, 365.

50 SI PAM 645, 4, 1973.

51 SI PAM 645, 4, 1973, 16/18.

According to the sources, it was female ignobility rather than nobility that saved them from suicide: they lacked the necessary courage to commit such an act, and, furthermore, they were not exposed to such stress and were less likely to be dealing with financial problems as they were confined to their homes and families.⁵²

However, suicide rates also started to increase among women. This fact, seen as a symptom of troubled times, stirred a lot of attention.⁵³ For the purpose of the present analysis, I focused on thirteen cases of suicides or attempted suicides by women, which demonstrate certain specificities compared to male suicides that clearly stemmed from the position of women in society. The conclusion that any death was a suicide was often reached quickly, without an in-depth investigation, even though many female suicides were linked to violence against women and could have also been interpreted in other ways. The tolerance towards violence and indifference to it was also evident in the conduct of the public authorities. When one woman attempted suicide by lying down on the railway tracks after having suffered violence, her attempted suicide was attributed to a nervous breakdown already by the railway station workers and gendarmes present. The woman refused to give any statement about who attacked her and when, and the law enforcement authorities refrained from searching for the unknown perpetrators, as it was obvious that the attack had not been life-threatening and that no one had forced her to attempt suicide.⁵⁴

In the files, women were characterised as unstable, unreliable, superficial beings lacking any depth. Therefore, it was not always possible to deduce what went on in their heads. The explanations that satisfied the investigators are astonishing from today's point of view and show a distinctly condescending attitude towards women who apparently could have committed suicide simply because they burned and ruined lunch and then their husbands reprimanded and/or beat them up for it.⁵⁵ One such example of the typically condescending discourse about the nature of women and their inferiority compared to men can be seen in the testimony of probably the most educated and eminent actor among the archival materials analysed: Mirko Črnič, Maribor Hospital's chief physician, who found himself in court for allegedly publicly defaming and slandering the good name of the high-school classical languages professor Karel Kožuh. In a public letter, the chief physician Črnič accused the professor of brutality, vindictiveness, and ill-treatment of students, including his son who, out of despair at the news that he would be held back a year, apparently attempted suicide that his family luckily prevented. Črnič wrote the following about the cruel professor who did not know how to deal with sensitive adolescents:

52 Remec, 'Epidemija samomorov?', 15.

53 Silkenat, *Moments of Despair*, 31. Gates, *Victorian Suicide*, 125. Matteo Perissinotto, 'Perché le donne si uccidono? Analisi dei suicidi femminili a Trieste nel primo dopoguerra (1918–1922)', *DEP - Deportate, esuli, profughe* 19, No. 50/1 (2023): 1–26.

54 Gates, *Victorian Suicide*, 126. Howard Kushner I, 'Suicide, Gender, and the Fear of Modernity', in Weaver and Wright (eds.), *Histories of Suicide*, 27–29. Kevin Siena, 'Suicide as an Illness Strategy in the Long Eighteenth Century', in Weaver and Wright (eds.), *Histories of Suicide*, 53.

55 SI ZAC 1220/1/705.

“You are no educator. You have failed in your profession and would have killed my son with your actions towards him, as he had no choice but to attempt suicide after you had brought him to the brink of ruin. He would have died had we not saved him at the last moment at home. You do not know the mentality of adolescents, who have the same mentality as women of a certain age, and therefore, you should treat such a boy extremely carefully and proceed like a husband should treat his wife when she reaches a critical age. You have shown that you do not understand the mentality of boys during puberty, and you are killing them.”⁵⁶

Unlike men who weighed and pondered the situation, women and teenagers made their decisions on the spur of the moment, recklessly and because of minor problems such as a rejection of an application for admission to their preferred school or a trivial dispute with friends or family members. Durkheim and Masaryk were convinced that less developed individuals, among whom they counted “savage peoples” as well as teenagers and women, were mostly incapable of a sufficiently complex reflection on their own existence for their suicides to count as a consequence of a serious and rational reflection. According to them, in the above quotation, the physician, with his highest authority, formulated a general statement on women as immature beings in need of special understanding and protection. Just like labile adolescents who were “too young and immature to be able to grasp the mysteries of human life with any degree of correctness and direction,” women were also considered incapable of controlling their bodily and hormonal impulses.⁵⁷ In the case of Pavla V., found to have died of morphine poisoning, the investigators initially considered both possibilities: that she had been poisoned by her husband because she was “cold towards him” or that she had committed suicide. As her husband “looked desperate and cried a lot during the interrogation,” the investigators and the physician did not think it was very likely that he had poisoned her. His explanation was that Pavla was ill and that she suffered constant unbearable and severe pains during her menstrual periods, which made her declare that she was going to take her own life before her next period. Menstruation was thus supposedly a time of diminished capacity, and it was not expected that it was even possible to find a tangible and rational reason for the suicide.⁵⁸

Who is to blame?

Suicides by women often involve the attempts to blame someone for the incident. An overwhelming need to find someone to blame and punish is present: someone who could have prevented the act but did not; someone who knew about the despair but

56 SI PAM 645, 30, 4601, Kzp X742/38.

57 SI PAM 645, 3, 4628, Kzp X 953/38.

58 Ibidem. ‘Tri mlada življenja je ubila ljubezen,’ *Glas naroda*, October 18, 1935, No. 244, 4. Émile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (London, New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005), 177. Tomáš G. Masaryk, *Suicide and the Meaning of Civilization* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 20, 110, 116–21.

did nothing; or someone who even actively contributed to the outcome.⁵⁹ According to Article 169 of the Criminal Code of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, “deceiving and aiding and abetting suicide was a punishable offence,” but it was extremely difficult to prove. The relatives of the deceased often blamed the person who had saddened, abandoned, or insulted the deceased and tried to denounce, for example, an unfaithful fiancé who left his fiancée shortly before the wedding, after she had already prepared her wedding gown and linen and had even bought gold earrings to wear on the day. The accusations were often followed by disappointment, as such behaviour, though considered immoral, was not a crime under the Criminal Code, so the prosecutor’s office dismissed such complaints. Such a “corrupt” person would only be proven guilty if they physically forced or assisted their partners to commit suicide or if they, with clear and proven acts, “solicited” suicide by presenting to them the dangerous situation or difficult circumstances in which they had found themselves in, e.g. that they were in a frenzy, committed a severe crime, had a terminal illness, etc. Additionally, this was only applicable if such statements were false or at least unsubstantiated. The maximum penalty for the offence was ten years in prison, though the penalty for influencing a minor or a person of impaired judgment could be more severe.⁶⁰ This is not an insignificant fact regarding the cases analysed. All the investigations in which the investigators tried to identify the “perpetrators” or persons who had allegedly “caused” someone else’s suicide took place in connection with suicides committed by women. The latter was in accordance with the belief that men decided to end their lives after careful consideration, while women could be induced to commit suicide, especially if someone took advantage of a particularly fragile condition such as pregnancy, the post-natal period, or the menopause period. Most but not all of the “instigators” of suicides among women were men, but not always as it can be observed in the case of death of Frančiška M.⁶¹ Although there were some doubts as to whether it might not have been a homicide, the death of Frančiška M. led to a detailed investigation of the scene of the death, including sketches of the place where the body was found and a thorough questioning of the witnesses who testified that the deceased had been followed by two men shortly before her death. Suspicion was aroused in particular by “a man of large stature, aged 40–45 years, with a long moustache, an elongated dark face, wearing a black worn hat, a black cloth overcoat, brown trousers made from rough home-made canvas, black boots, with a blue apron” who “spoke in the Prlekija dialect.”⁶² However, it turned out that the latter had merely stolen the victim’s wristwatch from the hanging corpse when, in fact, the woman had been driven to her death by her wicked sister-in-law, who had humiliated and ill-treated her. At the time of her death, a neighbour testified:

59 SI PAM 645, 3. 397, Vr VIII 2162/20.

60 Merrick, ‘Death and Life in the Archives,’ 73, 74. SI PAM 645, 30, 4601, Kzp X 742/38.

61 Metod Dolenc, *Tolmač h kazenskemu zakoniku Kraljevine Jugoslavije* (Ljubljana: Tiskovna zadruga, 1929), 283, 284.

62 Prlekija is a region between the Drava and Mura rivers in northeastern Slovenia. It comprises the eastern part of the Slovenske gorice hills, stretching from the border with Austria to the border with Croatia. It is part of the traditional province of Lower Styria.

“I think that Francka M. [abbreviated by the author] told me everything about why she was going to end her life. She had been complaining to me for an entire year that her sister-in-law was so nasty to her that she could not stand it. As her neighbour, I have also seen and heard the sister-in-law treating Francka badly and always telling her how boring and ugly her fiancé was. Francka was supposed to get her dowry through her mother, but her money was kept at the courthouse, and her sister-in-law did not let her husband – Francka’s brother – sign the documents that would allow Francka to withdraw her money. She also forbade her from speaking to her sister Anica, and the two sisters were not allowed to see each other again. Francka came to me to complain and cry, quite desperate, and I comforted her. Then she told me that in the case of her death, I should tell everyone everything about the reasons for her despair. She took care of her father, she always looked after him. However, her sister-in-law mistreated her and kept putting her down. She could get away with anything and did not let her brother give her a dowry. Francka had to eat leftovers. Indeed, she came by many times because she was hungry. She would keep saying: ‘My sister-in-law is so nasty. She won’t let me eat; she won’t let my brother sign for my money’. Francka kept quiet about all this because she did not dare say anything. Whenever she said anything, her sister-in-law became enraged, threatening violence and cursing her to hell – I have heard and seen it myself. Francka told me that if she killed herself, she would not leave any letters about the family situation so that her sister-in-law would not curse her even after her death. That is why this unfortunate girl asked me to inform the court in secret what miserable life she had and that she never had enough to eat. I plead with you as an old woman who has never done anything wrong. I have always been honest and will continue to be so, even to my next-door neighbour, M. There must be a way to punish such a woman and prevent others from falling victim to such wicked sisters-in-law as the unfortunate Francka M. She visited us every day, crying about her sister-in-law being at her worst whenever Francka’s brother was not home. She told me all this – that she and her father were treated as less than human – and it pains me. She would always complain about things like that. I would always comfort her and tell her to go to one of her sisters, but she said she did not dare go anywhere as, in that case, her sister-in-law would accuse her of slander. I tell you this: as a neighbour, I am afraid that this woman will eat us alive and she will cast a spell on me so that I will have no luck with cattle if she finds out that I talked to you, which is a great wickedness. I have known her for a year, I know what she is like, she came to threaten us before. It would break my heart if my children were ever as helpless as the M. girls, who no longer have their mother.”⁶³

The girl who appears in this testimony seems truly worthy of sympathy, but such was the fate of many country girls at that time: she was uneducated, economically completely dependent on family members, and unable to make use of the money she had inherited without the consent of a male relative. Her calculating sister-in-law prevented the dowry from being paid because she wanted Francka’s money to “stay home.” If Francka did not get married, it would also mean that the farm could count on another free worker and, above all, on someone to care for Francka’s elderly and infirm father, whom the daughter-in-law did not want to deal with. However, since

63 SI PAM 645, 3, 2967, Kzp X 333/32.

the girl – who had hoped to leave home soon and had already prepared everything for the wedding, even bought the wedding rings – was finally forced to call off the wedding, she declared that she was “going to show them.” In the investigator’s opinion, this meant that she was going to “disgrace them by committing suicide.”⁶⁴ Thus, it was evident that she had gone to her death knowingly and voluntarily and that the sister-in-law could not be held directly responsible for the girl’s death.⁶⁵ This case counts as a typical case of reverse aggression: Francka supposedly chose suicide to shame and punish those who had abused her and made her life difficult. Suicide was interpreted as a punishment for those who were left behind, not only because of the shame but also because of the condemnation expressed by their immediate surroundings. Public opinion did not need any evidentiary processes to determine who was guilty and who was to blame.⁶⁶

“Fallen women”

Female suicides have often been portrayed as the result of deviations from moral norms. Such was the case of the drowning of Marija F., who found herself in a love triangle between her husband, Jakob F., and her lover, Janez Ž., who was ultimately suspected of being responsible for her suicide. Witness statements reveal an extremely complicated family situation. The husband knew about the affair, which had been going on for almost nine years, and he and his son had beaten up Janez Ž. (and, according to the witnesses, probably also the deceased woman) several times because of it, but the husband nevertheless claimed that he and his wife had gotten on quite well at home. The husband testified that the deceased wife had repeatedly told him that Janez Ž. would be to blame for her death if she died. He wanted to bring an action under Article 169 to formally hold the lover responsible for Marija’s suicide. He claimed that Marija had become pregnant by her lover, for which he first provided her with money to “abort the foetus” (which she had already done once, four years before her death) and then threatened to report her to the authorities. As the deceased woman was buried without any investigation almost immediately after her body was found in the nearby pond, these allegations could not be verified. She was pushed to her death by the fear of the future, a bad conscience due to an illegal abortion, fear of the authorities, domestic violence, and rape, as her husband had alleged? Ultimately, it was not established whether Marija had actually been murdered, as the bruises on her body suggested. The public prosecutor concluded it was a suicide for reasons that were not understood, stressing that the gendarmes had done a very sloppy job and that such mistakes should not be repeated. However, no specific sanctions had been

64 Cf. the complaint of the mother of the deceased Ana S. who tried to file a report against the deceased’s fiancé Rudolf K., who was said to have induced Ana to commit suicide or that he could at least have prevented it, but he didn’t. The authorities already decided from the report that prosecution is not possible. – SI PAM 645, 3, 4400, Kzp X 516/37.

65 SI PAM 645, 3, 2967, Kzp X 333/32.

66 Hecht, *Stay*, 187.

imposed on them for this. After all, this was a morally fallen woman whose husband did not particularly object to the procedure, and since she was dead, there was no point in determining whether she might have been raped and beaten or whether she had indeed undergone an illegal abortion.⁶⁷

However, not all court proceedings were prevented by the victim's death. The proceedings against the teacher Jožef U., who was charged with "offences against public morals," continued even though his alleged victim, Mina M., had committed suicide. Jožef U. was accused of sexually abusing Mina M. on several occasions until she finally became pregnant. He did not want to take on the responsibility of fatherhood nor break off his engagement to Elsa P., who was much better suited for his coveted ascent up the social ladder than the illegitimate Mina, who had no dowry, family, or property. Jožef tried to persuade the local doctor to "abort the foetus." The doctor refused but was willing to prescribe Mina a harmless powder, which she thought would induce an abortion. In this way, she would remain calm and not cause any scandals shortly before the marriage of the ambitious teacher and his "posh city" fiancée. Once Mina found out she had been tricked, she drank large quantities of wine in several taverns the day before the wedding and then jumped into the river Drava, which was attributed to "the stigma of her own illegitimacy and her illegitimate pregnancy as well as the fear of illegitimate motherhood." The court did not try to determine whether and to what extent the teacher and the doctor were responsible for her suicide but whether he had actually raped her and had sufficient defensive scratches and wounds. In effect, Mina was put on a posthumous trial: the question was whether she had resisted actively enough and how she had behaved before and after the alleged rapes. The persons in whom Mina had confided – including the parish priest to whom she had told about the rape – were allowed to testify at the trial, even though their testimonies were in fact hearsay that would formally need to be excluded. The letters she had written shortly before her death were also taken into account. However, Jožef U. could not be convicted based on this evidence: there were no direct eyewitness who had actually seen the rape; her letters were written in a state of drunkenness and were therefore not completely reliable; the uneducated Mina used the word rape without knowing the true legal meaning of the word; the use of serious force was not proven; and, most importantly, if the defendant had lied to Mina, promised to marry her, and she believed it, the sexual acts could not count as rape. While the court agreed that Jožef U. deserved a "moral disqualification," "criminally, his guilt of rape could not be proved on sufficient grounds." Nevertheless, the court believed Mina because she had always had "the best reputation, particularly regarding sexual morality," was considered hard-working, honest, and modest, and did not believe Jožef's claims that she had not been a virgin at the time of the first sexual intercourse. They also believed her because she was considered to be exceedingly religious, swore to God in her letters, and because she had told everything to a priest. Nevertheless, they could not ignore the legal rules. Therefore, Mina M.'s relatives did not receive any satisfaction after her

67 SI PAM 645, 3, 5117.

death. However, it can be stated that at least her reputation was not tarnished. On the contrary, her decision to kill herself restored her reputation, as she was apparently so honourable and moral that she could not bear living with such a stain.⁶⁸

Women who did not conform to the patriarchal society were often disqualified even after death – even when they were clearly victims of violence. In the case of Julijan H., the former director of the Zagorje coal mine who shot his thirty-three years younger partner Elvira K., their baby daughter, and finally himself, the sources consistently labelled Elvira as a “concubine”. Allegedly, she had agreed to an affair with a man more than thirty years her senior whom she had not married but instead lived with him out of wedlock for pure convenience. Only the deceased, not the perpetrator, was subject to moral condemnation. Julian H., born in Czechoslovakia, who had held managerial posts in the coal mining industry during the German occupation, had fallen out of favour with the new authorities after 1945. He had been imprisoned for five weeks before being released, but a “phone call from Ljubljana” that would restore his former position had never come. The reports state that the family had fallen from prosperity and a “life of luxury” below the poverty line, that the elderly Julian H. felt humiliated by being forced to live with Elvira’s extended family, that he could not bear the wailing of his child, and that he was becoming increasingly jealous of the young Elvira by the day. Although her parents assured him he had no reason to be jealous because it was in fact himself who had cheated on her in the past, the investigators also pointed out the deceased woman’s tarnished reputation. The fact that she had gotten involved with an older man in the first place, apparently because she had initially hoped to benefit from him financially, was one of the reasons for the tragedy. The court pointed out that the procedure was flawed; that the investigators did not seize the weapon with which the crime was committed; nor did they sketch or photograph the crime scene. The investigation therefore relied entirely on the interpretation of the event as offered by Elvira’s relatives. However, everyone involved was dead, so the Judicial Commission of the Trbovlje County Court, in the presence of two members of the People’s Militia’s investigative branch, attributed the double murder and suicide to “unfortunate coincidence and family circumstances,” and the proceedings were concluded quickly. The authorities did not consider it necessary to perform an autopsy on the bodies. They made sure that the woman and child were laid to rest at home while the perpetrator was sent to the morgue of the parish cemetery in Zagorje.⁶⁹

“Bestial women”

Women trapped in the cycle of violence would often flee their violent husbands to save their lives and the lives of their children. However, they also regularly returned to

68 SI PAM 645, 3, 3815, Kzp VII 1328/34. Cf. the opposite case, where the murderer escaped punishment because his victim had a bad reputation, which was analyzed by Mateja Ratej in *Vojna po vojni*, 100–20.

69 SI ZAC 1220, 1, 07040.

the same environment despite the constant threats and brutalities to which they were subjected. They often denied the existence of violence before the authorities to hide their shame and salvage what little reputation the family had left.⁷⁰ The violence was so pervasive that often the only way out was through violence itself: most of the time, the women themselves ended decades-long patterns of abuse, as their surroundings were usually indifferent to what happened in the privacy of one's home.⁷¹ Children usually tried to get out of violent family relationships by leaving their homes, but there are also cases such as that of the 15-year-old Ervin F., who, as a result of his father's repeated violence against his mother and the constant threats that he would kill the wife and children one day, stole his father's gun and allegedly tried to shoot him and commit suicide.⁷²

In addition to women who used violence, often in self-defence, truly "bestial women"⁷³ existed who used extreme violence to achieve their ambitions or take revenge on their spouses or former lovers, thus adopting a masculine *modus operandi* – like, for example, the 23-year-old Zofija L., who was tried for the murder of her daughter and for injuring two other people. The defendant's father had squandered the estate by drinking and quarrelling. Like her siblings, Zofija had no choice but to work for other farmers from her earliest years until she finally found employment in the Sladki vrh paper factory. The court initially treated the case with utmost severity and firmness. Many circumstances spoke against Zofija: she was the mother of a four-year-old illegitimate daughter, whom she did not care for but instead gave her into foster care. She lived out of wedlock with Jožef C., with whom she had no other children, which was deemed suspicious. Moreover, she had a poor work ethic and apparently tried to profit from an injury to her hand sustained in the factory, while several witnesses testified to her strange and rebellious character. Zofija, who was obviously painfully jealous, attacked her lover, Jožef C., with a knife, inflicting serious intestinal injuries. However, he survived and was able to testify against her, causing raucous laughter and ridicule from the large audience when he described how afraid of Zofija he was and how he had fled when she had attacked her co-worker, Notburga P., whom Zofija suspected of being the reason why Jožef had called off the wedding Zofija had hoped and prepared for. The most aggravating circumstance was that she had picked up her daughter and lured her along by saying that she would buy her honey in Maribor until, allegedly, she finally threw the young girl into the river Mura or jumped into the river together with her. At this point, the trial also becomes interesting due to the role of suicide or attempted suicide in proving the mental state of the perpetrator. Much of the evidence revolved around the question of whether Zofija L. had truly intended to drown her child and herself; whether she only survived by chance because "the river deposited her on a stone"; or whether she had only intended to drown her illegitimate daughter, who represented an obstacle to the life she yearned for. While witnesses agreed that she had been sincerely sorry after the act and that the river current had been too strong

70 SI PAM 645, 15, 18

71 Ratej, *Rožengrunt*, 8.

72 SI PAM 645, 15, 18.

73 'Bestijalne ženske,' *Slovenski narod* 52, August 23, 1919, No. 196, 3.

for her to pull the young girl out even if she had changed her mind, they did not believe that Zofija had survived by a lucky chance. She must have intentionally saved herself, which cast doubt on the sincerity of her suicidal intent. Some did not even believe she had jumped into the river, as she could not swim and would have been swept away by the current. The newspapers fuelled these doubts, stating that, had she been seriously determined to die, she could have thrown herself into the waves again because no one would have prevented her. If she merely wanted to get rid of the child so that she would no longer have to worry about her, and if her suicide attempt was only an act, this would constitute a serious aggravating circumstance and a clear indication of intent, which could mean a death sentence for Zofija. Was she a desperate and poor woman or a calculating murderer, prepared to sacrifice her own child in the name of her passion for a man? In this case, the investigative process did not go according to the wishes of the judge and the prosecutor's office: once the river finally deposited the body of the little four-year-old Ernestina, the girl was buried without a medical examination at the place where the body was found. The local inhabitants did not consider it important to establish the identity of the deceased child. The authorities only found out about her through rumours and ordered the body to be exhumed. The villagers wanted to sort things out their own way without any interference. They did not think it was important to find out whether the child had died due to drowning or something else, nor did they know that it was possible and necessary to establish this.

Ultimately, the case was ruled an attempted suicide, which got Zofija a reduced sentence. However, although they had found mitigating circumstances in her family (her father's alcoholism and an aunt who had allegedly died in a psychiatric hospital), this would not have been enough for the court to recognise her diminished capacity. The medical forensic experts Dr Ivan Jurečko and Dr Ivan Zorjan, who were called to testify by the court, also testified to the psychological state of the defendant. They gave a psychiatric history of the family and described Zofija in words that meant nothing to her, her relatives, or her fellow citizens: the definition "mental and physical symptoms of a psychopathic neuropathic constitution" meant very little to people who merely distinguished between insane and not insane. The experts saw proof of her psychopathic nature in the fact that she "always kept to herself, was always quiet and strange," experienced alleged memory gaps, and was apparently obsessively jealous and unable to control her emotions. The court accepted the opinions of both experts that she had not acted after a conscious consideration and that she had committed all her acts in a state of "mental disintegration and fractured consciousness," which was evident from her suicide attempt. The fact that the court believed she wanted to die together with her child was the sole and only reason why it finally recognised her diminished capacity and held her not entirely responsible for her actions. She was only sentenced to a prison sentence of six years and three months.⁷⁴

74 SI PAM 645, 3, 4006, Kzp VI 1008/35. 'Svojo hčerko je vtopila,' *Enakopravnost* 18, December 19, 1935, No. 298, 3. 'Svojo hčerko je vtopila,' *Slovenec* 63, November 23, 1935, No. 270a, 3. 'Žrtev blazne matere,' *Slovenec* 63, September 4, 1935, No. 202a, 4.

Family and “love tragedies”

The newspapers showed a great deal of interest in “family tragedies”, where, most often, the husband would murder the wife and children before killing himself. Apart from publishing photographs of the deceased and giving many details of how the murders were carried out, the social conditions that were supposed to have pushed the perpetrator over the edge were also described to the last detail. If a once well-to-do husband, landlord, or innkeeper found himself in such a bad financial situation that he was even threatened with eviction, which would mean that the family would end up in the street, this was already an understandable reason for despair. Apart from the poor economic situation, alcohol abuse, the humiliation of being maintained by the wife, and the husband’s painful jealousy were often involved. Tragedies were inevitable and the wives had a lot to do with this: even with the best of intentions, if they worked to help the families economically, they were thus disrupting the patriarchal order and exposing the husbands’ helplessness and incompetence, thus aggravating their humiliation.⁷⁵ The theologian Josip Jeraj’s observation that “the peasant ethos cannot bear to be commanded by the wife” can, in fact, be extended to the working class in general.⁷⁶

Besides the cases where a man killed his entire family and then himself, the public was especially attracted by the murder-suicide cases which were described by the media, as well as the perpetrators themselves, as examples of “Styrian Romeos and Juliettes” who went to their deaths together in the name of unrequited love. The reality was far less romantic. Slavko F. addressed his farewell letter directly to the Maribor Police Department, stating the following:

“I am sorry to write you this farewell letter. I can tell you frankly that I have been a patriot throughout my life. I was a keen member of the Sokol Society. I loved the King and the Fatherland. Two months ago, I took over the bakery from Mr B. [abbreviated by the author] in Studenci, and from the very beginning, I was on very affectionate terms with his daughter, Anica. She loved me very much and was always there for me. But because of other people as well as himself, her father would have none of it. Today, on Sunday, Anica and I were supposed to go to a raffle. B. knew about it and didn’t let her go. Even though he used to let her go to the city at night for the festivities, he has suddenly started prohibiting everything. Therefore, we have decided to go to our death together. As we were already intimate, we could not separate in any other way. Love is stronger than the grave. All the money you will find with me is my property. I ask that you spend it only for a decent funeral. We want to be buried together because we were not allowed to live together. The staff can confirm how much Anica loved me. She was at my house from 11 o’clock one night and we were in love, as all the witnesses in B.’s house can testify, but most of all my servants. A cold grave will be our last greeting.”⁷⁷

⁷⁵ SI PAM 645, 3, 2616, Kzp IX 1228/31. ‘Velika družinska tragedija v Hočah,’ *Mariborski večerni Jutra* 5, April 24, 1931, No. 93, 1. ‘Grozna družinska tragedija v Hočah,’ *Tedenske slike* 7, April 30, 1931, No. 18, 1. See also Ratej, *Rožengrunt*, 6, 7. For more information about the link between suicide and economic crisis cf. Smiljanić, ‘Konkurzi, samomor, žalosten je pogled na trgovsko polje,’ 42–66. ‘Samomor,’ *Novice* 52, November 2, 1894, No. 44, 425. ‘Samomor,’ *Novice* 52, January 5, 1894, No. 1, 9.

⁷⁶ Josip Jeraj, *Naša vas: oris vede o vasi* (Ljubljana: Slovenska šolska matica, 1933), 72, 73. Ratej, *Rožengrunt*, 28, 29.

⁷⁷ SI PAM, 645, 3, 4256, Kzp X 1091/36.

However, it is clear from the statements and newspaper reports that the 19-year-old Ana B. disliked Slavko ever since he had acquired the gun. When he rented her father's bakery, he initially seemed the ideal groom. However, when her father inquired about him, he learned that Slavko had been violent towards his girlfriends. He had even tried to shoot a girl in Slovenske gorice, for which he had not been punished, and the father was therefore strongly opposed to any contact between the baker and his daughter Ana. They were even more afraid of him when they found out that he had procured a weapon. Ana did not take part in this suicide pact and wanted to save her own life at all costs. This was also clear from the fact that she fled from her alleged lover, first on her bicycle and then on foot. She sought help from the neighbours, but Slavko finally caught her and shot her twice before shooting himself.⁷⁸

A comparison of contemporary research on intimate partner homicide with the situation at the beginning of the 20th century reveals an entrenched pattern of behaviour and ways of dealing with these events. At the time in question, the press was more lenient towards such perpetrators than the others, describing these relationships romantically. These murders and suicides were supposedly "regrettable accidents" occurring between "young lovers", while the murdered girls were labelled as "sweethearts" who were too "close to men". The men were portrayed as victims of their own passion, as they "loved the girl desperately", "passionately and ardently". Men who went so far as to kill themselves were portrayed as tragic romantic figures, blinded by love, while men who only shot their partners but not themselves were seen as too cowardly to kill themselves in the end. Suicide was therefore the expected ending.⁷⁹

The mentality that emerges from the records is clear: the women had no right to change their minds or even think for themselves. From some of the court cases, it is clear that sometimes the women who the perpetrators proclaimed as their fiancées did not even know that they were "engaged". Often, only about a month would pass between the moment they met – the first moment of the "love at first sight", when the young man "fell desperately in love with the pretty young girl" – and the tragic conclusion. The 22-year-old Jožef Ž., who met the 19-year-old Johanna P. on St. Joseph's Day (19 March), was soon upset by all sorts of things, including the fact that the girl visited her parents and talked to other people. The "infatuated", "desperate", and "unhappy" Jožef killed his beloved Johanna with a hammer as soon as on 5 April.⁸⁰ Women were often subject to violence, threats, stalking, and even brutal physical attacks, especially

78 SI PAM 645, 3, 4256, Kzp X 1091/36. SI PAM 645, 3, 5082, Kzp XI 738/40.

79 E. g. Jasna Podreka, *Bila si tisto, kar je molčalo. Intimnopartnerski umori žensk v Sloveniji* (Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete, 2017). Also Jonathan Richards and John Weaver, 'I may as well die as go to gallows': Murder-Suicide in Queensland, 1890–1940,' in Weaver and Wright (eds.), *Histories of Suicide*, 304–27. 'Nesrečna ljubezen,' *Novice* 52, March 9, 1894, No. 10, 97.

80 'Iz Slovenije. Ustrelil je ljubljenko in sebe,' *Glas naroda* 44, August 17, 1936, No. 192, 2. 'Iz Slovenije. Umor iz ljubosumnosti,' *Glas naroda* 44, August 17, 1936, No. 192, 2. 'Ustrelil ljubljenko in sebe. Ljubavna tragedija mladega pekovskega mojstra,' *Jutro* 17, August 5, 1936, No. 179, 5. 'Ljubavna žaloigra v Rajčevi ulici s smrtjo dveh mladih zaljubljenec,' *Mariborski večernik Jutra* 10, August 4, 1936, No. 76, 3. 'Obžalovanja vredni slučaji. Mladi pek ustrelil hčerko pekovskega mojstra in še sebe,' *Slovenski gospodar* 70, August 12, 1936, No. 33, 7. 'Vesti iz Jugoslavije. Ustrelil ljubljenko in sebe,' *Prosveta* 29, August 20, 1936, No. 165, 3. 'Ustrelil deklo in sebe. Umor in samomor,' *Slovenec*, August 5, 1936, 64, No. 177, 7. 'Krvava ljubavna tragedija v Mariboru,' *Slovenski narod*, August 4, 1936, 69, No. 176, 1.

when they tried breaking off their relationships. If both partners were dead, the investigation was brief and served only to rule out the possibility that a third party had been involved. However, if the perpetrator survived and, as it turned out in some cases, the man had lost his courage when it had been time to kill himself – or, as we can read, “his hand shook when he swung the hammer, and he swung it with much less force and fewer times against himself than he did against the unmarried lover” – the authorities decided to carry out an autopsy. The latter was necessary to determine the extent of the injuries and ascertain whether the case in question was a murder or a brutal murder. If it was concluded that the man attacked “blindly, with great force and numerous and violent blows” or that he had injured or killed other people not involved in the relationship, the court saw this as an aggravating circumstance in determining the sentence, contrary to his “broken heart” and the woman’s possible infidelity, which were mitigating circumstances.⁸¹

Newspapers reported these cases with headlines such as “A love tragedy in the middle of the street,” which initially received considerable attention. However, after the outbreak of World War II, these often became little more than minor news hidden away in the back pages of the newspapers, among the news that “offal, dried meat, raw bacon, lard, grease, and tallow may be sold on meatless days” and that “a course in women’s dressmaking has started.” However, some details can be gleaned from the reports and accounts of the events: for example, when Frančiška R., wounded by three gunshots, ran down a city street asking for help, everyone just stared at her dumbly until a guard finally helped her and called an ambulance. The report also listed the reasons why the 20-year-old Oton C. had “decided to put an end to his unbearable jealous torment.” The reports show that the girl did not take the relationship, which lasted just over a month, as seriously as the “unfortunate” Oton, who very soon became so jealous that the girl became afraid of him. On the eve of the tragedy, they reportedly attended a party together. From there, Oton escorted her home. However, light-hearted as she was, the girl left the house again and returned to the party, where she danced with others. According to the newspaper discourse, Frančiška, considered a “diligent and hard worker,” could have prevented the tragedy had she been just a little more thoughtful.⁸²

The double suicide of two teenagers, Srečko K., 17, and Karel M., 16, who were both in love with the same girl, the 16-year-old Marija P., stirred up a lot of noise as well: unable to decide who would get the girl, the two boys resolved that she should not belong to anyone. As the newspapers stated, a decision was reached: “If she’s not going to be mine, she’s not going to be yours either, so none of us should live!” and therefore, the two boys shot the girl and then jumped under a train together. In this case, the newspapers highlighted a certain hereditary tendency in at least one of the two boys, as his older brother had already attempted suicide because of unhappy love.

81 ‘Maribor. Ljubavna tragedija v Rušah,’ *Slovenec*, April 6, 1941, 69, No. 80a, 7.

82 The perpetrator committed suicide only after he realized that he made a fatal mistake when, in addition to the alleged lover, he mistakenly shot another, innocent woman instead of his increasingly “cold concubine”. – SI PAM 645, 3, 1205, Vr X 361/25. SI PAM 645, 3, 5267, Kzp IX 422/21. ‘Novičar. Žrtve ljubosumnosti,’ *Novi domoljub*, April 1, 1925, No. 13, 95–96. ‘Ljubzenska drama v Framu,’ *Naša straža* 1, March 27, 1925, No. 16, 3.

The “death wish” was therefore somewhat familial, though this event also represented an example of sinister negative tendencies that were believed not to be present among country youth. However, the once diligent and God-fearing rural youth turned out to be just as “sensitive and highly susceptible to mental shocks” as their urban peers. The more lenient writers argued as follows:

“In light of this sad case, we cannot speak of the moral corruption of our children, though we can say that today’s youth is easily aroused mentally and erotically without being aware of the consequences of their limited experience with the matters of mind and heart. They are too weak and perhaps too ill-instructed to know how to restrain the emotions which are so liable to upset the maturing youth and push it into despair and ruin.”⁸³

Meanwhile, the more critical writers stated that all this was the result of an ungodly upbringing, a lack of Christian role models, as well as licentiousness and widespread moral deviations and delusions. Thus, the case can be interpreted from the viewpoint of the new emerging public discourse about sensitive adolescents. At first, this seemed reserved for the bourgeoisie that “had time” to be sensitive, while the working-class proletariat, preoccupied with the struggle for survival, grew up prematurely. However, the above discourse was now also extended to rural and working-class youth, who suddenly became delicate, sensitive, and labile as well.⁸⁴ What is interesting is also the position and role of the girl in this love triangle, which was no different from that of women in the other cases. The hardworking, responsible, and mature girl, as she was described in the newspapers, was once again relegated to being just a passive subject, a figure in the game of two boys who had barely finished school when they already assumed it was their right to make decisions for her, without paying any attention to her opinions or wishes.⁸⁵

Countryside “Quarrels and Brawling”

Much research conducted in recent decades has shown that suicide statistics for the first half of the 20th century are highly unreliable due to the clear tendency to cover up suicide cases. The number of suicides is believed to have been higher, as many of them were disguised as accidents.⁸⁶ The court materials also include opposite examples: cases where it is unclear whether the incident was a suicide or murder. The medical experts noticed that many murders were being camouflaged as suicides

83 ‘Maribor. Poročilo ‚Ljubezenska tragedija na cesti,‘ *Delavska politika* 15, July 4, 1940, No. 75, 3. ‘Žaloigra v Tomšičevem drevoredu,’ *Slovenec*, 68, July 1, 1940, No. 148, 7. ‘Strelji v izdelovalnici papirnih vreč,’ *Slovenski narod* 73, July 2, 1940, No. 148, 3.

84 ‘Tri mlada življenja ubila ljubezen,’ *Jutra* 16, October 3, 1935, No. 229, 3. ‘Tri mlada življenja je ubila ljubezen,’ *Glas naroda* 43, October 18, 1935, No. 244, 4. Cf. Ratej, *Rožengrunt*, 17, 27, 28.

85 Cf. Ratej, *Rožengrunt*, 17–21. ‘Ljubezen ubija otroke,’ *Mariborski večernik Jutra* 9, October 3, 1935, No. 244, 4. ‘Štiri žrtve ljubosumnosti,’ *Mariborski večernik Jutra* 9, October 2, 1935, No. 233, 3. ‘Obžalovanja vredni slučajji. Mladina brez Boga in krščanskih vzorov,’ *Slovenski gospodar* 69, October 9, 1935, No. 41, 6.

86 SI PAM 645, 3, 4029, Kzp XI 1185/35. ‘Tri mlada življenja je ubila ljubezen,’ *Glas naroda* 43, October 18, 1935, No. 244, 4. ‘Strašno dejanje dveh mladoletnikov,’ *Slovenec* 63, October 3, 1935, No. 227, 5.

and were determined to ensure that especially the bodies of those who had allegedly hanged themselves were always subject to forensic examination. The medical experts argued that it was possible to determine with relative certainty whether these were really suicides or “faked suicides by hanging”, as the perpetrators, ignorant of human anatomy and forensic science, were convinced that they could conceal their crime this way. Sometimes, the real perpetrators behind fake suicides were clumsy and clueless, so already a cursory inspection of the scene of death revealed that it was a murder rather than suicide.⁸⁷ However, many investigations were impossible because those present often “took care” of the deceased themselves. They did not wait for the coroner, and the village women would wash the deceased and change their clothes so that the coroner often found the deceased already “nice and neat and ready to be interred.” Such was the case of the abovementioned Marija F., who was found in a nearby pond. The people present judged it to be a suicide, and the gendarmes allowed the corpse to be taken home without a doctor present. While changing the woman’s clothes, the village women noticed unusual bruises on her back, indicating that she had been a victim of violence before her death and that she had therefore not ended up in the lake voluntarily. However, they did not want to get involved. The husband of the deceased even pointed out these bruises to the officers, but they believed that the injuries had been caused by dragging the deceased out of the water with poles and sticks. The doctor was not informed.⁸⁸

In the case of Franc H., the deceased had also been washed, dressed, and ready for burial by the time the police patrol entered the house. The police officers spoke to the relatives, who allegedly forgot to report the suicide to the authorities and only looked at the deceased from a safe distance. When they noticed suspicious blood coming from his ear, they did not ask for a medical opinion or conduct a closer examination of the corpse themselves – the body was not lifted, undressed, or turned over. The burial was allowed without a medical examiner’s opinion. Unaware that relatives were not allowed to interfere with the crime scene, the suicide victims were often moved. As in some other cases, the relatives of Franc H. stated that his body had been taken down from the rope because they tried to resuscitate him, which was an acceptable explanation for the police officers. In their report, the two police officers present stated their opinion that the deceased had committed suicide in a state of mental confusion and that he had given up on life because of a serious illness. The opinion of the two officers without any medical training was deemed valid.⁸⁹

Post-mortem examinations were to be carried out by the local doctors, but in reality, they were not always present when the bodies were examined. Physicians Ivo and Bojan Pirc, one the leader of the newly formed Hygiene Institute in Ljubljana, the other the first Slovenian (Yugoslav) and expert in medical and vital statistics, pointed out that in 56 % of the cases in the Drava Banate, the cause of death was not determined by an “expert

87 Cf. Remec, ‘Epidemija samomorov?’, 11–23.

88 SI PAM 645 3, 337, Vr VIII 1297/19.

89 SI PAM 645, 3, 5117.

doctor”. Their role was often taken over by other “qualified” individuals who were not always able to determine whether the incident was a suicide or a crime and who gave unclear causes of death, overlooking various causes and diagnoses.⁹⁰ These “competent, impeccable, and trustworthy non-experts,” who were supposed to carry out the examinations of the dead in the absence of medical experts in accordance with pre-war legislation, often prioritised the interests of the family. The coffin lid was often only briefly open, and the body was only glanced over superficially because, obviously, the deceased had brought “shame” on the family by committing suicide.⁹¹ Thus, the best thing to do was to bury the deceased as soon as possible and put an end to a painful ordeal for all the family members, who often had no idea how to behave in the event of a suicide. Some of them (e.g. the relatives of those who had committed suicide in prison or otherwise dishonoured the family) did not even take possession of the body, while others wondered whether they were entitled to public mourning at all and whether a traditional funeral with a procession was even appropriate. Although priests did not refuse to perform such burials, the relatives often buried their loved ones in other cemeteries (e.g. in Maribor) rather than in their smaller local graveyards. Other comparable studies have shown a similar phenomenon: burials were carried out in cemeteries, and the deceased received ordinary headstones like everyone else, but apparently, such burials were less solemn and without any singing – as if everyone was a bit embarrassed.⁹²

Gradually, new actors entered the world of rooted traditions and neighbourly relations: police investigators, prosecutors, and medical experts, whose authority disrupted the established order and confronted the entrenched customs and beliefs. An excellent case study of such a collision between the two worlds and ways of thinking was the death of 81-year-old Ana L. In that case, a plethora of issues emerged: in addition to the phenomenon of suicide in a close-knit village community, the issues involving the deaths of men on the World War I front lines, domestic violence, and the attitudes towards the elderly and their place in society can be observed. In addition, the alleged suicide of Ana L. must also be considered in the context of the pre-history of the case that becomes apparent from both the archival sources and newspaper reports that clearly found the circumstances entertaining. Indeed, the story of the 81-year-old grandmother who burned down her grandson’s outbuilding and was sentenced to six months in prison, five years suspended imprisonment, a fine, and compensation for the enormous damage (amounting to 21,700 dinars) was anything but common, and it transcended the borders of her homeland.⁹³ In the newspapers, we find the following description:

90 SI ZAC 1220, 1, 7034.

91 *Deželni zakonik za vojvodino Kranjsko*, 53, No. 25, December 12, 28, 1901, 103–31. Bojan Pirc and Ivo Pirc, *Življenjska bilanca Slovenije v letih 1921–1935*, 6. Peter Borisov and Anton Dolenc, ‘Razvoj sodnomedicinskega izvedenstva v Evropi in na nekdanjem Kranjskem,’ in *Zbornik za zgodovino naravoslovja in tehnike 11* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1991), 72–75. Anton Dolenc, ‘Mrliško pregledna služba na Slovenskem nekoč in danes,’ in *Mrliškopregledna služba v Republiki Sloveniji. Spominsko srečanje akademika Janeza Milčinskega* (8, 1998) (Ljubljana: Inštitut za sodno medicino, 1999), 13, 14. Cf. Remec, ‘Epidemija samomorov?’, 19. Bailey, ‘*This Rash act*’, 23.

92 SI PAM 645, 3, 3203, Kzp VII 1521/32.

93 Cf. SI ZAC 65, 1, 24/18. SI ZAC 65, 2, 14, 20. SI ZAC 1220, 1, 0740. SI PAM 645, 4, 1963, Preds 290/16/31. SI PAM 645, 3, 5114. Silkenat, *Moments of Despair*, 13. Smiljanič, ‘Konkurzi, samomor, žalosten je pogled na trgovsko polje,’ 52, 53.

"The criminal annals of our countryside do not seem to have recorded a similar case as the one that was recounted today in the small chamber of the Maribor District Court. It was a story of a quarrel between the old and the young – between the ancestors who had secured the property with toil and grit and the young generation that had received this property only to then push the old generation into a corner. While these stories are commonplace in our countryside, the conclusion of the case that is the subject of today's hearing is far from typical."⁹⁴

Ana L. was certainly not a mild-tempered, helpless old woman. She and her daughter-in-law Rozalija had apparently been fighting for dominance over an estate measuring almost ten hectares from the moment when the son and husband had disappeared at the front during World War I. Over the years, the dispute had escalated to physical confrontation, mainly because of the demands of the subsistence and alimony holder Ana L. (a certain amount of grain, milk from one of the five cows in the stables, etc.), which threatened her daughter-in-law economically.⁹⁵ The newspapers stated that the grandson and the grandmother would have found a common language, but the actual "snakes" were the daughter-in-law Rozalija and the grandson's wife Etelka, for whom Ana obviously represented an obstacle. When Ana L. was found hanged, she had apparently been dead in her room for at least two days without her daughter-in-law even noticing. The reason for the suicide given by those present was the family situation and, above all, the impending confiscation of her property, which was intended to cover at least part of the damage she had caused to her grandson with arson. The neighbours took her off the rope, while the local doctor, Dr Rituper, signed the burial permit without performing a thorough examination of the body. The story would have ended there had it not been for the intervention of the nearest neighbour, Karol B., who was willing to expose himself by making a statement to the authorities that he doubted Ana had committed suicide. Karol claimed that instead of being desperate, Ana had been rather optimistic and convinced she could save the estate, declare her son dead, and inherit some of his property. There was also the possibility of challenging the subsistence and alimony contract if Ana L. could prove that her daughter-in-law Rozalija and her grandson had not adhered to the provisions of the contract. He also drew the investigators' attention to the fact that the daughter-in-law Rozalija L. and her son-in-law Janez Ž. – the very same person whose outbuilding Ana L. had burnt down – had insured Ana's life for the sum of 10,000 dinars without her knowledge or consent. Based on Karol's statement, an investigation was launched that involved the exhumation of the body, which was perceived as an interference with the final resting place of the deceased. The delay made more detailed analyses and forensic procedures, which were state-of-the-art at the time, very difficult. The crime scene could no longer be analysed; the rope had apparently disappeared; and the witnesses could not even recall whether or not Ana had been locked in the room when she was found, what had

94 'Vesti iz Jugoslavije,' *Glasiló K. S. K. jednote* 18, February 22, 1932, No. 8, 1. '80-letna starka – požigalka,' *Slovenski gospodar* 66, January 27, 1932, No. 5, 3. '80-letna starka zažge vnuku hišo,' *Slovenec* 60, January 20, 1932, No. 15, 4.

95 Remec, 'Vojak naj bo!'; 5–24. Ratej, *Vojna po vojni*, 2016. '80-letna starka zažge vnuku hišo,' *Slovenec* 60, January 20, 1932, No. 15, 4.

been on the table, or how the furniture had been arranged. Moreover, the furniture had been sold shortly after her death, and although the village teacher had marked the places where the furniture had been placed with chalk just in case, the crime scene could not be reconstructed. The autopsy, which was also carried out by Dr Rituper, who did not raise any suspicions at the time of death, revealed that the woman had almost certainly been strangled first and hanged only after her death. The accused immediately raised doubts about the doctor's competence, while the doctor excused himself on the grounds that he had carried out the first examination "under poor lighting conditions," which meant that he had not been able to see "everything at the time that he later found out as an expert." Therefore, the court asked for an additional expert opinion from Dr Ivan Zorjan. The latter tried to defend the initial investigator Rituper in court by stating that it was sometimes only possible to distinguish between suicide and strangulation "after microscopic examination and autopsy in a forensic medical institute, not when an autopsy was carried out in a country mortuary with the most primitive means." He was also certain that the bruising on the victim's neck did not correspond to a death by hanging. As the investigators noted that the deceased had sustained blunt-force injuries to her head and bruising to her thigh, this suggested that she had been subject to violence. Dr Zorjan also testified that, given the measured room ceiling height, the 81-year-old woman could not have hanged herself. Of the original five suspects, two were eventually tried: the daughter-in-law Rozalija and grandson Mihael. Rozalija's son-in-law Janez Ž. had an alibi. He also stated that he had indeed insured Ana's life but that he was not the only one, as several individuals in the village had speculated on her death and that he had insured at least two other elderly people apart from her. Both of the accused were eventually acquitted, as the court ruled that the investigation had been interfered with too much from the outset and that the results of the autopsy after exhumation were also unreliable and questionable.⁹⁶

Many cases thus remained unsolved, just like the case of the deceased Maria K., who was found drowned at the Fala dam near Maribor. Even though the deceased had drowned, even a superficial glance revealed injuries to her head caused by a sharp object "shortly before drowning," apparently inflicted by a "third party with hostile intent." Witnesses who had seen the victim before her death reported that she had been poorly dressed and desperate and that she had threatened to throw herself into the river because her husband "despised her." However, they had not intervened because they had not believed her. The husband, Valentin K., denied ever being violent towards his wife, which was confirmed by their daughter, who described her mother as "feeble-minded" (a characterisation which was then uncritically reproduced in the newspapers). The daughter denied the possibility that the perpetrator might have been her father. Even when a careful examination of the body revealed a wound under the armpit and some bruising obviously caused by someone pressing on her with considerable force, this was not sufficient evidence to prosecute the husband. It could not be

96 SI PAM 645 3, 3203, Kzp VII 1521/32. 'Tašča in vnuk obsojena umora,' *Murska krajina* 2, September 3, 1933, No. 36, 2.

concluded that the injuries had been inflicted during the suspected murder, as they might have been caused during an earlier family altercation.⁹⁷

There are also cases of men as victims. The sudden death of Ivan S., who lived with his mother-in-law Ana K. and his underage daughter Irena S., was a matter of some confusion from the outset. The man known for “losing his temper when there was no wine in the house” and whose wife knew that “he wants to commit shameless deeds with the daughter and the old mother” died suddenly for no apparent reason. Four days prior to his death, he had been examined by a doctor, who had found Ivan to be an alcoholic but otherwise in good health. Death from natural causes was therefore unlikely. He was nevertheless buried, and only at the insistence of his father and sister-in-law was the body subsequently exhumed and sent for an autopsy. The man’s intestines were sent for analysis to the Institute of Physiology of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Ljubljana, as were some powders given to the deceased by his mother-in-law shortly before his death. The report from the Institute was that the powders had been tested “on a frog” but that they “had not produced any specific changes.” On the other hand, the analysis of the intestines showed “beyond any doubt that the deceased had died of arsenic poisoning.” Ivan’s mother-in-law and his wife most emphatically denied poisoning him, and his mother-in-law firmly maintained that he had committed suicide, which he had supposedly attempted on several other occasions. Nobody else knew anything about his suicidal tendencies. The question was therefore raised as to where and when the deceased was supposed to have obtained the arsenic. It is clear from the court case that not only the women but also the deceased and his character were all put on trial. As he was a lazy alcoholic with a known history of drug abuse (allegedly cocaine), Ivan did not receive much sympathy, and the court accepted the idea that he was more than capable of obtaining arsenic illegally because he knew the right sort of people. The mother-in-law testified that she had defended herself and her granddaughter against the risk of rape in every possible way on more than one occasion, as he had wanted to have sex with her in a sober as well as drunken state. She admitted threatening to “whack him with a stick until he had enough” but claimed that she had not really meant it. However, she firmly denied poisoning him and did not even know the substance with which he had been poisoned. In the absence of direct evidence against the women, they were eventually acquitted.⁹⁸

Conclusion

Michel Foucault argued that “by studying the past, we can better understand the problems of the present” and that only in this way can “we break with the past and separate it from the present” and break with the patterns of thought and action that have

⁹⁷ SI PAM 645, 30, 4601, Kzp X742/38. ‘Maribor. Naplavljeno truplo identificirano,’ *Slovenec* 66, July 8, 1938, No. 154, 7. ‘Iz Jugoslavije. Naplavljeno truplo,’ *Amerikanski Slovenec* 47, July 29, 1938, No. 146, 1.

⁹⁸ SI PAM 645, 3, 3632, Kzp VII 186/34.

brought us to where we are today. One of the research topics to which his thoughts apply best is suicide research: a multifaceted phenomenon with different connotations in different societies, reflecting the values, fears, and social conditions of a particular place and time. In recent years, it has become clear that this topic should be studied in an interdisciplinary manner since only a methodologically combined approach can capture all its nuances. If suicidology, sociology, and other sciences can offer insights into the dimension of the problem of suicide today, historiography can reveal how the beliefs we hold today have been formed: how we have gotten to where we are and what lies beyond the way we think and act today. Or, as Foucault put it, it is through the past that the present is diagnosed.⁹⁹

By analysing the relevant court cases, the case study focusing on the eastern part of today's Slovenian territories, which were notorious for their considerable suicide rates, shows that at the micro level, the attitude towards suicide was mostly tolerant and benevolent. It is true that suicide was seen as a disgrace and sometimes still a shame, but that there was less and less prejudice towards those who resorted to it. The practice of refusing burials was no longer present, not even by priests.¹⁰⁰ However, the society described in those court files is far from idyllic. The violence against women, domestic violence, alcoholism, extreme poverty, and the surprising indifference of the immediate surroundings that mostly ignored the repeated "cries for help" before people eventually took the final step are as obvious as the fact that suicide was increasingly accepted and, in some cases, even seen and felt as the expected step. Studying the phenomenon of suicide does not only reveal the changing social and gender relations but also the clash between the old traditional society, which could be quite secretive as people preferred to settle scores among themselves and did not want the authorities to interfere with their *modus operandi*, and the authorities, who wanted to implement a monopoly on punishment, maintain clear and transparent statistics, and control, analyse, and re-educate the population. Suicides of everyday people with all their tragedies and personal sorrows serve as a precious resource for a broader socio-historical analysis of the shifts in values, mentality, behaviour, and the dominant public discourse in Slovenia during the period under consideration.

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⁹⁹ Clare O'Farrell, *Michel Foucault* (London: Sage, 2005), 61, 71, 72. Marsh, *Suicide*, 46–51 and 76, 77. Michel Foucault, 'Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault,' in Martin L.H., Gutman H. and Hutton P. (eds.), *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

¹⁰⁰ Silkenat, *Moments of Despair*, 11.

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Meta Remec

NEME PRIČE: MIKROZGODOVINSKI POGLED NA SAMOMOR V SODNIH SPISIH PRVE POLOVICE 20. STOLETJA

POVZETEK

Članek na podlagi arhivskega gradiva Okrožnega sodišča v Celju, Okrožnega sodišča v Mariboru in posameznih primerov z Okrajnega sodišča v Trbovljah, ki so imela pristojnost na območjih z najvišjo stopnjo samomorilnosti v okviru Dravske banovine, ter časopisja obravnava primere samomora v prvi polovici 20. stoletja na mikroravni. Obravnavano arhivsko gradivo zajema samomore v mestnem in ruralnem okolju, zaznamovanem s slabimi socialnimi in ekonomskimi razmerami, slabo pismenostjo pa tudi še vedno zelo razširjenimi poskusi prikrivanja samomorov – iz sočutja do družinskih članov pokojnika kot tudi zakoreninjenih navad in prepričanj. S pomočjo analize posameznih primerov avtorica prikaže odnos do samomora, sramoto in stigma, ki so jo družinski člani še vedno čutili ob samomoru sorodnika, prisotnost in postopno prevlado psihološkega in psihiatričnega diskurza v zvezi z določanjem vzrokov za samomor kot tudi ravnanje vsakokratnih nosilcev oblasti, ki so bili prisotni ob najdbah trupel. Primeri so razvrščeni v več kategorij na podlagi skupnih značilnosti, kot je skupen oziroma soroden povod za samomor, spol ali druge sorodne življenjske okoliščine pokojnika, analiziran pa je tudi diskurz, ki je spremljal vsakega od teh primerov. Članek tako obravnava primere samomorov, pri katerih ni bilo mogoče določiti identitete pokojnega in se je bilo treba odločiti, kdaj so poskusi identifikacije izčrpani, kdo bo kril stroške pokopa, kdo bo prevzel truplo in kaj storiti z osebnimi predmeti pokojnika. Analiza zajema tudi primere domnevnih samomorov, pri katerih trupel pokojnikov niso našli, kar je sorodnikom prinašalo dolgoletne

čustvene in ekonomske stiske. Številčno kategorijo analiziranih primerov predstavljajo samomori, ki so bili domnevno storjeni zato, ker se je pokojnik želel izogniti kazni zaradi zagrešenih kaznivih dejanj: med temi je največ tistih, ki so samomor storili v zaporu ali priporu, nekateri pa zaradi strahu in/ali sramote že med preiskovalnim postopkom. Članek posebno pozornost namenja samomorom žensk in diskurzu, ki je spremljal te smrti, v primerjavi z diskurzom, ki je spremljal samomore moških. Iz analiziranega gradiva je očitno, da so pokojne ženske označevali bodisi kot impulzivne, labilne in čustvene sužnje hormonov ali kot moralno propadle ženske. Ženske se v obravnavanem gradivu pojavljajo tudi kot žrtve intimnega partnerskega nasilja v primerih umora-samomora, v katerih je moški storilec po umoru storil samomor. Tako v sodnih spisih kot v medijskem diskurzu je pogosto mogoče opaziti sočutno obravnavanje teh moških storilcev, ki naj bi dejanja storili v afektu in zaradi razočaranja v ljubezni, obenem pa je mogoče opazovati tudi moralno seciranje ženskih žrtev in ugotavljanje, ali bi se dogodku lahko izognile. Analiza vsebuje tudi primere poskusov iskanja krivca, ki je pokojnika spravil v obup do te mere, da si je sam vzel življenje, kot tudi primere, kjer so storilci umor poskušali prikriti s samomorom. Iz zadnjih je mogoče razbrati, kako je na terenu potekala preiskava teh primerov, katere nove forenzične postopke so uporabljali in kako so se na prihod zunanjih strokovnjakov odzivala tradicionalna okolja, kjer so se še vedno zanašali na dano častno besedo in so ob nejasnih primerih smrti pogosto zamižali na obe očesi.

Ivan Smiljanič*

“We ourselves proudly chose death.” The Concept of Heroic Partisan Suicide in Slovenia in the Yugoslav Context**

IZVLEČEK

»SAMI PONOSNO SMO SI SMRT IZBRALI.«
 KONCEPT PARTIZANSKEGA HEROJSKEGA SAMOMORA
 V SLOVENIJI V JUGOSLOVANSKEM KONTEKSTU

Članek se osredotoča na koncept herojskega samomora med jugoslovanskimi in še posebej slovenskimi partizani med drugo svetovno vojno. Partizansko poveljstvo je pričakovalo, da borci v skrajnih okoliščinah naredijo samomor, da bi se izognili sramotnemu zajetju, mučenju in potencialni izdaji podatkov. Po vojni so partizanski samomori formalno obveljali za junaško dejanje najvišjega samožrtvovanja, vendar so hkrati predstavljali tudi sivo polje jugoslovanskega spomina na vojno, ker so odpirali zahtevna moralna vprašanja, kot je nesprejemljivost samomora z vidika marksistične etike. Mnenja, ki so se v jugoslovanski strokovni in laični javnosti pojavljala o partizanskih herojskih samomorih, so bila raznolika. Odnos do samomorov se je med različnimi deli države razlikoval, domnevno glede na tradicionalne percepcije smrti in samomora, ki so jih gojile regionalne ali lokalne skupnosti.

Ključne besede: samomor, herojski samomor, partizani, druga svetovna vojna, Jugoslavija

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ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the concept of heroic suicide among Yugoslav and especially Slovenian partisans during the Second World War. Partisan command expected fighters to commit suicide in extreme circumstances to avoid ignominious capture, torture and potential treason. After the war, partisan suicides were formally recognized as a heroic act of the highest self-sacrifice, but at the same time they also represented a grey area of Yugoslav memory of the war because they raised challenging moral questions, such as the inadmissibility of suicide from the point of view of Marxist ethics. Opinions expressed in the Yugoslav professional and lay public about the partisan heroic suicides were diverse. Attitudes towards suicide were different in different parts of the country, supposedly depending on the traditional perceptions of death and suicide held by regional or local communities.

Key words: suicide, heroic suicide, partisans, Second World War, Yugoslavia

Introduction

Suicide is generally regarded as an act that is criticised, condemned and rejected by society.¹ However, there are certain exceptions in which suicide is portrayed in a new light and takes on a much more positive connotation. In his classic study, Émile Durkheim categorised this type of suicide among altruistic suicides, i.e. those that are desired or even expected in society because the deliberate death brings a benefit to society, so that such suicides take on the character of heroism and martyrdom. On the other hand, they also demonstrate society's dominance over the human individual and impose demanding, extreme expectations on him.² It is a quid pro quo: if an individual sacrifices himself for the common good, he is celebrated posthumously, and so it is not surprising that this type of suicide is present mainly in military contexts.³ This relationship also gave rise to a concept that Durkheim only hinted at in passing,⁴ but which will be the focus of this article: heroic suicide.

One of the few people in Slovenia who dealt with the topic of heroic suicide was Dr Janko Kostnapfel, professor at the Department of Psychiatry at the Faculty of Medicine in Ljubljana. In his opinion, a suicide, if committed consciously, "can show

1 I would like to thank Blaž Štangelj, Bojan Godeša and Nataša Henig Mišičič for help with suggestions and gathering literature, and Jan Hlade for help with collecting statistical data.

2 Émile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002), 178–81. Jeffrey W. Riemer, 'Durkheim's, 'Heroic Suicide' in Military Combat,' *Armed Forces & Society* 25, No. 1 (1998): 103–05.

3 Joseph A. Blake, 'Death by Hand Grenade: Altruistic Suicide in Combat,' *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior* 8, No. 1 (1978): 47–51.

4 Durkheim, *Suicide*, 199.

an obvious note of grandeur and heroism."⁵ According to Kostnapfel's definition, a heroic suicide is "the act in which an individual, a couple or a larger group of people take their own life with free will and in clear (lucid) consciousness, to convey a lofty, philanthropic message with their death or to sacrifice their lives for the destruction of a recognised, confirmed enemy and its weapons." Kostnapfel also believed that not endangering the lives of others is a key element in the definition of heroic suicide: "No one, not even an imaginary worldly or otherworldly god, can give permission to sacrifice the innocent."⁶

It is difficult to talk about the scientifically recognised definition of heroic suicide, as there is no consensus among experts as to whether this type of suicide exists at all. Undoubtedly, the concept contains inherent political and ideological components that distance it from a strictly scientific treatment and raise many dilemmas. Is suicide heroic even from the point of view of a military opponent (e.g. did kamikaze commit heroic suicides)? Is the heroic character of suicide determined by the suicide victim himself or by the society around him? Is such a death more heroic than death by the enemy through torture, shooting or hanging? Or is the term merely an oxymoron that cannot exist on its own? Either way, the idea of heroic suicide is a complex phenomenon that - if it exists at all - resides in a moral-psychological grey area. In the words of Kostnapfel: "The question of the existence of heroic suicide is not always easy to answer with a yes or no, because between these two answers lies a wide field of all kinds of psychological and also ethical entanglements and events."⁷

Heroic suicide is a category that is used in many ideological-political state systems, especially when they talk about their own military past. The tendency to portray "our" army and soldiers as fair, just and heroic, as opposed to every enemy, paints the past as a simple binary conflict between good and evil. Heroic suicide is one of the categories used to prove the heroism and self-sacrifice of one's own soldiers, who consciously gave their lives for the highest goals. Such an approach was also taken by socialist Yugoslavia, which largely based the legitimacy of its power on the anti-fascist partisan struggle during the Second World War, then called the National Liberation Struggle (NLS). A strong cult developed around the partisans who died heroic deaths. Nevertheless, the idea of heroic partisan suicide in Yugoslavia had a complex function that was not simply unequivocally positive. It was also a potentially problematic topic that raised uncomfortable questions not only about partisan warfare, but also about combatant morality, betrayal, cowardice, and other undesirable categories. The paper presents some key features of the concept of partisan heroic suicides in Slovenia, as they appeared in the Yugoslav framework.

5 Janko Kostnapfel, *Zakaj vojna* (Ljubljana: Unigraf, 2007), 111.

6 Janko Kostnapfel, 'Herojski samomor – da ali ne?' *Isis: glasilo Zdravniške zbornice Slovenije* 15, No. 3 (2006): 56.

7 *Ibidem*, 58.

An Attempt of Categorization of Partisan Suicides

Before discussing the perceptions of partisan suicides from the perspective of Slovenian socialist society, the concept of partisan suicide must be defined. The term refers to suicides committed by members of the Slovenian partisan movement under difficult military, existential or psychological circumstances during the military conflicts between April 1941 and May 1945. It is certain that there were more than a few such incidents, but at the same time it is difficult to document such cases, as the summarising list was never published. Serbian historian Dr Vladimir Dedijer, best known as the author of extensive monographs on various topics of recent Yugoslav history (including his most famous work, the comprehensive biography of Josip Broz - Tito), wrote that he had collected material on 872 suicides of Yugoslav partisans,⁸ but his list was not found. Based on his database of partisans killed by Slovenian members of the anti-communist groups (MVAC, Home Guards, Chetniks), researcher Silvo Grgič calculated that suicides in Slovenia accounted for around 2% of violent partisan deaths. At the same time, the author warns: "Of course, these are confirmed suicides, as there is no verified data on suicides from the many cases of violent deaths of partisans in offensives, of which we assume that there were many more than is known at the time."⁹

Suicides characterised the entire war period. The attack by the occupying forces on Yugoslav territory, which began on 6 April 1941, caused extreme despair among many inhabitants of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, especially among the soldiers of the helpless Yugoslav army. The poet and later partisan Miran Jarc wrote that during the first battles on the Yugoslav-German border, he saw a Yugoslav soldier of Serbian origin who said he would rather go into the water than into German captivity, and he drowned in the river.¹⁰ After the soldiers, civilians also began to commit suicide. On 10 April, Andrej Kukec, the manager of the paper factory in Sladka Gora, jumped out of the production hall onto the concrete floor because German sympathisers threatened to hang him.¹¹

In the weeks and months following the military victory over the Yugoslav army and the dismemberment of Slovenian territory by the occupying forces, a Slovenian partisan movement emerged within the framework of the Liberation Front, which was made up of several groups, with members of the Communist Party of Slovenia playing a leading role. Military partisan formations were formed to fight against the occupying soldiers and the Slovenes of the counter-revolutionary camp. By May 1945, tens of thousands of people had died in the military conflicts in Slovenia, both soldiers from all warring parties and civilians. Many were killed in the fighting, others were shot as hostages, some died in the camps, and some were self-inflicted.

8 Vladimir J. Dedijer, 'O partizanskom samožrtvovanju i herojskom samoubistvu,' *Glas SANU: Odeljenje istorijskih nauka: knjiga 3*, No. 338 (1983): 258. A copy is available at SI AS 1979, Družina Dedijer, f. 72.

9 Silvo Grgič, *Zločini okupatorjevih sodelavcev: knjiga 1* (Ljubljana: Društvo piscev zgodovine NOB Slovenije, Novo mesto: Tiskarna Novo mesto, Dolenjska založba, 1995), 431.

10 Miran Jarc, 'Odgnali so nas iz Maribora – april 1941,' *Borec* 42, No. 8–9 (1990): 755.

11 Drago Novak, Ivo Orešnik and Herman Šticl, *Pomniki NOB v Slovenskih goricah in Prekmurju* (Murska Sobota: Pomurska založba, 1985), 217.

Suicide under extreme circumstances, usually by shooting or exploding a bomb, was, according to the data collected so far, a particular speciality of the partisans, as it occurred relatively more frequently among them than among all other military formations in Yugoslavia.¹² Due to the insufficiently collected and organised data, it is currently not possible to present comparative statistics on partisan suicides on the territory of the individual Yugoslav republics. An interesting starting point, however, is Dedijer's suggestion that the number of suicides could depend on the environment in which they occurred and its traditional notions of death and suicide. He surmises that there were fewer partisan suicides in Bosnia and Montenegro because the society there valued the fight to the death more, and in the Catholic milieu, which strictly rejects any form of suicide.¹³ At this stage of research, it is still too early to draw generalised conclusions even for Slovenia; some credibility can be attributed to the claims that suicides increased during major offensives, such as the Italian Rog offensive in Slovenia in 1942,¹⁴ but at the same time it is necessary to point out the observation of some psychologists that under extreme circumstances a person invests all his mental and physical strength in survival, so that the number of suicides often decreases.¹⁵

For this article, a list of documented suicides by Slovenian partisans was compiled based on previously published material that has appeared since the war until today: monographs, anthologies and articles about the NLS, monographs of NLS memorials and articles in the magazine *Borec*, the newsletter of the Slovenian Association of Fighters. The result is around 250 documented suicides, although the number is far from completely reliable due to data deficiencies, often unreliable statements and contradictory claims from various sources. As the Croatian historian Dr Vjekoslav Perica points out: "It is not always easy to research the circumstances under which such cases occurred. Spectacular heroic suicides in front of crowds of witnesses are rare, and even in this case, each case is a potential rashomon and a victim of the later battles over memory and collective memory."¹⁶

The suicides were divided into eight groups, which represent an attempt to catalogue the most important types of partisan heroic suicides in Slovenia according to the specific circumstances in which they occurred. Only suicides of partisan fighters or other active participants in the partisan struggle were considered. Cases of suicides by partisan helpers (e.g. house owners who gave them shelter) and fighters of other anti-fascist formations are not included, nor are "false" suicides, i.e. cases in which fighters were wounded for one reason or another - a failed suicide attempt, a serious injury or involuntary self-harm - and were finished with a mercy shot by comrades or enemies.

12 Nemanja Dević, *Za partiju i Tita: partizanski pokret u Srbiji 1941–1944* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2021), 781.

13 Vladimir Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita 2* (Rijeka: Liburnija, Zagreb: Mladost, 1981), 515.

14 Nataša Budna, Jože Dežman and Janez Lušina, *Gorenjski partizan: Gorenjski odred 1942–1945* (Kranj: Partizanski knjižni klub, 1992), 166.

15 Janko Kostnapfel, *Jutro poldan večer: izbrani spisi* (Ljubljana: Unigraf, 1997), 146, 147, 197.

16 Vjekoslav Perica, 'Kult narodnih heroja i patriotska mitologija titoizma,' in *Mitovi epohe socijalizma* (Novi Sad: Centar za istoriju, demokratiju i pomirenje, Sremska Kamenica: Fakultet za evropske pravno-političke studije, 2010), 114.

Also not taken into account are cases in which the enemy claimed that the combatant had committed suicide (usually in captivity), but the literature unanimously claims that this was a cover-up of the execution. In geographical terms, the list is limited to the Slovenian territory with the neighbouring border regions.

The first group of partisan suicides is represented by the most common circumstances for this act: a hopeless military situation in which a fighter was surrounded by the enemy and could not realistically expect a successful breakthrough, so he sought a solution in suicide. These circumstances were reflected in 53 suicides, of which 17 occurred in 1942, 9 in 1943, 16 in 1944 and 11 in 1945. Two representatives of this group were posthumously honoured with the title of National Hero of Yugoslavia. The first is Vinko Paderšič - Batreja, who, together with a group of partisans, took refuge in the Becele Cave near Zagrad during the Italian offensive in 1942. Due to betrayal, the cave was surrounded and everyone except Paderšič surrendered on the basis of (false) promises that they would not be punished. He fought alone against the Italian division for two more days until he ran out of ammunition and shot himself with his last bullet on 24 September 1942.¹⁷ The second is Ivan Kosovel, who was surrounded by Italian fascists in a house in Vrtovin near Ajdovščina on 7 March 1943. During the battle, he destroyed illegal documents and then killed himself.¹⁸

The second group could be considered a subgroup of the first, since it includes the same circumstances of suicide, only with the addition of a further aggravating circumstance: the wounding of the partisan, which further limited or completely stopped his mobility and speed. There are documented cases in which fighters committed suicide not only because of their own inability to flee from the enemy, but also out of an altruistic motive, so that comrades who tried to help them would not fall behind because of them. With 80 documented cases - 3 cases in 1941, 19 in 1942, 12 in 1943, 35 in 1944 and 11 in 1945 - this group is the most numerous of all. Accordingly, this group includes seven national heroes, all of whom were well-known and respected commanders or commissars of various partisan units. At the end of September 1941, after the destruction of the Rašica Company, Maks Pečar - Črne accompanied the wounded on their way home. They were attacked by the Germans in Selo near Vodice. Wounded Pečar fought to the end and shot himself with the last bullet.¹⁹ On 8 February 1942, Jakob Bernard was travelling with a companion when they were surrounded by a German ski patrol near Stirpnik. The companion was killed immediately and Bernard tried to escape, but was forced to commit suicide due to the heavy snow, the difficult terrain and his wounds.²⁰ Lojze Hohkraud was ambushed by the German police near

17 Ferdo Gestrin et al. (eds.), *Pomniki naše revolucije* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1961), 173, 174. Albert Jakopič (ed.), *Vodnik po partizanskih poteh* (Ljubljana: Borec, 1978), 144, 145, 153. Petar Kačavenda and Dušan Živković (eds.), *Narodni heroji Jugoslavije: N-Ž* (Beograd: Partizanska knjiga, Narodna knjiga, Titograd: Pobjeda, 1982), 63. Miloš Rutar, *Sodelovati in zmagati: slovenski športniki v NOB* (Ljubljana: Borec, 1986), 196–98.

18 Jakopič, *Vodnik po partizanskih poteh*, 354. Petar Kačavenda and Dušan Živković (eds.), *Narodni heroji Jugoslavije: A-M* (Beograd: Partizanska knjiga, Narodna knjiga, Titograd: Pobjeda, 1982), 404, 405.

19 Jože Ravbar - Jošt, 'S prvoborci kamniškega bataljona,' *Borec* 22, No. 3 (1970): 248–54.

20 Jakopič, *Vodnik po partizanskih poteh*, 259. Kačavenda and Živković, *Narodni heroji: A-M*, 71. Rutar, *Sodelovati in zmagati*, 344.

Cvetež on 31 May 1942. Wounded and leaving a trail of blood behind him, he buried the illegal documents and shot himself in the head.²¹ On 26 February 1943, Jože Slak and his comrades fell into an Italian ambush near Dolnja Straža. Slak was wounded during the conflict and in order not to fall into the hands of the enemy, he committed suicide by activating a bomb.²² On 18 March 1943, Vladimir Dolničar took part in the clashes with the Germans, Italians and Home Guards in the Belca Gorge. He was wounded while trying to break through enemy lines and took his own life due to the hopeless situation.²³ Marko Redelonghi was recovering from his injuries near Breginj. When German soldiers surrounded him on 5 May 1944, he fought against them until he was wounded and shot himself with the last bullet.²⁴ Alojz Kolman - Marok was in the village of Koprivnik on 4 November 1944 when the house he was staying in was surrounded by a Home Guard unit. During an attempt to break through, he was wounded in the knee and shot himself to avoid being captured.²⁵

The third group is also related to the first two in terms of the circumstances that the suicide occurred in the face of a hopeless military situation, but its differentia specifica is that the situation was caused by the suicide victim himself by assassinating a figure from the enemy camp. This specific category has only one representative, the 16-year-old student Dušan Turk, who, as a member of the Security Intelligence Service, together with a colleague, carried out the execution of the commander of the anti-communist Slovenian Legion, Ivan Peršuh, in the Vzajemna Insurance building in Ljubljana on 26 May 1942. When Peršuh was shot, they fled the scene, but on the street Turk missed the front door through which he was supposed to escape and fled into a neighbouring shop that had no other exit. He shot at his pursuers, was wounded in the leg and killed himself with the last bullet.²⁶

The fourth category includes suicides of persons in prison, during arrest or as a result of torture during interrogation. Such suicides and attempted suicides occurred from the first days of the occupation, when prisoners anxiously awaited interrogations or returned from them with broken spirits. They developed an apathy that could turn into depression, leading to a suicide attempt. Many prisoners were not only afraid of torture, but also of giving their names and information to their tormentors against their will.²⁷ Some prisoners tried to commit suicide out of guilt after the betrayal. Prison staff tried to prevent suicide - it being a form of escape from punishment - and therefore strictly controlled what items prisoners carried with them. However, prisoners were quite innovative in their choice of means - and unfortunately often successful.

21 Kačavenda and Živković, *Narodni heroji: A-M*, 288. Jakopič, *Vodnik po partizanskih poteh*, 505. Gestrin, *Pomniki naše revolucije*, 24, 25.

22 *Vodnik po partizanskih poteh*, 143. Rutar, *Sodelovati in zmagati*, 383, 384. Kačavenda and Živković, *Narodni heroji: N-Ž*, 199.

23 Kačavenda and Živković, *Narodni heroji: A-M*, 192, 193. Grgič, *Zločini okupatorjevih sodelavcev: knjiga 1*, 234.

24 Kačavenda and Živković, *Narodni heroji: N-Ž*, 166, 167.

25 Gestrin, *Pomniki naše revolucije*, 43, 177, 178. Jakopič, *Vodnik po partizanskih poteh*, 120. Kačavenda and Živković, *Narodni heroji: A-M*, 392, 393. Rutar, *Sodelovati in zmagati*, 360.

26 Gestrin, *Pomniki naše revolucije*, 60. Jakopič, *Vodnik po partizanskih poteh*, 21.

27 Damijan Guštin, *Za zapahi: prebivalstvo Slovenije v okupatorjevih zaporih 1941-1945* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2006), 291-93.

The guards' reaction to such deaths was usually not compassionate, but violent, as Janez Gerčar reports about the unnamed prisoner who hanged himself in Begunje penitentiary and was found dead by a guard: "They brought him down, but instead of providing medical assistance, they threw him on the ground and beat him mercilessly with their fists and kicked him, but they could not revive him. Stripped to his bare feet, they threw him into a box made of rough boards, took him to the communal pit and buried him."²⁸ There are 27 suicides recorded in this category - 4 in 1941, 9 in 1942, 3 in 1943 and 5 each in 1944 and 1945, while for one man the time of death was not established. None of the people in this category received the title of national hero. A better-known example is the illegal Tine Majer, who jumped out of the second floor window of the Gestapo headquarters in Celje in the summer of 1942 during German interrogations and torture.²⁹

The fifth category is suicide due to psychological problems. Guerrilla warfare was often extremely arduous: the fighters battled their way through difficult terrain in bad weather, were often poorly equipped and clothed, and were hungry and thirsty. The difficult conditions combined with the constant expectation of an enemy attack caused or exacerbated psychological problems in many of the fighters, which in extreme cases could lead to a nervous breakdown and suicide. Partisan Ivan Može wrote that he seriously contemplated suicide during the difficult winter crossing over the mountains:

"I was convinced that this damned climb was already over. But when I came to my senses a little and looked around, I saw an almost vertical rock formation above us and Podbrdo below us. Full of fear, I asked an official who was walking alongside the convoy where we were going. He just raised his hand in the direction of the rocks and walked on ... I was so shaken that I thought about shooting myself. If I hadn't had a wounded and even more shattered fellow villager, Andrej, next to me, I probably would have done just that and my bones would be rotting in Gorenjska today ..."³⁰

Extremely traumatic news in connection with the violent death of a family member or partner could also cause partisans to commit suicide. Nine cases are documented in this category, of which the case of the Bizjak family from the village of Predmeja above Ajdovščina is the best known. Slavko Bizjak joined the partisans. When the fascists found out, they took revenge on his family. On the night of 24 to 25 February 1943, the fascists tortured and shot all the family members: Slavko's father, his mother, his brother, his pregnant wife and his two-year-old son. When they left the house, the fascists also set fire to it. When Slavko Bizjak learnt of the tragedy, he visited the scene, but the event shook him too much. He wrote the message "I could not do otherwise" on a cigarette wrapper and committed suicide.³¹

The sixth category is group suicide. 17 cases of mass suicides (with at least two partisans committing suicide at the same time) were documented, in which a total of

28 Janez Gerčar, *Begunje: priča narodovega trpljenja* (Ljubljana: Založba Borec, 1969), 68.

29 Jakopič, *Vodnik po partizanskih poteh*, 479.

30 Radoslav Isaković, *Kosovelova brigada* (Ljubljana: Odbor Kosovelove brigade, Partizanska knjiga, 1973), 695.

31 Jakopič, *Vodnik po partizanskih poteh*, 353.

around 56 people died. The sources in these cases are often unclear, so that the information on the number of suicides committed and the names of the suicide victims vary from source to source. The most famous of these events is the battle of the Okroglo Cave. In April 1942, part of the Kokra Company broke out of the German encirclement in the forest of Udin boršt. A group of 13 fighters hid in the cave in the rock face above the Sava River, next to the village of Okroglo near Kranj. Following a betrayal, German soldiers surrounded the cave and began firing at the narrow entrance. When this had no effect, they also tried mining, bringing prisoners from Begunje to persuade the partisans to surrender and burning straw in front of the cave entrance. The fighting continued on 21 and 22 April 1942, two partisans died and six committed suicide due to the hopeless situation. The remaining five fighters were stunned by the smoke and captured by the Germans, all but one of whom were later shot.³² There is only one national hero in this category, Franc Ravbar - Vitez, who was hiding with four comrades in a partisan shelter - a mud house - in the Poljane Valley on 13 January 1943. As the hiding place had been betrayed, the German police surrounded it in the morning and attacked it with hand grenades, causing the roof of the shelter to collapse. In the hopeless situation, most of the fighters were wounded and Ravbar and two partisans took their own lives.³³

The seventh category includes suicides in partisan hospitals. In order to treat wounded and sick partisans, an illegal medical network had to be set up, hidden in forests and mountains, where the constant danger of betrayal or exposure made these places particularly vulnerable. The psychological pressure on the patients was great, as such an event meant almost certain death for them. In some Yugoslav hospitals, weapons were therefore taken from the wounded, which was a kind of "secondary suicide prevention".³⁴ There was particular pressure on the doctors of the partisan patients, who also had to be prepared for suicide. One of them, Pavel Lunaček - Igor, stated: "When I was with the partisans, I always carried two hunting ampoules with hydrogen cyanide in my jacket pocket, because I had sworn to myself that I would never leave my immobile wounded, even if the enemy entered the hospital."³⁵ Four cases are documented in Slovenia, including the suicide of a wounded man, a doctor and a female doctor, and by far the most notorious case, mass death in the Ogenjca hospital near Loški Potok. During the Rog offensive, around 15 seriously ill patients from Ogenjca were transferred to a cave deeper in the forest, where they were cared for by 20-year-old nurse Marija Čepon - Mimica and treated by Dr Aleksander Gala - Peter. One of the patients left the hiding place, revealed the location to the Italian army and returned with the soldiers on 31 July 1942. The wounded had previously agreed that Čepon would shoot them if they were betrayed. When this happened, the nurse killed most of

32 Gestrin, *Pomniki naše revolucije*, 128, 129. Ivan Jan, *Okrogelska jama* (Ljubljana: ČZDO Komunist, TOZD Komunist, 1982).

33 Gestrin, *Pomniki naše revolucije*, 28. Jakopič, *Vodnik po partizanskih poteh*, 13, 259. Kačavenda and Živković, *Narodni heroji: N-Ž*, 166. Rutar, *Sodelovati in zmagati*, 287-91, 379, 380.

34 Kostnapfel, *Zakaj vojna*, 100.

35 Janko Kostnapfel, *Srečanja* (Radovljica: Didakta, 2010), 25.

the wounded and then herself, and some who survived the shooting killed themselves; who exactly was shot and who shot themselves is still quite unclear despite research, only 17-year-old Ciril Vidmar is proven to have shot himself.³⁶

The last, eighth category is specific, as it includes presumed suicides. As already emphasised, the documentation of suicides during the war is not an easy task, as it is often not clear from witness statements whether a person's death was a suicide or not. This category also includes cases of alleged suicides where the information from different, equally credible sources does not match, as well as cases where Yugoslav researchers have already admitted that it is impossible to determine from the available sources under what circumstances the death occurred. 19 cases are documented in this section, although it could undoubtedly be much more extensive, but there are still seven national heroes among them. In the case of Stane Kosec, it is not clear whether he committed suicide in the Begunje prisons on 3 October 1941 or whether the suicide was staged by the Germans,³⁷ and the same dilemma exists with Vida Janežič, except that she is said to have been poisoned on 5 October 1944.³⁸ On 21 May 1942, Jože Kovačič was wounded in clashes near the village of Tuji Grm. During the retreat, his comrades hid him in the woods near Vnajarje. Three days later, he was found by a boy whom Kovačič asked to tie a rope to his toe and the trigger of his gun, and when the boy did so and retreated, Kovačič shot himself with this improvised mechanism.³⁹ Other sources state that he was mowed down by a German machine gun and bled to death.⁴⁰ In the case of Janko Stariha, who according to most reports died on 7 November 1942 in a clash with the Germans in Dobrovlje (Tolsti vrh), a wound on his forehead, which was later found on his corpse, raises doubts.⁴¹ The main problem with the death of famous Gorenjska commander Jože Gregorčič - Gorenjc is that there were no reliable witnesses to it. Gregorčič was wounded in the leg during a clash with the Germans on Jelovica on 8 September 1942. His comrades hid him in the woods and covered him with branches and ferns. According to some reports, when they returned four days later, they found Gregorčič's body with a spliced head, from which they concluded that he had placed a bomb underneath to avoid being captured. According to other sources, the body was no longer there, only some coagulated blood.⁴² The situation is similar with Dušan Jereb - Štefan, who on 12 March 1943, on his way to Žužemberk with his group near the village of Veliki Lipovec, was ambushed by the Italians and the Home Guards and covered the breakthrough and retreat of his comrades with his pistol behind one of the buildings, while he himself died - it is not clear whether he was shot⁴³ or whether he shot himself.⁴⁴ For Ivan Turšič - Iztok, the published data do

36 Aleksander Gala, *Ogenjca: tragedija partizanskih ranjencev* (Ljubljana: Partizanska knjiga, 1977).

37 Gestrin, *Pomniki naše revolucije*, 29. Kačavenda and Živkovič, *Narodni heroji: A-M*, 403.

38 Kačavenda and Živkovič, *Narodni heroji: A-M*, 312. Rutar, *Sodelovati in zmagati*, 146.

39 Kačavenda and Živkovič, *Narodni heroji: A-M*, 421. Rutar, *Sodelovati in zmagati*, 363.

40 Jakopič, *Vodnik po partizanskih poteh*, 107.

41 Kačavenda and Živkovič, *Narodni heroji: N-Ž*, 218. Rutar, *Sodelovati in zmagati*, 385.

42 Kačavenda and Živkovič, *Narodni heroji: A-M*, 269, 270. Budna, Dežman and Lušina, *Gorenjski partizan*, 146.

43 Jakopič, *Vodnik po partizanskih poteh*, 146.

44 Kačavenda and Živkovič, *Narodni heroji: A-M*, 325.

not match: according to the most detailed study, he was ambushed by the Germans on the way to Lokev on 28 July 1944, was wounded in the legs and shot himself to escape capture,⁴⁵ but all other sources indicate that he died in battle.⁴⁶

Attitude Towards Partisan Suicide During the Second World War

During the war, the Yugoslav and Slovenian partisan leadership and the partisans themselves had a clearly defined, desirable moral image of an exemplary partisan. The basic qualities that should characterise such a fighter were heroism, perseverance and an unwavering belief in liberation. Any hint of cowardice was strictly rejected. The partisan writer and thinker Edvard Kocbek remarked during the war: "Pleasant times in the life of a person and in the life of collectives go hand in hand with the worst degradations of moral character. On the other hand, pain, suffering and fear prepare a new, higher, purer and firmer consciousness."⁴⁷ How does suicide fit into this binary model?

Partisan suicides were a continuation of the phenomenon of communist suicides in interwar monarchical Yugoslavia, which activists committed primarily to avoid torture during interrogations and revealing names or information. A communist was expected to bravely engage in a conflict if the police crossed his path, but if he happened to survive it, he was expected to show an unbending attitude towards the law enforcement authorities. Some activists could not bear the torture and committed suicide out of a guilty conscience after committing treason. In the pre-war period, however, there was not yet a complete consensus on suicide among the communist factions, so some revolutionaries categorically rejected it. Among them was the circle that organised and carried out the assassination of Interior Minister Milorad Drašković, the author of the anti-communist *Obznana*. They were of the opinion that the assassin must be "a fighter, a revolutionary who stood up against the violence of the bourgeoisie, not some desperado who first shoots the minister and then himself."⁴⁸

Even in the pre-war communist movement, suicide was therefore generally seen as an acceptable, if not desirable, act in the event of a direct clash with monarchical repression, serving as a safeguard against torture and betrayal. At the same time, there was no party policy in the pre-war period that required activists to commit suicide. The same applies to wartime. According to the broad consensus of researchers, nowhere in the partisan guidelines and documents was there an explicit instruction that a partisan must commit suicide if he finds himself in a hopeless situation.⁴⁹ This was also claimed by participants in the partisan struggle. Vladimir Dedijer collected the testimonies of

45 Franjo Bavec, *Bazoviška brigada* (Ljubljana: Odbor Bazoviške brigade, Partizanska knjiga, 1970), 313, 314.

46 Lado Ambrožič, 'Heroj Ivan Turšič: Iztok, komandant XXX divizije,' *Primorski dnevnik*, September 5, 1953, 4.

47 Edvard Kocbek, *Partizanski dnevnik: prva knjiga* (Ljubljana: Sanje, 2022), 195.

48 Devič, *Za partiju i Tita*, 782.

49 *Ibid.*, 781, 782. Dedijer, *Novi prilozi*, 522. Dedijer, 'O partizanskom samožrtvovanju,' 260. Grgič, *Zločini okupatorjevih sodelavcev: knjiga 1*, 431.

three Montenegrin officials and former partisans, who all happened to be called Veljko. The first of them, Veljko Milatović, wrote:

“Even before the war, great attention was paid to the behaviour of captured communists and sympathisers towards the class enemy. Before the war, there was a firm conviction that a communist must not betray anything, but in wartime this unwritten rule grew into the dictum that one must not surrender to the enemy alive, because surrender is tantamount to treason. This belief was particularly widespread among students and intellectuals - the party members. They adhered most strictly to this sacred rule.”⁵⁰

Veljko Mićunović claimed the same:

“During the war, there was no directive on the necessity of suicide in order not to fall into the hands of the enemy, but in practise this was also the case. When we were with the guerillas in the winter of 1942, 1943 and the courier left for just one day, we said goodbye to him as if we would never see each other again, that is, it was assumed that in the event of encirclement he would have to fight to the last bullet and save that bullet for himself so that he would not fall alive into the hands of the enemy.”⁵¹

The last Veljko, Veljko Kovačević, added: “The idea that a partisan must not fall alive into the hands of the enemy lived in every fighter as if it were an order from above. There was nothing more shameful than a partisan being captured. It is interesting that both party members and non-members thought this way. It just lived in us.”⁵²

Nevertheless, the claim that there was no guideline for partisan suicide is only true to a certain extent. While the search for a document that directly calls for suicide is indeed a fruitless endeavour, it is also clear from the testimonies that the command fully expected the fighters to commit suicide if necessary. This is most clearly seen in the instructions issued by the Serbian General Staff for the formation and training of partisan units in November 1942, which demanded:

“A partisan must not surrender to the enemy unless he no longer has the strength to kill himself, i.e. he is wounded in both hands and cannot commit suicide. If he is captured, he must not confess anything to the enemy, because even the slightest confession is treason. His behaviour must be heroic, without the slightest sign of fear for his life.”⁵³

Testimonies about the events of the war that were published in Yugoslavia in the decades after 1945 repeatedly show that the partisan fighters understood and generally followed the command's informal recommendation that it was better to commit suicide than to be captured, tortured and forced to reveal secret information. Serbian historian Ljubinka Škodrić expresses a similar view, quoting an extract from a memoir document in the Belgrade Historical Archives: “The directive was - the last bullet is yours.”⁵⁴ A similar conclusion can be drawn from the short novel *Hotel Park* by Aleksandar Vojinović (1958),

50 Dedijer, ‘O partizanskom samožrtvovanju,’ 260.

51 Ibid., 261.

52 Dedijer, *Novi prilozii*, 522.

53 *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda, tom I, knjiga 20: borbe u Srbiji 1941–1944* (Beograd: Vojnoistorijski institut, 1965), 278.

54 Ljubinka Škodrić, *Žena u okupiranoj Srbiji 1941–1944* (Beograd: Arhipelag, Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2020), 431.

which deals with a partisan bombing raid on the eponymous hotel in Niš, Serbia, in which several German officers were killed and wounded - and to which a certain degree of documentary authenticity can be attributed, as the author was also the perpetrator of this attack. Vojinović describes how he spoke to the older communist Mika while planning the attack and asked him whether he should kill himself or be captured if the escape failed. Mika explains to him that a communist must strive to demoralise and frighten the enemy with his own heroic death, so that the enemy almost admires him.⁵⁵ As for the dilemma of suicide or capture, Mika believes that every partisan must decide for himself when he truthfully answers the question of whether he can endure the torture without betraying his comrades: "If you are sure / ... / that you can endure all the torture without betraying anything, then spend all the revolver bullets on them. But if you are not, then save the last one for yourself. That's for you to judge." Mika personally believes that a person does not have the right to take his own life, adding that "suicide at a difficult moment is a kind of help to the enemy," because with suicide the story is irrevocably over, but a partisan who does not choose suicide can also use the last bullet to shoot at the enemy, and the unpredictability of fate can even bring him survival and freedom later.⁵⁶

Regarding the conclusion that the leading party members and the military leadership quietly expected all subordinate fighters to be prepared to take their own lives at a critical moment, it should be noted that this also applied to them, especially judging by Dedijer's statements. Dedijer wrote that Edvard Kardelj, during the Rog offensive in 1942, thought about committing suicide if the enemy surrounded him.⁵⁷ In autumn 1943, Dedijer also spoke to Boris Kidrič about the possibility of suicide, whereupon the latter allegedly tapped his revolver in response and said "I always keep the last bullet for myself."⁵⁸ The willingness to commit suicide is said to have reached the very top. As Josip Broz - Tito's nephew Branko Broz reported, the commander-in-chief was prepared for the worst in Drvar in 1944: "When Tito saw the gliders descending, he realised that they were paratroopers. He pulled out his rifle and put a round in the barrel. It was clear that the situation was extremely critical and that he would not get into the enemy's hands alive."⁵⁹

The partisans understood and internalised the partisan command's loose instructions to commit suicide and to a large extent put them into practise - even if they were probably thinking more about their own interests than about the expectations of the military command when they committed the act. In general, however, several allies and opponents of the partisans noted a great, almost excessive heroism bordering on suicide. German documents spoke of "suicidal heroism,"⁶⁰ and the Slovenian-American pilot Jurij Kraigher - Žore claimed: "I saw the partisans running down the

55 Aleksandar Vojinović, *Hotel Park* (Ljubljana: Zavod Borec, 1961), 58, 59.

56 *Ibid.*, 60.

57 Dedijer, 'O partizanskom samožrtvovanju,' 263.

58 *Ibid.*, 264.

59 Branko Broz, *Moj život uz Tita* (Zagreb: Spektar, 1982), 95.

60 Boško Brajović, 'Iz događaja u Beogradu i oko Čačka,' in Koča Popović et al. (eds.), *Ustanak naroda Jugoslavije 1941: zbornik: knjiga treća* (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački zavod JNA Vojno delo, 1964), 816.

hill and attacking the Germans in perfect formation. These partisans simply have a kind of suicidal conviction.”⁶¹ On the other hand, the partisan commanders repeatedly criticised the fighters for being overly heroic and unnecessarily endangering their own lives,⁶² and there was also a negative assessment of the excessive modesty, ascetic refusal of food, clothing, shoes, etc., as the solid psychophysical health of the fighters was essential.⁶³

There is no shortage of testimonies about suicides and attempted suicides from the Slovenian partisan struggle, which were published both in the form of documentary articles and fiction stories, mostly based on real events. The same motives appear again and again in these testimonies. A situation is often described in which a wounded fighter asks his comrades to kill him mercifully, but they are unable to do so: “Shoot me, comrades, say that I have fallen.’ But who would shoot a partisan - our brother, it’s hard for us, he shot himself.”⁶⁴ Other accounts focus on the consequences of the suicide, i.e. the emotional distress of the fighters who had to come to terms with this act, including Vid Jerič from the Gubec Brigade: “It broke my heart. Bitter thoughts came over me. I lost a comrade with whom we carried out countless daring actions. He was the kind of comrade I have rarely met in my life. I had the feeling of being left alone, of being an orphan. Completely alone in a hopeless situation.” But it was the extreme feeling of loneliness that gave Jerič the courage to keep fighting: “Should I take my own life before I fall into the hands of those disgusting Italian servants? No!” He began firing at the enemy and managed to escape. “How marvellously a man fights when there is no other way out!”⁶⁵

Some narratives reflect the extent to which the fighters internalised the informal instructions of the military leadership to commit suicide, such as the inner monologue of the partisan Janez, who is hiding from the Home Guards:

“Everyone would rather shoot themselves than surrender. / ... / No! They won’t get me. A partisan does not surrender. At least not a true partisan. Anyone who surrenders is a coward to me. / ... / That’s what I taught my comrades. I have to prove that I myself am of the same opinion. No! I’d rather shoot myself. I won’t give them that pleasure. They would show me through the streets of Ljubljana like a bear. Pious women would spit after me ... / ... / No, they won’t catch me like that, Janez concluded. I’d rather be eaten by foxes. I’d rather shoot myself. At least they’ll say I was consistent, or as they say, determined.”⁶⁶

Some witnesses go even further, for example the partisan who was part of a besieged group that could only escape by jumping into the depths: “And then we jumped into the abyss one by one. As I flew through the air, I remembered the verses of

61 Vladimir Dedijer, *Dnevnik 1941–1944: treća knjiga, od 10. novembra 1943 do 7. novembra 1944* (Rijeka: GRO Liburnija, 1981), 188.

62 Milan M. Miladinović, *Moralni lik članova Saveza komunističke omladine Jugoslavije u NOR-u i revoluciji* (Beograd: self-publishing, 1972), 68.

63 Ibid., 130, 131.

64 Duško Kukman, ‘Na Štajerskem je bila trda,’ *Borec* 1, No. 3 (1949): 28.

65 Vid Jerič, ‘Samo dva sva se prebila,’ *Borec* 18, No. 1 (1967): 44.

66 Mile Pavlin, ‘Zgodilo se je ...,’ *Borec* 6, No. 5–6 (1954): 214–16.

Prešeren: 'Less frightening is the night in the black earth ...'"⁶⁷ The partisan referenced France Prešeren's verses "Less frightening is the night in the black earth / Than days of slavery under the bright sun," which spoke of death being a better option than life in the shackles of slavery, often used as a striking slogan in partisan press and propaganda, and also reflected well the partisans' philosophy of preferring suicide to capture.⁶⁸

On the other hand, the motif of heroic perseverance in life and in battle also appears in the same stories, regardless of the difficult circumstances. In such stories, suicide takes on the character of a defeatist act and is no longer the act of a hero. A motif that is often emphasised is the thought of the family, for whom a partisan renounces death, for example in the case of Karel Kolovšek, when he is surrounded and finds himself facing the abyss: "Should I throw myself into the depths?' Karel thought. 'No, I have a family.' The image of his young wife and his five-week-old daughter, whom he had left at home, appeared before him. The thought of his two beloved beings held him back."⁶⁹ Another typical case is a demoralised partisan who wants to end his life due to injuries or heavy losses, but his comrades persuade him to do the opposite: "Janez's shattered heel hurt more and more. He began to despair. Suddenly he collapsed on the floor and said he wanted to shoot himself. He began to prepare the rifle. I knew he was serious, so I took the gun from him and sat down next to him. 'Are you a partisan or not? It's really not that bad to give up. I'll help you and we will go on and catch up.' He calmed down and we slowly walked on."⁷⁰ A similar situation is the suggestion of a group suicide, which comes from a demotivated team and is harshly rejected by the commander: "Are you insane? To kill ourselves now, after we have so luckily escaped through the fire of the rapid-fire rifles and machine guns - when we slipped past hundreds and hundreds of Germans? No, comrade, not now! We will keep to fight with the Germans! They will pay dearly for this wickedness! We will keep singing and dancing, boys!"⁷¹ In a story based on a true incident, the writer Karel Grabeljšek illustrated the clash between the two approaches - willingness to commit suicide and insistence on fighting - using the example of two fighters battling the Home Guards in a besieged house:

"Should we fall into their hands alive? No, not alive! You must save the last bullet for yourself! That was always close to our hearts when we talked about it. Will it ever be necessary? Now the fateful moment was approaching. / ... / 'Žan, I say aloud, 'I will shoot myself, but you do what you want.' Žan looks at me, more reproachful than astonished. 'Wait a minute,' he says, 'you still have a few rounds left, don't you?' 'One and a half rounds more,' I reply. 'Well, then why are you in such a hurry,' Žan says, as if we were talking about completely mundane things."⁷²

67 Andrej Pagon - Ogarev, 'Okupatorjev zločin v Brdi nad Gornjo Kanomljo,' *Borec* 22, No. 5 (1970): 441.

68 Dedijer, 'O partizanskom samožrtvovanju,' 342.

69 Ivanka Lebar, 'Časi so minili, ostali so spomini,' *Borec* 19, No. 4 (1968): 368.

70 Andrej Pagon-Ogarev, 'Ranjen,' *Borec* 20, No. 1 (1969): 61, 62.

71 Katja Špur, 'Ofenziva (iz zapiskov L. Grada-Kijca),' *Borec* 19, No. 2 (1968): 110.

72 Karel Grabeljšek, 'Dva sta ostala,' *Borec* 15, No. 3 (1964): 135.

The partisan suicide could also become the subject of legends, not only commemorative literature. Especially in the southern parts of Yugoslavia, songs, myths and legends about the death of important partisan fighters, including those who committed suicide, often emerged, based on a strong tradition of epic folk lore. In Slovenia, such a tradition is less pronounced, and the few documented cases show the tragedy of losing one's life rather than the glorification of a heroic deed. One example is the poem *Death of a Partisan* by an unknown author:

“Oh my dears, how I have loved you,
I lived and suffered for you.
But now that I've lost you
I will take my own life.
He supports his chin with a rifle,
the shot goes off in the middle of the night
and on the bones he collapses,
spraying with red blood.”⁷³

A similar work is *The Ballad from the Karst Cave* or *The Ballad of a Heroic Death*, which describes the mass death in the Ogenjca hospital and has been circulating in Notranjska since at least 1943. The lyrics of the 15-verse song are about the wounded partisans who hid in a cave while awaiting their own fate when they were betrayed. The nurse shoots the fighters, while the remaining wounded - unlike in reality - kill themselves with a bomb:

“The gun goes off, the nurse now
falls, crashes to the ground,
her blood merges with the brother's. / ... /
The bomb goes off. It's over now.
Twelve dead partisans
and among them nurse Zlata.
Thirteen of them died here
a heroic death for freedom.”⁷⁴

Despite the above-mentioned testimonies and poems, the discourse on suicides in the wartime partisan press was not so unambiguous in its positive evaluation of their heroism. It should be noted that the word “suicide” or any more precise definition of the manner of death did not appear in most newspaper reports and letters. Kocbek quotes a letter he received from Jože Brejc (Jože Javoršek) on 16 October 1942 about the death of Vinko Paderšič, in which a heroic narrative is used but no suicide is mentioned:

“I bring you the difficult news that the Italians got hold of Paderšič and Kos and killed them. They were found in a cave where they had taken refuge from a sudden Italian attack. The Italians bombed the cave. Paderšič continued to respond with a shout and a rifle for

73 Marija Stanonik, 'Poezija konteksta II: „Na tleh leže slovenstva stebri stari,' *Borec* 45, No. 8–10 (1993): 925.

74 Gala, *Ogenjca*, 129–31.

two days until he ran out of ammunition. Finally, he too was hit by a bomb. Both fell as true heroes fall. As I write this to you, my eyes are filling with tears, but I too would like to die such a death. May their memory live forever!"

In the letter, Brejc is also said to have hinted that Paderšič was probably shot by a Slovenian member of the Home Guard.⁷⁵

The question of how reliable the authors of such documents were about the deaths of their comrades is certainly relevant here, and given the chaotic situation it would not be surprising that the information was often incorrect, so that the deaths of combatants who committed suicide could quickly be presented as deaths in battle. However, a review of the published documents of the Slovenian and Yugoslav partisan leadership and the leadership of individual units shows that the word "suicide" was rarely used in the reports. Individual commanders of partisan detachments did announce the suicide of their fighters in their reports, but such statements were rare. They were less hesitant to talk about suicides when it came to the death of military opponents. The partisan suicide, though widely celebrated, retained a shadow of infamy.

Some historians suggest interpreting the partisans' complex attitude to suicide through (at least) two phases. In the first months of the fighting, the partisan press did not talk about suicides as deaths worthy of party members, but covered up such deaths by using general terms and saying that they had "fallen" without giving details. Suicide is thus supposed to be an escape from the torture that every decent communist must endure proudly and without betrayal. The longer the war lasted and the death toll rose, the more the stigma of suicide faded among the partisans and a heroic interpretation of the act prevailed, but only if the suicide occurred before capture and not afterwards, which continued to bear a sign of dishonour.⁷⁶ It is also reasonable to consider whether it is better to view the phases as chronologically separate entities or as two approaches that were intertwined throughout.

Behind the image of unwavering heroism of the partisan army, which was conveyed in newspapers, leaflets, speeches and other partisan material, were hidden human emotions and the difficult psychological state of the frightened, confused and insecure fighters, who were constantly accompanied by the thought of the possibility of imminent death. Even the higher authorities were not immune to such feelings. In his diary entry of 25 August 1942, Edvard Kocbek described how they could not sleep at night: "Then [the writer and literary critic Josip Vidmar] turned to me and suddenly asked: 'Pavle, have you ever thought about suicide?' I looked at him in surprise and said slowly: 'No.' He replied: 'I have many times.' He did not explain his question and answer. He only thoughtfully concluded: 'How strange is the fate of man!'"⁷⁷

The partisans believed that the harsh conditions of war made it possible "to prove bravery and maturity or charlatanry, confirm or deny a person, confirm their qualities

75 Edvard Kocbek, *Tovarišija* (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1949), 219.

76 Dević, *Za partiju i Tita*, 787, 788.

77 Kocbek, *Partizanski dnevnik*, 342.

or expose their faults and incompetence.”⁷⁸ Consequently, the partisans greatly valued the fight to the end and heroic behaviour during interrogations, especially those who went to their deaths without betraying anyone or who symbolically protested with a gesture or a word just before being shot.⁷⁹ But what happened if the partisan did not do what was expected of him and missed the right moment to commit suicide? Postponing suicide out of indecision or fear of death, which led to being captured, was viewed just as negatively by the partisans as desertion, surrender and betrayal. In general, fearfulness, cowardice and panic were strongly criticised and attempts were made to restrict them in the partisan ranks, often through demotion, exclusion or boycott, i.e. collectively ignoring the perpetrator,⁸⁰ and in extreme cases through execution. At the first regional party conference, the communists of Bosanska Krajina were particularly direct: “We do not need cowards in our ranks. Should the vanguard of the proletariat be a coward?”⁸¹ Miloš Rutar wrote about the Slovenian partisan movement: “I think that there is no coward among us, because everyone would laugh at him and judge him.”⁸²

In 1979, Dedijer discussed the (in)ability of partisans committing suicide with the politician Ivan Maček - Matija, who claimed that “there was an unwritten rule in Slovenia that a partisan could not surrender alive”: “At that time, he pointed out, in difficult days, when the highest Slovenian command was hidden in the bunkers over which the Italian army was marching, there was a general conviction that one should fight to the last bullet and then shoot oneself with the last bullet in order not to surrender alive to the enemy.” Maček also spoke about the case in Belca Valley in 1943, when the partisans - even worse, the partisan commanders - did not abide by the unwritten rule:

“In the Dolomites near Ljubljana, the Italians surrounded a group of partisans. The fighters fought to the last bullet, and then many killed themselves to avoid falling into the hands of the enemy. At the same time, the commander and the commissar surrendered. The commander was later sentenced to death and shot, and the commissar somehow got away, but to this day many national heroes in Slovenia look at him with contempt because he broke this sacred partisan rule.”⁸³

An archival document with a brief summary of Maček’s thoughts contains an even harsher criticism of this incident: “Matija says that the partisan law ordered both the commander and the commissar not to surrender to the enemy alive, but they did. There is no excuse for that.”⁸⁴

78 Milan M. Miladinović, *Osnovne moralne vrednosti socijalističke revolucije u Jugoslaviji 1941–1945* (Leskovac: s.n., 1980), 101.

79 Milan M. Miladinović, *Osnovna moralna svojstva komunista* (Subotica: Radnički univerzitet, 1973), 107, 108, 110–12.

80 Ibid., 91, 106, 107. Dedijer, *Novi prilozi*, 523.

81 Miladinović, *Osnovna moralna svojstva*, 107.

82 Budna, Dežman and Lušina, *Gorenjski partizan*, 130.

83 Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju*, 514. Dedijer, ‘O partizanskom samožrtvovanju,’ 257.

84 SI AS 1979, Družina Dedijer, f. 203, Herojsko samoubistvo Slovenija, Razgovor Dedijera sa Ivanom Mačekom Matijom 7. XII 1979. godine.

Theoretical Interpretations of Partisan Heroic Suicide

After the Second World War, a complex system of historical myths, rituals and institutions emerged in Yugoslavia that preserved the memory of the war, its victims and heroes. Their function was to legitimise the new political order, which based its rule on the anti-fascist partisan struggle. The concept of partisan suicide was also incorporated into this system, while retaining its wartime vagueness. Many theoretical texts on the nature of the Yugoslav socialist system of self-government point out that the revolution was an act whose main goal was not a political overthrow per se, but the moral improvement and ennoblement of man in order to liberate the masses and enable them to self-actualize in the form of free creation according to their own desires and abilities. The new socialist system with its humanistic orientation was to represent the antithesis to the oppressive and egoistic society of the capitalist-bourgeois system. In this context, suicide was regarded as a serious disorder and a crime that a person should not commit against himself. Nevertheless, partisan suicide was an exception - for many years, theorists tried to formulate why and how exactly.

The concept of heroic partisan suicide first emerged in the discussion in the 1970s, but only experienced a real upswing at the beginning of the 1980s. Some researchers attribute this to the personal reluctance of the state leadership to enter the moral grey areas of the heroic narrative of the NLS. Tito himself in particular is said to have been reluctant to deal with such issues - these topics have worried and depressed him, which is why he propagated the triumphant chapters from the war, but not the episodes of martyrdom.⁸⁵

The analysis of the role of partisan suicides, which also shows the process of their heroisation, will be presented on the basis of the work of two key researchers on the subject in Yugoslavia. The first is the Serbian professor Dr Milan M. Miladinović, author of a substantial book opus on ethics and morality among communists and partisans, who also published in the journal *Borec*. His works are written according to a similar pattern, because regardless of the group that Miladinović chose as the focus of his research, in the core of the text he listed the positive qualities that he recognised in their actions (honesty, modesty, heroism, humanity, loyalty to the party, self-initiative, solidarity...) and supported them with quotes from sources and literature.

Miladinović categorised the issue of partisan suicides as a subcategory of humanity and, within it, the attitude towards the value of life. One of his first discussions on suicides from 1973 illustrates in an interesting way the complex, contradictory attitude towards partisan suicides. On a theoretical level, Miladinović showed his criticism of suicide:

"Throughout its activity, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia developed a love for life and opposed all phenomena of premeditated suicide and death. The struggle for a new life could not be linked to the undervaluation of life, self-negation, etc., because Marxist ethics

85 Perica, 'Kult narodnih heroja,' 114, 122.

considers the self-negation of life to be an immoral act and an expression of cowardice. It assumes that man as a social being does not have the right to take his own life, because this also negates humanity in every respect.”⁸⁶

Notwithstanding the rather harsh criticism of suicides, a number of heroic partisan suicides are listed on the next pages of Miladinović’s discussion.⁸⁷ The result is a kind of non sequitur, a balancing act between the inadmissibility of suicides from the point of view of Marxist ethics and the unreflected, non-contextualised listing of heroic suicides.

In the following years, Miladinović elaborated his views on suicide in more detail and presented them in a more coherent manner. The Gordian knot he tried to untie was the discrepancy between Marxist ethics, which negatively judge suicide as an anti-human act and a cowardly escape, since a person does not have the right to take their own life and thus deny their own humanity (Miladinović instead of the term “suicide” preferred to use the term “self-negation”, perhaps as a form of euphemism or self-censorship), and Yugoslav revolutionary practise, which served up an abundance of heroic suicides. As he asserts, the conflict is only apparent. Suicides were committed by the fighters in the name of preserving the dignity of human life, it was

“a protest against the physical oppression, torture and sadism of the occupiers and counter-revolutionaries, which they used against the fighters of the revolution and the inhabitants. In this way, the moral struggle also continues. The revolutionary leads the struggle to the end, and only when he is convinced that there are no conditions to save his life, he refuses to surrender and commits suicide.”⁸⁸

According to Miladinović’s interpretation, partisan suicide is therefore the opposite of the attitude that the destructive occupation regimes had towards human life, denying any value of life, and instead approaching the idea of contempt for death mentioned by Lenin,⁸⁹ proving “how much a revolutionary loves his life, worthy of a human being.”⁹⁰ Such a way of dying reflected an understanding of the value of life and preserved human dignity, which the enemy would otherwise have trampled on, thereby achieving a moral victory.⁹¹ Due to the exceptional circumstances, partisan suicide is therefore an honourable exception to the Marxist ethic that deserves recognition.

Miladinović warned that partisan suicide can only be justified if there is no other way out of a difficult military situation.⁹² He repeatedly emphasised that the partisan movement was aware of the value of human life and was trying to protect it. Consequently, no one should join the ranks of the partisans with the intention of falling for freedom; such an aim would miss the real goal of warfare, i.e. the realisation of the ideals of achieving freedom and socialism by military means. A partisan must value his own life because he values the lives of others in the same way, so that any

86 Miladinović, *Osnovna moralna svojstva*, 114.

87 Ibid., 114, 115.

88 Miladinović, *Moralni lik*, 67.

89 Miladinović, *Osnovne moralne vrednosti*, 118–21.

90 Ibid., 122.

91 Ibid.

92 Ibid., 122, 123.

display of exaggerated heroism or agitation for death is judged negatively, as a form of fatalistic contempt and pessimistic rejection of life, which is more characteristic of representatives of religion who believe that by self-sacrifice they can save themselves and the world from sin.⁹³ In short, the partisans, in Tito's words, "did not go into battle and die because they hated life, but because they loved life."⁹⁴

Before Tito's death, Miladinović was almost the only theorist to deal with the partisan suicides in Yugoslavia, and even then only sporadically, in the context of more general topics. The debate on this topic was only revived after the Tito era, in the 1980s, and showed that the experts did not have a unified position on this issue. The division of experts is perfectly illustrated by the events at the Fourth Yugoslav Symposium on the Prevention of Suicides at the Hotel Riviera in Herceg Novi at the end of September 1980 - marked by the attempted suicide of a hotel guest - which was opened by the Serbian psychologist and penologist Jelena Špadijer-Džinić with the question of whether heroic suicides even exist. She argued that the particular circumstances of war are not the best framework for analysing this phenomenon, as this would mean that all captured, tortured and killed fighters are implicitly cowards. The discussion sparked a heated debate among the participants. One of the next speakers, Serbian psychiatrist Borislav Kapamadžija, referring to the fate of Sergej Mašera and Milan Spasić (which will be discussed later), defended the thesis that heroic suicide is a meaningful concept. The leading Slovenian suicidologist Dr Lev Milčinski warned that the boundaries of heroic suicide were problematic, as such a death in a military conflict was only considered heroic on one side. Due to the still heated discussions, one of the participants suggested that those present should decide on the existence of the concept of heroic suicide - by voting. The voting results did not produce a definitive outcome: one third voted in favour of its existence, one third against, and one third chose an intermediate solution, stating that such suicide is primarily the result of a natural fear of torture and pain.⁹⁵

In the following years, the vagueness of expert opinions on heroic suicide was overshadowed by the publication of the discussions of the aforementioned Vladimir Dedijer, a Serbian historian, publicist, activist and politician living in Slovenia, who was the main proponent of the concept of heroic partisan suicide as the crowning proof of the fighters' commitment to the anti-fascist struggle and the highest form of revolutionary self-sacrifice. Dedijer became interested in the suicides of the partisans in the mid-1970s when he gave a lecture on the Yugoslav revolution at the Institute for the History of the French Revolution at the Sorbonne in Paris and the question arose during the debate as to whether the suicides of the Yugoslav partisans could be compared with those of the participants in the French Revolution. The question appealed to Dedijer so much that he embarked on a research project on heroic suicide not only among the partisans, but practically on a global scale and began to collect data on the existence and status of such suicides in various societies and epochs, as he did not

93 Ibid., 116, 117, 123, 124, 215. Miladinović, *Moralni lik*, 9, 66. Miladinović, *Osnovna moralna svojstva*, 107.

94 Miladinović, *Moralni lik*, 75.

95 Vladimir Adamović, 'Samoubica kukavica ili heroj,' *NIN*, October 5, 1980, 32, 33.

want to fall into Eurocentrism and search not only in the traditions of Greco-Roman antiquity, Judaism and Christianity, but also in Islam and Eastern philosophies, for example.⁹⁶ As the archival material shows, Dedijer did indeed collect data from various sources, from Yugoslav and French newspapers to American and Slovenian research papers.⁹⁷ He also tried to collect statistical data on partisan suicides. Slovenian national heroine Andreana Družina - Olga helped him with data and sent him information on 23 suicides, and she also put together a group to continue collecting data in Slovenia.⁹⁸

Dedijer harbored the ambition to create a comprehensive scientific typology of partisan suicides on the basis of the collected material, but at the same time he was not sure whether he could fulfil this task. He wished for a greater temporal distance because many of the actors involved - including those who avoided suicide but should have done so according to the unwritten rule - were still alive (and often in influential positions) and because he himself was emotionally involved in the events of the war and could not offer an objective view. Nevertheless, Dedijer has already outlined three central fields of research: historical facts (testimonies about the circumstances of the suicides as well as myths and legends about them), sociological material (the relationship of the individual to society, possible orders to carry out suicides and the moral ideas of Yugoslav society about suicides) and psychological, psychopathological and psychoanalytical material (psychological profile of the partisan suicide victims).⁹⁹

On 8 November 1980, Dedijer gave a lecture at the Sorbonne on *Heroic Suicide in the Yugoslav Revolutionary War*, although he had already published his first articles on suicide in the Serbian press (*Politika*, *NIN*) at the end of the 1970s and had spoken about it on television programmes. He received many reactions from readers and viewers, some of them reportedly negative and protesting, but many praised him for addressing the topic and contributed additional information about their own relatives or friends who had committed suicide during the war. After a particularly high-profile televised appearance, the sculptor Dušan Džamonja called him and said: "I listened to you on television and believe me: the whole of Yugoslavia cried with you."¹⁰⁰ A pensioner from Bijeljina, for example, wrote to him:

"I read all your articles in ‚Politika‘, and when I came across the information you wrote in the inaugural lecture about our fighters who killed themselves so as not to fall alive into the hands of the enemy, I felt that I had to pass on the information about the suicide of two comrades, because I believe that you do not have this data. You must understand me, dear Vlado, how I still feel today when I remember these young people, because they selflessly sacrificed their young lives, which had only just begun. I am indebted to them and it would be the greatest happiness for me if this were written down somewhere. I believe you will do it for me."¹⁰¹

96 Dedijer, 'O partizanskom samožrtvovanju,' 223.

97 SI AS 1979, Družina Dedijer, f. 77, Herojsko samoubistvo.

98 SI AS 1979, Družina Dedijer, f. 100, Herojsko samoubistvo partizana, Pisma čitalaca.

99 Dedijer, *Novi prilozii*, 515, 516.

100 SI AS 1979, Družina Dedijer, f. 100, Herojsko samoubistvo partizana, Pisma čitalaca.

101 Ibid.

Dedijer summarises his findings on the self-sacrifice of partisans and heroic suicide in two contributions: the twelfth chapter of the second volume of *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita* (*New Addendum to the Biography of Josip Broz Tito*) from 1981, and his inaugural lecture on the occasion of his election as a member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts on 24 March 1982. The text was published in the Academy's journal *Glas* the following year.

The two contributions confirm that Dedijer wanted to cover a rather broad spectrum of the concept of martyrdom, self-sacrifice and heroic suicide throughout history. Dedijer found their roots in the philosophical system of the ancient Greek Stoics, who regarded suicide as a virtue, but only when man comes to the realisation that he cannot remain true to himself in the world in which he lives. Dedijer cites several examples of mass suicides from ancient military history¹⁰² and continues his overview all the way to the French Revolution, the nationalist and class movements of the 19th century, Tsarist Russia, the Soviet Union and Jan Palach.¹⁰³ On the other hand, Dedijer points out that the suicides of tyrants cannot be heroic suicides, as they are an expression of an escape from responsibility and extreme egoism rather than noble ideals; he cites Hitler and Goebbels as examples.¹⁰⁴

For the Balkan region, Dedijer noted that due to its chequered military past, it also has a long history of the concept of heroic suicides, which goes back at least to the Middle Ages with the Battle of Kosovo, continued in the popular tradition and was expressed more strongly again with the anti-Turkish liberation movements at the beginning of the 19th century. He particularly emphasised the heroic suicide of the Serbian commander Stevan Sindelić, who took his own life in 1809 near Niš by exploding barrels of gunpowder, killing a large number of Turkish invaders in the process. Dedijer also attributed an important role to the suicide of the Bosnian Serb Bogdan Žerajić after the failed assassination attempt on the governor of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Marijan Varešanin, in 1910, which significantly inspired Gavrilo Princip and the Sarajevo assassination four years later.¹⁰⁵

In interpreting the partisan suicides, Dedijer orientated himself on the theoretical framework of the friend and historian of the French Revolution, Albert Soboul. Soboul developed a theory of revolutionary self-sacrifice and distinguished between two types of suicide: the heroic suicide (*suicide héroïque*), in which a revolutionary either commits suicide to avoid being captured by the enemy or realises that the revolution has failed and deliberately destroys his own life by suicide, and the supreme sacrifice (*sacrifice suprême*), which means that the revolutionary heroically exposes himself on the battlefield and fights to the death, i.e. without literally committing suicide. Dedijer adopted Soboul's model and translated *sacrifice suprême* as indirect heroic suicide, which means that *suicide héroïque* became direct heroic suicide.¹⁰⁶ A

102 Dedijer, *Novi prilozi*, 511, 512.

103 *Ibid.*, 517.

104 *Ibid.*, 518.

105 *Ibid.*, 520.

106 *Ibid.*, 513. Dedijer, 'O partizanskom samožrtvovanju,' 219, 220.

new element of Dedijer that Soboul did not have and which, in Dedijer's estimation, represents an essential finding of his research is the psychological state of the suicide victims at the time of death. According to his hypothesis, the disillusioned revolutionaries of the French Revolution committed suicide in the pessimistic belief that the revolution had failed and that the struggle was pointless. The partisans, on the other hand, committed suicide in the optimistic belief that their comrades would continue the fight despite their physical death and one day achieve victory over the occupiers and freedom.¹⁰⁷

Dedijer's tendency to uncritically include unverifiable stories and anecdotes in his works could cause him to receive critical feedback, and that's just what happened with one of his case studies on heroic suicides. It was the double suicide of the Slovenian Sergej Mašera and the Serb Milan Spasić, the only non-partisan members who nevertheless became a widely known and propagated example of heroic behaviour in socialist Yugoslavia. Mašera, a 28-year-old naval officer of the Yugoslav Royal Army from Gorizia, and 31-year-old Lieutenant Spasić from Belgrade were stationed on the destroyer *Zagreb* in the bay of Boka Kotorska when the Italian army attacked Yugoslavia. To prevent the ship from falling into enemy hands, they blew it up on 17 April 1941 and sank with it. Spasić's body was soon found and solemnly buried, but only Mašera's head was found and secretly interred; it was not until 1987, when the story came to light, that his alleged skull was identified and buried with military honours at the Žale Cemetery in Ljubljana. Their story remained present in the collective consciousness of Yugoslavia, and although they belonged to the pre-war Yugoslav monarchical army, they became symbols of the heroic response to the occupation. In 1952, the first two memorials to them were unveiled in Tivat and near the site of the sinking, followed by monuments, busts and reliefs in Piran, Nova Gorica, Pula, Dobrota, Kotor, Belgrade and elsewhere, and wreaths were thrown into the sea on the anniversaries of their deaths. Numerous streets and facilities on the Yugoslav coast were named after them (among them the Sergej Mašera Maritime Museum in Piran), and in 1968 the film *Flammes sur l'Adriatique* was shot in a French-Yugoslav co-production. Their celebration reached its climax on 10 September 1973, when they were named national heroes at a ceremony on the warship *Galeb*, with which "these two heroes deservedly entered the ranks of the many giants of our Revolution,"¹⁰⁸ as Dedijer wrote.

Dedijer definitely agreed that the death of Mašera and Spasić was one of the purest examples of heroic suicide, even though they were not partisans. Accordingly, he devoted much attention to their death in his writings and painted it in epic strokes. Mašera and Spasić, who according to Dedijer had "connections to communist organisations," went to the stern, where they were seen by many people on the shore, tore off each other's epaulettes and threw them into the sea, looked for a few moments at Lovćen, "the sacred Montenegrin mountain, a symbol of self-sacrifice throughout

107 Dedijer, *Novi prilozi*, 524. Dedijer, 'O partizanskom samožrtvovanju,' 266.

108 Dedijer, 'O partizanskom samožrtvovanju,' 235.

the centuries," set off the dynamite and died in the sinking. "The people on the shore took off their headgear and fell to their knees." At the burial of Spasić's remains in the Savina monastery, the priest said: "Glory to you, the new Sindelić!"¹⁰⁹ This account was read by retired battleship captain Jože Pretnar from Ljubljana, who was stationed on the destroyer *Dubrovnik* and witnessed the events of that day. He wrote to Dedijer and problematised many elements of his interpretation of the events. According to Pretnar's claims, the dead officers had no links to communists, they did not tear off their epaulettes, there were no people crying on the shore, and there was no comparison between Spasić and Sindelić. Dedijer showed integrity when he later published the letter, but he also argued quite angrily with Pretnar, questioning the captain's motives and the credibility of his statement, saying that it "contains ideological and political motives"; above all, he accused Pretnar of (Slovene?) nationalism for allegedly wanting to erase the mention of Sindelić's name. In the conclusion, Dedijer also implicitly accused the captain of cowardice and asked why he did not follow the heroic example that day and commit suicide himself:

"He himself admits that he was boarded on the destroyer *Dubrovnik*. Why was not there someone there who, like Mašera and Spasić, would blow the ship up and not hand it over to the enemy? / ... / Joža Pretnar, / ... / shamed by this heroic deed (which he did not perform himself), had to destroy this epic tradition of ours, which was so magnificently revived by the heroic deed of Mašera and Spasić."¹¹⁰

Dedijer tried to look at the partisan suicides from the perspective of historical science, but with the axiom that these suicides were heroic, he too fell into the ideological evaluation of history. The aforementioned leading Slovenian suicidologist Lev Milčinski had a more objective opinion on this phenomenon, noting:

"It is important that when analysing such events we do not get caught up in the maelstrom of ideology and prefer not to use categories such as 'heroic suicide', because this can obscure our view of the complex mechanisms at work here on various levels, leading the final synthesis to a fatal end. Is any type of suicide heroic? Each of them is, after all, an escape. It is true that escape is often very human. But sometimes heroism consists of consciously accepting the inevitable in our existence and still remaining a normal human being."¹¹¹

Partisan Suicides in Slovenia Between Celebration, Indifference and Deconstruction

Referencing the victims of the Second World War was an essential part of the legitimisation mechanisms of the socialist regime. The new Yugoslavia was to be built on these sacrifices, which brought freedom and a new social order. The German

109 Dedijer, *Novi prilozii*, 521.

110 Dedijer, 'O partizanskom samožrtvovanju', 236–38.

111 SIAS 1979, *Družina Dedijer*, f. 77, Herojsko samoubistvo, Lev Milčinski: Kulturni faktori u etiologiji samoubistva, 14.

researcher on Yugoslav memory of the Second World War, Dr Heike Karge, pointed to the existence of a “Yugoslav hierarchy of memory” consisting of two main groups: the partisan fighters and - one level below them - the victims of fascist terror. Accordingly, the most celebrated participants in the Second World War were the partisans who actively fought against the enemy with rifle in hand. The victims of fascist terror included all those who died in any way at the hands of the occupiers or collaborators, from hostages and victims of concentration camps to those who died in air raids, without actively engaging in armed resistance.¹¹² The passivity of the victims was a characteristic that wasn't publicly criticised, but nevertheless influenced the hierarchical order within the symbolic imaginarium. A hero of armed resistance was accorded a higher degree of social recognition than a “mere” victim of fascism. Surviving former prisoners received little recognition, the public and the state often ignored them or didn't trust them.¹¹³ One of the camp survivors said:

“Being in the camp - that's not written or spoken anywhere - but it had an air of degradation. As in, this one was no good. If you had been brave, you wouldn't have come to Gonars in the first place. If you were an active partisan, that's another matter. If you were somehow excluded from the action, at least keep quiet. Experiences in Gonars and similar camps mean nothing. At least they didn't use to. / ... / Going to a prison or a camp meant a strong stain not only on your career, but also on your personality.”¹¹⁴

A closer look at the hierarchical strata of fighters and victims shows that there was also an internal hierarchisation within the strata. Among the partisan fighters, for example, prestige grew in direct proportion to the time they joined the partisans. Of course, those who had been in the partisan ranks from the very beginning, i.e. since 1941, received the most recognition.¹¹⁵ The question therefore arises as to which level within the group of fighters the partisan suicide victims belonged to, as this was a kind of blind spot in the Yugoslav memory of the war. Did they end up at the very top of the pyramid through noble self-sacrifice, or did they finish in the “lower upper” stratum due to the problematic nature of their act from the point of view of Marxist ethics, or something else? Is it even possible to answer this question with a single answer that would apply to the entire country?

Since, as already mentioned, communist suicides were already taking place in the interwar period, the celebratory attitude also developed in relation to them. The most important group in this context were the so-called seven SKOJ secretaries - the seven leaders of the League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia, who died between the ages of 24 and 29 in clashes with the police during the dictatorship of King Alexander. At least two of them are said to have committed suicide on the same occasion: Josip Kolumbo and Pero Popović - Aga got into a fight with the Zagreb police on 14 August

112 Hajke Karge, *Sećanje u kamenu – okamenjeno sećanje?* (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 2013), 35, 36.

113 Ibid., 45.

114 Oto Luthar, Marta Verginella and Urška Strle, *Užaljeno maščevanje: spomin na italijanska fašistična taborišča* (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2023), 304.

115 Karge, *Sećanje u kamenu*, 43, 44.

1930 and shot themselves to avoid arrest.¹¹⁶ After the Second World War, the seven secretaries achieved the status of martyrs due to their unwavering commitment to communist ideals and their violent deaths. Moša Pijade believed that the secretaries deserved to be celebrated "because when they died, they were not thinking of themselves, of cowardly saving their lives, but of the Party, of the revolution," so that they are an example of "how to fight and die in the struggle for peace, freedom, democracy and socialism."¹¹⁷

During the Second World War, the highest recognition a partisan could receive for his heroic behaviour was the title of national hero. National heroes were particularly meritorious fighters who had proven themselves through courage and sacrifice in the fight against the occupying forces and their helpers, and whose moral values were considered exemplary for all Yugoslav citizens. As the medals were awarded both to fighters who had died in the war and to those who survived and became active members of public life, the heroes preserved the memory of the heroic sacrifice for freedom on the one hand and established a direct continuity between the war and post-war period on the other. A cult of celebration developed around them, both for the dead and the living, which legitimised and strengthened state power.

The model for the Yugoslav Order of the National Hero was the title Hero of the Soviet Union, which was awarded for personal and group heroic deeds since its establishment in 1934 (it was also awarded to a number of fighters who had committed suicide, but it is interesting to note that they especially valued those who, together with their own death, caused the mass death of the enemy, e.g. by an explosion). The title of national hero appeared in the Yugoslav Partisan Army in February 1942 and was awarded to fighters who had particularly distinguished themselves in the fight against the enemy through their heroism and self-sacrifice, with membership of the Communist Party also being an almost necessary prerequisite. The Order of the National Hero was officially created in August 1943. By the end of the war, around 170 titles had been awarded, and the number only increased at the end of the 1940s, during the split between Tito and Stalin (1141 titles being awarded between 1949 and 1953), which was an attempt to reinforce the importance of the Yugoslav partisan struggle as proof that the Yugoslavs were liberated mainly by themselves and not with the help of the Red Army. A total of 1322 titles of national heroes were awarded, although some authors give a slightly higher or lower number. According to research, about 13% of the national heroes were Slovenians, however the Yugoslav authorities did not emphasise the national representation of the national heroes and instead claimed that all nations and nationalities are equally deserving of the liberation.¹¹⁸

116 Slobodan Petrović, *Sedam sekretara SKOJ-a* (Beograd: Izdavačka radna organizacija Rad, 1979), 395, 396, 453, 454.

117 *Ibid.*, 7.

118 Vjekoslav Perica, 'Herojstvo, mučeništvo i karizma u civilnoj religiji titoizma: proturječja između Titovog kulta i kulta narodnih heroja Jugoslavije,' in Olga Manojlović Pintar, ed., *Tito – viđenja i tumačenja: zbornik radova* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, Arhiv Jugoslavije, 2011), 590. Marjana Strmčnik, *Javne reprezentacije narodnih herojev Jugoslavije v Sloveniji: doktorska disertacija* (Ljubljana: self-publishing, 2018), 78. Dević, *Za partiju i Tita*, 666, 668, 683.

In many countries, dead heroes are used as useful political capital that shapes collective memory and legitimises state power. National heroes were at the centre of Yugoslav thanatopolitics. The characteristics that defined the heroes can be divided into several categories. Several authors refer to the role of heroes who proved themselves on the battlefield or in leadership through heroism, and to the role of heroes who died a martyr's death, which, in addition to those who died as a result of torture and execution, partisan suicide victims were a part of.¹¹⁹

How did the national heroes who committed suicide rank in the memorial system of socialist Yugoslavia? It is hard to deny that the "greatest of the greatest" were the fighters who lost their lives dramatically at the hands of the enemy, i.e. those who were shot or hanged but went to their deaths with anti-fascist slogans and calls for an uprising - Rade Končar said before his execution, when asked if he would ask for a pardon: "I would neither give it to you, nor am I asking for it from you."¹²⁰ - and with other symbolic gestures, such as defiantly tearing off the blindfold. Many examples of last words have become legends and have been reproduced in school textbooks, on monuments, in speeches and elsewhere. The most famous example is the death of Stjepan (Stevan) Filipović, who was hanged in Valjevo in 1942. The photo showing him shortly before his death with his hands raised high and shouting revolutionary slogans has become one of the most famous visual symbols of the Yugoslav partisan struggle.

National heroes who committed suicide may have been less prominent, but they did exist. There is no consensus among researchers as to how many national heroes actually committed suicide. According to official Yugoslav statistics, there were 55, i.e. 6% of all national heroes. Vjekoslav Perica counted at least 76 of them, and significantly more if the criteria are looser.¹²¹ According to the 1982 encyclopaedia *Narodni heroji Jugoslavije*, at least 58 Yugoslav national heroes died in this way (if one excludes the 17 Slovenian heroes who undoubtedly or allegedly committed suicide), including 20 Serbs, 17 Montenegrins, 10 Croats, 7 Macedonians and 4 Bosnians; 53 were men and 5 women.

It seems that the Yugoslav authorities had no qualms about rewarding deceased fighters who committed suicide. Already on 25 November 1944, the legendary fighter Slaviša Vajner - Čiča received the title, followed by 3 national heroes-suicide victims in 1945 and 1946, 5 in 1949, 15 in 1951 and one in 1952. In 1953, when by far the most titles for national heroes were awarded, 28 partisans who committed suicide received the title. In 1973, Sergej Mašera and Milan Spasić were the last to do so. Of the Slovenian national heroes who certainly or allegedly committed suicide, all received the title in the early 1950s: Paderšič, Slak, Redelonghi, Kolman, Ravbar, Gregorčič, Stariha and Turšič in 1951, while Kosovel, Pečar, Bernard, Hohkraut, Dolničar, Kosec, Kovačič, Jereb and Janežič received the title in 1953.

119 Vjekoslav Perica, 'Kult narodnih heroja,' 111. Ivana Lučić-Todosić, 'Heroizam u likovima Narodnih heroja: potrošeni simbolički kapital naroda Jugoslavije?,' *Etnoantropološki problemi* 14, No. 4 (2019): 1238. Ivana Lučić-Todosić, 'Telo kao izvor značenja u kulturi sećanja: reputaciono preduzetništvo likova jugoslovenskih narodnih heroja,' *Etnoantropološki problemi* 15, No. 4 (2020): 1157.

120 Kačavenda and Živković, *Narodni heroji: A–M*, 398.

121 Perica, 'Herojstvo, mučeništvo i karizma,' 590, 591. Perica, 'Kult narodnih heroja,' 113.

What does a glance at the public monuments unveiled in memory of fallen fighters reveal about the heroic suicides of the partisans? It is known that thousands of NLS monuments were put up throughout Yugoslavia on the initiative of the authorities, associations and private individuals to commemorate fallen victims and important events of the war period. A number of monuments was put up in places associated with partisans who committed suicide. According to the data collected so far, at least 77 such monuments have been unveiled in Slovenia, 16 of them at the places of birth or residence of the partisans who committed suicide, 41 monuments were built at the places of death, and 16 were busts of the deceased, mainly national heroes. A further four memorial plaques were placed in other institutions, particularly primary schools. If the statistics of monuments to the partisans whose suicide is questionable are added, there are at least 22 more monuments (five at the birthplaces, four at the places of death, seven busts and six in institutions). It should be added that the partisan suicide victims also appear as concrete, albeit unnamed, figures in public artworks on the theme of the NLS, in particular by the artist Ive Šubic, who included some of them in his fresco in Poljane pri Škofji Loki and in the mosaic that is part of the memorial complex in Dražgoše.¹²²

The number of monuments to partisan suicide victims is therefore not small, but at the same time it is true that the word "suicide" is not engraved on any of them. Moreover, the monuments generally only very rarely mention that a fallen partisan committed suicide. In most cases, the information is obscured by the loose notion that the fighter "fell" or "sacrificed his life", and in rare cases the inscription even directly contradicts the references to suicide from the literature and claims that the partisan was shot. Of the almost one hundred monuments, there are only two that at least indirectly refer to the suicide. The older of these is the memorial plaque to the victims of the Okroglo Cave, which was ceremonially unveiled on 30 October 1949 on the initiative of the Central Committee of the People's Youth of Slovenia and on which the inscription is engraved: "When every exit was closed to the besieged / loyal to the end we did not surrender / we ourselves proudly chose death."¹²³ A few years later, on 15 February 1953, partisan veterans in Celje unveiled a memorial plaque for Tine Majer¹²⁴ with the inscription (albeit with the wrong name engraved on it): "Rather than betray any of his comrades during the interrogation, the illegal comrade Majer Jože jumped out of the window and killed himself."

What is the reason for the fact that the suicide of partisans was almost never mentioned on monuments? Did the planners of the monuments not want to be too explicit out of reverence for the deceased? This interpretation is complicated by the fact that in cases of particularly brutal executions of partisans, the instigators had no problem emphasising the bloodthirstiness of the enemy; an example of this is the monument in Idrijske Krnice, which directly mentions that the partisans who died there were

122 J. Košnjek, 'Umetnikovo doživetje dražgoške bitke,' *Glas*, February 13, 1976, S. Rutar, *Sodelovati in zmagati*, 209.

123 'Niso se predali ... ponosno so rajiši smrt izbrali!,' *Gorenjski glas*, November, 3, 1949, 3.

124 'Špominska plošča ilegalcem v Celju,' *Slovenski poročevalec*, February 16, 1953, 2.

tortured and beheaded. So is it a remnant of the belief in suicide as an inappropriate, semi-cowardly act, and stating that a partisan “fell” makes him a greater hero than saying he “committed suicide”?

On the other hand, it is clear that the manner of death was never an obstacle to the commemoration of the fallen partisans. There were no reservations about naming public institutions after national heroes who had committed suicide. In socialist Slovenia, many streets, primary schools, high schools, pioneer detachments, cultural and art associations, military barracks, sports competitions, memorial marches, choral societies, youth work brigades, neighbourhoods, even a pharmacy and other institutions were named after suicide heroes, sometimes in close connection with their manner of death (Batreja Cave Association), sometimes to the limits of good taste (Ivan Kosovel Shooting Association). Some local communities chose the date of their local holiday after the day of the suicide of this or that hero.

Whether or not the memory of the suicide partisan's manner of death would be present was largely determined by the local communities who shaped the commemoration policy in relation to the NLS events that took place in their surroundings. Newspaper articles show that while some communities celebrated national heroes who were born or committed suicide there, they did not emphasise the manner of their death, while other communities regularly highlighted the manner of their death as an integral part of the narrative of these partisans' heroism. For example, there was a strong local tradition regarding the death of Vinko Paderšič - Batreja, as the Becele Cave, the site of his death, was already a tourist destination in the 1950s, and the public paid special attention to the discovery of a historical artefact in 1965 - an alleged revolver with which Paderšič took his own life, which the cave explorers found in the cave together with other remains and handed over to the Dolenjska Museum.¹²⁵ In Primorska, there are several such examples where fallen national heroes were honoured as victims who contributed to the liberation of the region from fascism and the annexation of Yugoslavia after the war, e.g. when the remains of some national heroes were buried in local cemeteries, such as Ivan Turšič in 1946 and Ivan Kosovel a year later.

A textual analysis of the printed sources also reveals a somewhat unclear, ambivalent attitude of Slovenian society towards the heroic suicides of the partisans. When reading Slovenian historiographical contributions, collections of articles, newspaper articles and other literature on the subject of NLS, one gets the feeling that the term “suicide” is subject to a kind of rejection. If the authors did not completely bypass the information about the manner of death by merely saying that the fighter had “(heroically) fallen” (which was not so rare even in more extensive biographical newspaper articles), they preferred to use somewhat euphemistic terms, saying that the partisan had “taken his own life”, “ended his life” and “saved the last bullet for himself”. In some cases, however, the biographies were more explicit and mentioned the manner

125 Ivan Zoran, 'Prvi dokazi iz Beceletove jame,' *Dolenjski list*, May 13, 1965, 21. Slavko Dokl, 'Prizadevni novomeški jamarji,' *Delo*, January 30, 1981, 24.

of suicide, supplemented by comments such as: "He fell in honour."¹²⁶ Meanwhile, the term "suicide" appeared more often when describing the death of military opponents; as an example, the 1978 voluminous monograph *Vodnik po partizanskih poteh* (*Guide Along the Partisan Paths*), which contains an overview of the NLS monuments in Slovenia, the term "suicide" is only mentioned once in total, namely in the description of the death of the defeated Chetnik commander Danilo Koprivica in Grčarice.¹²⁷

It can be concluded from this that in the celebration of partisan heroism in Slovenia, suicide as the highest form of heroic death was rarely emphasised as a special virtue. The glorification of heroes in the press was based primarily on their heroic deeds and partly on their deaths, especially in cases where they were executed by the occupying forces and proved their heroism through an act of protest. Perhaps this lukewarm attitude towards suicides contains a culturally conditioned attitude that Dedijer wrote about; the Slovenian lands, as an area with a strong Catholic tradition, did not cultivate a benevolent attitude towards any kind of suicide, and this tradition could be passed on even in the post-war period despite the ideological-political rupture.

Just as there was no consensus among professional psychologists as to whether heroic suicide even existed, there were obviously also reservations about it among the Slovenian public. Their reactions can be showed through the affair in the early 1980s when the partisan suicide was portrayed through the lens of the camera. In 1981, Television Ljubljana filmed and broadcast a five-part television series *Manj strašna noč* (*Less Frightening is the Night*) about the tragedy in the Ogenjca hospital, the script of which was written by Dimitrij Rupel based on the book by Aleksander Gala.¹²⁸ The series was criticised in the mainstream press. According to the reviewer of *Delo*, the key scene of the mass murder-suicide was particularly weak, lacking in dramatic weight and presented in a drawn-out manner.¹²⁹ The audience's opinion was quite divided. From the beginning of 1982, there was a fairly heated debate in the media, which revolved not only around the formal weaknesses of the series, but also around the history that the series depicted. Commentators - both witnesses of the war, intellectuals and regular viewers of the series - asked questions in letters to the editor such as who had entrusted doctor Gala with the care of the seriously wounded, to what extent was (at the time already deceased) Gala responsible for the attack on the hideout and, most sensitively of all, whether the nurse Mimica had fundamentally violated her medical duty by executing the patients (which also made the fact that the Ljubljana Clinical Center took over the patronage of Ogenjca problematic); in other words, it was a matter of clarifying who was the coward and who was the hero in this story. A canonised event from the history of the NLS, when brought into the spotlight of public interest, proved to be quite controversial.

Even in Slovenian post-war literature, more and more texts appeared that demystified the image of heroic partisan suicide. Some authors trivialised suicide and were

126 'Na Cvetežu so odkrili spomenik kjer je padel 'Hohkraut Lojze' - revolucionarni borec revirjev,' *Zasavski udarnik*, May 13, 1949, 1.

127 Jakopič, *Vodnik po partizanskih poteh*, 163.

128 'Manj strašna noč,' *Delo*, August 12, 1981, 6.

129 Bojan Kavčič, 'Bolj strašna noč,' *Delo*, December 29, 1981, 7.

harshly criticised by the forum of the authorities, such as Janez Vipotnik by the reviewer of the magazine *Borec* for his work *Soncu naproti* (*Towards the Sun*), in which he mentions a wounded woman in a partisan hospital who shoots herself out of despair because she does not believe that she will get a groom after the war.¹³⁰ A particularly common approach of those authors who wanted to look behind the scenes of Yugoslav myths was the introduction of characters of former partisans who survived the war but are forgotten and lost in the new post-war conditions, become lonely and are also haunted by their sins and war crimes, which drives them to suicide. The motif appears in several works of Slovenian literature, most clearly in Karel Grabeljšek's 1973 novel *Bolečina* (*Pain*), which tells the life story of veteran France Korenčan, who decides to commit suicide in his old age. Before he shoots himself, he reflects on his life, his many disappointments and his scepticism towards the image of the ideal communist:

“How many communists are there among us, real communists? he asks himself. The kind we were taught that a communist should be. The figure of the communist! Morally impeccable, hard-working, self-sacrificing, he does not look out for himself, he only has the common good in mind, the rights of the working people, the fight against the occupiers and their accomplices, the construction of socialism ... he is modest, honest, enjoys respect among the people, a mass labourer. How many communists are there among us? Were we ever such ... such characters?”¹³¹

Korenčan's unhappy life, which can be attributed on the one hand to his character flaws and sins from the past, which are in no way worthy of a “real” communist, and on the other to a bureaucratised political system alienated from the people, ends with the suicide of a broken man in which there isn't any trace of partisan heroic suicide.

The literary figure of the partisan veteran, who waits in the post-war decades for the recognition and material benefits he deserves, only to experience disappointment and loss in the brave new socialist world, and who is also psychologically burdened by the war, was based on real-life cases. The war took a heavy psychological toll on the Yugoslavs, even though the subject was not discussed publicly for a long time. A rare exception was the Jewish doctor Hugo Klein from Vukovar, who in 1945 wrote the study *Ratna neuroza Jugoslovena* (*War Neurosis of the Yugoslavs*), in which he used a sample of 150 partisans to describe the neurosis from which many Yugoslav veterans were said to have suffered. The book was not published until a decade later, probably because it would have been too provocative to write about partisans as mentally ill immediately after the end of the war. In the book, Klein diagnosed a disorder that had been occurring among the partisans since the middle of the war: a militant neurosis in the form of a simulation of an attack on the enemy, during which the soldiers fell into a trance and remained in it for several hours, after which they could no longer remember anything.¹³² He did not look for the causes of the neurosis in the horrors of war, as it only appear quite late, at a time when victory was already more tangible

130 Milan Guček, 'Romansirana zgodovina – da ali ne?', *Borec* 37, No. 10–11 (1985): 577.

131 Karel Grabeljšek, *Bolečina* (Ljubljana: Partizanska knjiga, 1973), 18.

132 Hugo Klajn, *Ratna neuroza Jugoslovena* (Beograd: Sanitetska uprava JNA, 1955), 23.

and mere survival could be replaced by self-centredness. Klein explains the neurosis as a consequence of difficult decisions that had to be made by the - often young and inexperienced - fighters and as a result of the desire for revenge and public recognition for their heroic deeds.¹³³ Klein's conclusion is that the Yugoslav partisans generally showed a high degree of willingness to fight to the death and a deep desire for recognition, which was not observed to the same extent in the other Allied soldiers, which consequently was also reflected in the specifically Yugoslav neurosis.

For the Slovenian territory, the most extensive studies on the psychological consequences of war for former combatants were carried out by aforementioned Janko Kostnapfel. Over a period of 35 years, from 1954 to 1988, he collected and published information on partisan veterans who were treated by him for psychological disorders. On the basis of comparisons between two groups of 60 members, one consisting of combatants and the other of random patients, he came to the conclusion that former partisans suffered more frequently from neuroses and alcoholism. The neuroses were the result of the tense war conditions, the physical exertion, the demanding external conditions and the stress with which the partisans had to contend, as well as alcoholism, which was an outlet for the nervousness and led to stomach ulcers and liver cirrhosis in many veterans. He found emotional instability and, in some cases, psychopathic and sadistic characteristics in alcoholic veterans. In addition, many partisans were wounded during the war, and a quarter of them killed at least one person during fighting. Older combatants reported feelings of disillusionment and disinterest in life, as well as inactivity due to various illnesses, including those resulting from war injuries and disabilities. Kostnapfel pointed out that partisan status could also have an impact on married life, as former female partisans were on average married for four years less than members of the control group, and on professional life, as veterans often came into conflict with their coworkers and wanted to retire to peace and solitude. He also found that veterans die on average two to three years earlier than patients in the control group and that they have an above-average fear of ageing, believing that they have wasted their lives.¹³⁴

Some veterans fought with suicidal thoughts. One former partisan considered hanging himself, which Kostnapfel linked to the possibility of feelings of shame and self-punishment, as hanging was considered a less honourable death than being shot.¹³⁵ Kostnapfel also documented at least one suicide of a hospitalised veteran who was clearly affected by his own ageing and the disintegration of Yugoslavia:

"He had already announced it beforehand, saying that there was no point in living any more, that he was too old / ... /. He spoke of the great disappointment that the socio-political upheaval had caused and emphasised how hard and honest he had worked in the state apparatus. One had the impression that it was a 'balance sheet' suicide."¹³⁶

133 Ibid., 42, 43, 48–51.

134 Janko Kostnapfel, *Z vojno po vojni* (Ljubljana: Društvo piscev zgodovine NOB Slovenije, 1994), 10–17, 29–38, 45–55, 59–92.

135 Kostnapfel, *Zakaj vojna*, 108, 109.

136 Kostnapfel, *Z vojno po vojni*, 65.

Conclusion

The heroic partisan suicide is a concept that at first glance appears to be one of the constitutive elements of the Yugoslav legitimisation narrative of the NLS, but in reality played a much more complex role. If one tries to outline the history of this concept, one constantly encounters contradictory opinions at all levels, from the partisan command or the later political leadership of Yugoslavia, to the experts in psychology and suicidology, to the intelligentsia and ordinary citizens. On the one hand, since the first months of the Second World War, there has been a noticeable tendency to present this kind of suicide as the ultimate example of self-sacrifice for freedom, which also has a pragmatic dimension: the avoidance of shameful surrender, torture and possible betrayal. On the other hand, there have always been sceptics who have not vociferously opposed such an interpretation, but have expressed doubts about the supposed inherent heroism of such an act. Nevertheless, the state authorities have shown little interest in defending their favourable stance on heroic suicides. It seems that the justification of suicide, even when carried out in such difficult circumstances, was a position that only a limited number of people could defend with fervour and full self-confidence. Dealing with the issue of partisan suicide meant leaving through the chapters of NLS history that deviated from the beaten path, the latter being stories of heroism in battles, partisan comradeship and resistance to the enemy, which were undeniably positive and universally promoted points of the partisan struggle. At the same time, partisan suicides could raise difficult and controversial questions related to martyrdom, escape from a difficult situation, defeatism and disregard for the postulates of Marxist ethics, and even - e.g. in the debate between Dedijer and Pretnar - nationalism. Is it possible that the partisans' suicide was characterised more by selfish fear than heroism? It seems that this question weighed heavily on all Yugoslavs who had to deal with it and that many answered it with a wise silence.

The second part of the answer to the question of Yugoslavia's attitude towards partisan suicides can be found in the attitude of local, regional and state communities towards suicide in general. Traditional beliefs that were formed over the centuries under the influence of the system of ethical beliefs, religion, folk tradition and other factors were probably also reflected in the interpretation of partisan suicides. So far, the data that could confirm this for the whole of Yugoslavia is still too modest, so that the hypothesis is still awaiting confirmation. For the Slovenian territory, it can be stated that - perhaps under Catholic influence - heroic partisan suicide is a category that was often not taken into account when honouring fallen fighters, although some local communities and families did so when honouring "their own" national heroes. A hero in Slovenia was not mainly made by a heroic suicide, but above all by heroic deeds.

Yugoslavia dissolved in blood at the beginning of the 1990s, but some of its institutions continued to exist for some time after that. One of these was the Order of the National Hero. The last such title was awarded by the Presidency of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on 19 November 1991 to Milan Tepić, a major in the

Yugoslav People's Army, who had been surrounded by members of the Croatian military formation in Bjelovar a few weeks earlier and had detonated explosives in the barracks warehouse, killing himself and eight Croatian soldiers. Today, Tepić is a hero in Serbia, with streets named after him and several monuments dedicated to him, while in Croatia he is considered a criminal, if not a terrorist, who endangered many lives. As the last national hero who was already fighting in a new war, Tepić symbolically closed the chapter of Yugoslav heroic suicides with additional moral and ideological-political ambiguities.

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Ivan Smiljanić

»SAMI PONOSNO SMO SI SMRT IZBRALI.« KONCEPT PARTIZANSKEGA HEROJSKEGA SAMOMORA V SLOVENIJI V JUGOSLOVANSKEM KONTEKSTU

POVZETEK

Jugoslovanski partizani so se med spopadi v drugi svetovni vojni večkrat znašli v brezizhodnih položajih, iz katerih so pobegnili s samomorom. Statistika teh samomorov še ni natančno zbrana, za slovenski prostor pa je dokumentiranih približno 250 partizanskih samomorov, čeprav pri marsikaterem primeru ni jasno, ali je res šlo za samomor ali je smrt povzročil kdo drug. Partizansko poveljstvo je, čeprav tega ni nikoli neposredno izrazilo v direktivah, od partizanov pričakovalo, da bodo v skrajnih situacijah zmožni storiti samomor in se tako izogniti sramotnemu zajetju, mučenju in potencialni izdaji imen in podatkov sovražniku. Partizani so ta neformalni napotek upoštevali, tako da je zajetje postalo eno izmed najsrmotnejših dejanj, ki so se lahko zgodila borcu. Kljub temu pa so vojni tisk in dokumenti le redko omenjali samomor, tako da se je junaški značaj tega dejanja začel poudarjati z zamikom. Na drugi strani je ves čas ostalo prisotno prepričanje, da je izogib samomoru, če so zanj bili

izpolnjeni pravi pogoji, dejanje strahopetca, ki si ne zasluži naziva partizan. Obravnava teme partizanskega herojskega samomora se je v socialistični Jugoslaviji odprla šele v sedemdesetih letih in se razživila v osemdesetih letih. Ker so takšni samomori odpirali teme partizanske morale, mučeništva in drugih zapletenih, potencialno neprijetnih tem, se državni vrh z njimi ni pogosto ukvarjal, pa tudi Josip Broz – Tito naj bi se jim izogibal. Tematiko je med prvimi načel srbski raziskovalec Milan Miladinović, ki je v partizanskih samomorih prepoznal kršenje načel marksistične etike, vendar jih je interpretiral kot izjemo, saj so partizani samomore delali v boju za človeka dostojno življenje. Ključni podpornik in promotor ideje herojskega samomora je bil srbski zgodovinar Vladimir Dedijer. Osnovna teza, ki jo je predstavil v svojih razpravah o partizanskih samomorih, je bila, da so partizani, v nasprotju s skoraj vsemi drugimi samomori vojakov po svetu, umirali z optimističnim prepričanjem o končni zmagi, tudi če je sami ne bodo dočakali. Jugoslovanska psihološka in suicidološka stroka je bila precej bolj razdeljena in ni dosegla niti konsenza o tem, ali herojski samomor sploh obstaja. Ta neodločnost glede obstoja in značaja take vrste samomora se je kazala tudi pri širši javnosti. Čeprav je jugoslovanska oblast podeljevala nazive narodnega heroja tudi partizanom, ki so storili samomor, in jim brez zadržkov postavljala spomenike, pa način njihove smrti, kot kaže primer Slovenije, pogosto ni bil posebej poudarjen kot ključni dokaz njihove heroičnosti in je bil večkrat tudi zabrisan, saj na slovenskih partizanskih spomenikih skoraj nikoli ni bil omenjen podatek, da je partizan storil samomor. Marsikaj je bilo odvisno od lokalnih skupnosti, ki so proslavljale narodne heroje in druge partizane, ki so se v njih rodili ali umrli. Čeprav je v nekaterih okoljih v Sloveniji samomor partizanov postal del narativa o njihovi junaškosti, pa so v večini skupnosti bolj poudarjali junaška dejanja padlih kot pa njihov herojski samomor. Teh ugotovitev ne gre posplošiti na celo državo. Kot je sugeriral Dedijer, so pri recepciji partizanskih samomorov pomembno vlogo igrala tradicionalna prepričanja pripadnikov različnih jugoslovanskih skupnosti o smrti in samomoru, kar bi pomenilo, da je slovenska javnost do slavljenja partizanskih samomorov ostala zadržana zaradi vpliva katoliške doktrine o nesprejemljivosti kakršnegakoli samomora. Partizanski samomor kot psihološki pojav in skrb za psihološko stanje partizanskih veteranov sta bila dolgo časa v ozadju, redke študije, ki so obravnavale to temo, pa so pokazale, da je vojna na preživelih pustila hude psihične posledice, ki niso redko pripeljale do samomora, vendar ga ni nihče več slavil kot herojskega.

Marko Zajc*

Suicide as a Slovenian Metaphor: on the Intellectual History of Suicide as a Metaphor in Socialist Slovenia**

IZVLEČEK

SAMOMOR KOT SLOVENSKA METAFORA: K INTELEKTUALNI ZGODOVINI SAMOMORA KOT METAFORE V SOCIALISTIČNI SLOVENIJI

Od šestdesetih do osemdesetih let 20. stoletja je bil samomor pogosto obravnavan kot pomembno družbeno vprašanje v slovenski javnosti, kar je pripeljalo do oblikovanja ideje Slovencev kot »nacije samomorilcev«. V svoji knjigi Bolezen kot metafora Susan Sontag raziskuje, kako družba uporablja bolezen kot metaforo za moralne, psihološke in politične razmere, kar pogosto vodi v stigmatizacijo bolnikov. Ta pogled je dragocen za razumevanje predstav o samomoru v socialistični Sloveniji. Pričujoči članek analizira vpliv metafore »nacije samomorilcev« na politično misel in diskurz v socialistični Sloveniji. Preučuje, kako so intelektualci to idejo uporabili ali zavrnili v svojih razpravah in kako so prilagodili strokovne razprave in statistične podatke svojim političnim agendam. Koncept samomora kot »slovenskega problema« se je pojavil v poznih šestdesetih letih, podprt s statistiko in odmevnimi primeri samomorov med mladimi iz uglednih kulturnih in političnih družin.

Ključne besede: samomor, metafora, politična misel, socialistična Slovenija, intelektualci

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ABSTRACT

Between the 1960s and 1980s, suicide was frequently discussed as a major social issue in the Slovenian public sphere, leading to the establishment of the idea of Slovenians as a “suicide nation”. In her book “Illness as Metaphor”, Susan Sontag examines how society uses illness as a metaphor for moral, psychological, and political conditions, often resulting in the stigmatisation of patients. This perspective is valuable for understanding the representations of suicide in socialist Slovenia. This paper analyses the influence of the metaphor of the “suicide nation” on political thought and discourse in socialist Slovenia. It explores how intellectuals used or rejected this idea in their debates and how they adapted expert discussions and statistics to their political agendas. The concept of suicide as a “Slovenian problem” emerged in the late 1960s, supported by statistics and high-profile cases of suicide among young people from prominent cultural and political families.

Keywords: suicide, metaphor, political thought, public, socialist Slovenia, intellectuals

Introduction

“No one does anything in the face of this terrible truth or even dares to insistently inquire about the causes of this national disgrace. On the contrary! Everyone is anxiously looking for a way to cover our national disease from the gaze of the other Yugoslav nations as well as from the world.”¹

Between the 1960s and the end of the 1980s, the Slovenian cultural-political public repeatedly discussed suicide as a pressing problem in Slovenian society. The discussions involved both the topos of Slovenians as a suicidal nation and the idea of suicide as a collective disease (suicide epidemic). The Slovenian writer Jože Javoršek was not the only one to define suicide in Slovenia as a national disease during the socialist era, but he was certainly an intellectual who contributed significantly to the discussions about this issue in Slovenian society. His public interventions about suicide are not only interesting because of the literary-political and personal controversies they provoked but also due to his role in spreading the metaphor of Slovenian suicide. The intellectual, who was intimately affected by the issue of suicide, placed his personal loss in the context of the Slovenian cultural-political situation through his reflection on the Slovenian suicide syndrome.

The book *Illness as Metaphor* (1978), written by the American cultural critic Susan Sontag, explores how society and culture deal with diseases, especially cancer and tuberculosis. Sontag argues that these illnesses are often loaded with metaphorical

1 Jože Javoršek, *Kako je mogoče* (Maribor: Založba Obzorja, 1978), 13.

meanings that transcend their medical reality. Illness is used as a metaphor for a moral, psychological, and political condition, often leading to the patients' stigmatisation. Sontag claims that these metaphors are harmful to patients because they impose an additional burden of shame and guilt and render it more difficult to understand and treat the illness objectively.² Ten years later, she published *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (1989), analysing how fears, prejudices, and misconceptions about AIDS influenced the way the disease was perceived and treated. She pointed out that AIDS was often used as a metaphor for moral depravity, punishment, or death sentence, leading to the stigmatisation of patients and their social marginalisation.³

Susan Sontag's perspective on illness as a metaphor can represent a solid intellectual and methodological foundation for a better understanding of the representations of suicide in socialist Slovenia. The present contribution focuses on the perception of suicide as a typical Slovenian feature in the Slovenian political thought of the socialist period. It attempts to approach the issue of suicide through the intellectual history, the history of political thought, and also the history of crisis discourse. The basic question is how the metaphor of Slovenians as a "suicide nation" shaped political thought during that period. To what extent did public intellectuals use this idea in their discussions, and to what degree did they distance themselves from it or express scepticism towards it? Did they take treatises and statistics into account? How did they adapt them to serve their own political agendas? Did they use the trope of the "suicide nation" for the oppositional promotion of crisis discourse, or did they build their critique on the deconstruction of national-pathological concepts?

An Emerging Epidemic

In the Slovenian public, the "suicide nation" trope can be traced to the very beginning of the 20th century. Given his literary orientation, it is not unusual that the Slovenian naturalist writer Fran Govekar used this idea. In his 1905 novel titled *Nad prepodom* (Above the Precipice), he put into the mouth of the fatalistic literary hero Dr Kolarič the words of a man who had given up on his own nation: "I have never seen Slovenians genuinely rejoice in even the slightest triumph of their countryman; I have never witnessed them unequivocally acknowledging anyone's true success, true merit, true honour! /.../ We are a nation of suicides, and most likely, our only real pleasure is to see our countryman on the ground, destroyed, killed, dead!"⁴ Nevertheless, in the years after World War I, suicide was more frequently problematised in the Slovenian press. As Meta Remec observes, newspapers at the time often wrote about a "suicide epidemic" even though they lacked the empirical evidence for such theses. The increased number of suicides was attributed to the devastating consequences of the

2 Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), 3.

3 Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989), 5–16.

4 Fran Govekar, "Nad prepodom," *Slovan* 3, No. 2 (1905), 47.

recent world war. This phenomenon, however, was not perceived as an exclusively Slovenian feature and the “suicide epidemic” was portrayed as a European problem.⁵ The feeling of post-war nihilism was expressed by the young Slovenian avant-garde poet Srečko Kosovel in his essay: “The European man, exhausted to death, is racing with electric speed towards development, scurrying with only a single desire left: to die.” Srečko Kosovel, who was close to the Trieste communists,⁶ could hardly be accused of nihilism. He contrasted the post-war despair and savage capitalism with the future uprising of the humiliated and insulted: “A new humanity is rising. So what if it comes from below?! It has been humiliated. So what if it comes from the bottom?! It has been defiled. So what if it comes with storm and lightning!”⁷ Hence, only resistance can overcome suicide. Given the existing literature on the issue of suicide and the empirical research of digitised newspapers from the interwar period, it is possible to propose a conclusion that the idea of Slovenians as a suicidal nation was barely perceptible in the Slovenian (general and professional) public at the time.⁸

In socialist Yugoslavia, the situation was very different. Meta Remec establishes that the common consensus among the post-war suicide rate analyses was that after the initial post-war period, when the euphoria of liberation had still persisted, the number of suicides increased drastically. As suggested by the data from 1937 to 1939, apparently overlooked by the authors of these analyses, the increase in the suicide rate twenty years after the war had not been as significant as the analysts from the 1980s believed. Nevertheless, Slovenia’s suicide rate stood out negatively in comparison with the other Yugoslav republics, and the optimistic expectations of the authorities and the medical profession that the number of suicides would decrease did not come true. On the contrary, the Slovenian suicide rate continued to rise, and the gap with the rest of Yugoslavia kept widening. As Meta Remec notes, an opinion emerged in the 1960s that the increased suicide rate in Slovenia was not caused by Yugoslav socialist reality but rather by the Slovenian particularities: an upbringing imbued with Catholic humility and a Central European (Habsburg) melancholic national character prone to despondency and self-destruction.⁹ While the suicide rate in Slovenia (the number of suicides per 100,000 inhabitants) was 23.3 between 1955 and 1959, it rose to 26.2 in the first half of the 1960s. By the end of the 1960s, it had increased to 29.6 (1970). In the first half of the 1970s, the statistics show a slight decline, but in the second half of the 1970s, the suicide rate exceeded 30 (1976: 30.6; 1977: 31.7; 1978: 31.3; 1979: 32.4 and 1980: 34.0).¹⁰ The suicide rate trend in Slovenia between 1965 and 2020 shows an inverted U: it rose gradually until 1997 and then started to decline. In the

5 Meta Remec, “Epidemija samomorov? Odmevi na naraščanje stopnje samomorilnosti na Slovenskem v 19. in 20. stoletju,” *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 63, No. 1 (2023): 8, <https://doi.org/10.51663/pnz.63.1.01>.

6 Vladimir Martelanc, *Članki in pisma* (Ravel Kodrič in Amelia Kraigher (eds.)) (Ljubljana: Založba *cf: 2023), 183–86.

7 Srečko Kosovel, *Izbrane pesmi*, ed. Matevž Kos (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1997), 103, 104.

8 An overview of the newspapers *Jutro* and *Slovenec* (1918–1941), carried out between May 5, 2024 and June 16, 2024 at the *dlib.si* portal.

9 Remec, “Epidemija samomorov,” 26, 27.

10 *Ibidem*, 24.

1985–1994 period, the average suicide rate was 31/100,000. From 1997 to 2010, the average suicide rate was 26.2/100,000. The average suicide rate in the decade between 2009 and 2020 was 19.79/100,000. The changes in suicide rates may reflect both the societal changes over the years and the increase in suicide prevention activities.¹¹

Based on the existing research, it can be inferred that the thesis of suicide as a “Slovenian problem” was established in the Slovenian public in the second half of the 1960s and persisted until the end of the Yugoslav period. Apart from being supported by the statistics – especially the apparent disparity between the Slovenian and Yugoslav reality – the media coverage of suicides among the youth between 1965 and 1971 probably also had an impact on the thesis. These suicides were notorious for several reasons: the young victims were the children of important cultural and political figures. In addition, these cases also received considerable attention due to the documentary film made by the director Mako Sajko (*Samomorivci, pozor! / Suicides, Beware, 1967*) and the sensationalist writing in the yellow press about a “suicide club” in Ljubljana. The Italian and German press also wrote about the “suicide club”, further alarming the authorities in Slovenia. Suicide became a political problem. In 1968, the Slovenian police, in cooperation with the secret police, launched an investigation called “Hashish” (1968–1969), which focused in particular on the suicides of Aleš Kermauner (1946–1966), Borivoj Dedijer (1945–1966), and Svit Brejc (1947–1968), which had allegedly triggered the suicides that followed.¹² The fathers of the victims – Vladimir Dedijer (1914–1990), Dušan Kermauner (1903–1975), and Jože Javoršek (1920–1990) – were prominent public figures, who shared some common characteristics. They were intellectuals who had participated in the National Liberation Struggle and supported the socialist regime. However, due to their non-conformist views, they had been side-lined and had difficulty reintegrating into the cultural-political elite. The investigation did not confirm the existence of a “suicide club”, although the victims belonged to the same avant-garde cultural circle and shared a common affinity for drug use.¹³ Investigators concluded that these were isolated acts by lonely young people without any audience or higher truth. The thesis of lost, lonely adolescents certainly appealed to the authorities more than the interpretations identifying the alienated socialist system as the reason for the suicides – as suggested by the Western and emigrant press. While these suicides caused a lot of turmoil, the situation was quite different in 1971 when Borut Kardelj (1941–1971), the son of Edvard Kardelj (1910–1979), committed suicide. At that point, the Slovenian media did not report on the incident at all. The media silence can be explained by the fact that Kardelj was considered the second most influential man in Yugoslavia and that

11 Saška Roškar, Matej Vinko and Nuša Konec Juričič, “Samomorilno vedenje v populaciji – prikaz stanja, trendov in značilnosti po svetu in v Sloveniji,” in Saška Roškar and Alja Videtič Paska (eds.), *Samomor v Sloveniji in po svetu. Opredelitev, raziskovanje, preprečevanje in obravnava* (Ljubljana: Nacionalni inštitut za javno zdravje, 2021), 69.

12 Meta Remec, “Traitors, cowards, martyrs, heroes: youth suicide as a socio-historical phenomenon in the 1960s Slovenia,” *Studia Historica Slovenica* 23, No. 1 (2023): 203–38.

13 Ljuba Dornik Šubelj, “Aleš Kermavner, sin Dušana Kermavnerja v dokumentih Arhiva Republike Slovenije,” in Jurij Perovšek and Aleksander Žižek (eds.), *Življenje in delo dr. Dušana Kermavnerja 1903–1975, Med politiko in zgodovino* (Ljubljana, ZZDS: 2005), 81–87.

this was the time when the era of “Party liberalism” was coming to an end, as the state’s communist leadership was reasserting its control over society.¹⁴

As already mentioned, after 1967, Slovenian newspapers, especially the *Tedenska tribuna* (TT) weekly, also wrote about suicide as a typically Slovenian problem and Slovenians as a suicidal nation. “Are we a suicide nation?” this magazine wondered on the occasion of the Slovenian Cultural Holiday (8 February) in 1967. There was a lot of talk in Ljubljana about a youth suicide club. Slovenia had one of the world’s top suicide rates, with more deaths resulting from suicide than from road accidents and tuberculosis.¹⁵ In the days following Svit Brejc’s suicide in May 1968, the journalist Feri Žerdin published a column on suicide in Slovenia. “Slovenians are on the top. This is a fact, and the numbers prove it,” the concerned journalist began his column. Recently, a film by Mako Sajko about suicides among the youth in Slovenia was shown in cinemas, the journalist recalled, and yet a young boy’s life was once again snuffed out on a rope. Of course, this provided no proof for the existence of a suicide club, yet there were no initiatives to investigate and strive to prevent the phenomenon, the journalist criticised. Unfortunately, there was no money for scientists to investigate why suicide was a Slovenian disease, which is also why it was impossible to prevent. There are ideas that an SOS helpline for suicidal people could be introduced, the journalist explained. However, in his opinion, such a hotline would not be successful in Slovenia. Even before the introduction of a hotline, the petty Slovenians would bicker about the funding, organisation, and supervision so that the whole thing would soon go down the drain, the journalist Feri Žerdin claimed resignedly.¹⁶ On 19 June 1968, another journalist – Tone Fornezzi, a famous humourist – published an article in the same magazine with the bombastic title *Suicide Club – Yes or No?*. He did not answer the question but did emphasise that certain facts pointed in that direction. He mentioned the young poet AK, who wrote suicide poetry, and pointed out that the young suicides belonged to the same circle of friends.¹⁷ In the relatively small Slovenian society, it was not difficult to establish that the initials AK referred to the deceased Aleš Kermavner, who was already an established artist despite his youth. Unsurprisingly, the subject was also picked up by the Yugoslav sensationalist press. In 1969, the Belgrade newspaper *Politika ekspres* published a six-part serial story titled *Suicide Club behind the Wall of Silence*.¹⁸

Suicide and Slovenian Culture in the Post-war Period: the Nation and Suicide

These suicides are relevant for the assertion of the trope of Slovenians as a “suicide nation”, also because of their connection to the major conflict in the Slovenian literary

14 Remec, “Traitors, cowards, martyrs, heroes,” 228, 229.

15 Feri Žerdin, “Samomorilci so med nami,” *TT*, February 8, 1967, 4.

16 Feri Žerdin, “Rentabilnost našega samomora,” *TT*, May 29, 1968, 3.

17 Tone Fornezzi, “Klub samomorilcev, da ali ne,” *TT*, June 19, 1968, 3.

18 Dornik Šubelj, “Aleš Kermavner,” 86.

and cultural scene in the 1945–1991 period. Three personalities were at the centre of these discussions: the writers Vitomil Zupan (1914–1987) and Jože Javoršek (1920–1990), and the professor of comparative literature and philosopher Dušan Pirjevec (1921–1977). They all had joined the Partisans as committed young people and held important political and cultural positions during and immediately after the war. The oldest of them, Vitomil Zupan, had already established himself as a writer before the war. He was known for his adventurous and bohemian lifestyle, with a particular penchant for a demonstrative use of firearms. After the war, he was the editor of the cultural programme at Radio Ljubljana. He was also on good terms with Dušan Pirjevec, a visible member of the Communist Party Agitprop at the time. Zupan's friend from the Partisan years, Jože Brejc (later: Javoršek), who had studied literature in Paris immediately after the war and who also worked as an intelligence officer for the Yugoslav secret service, often socialised with them after his return from Paris. Zupan's behaviour became increasingly intolerable for the authorities: drinking sprees, endangerment with firearms, fistfights, scandalous sex life and, last but not least, ridiculing prominent politicians. After these friends indulged in a practical joke during the sensitive period of the conflict between Tito and Stalin in 1948 – they called an important cultural official and told him that Tito had resigned – the authorities decided to take action. They were convicted of “crimes against public morals”, i.e. of engaging in unusual sexual practices, perversion, and distribution of pornographic literature. The court accused Zupan of being responsible for the suicide of his mistress during the war. The three men were also convicted of making jokes and smearing leading politicians and the National Liberation Struggle, as well as divulging secret information. Zupan was sentenced to twelve years, Brejc to seven years, and Pirjevec only to seven months in prison.¹⁹

Jože Brejc was released early, in 1952. At that point, he also assumed his mother's surname, Javoršek. Brejc had joined the Partisans as a member of the left-wing Catholic movement (the Christian Socialists), led by the poet, writer, and Brejc's mentor Edvard Kocbek.²⁰ Kocbek, who was a high-ranking functionary after the liberation, came into conflict with the political leadership in 1952 over the publication of his short story collection titled *Strah in pogum* (Fear and Courage), which dealt with the Partisan struggle in a critical and individualistic manner.²¹ His collection was torn apart by the most influential cultural critic of the time, Josip Vidmar, which represented a prelude to the official anathema. Kocbek was forcibly retired, and his works were prevented from being published for more than ten years. Josip Vidmar accused Kocbek of not only “distorting the image of the liberation struggle” but also of spreading desperation and mystical nihilism.²² After his release from prison in 1952, Javoršek

19 Aleš Gabrič, “Greh in kaznen,” in Nela Malečkar et al. (eds.), *Vitomil Zupan: Važno je priti na grič: življenje in delo Vitomila Zupana 1914–1987* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 2014), 260–76. Alenka Puhar, “Kriminalna kariera Vitomila Zupana,” in *Vitomil Zupan: Važno je priti na grič*, 235–57.

20 Andrej Inkret, “Jože Brejc - Franček alias Jože Javoršek ali spregledano poglavje iz Kocbekove biografije,” *Sodobnost* 75, No. 12 (2011): 1598.

21 Aleš Gabrič, *V senci politike: opozicija komunistični oblasti v Sloveniji po letu 1945* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2019), 148.

22 Josip Vidmar, “Kritika – Edvard Kocbek: Strah in pogum,” *Novi svet* 7, No. 1 (1952): 85.

resumed his friendship with Kocbek. However, Javoršek was allegedly already spying on Kocbek during this period and writing reports to the secret police.²³ Javoršek parted ways with Kocbek in 1963. He publicly assumed the opposing positions and joined the intellectual group gathered around Josip Vidmar. He worked as an expert associate at the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts and headed Vidmar's office.²⁴ According to the testimony of Stane Kavčič, President of the Executive Council of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (SRS) between 1967 and 1972, Javoršek also secretly supervised his patron Josip Vidmar for the State Security Service (SDV).²⁵

Jože Javoršek is also the intellectual who, in 1969, wrote the book without which it is impossible to understand the trajectory of Slovenians as a suicidal nation. Javoršek conceived the book titled *Kako je mogoče* (How It Is Possible) as a dialogue with his deceased son, who had committed suicide. In the book, Javoršek moves from intimate confessions and his inner experience of a profound loss through meditations on the past and on the pathologies of the Slovenian nation – of which he is extremely fond – to polemical accusations of those he holds responsible for his son's death and for the Slovenian "suicide cult", which, as he claims, "is unique in the world for its cunning, cultural perversity, and satanic activity."²⁶ In the book, Javoršek also blames his dead son for committing suicide because he regarded this as a distinctly anti-Slovenian act. The accusation refers to his son's oppositional political activities, as the deceased Svit Brejc organised a small group called the Slovenian National Party, which, according to the authorities, strived for the break-up of Yugoslavia and an independent Slovenia.²⁷ Javoršek reminded his son that the youth of a small nation should develop greater creative powers than the youth of large nations. Javoršek argues that all previous Slovenian generations were forced to fight for basic national and human rights, while the post-war Slovenian youth no longer have to waste precious energy fighting for the fundamental demands of their nation. The Slovenian youth finally have the opportunity to devote themselves exclusively to creativity. This privilege – and Javoršek is proud of it – was heroically won by his Partisan generation.²⁸ What are the reasons why the Slovenian youth are not reaching their potential? In Javoršek's opinion, the Slovenian national character, which is still meek, self-absorbed, subdued, uncreative, and servile, plays a vital role in this. Instead of rolling up their sleeves, Slovenians commit suicide or leave their homeland. "Slovenians are not only the first in the world in the number of youth suicides – we also have the greatest number of suicides in general," Javoršek points out.²⁹ However, Javoršek is not satisfied with a general criticism of society. He also draws attention to the "dark agents of suicide", who are particularly active on the

23 Alenka Puhar, "Kako se je tovarišija spremenila v črno sluzasto mavrico," *Pogledi*, October 15, 2014, <https://pogledi.delo.si/mnenja/kako-se-je-tovarisija-spremenila-v-crno-sluzasto-mavrico>.

24 Marjan Dolgan, "Ljubljana kot socialni in literarni prostor slovenskih književnikov," *Primerjalna književnost* 35, No. 3 (December 2012): 345.

25 Igor Omerza, *Edvard Kocbek, Osebni dosje št. 584* (Ljubljana: Karantanija, 2010), 167.

26 Javoršek, *Kako je mogoče*, 13.

27 Remec, "Traitors, Cowards, Martyrs," 226.

28 Javoršek, *Kako je mogoče*, 8.

29 *Ibid.*, 12, 13.

Slovenian literary scene. The cult of misery and death dominates Slovenian contemporary literature, Javoršek claims, and the joy of life is considered worthless. The contempt for the National Liberation Struggle – which is the only miracle in Slovenian history that can give Slovenians hope for the future – has also started spreading. In addition, the Slovenian nation has a low birth rate: “Our women no longer like being mothers, our husbands no longer want to be fathers. /.../ They are afraid of life, and this fear has exactly the same roots as in the case of those who commit suicide.”³⁰ In addition to the suicide cult, Javoršek also detected a cult of abortion and contraception. He is disgusted with the women sitting in the waiting rooms of Slovenian clinics “with a foetus under their heart and a murderous desire in their mind.” After all, in socialism, unwed mothers enjoy all the moral and material protection, which is why abortion is, in his view, impermissible.³¹ He believes that Slovenian intellectuals bear much of the blame for this situation, first and foremost his former friend and mentor Edvard Kocbek, to whom he dedicates much attention in the book. Javoršek declares him a lost, harmful man who successfully seduces people, even though everyone has always abandoned him. Kocbek was supposedly responsible for the spiritual decrepitude of his followers, the glorification of internal emigration, the confusion and despair in the Slovenian culture, and, indirectly, also for the suicide of Javoršek’s son.³²

Uncompromising and personal, the book obviously prompted various responses. The writer Taras Kermavner, brother of the poet Aleš Kermavner who had ended his young life voluntarily during the same wave of suicides as Javoršek’s son, reacted to Javoršek’s work. While Javoršek was not ashamed of his intimate resentments, Taras Kermavner consciously refused to take a personal position. He criticised Javoršek’s work as a Slovenian intellectual and literary historian. Kermavner observes self-torture, rage, and similar bitter passions in Javoršek’s sentences, which he considers to be an expression of a broader social complex of a particular generation or an expression of Slovenian traditional ideology. As Kermavner informs us, Javoršek builds upon the traditional idea of how Slovenian cultural workers see themselves as a group that has succeeded in creating and integrating the Slovenian nation. Javoršek cannot escape the traditional Slovenian ideology, which believes in the imminent end of the European civilisation and the necessary emergence of a new one. After the war, a new era of creativity should have dawned, but instead, according to Javoršek, Slovenian culture is dominated by nihilism and mindless imitation of Western models. Taras Kermavner disagrees with Javoršek’s denigration of Slovenian history and culture. Instead, he claims Slovenian culture is in good shape and has never been more creative. Javoršek is extremely annoyed by the constant mockery of Slovenian history and culture, while Taras Kermavner notes that Javoršek himself is the one who actually mocks it the most. The greatest nihilist is the one who accuses the young avant-garde artists of nihilism.³³

30 Ibid., 15.

31 Ibid., 16.

32 Ibid., 212.

33 Taras Kermauner, “Marsikako je mogoče,” *Naši razgledi*, September 5, 1969, No. 17, 504, 505; September 19, 1969, No. 18, 536, 537.

Taras Kermavner clearly distinguishes his own conception of the Slovenian nation and culture from Javoršek's. This distinction is consistent with the division between the younger "critical generation" of writers who found refuge in the *Perspektive* magazine (1960–64) and the group of the established Partisan "patriarchs" (Josip Vidmar, Matej Bor, Jože Javoršek). The *Perspektive* magazine was openly supported by Javoršek's former comrade Dušan Pirjevec, who was ultimately expelled from the League of Communists in 1964 because of this.³⁴ The archival documents on the "Hashish" investigation reveal that Javoršek blamed the corrupting influence of Professor Dušan Pirjevec for his son's death.³⁵ In 1971, the poet and playwright Matej Bor, who belonged to the same cultural circle as Javoršek, wrote a play called *Šola noči* (The School of the Night), problematising the issue of suicide among the youth and associating it with the figure of a demonic professor. In 1972, Bor's play was filmed and broadcast on TV Ljubljana. The subject of the play is simple: the diabolical mentor Ahriman runs a secret "School of the Night". It is attended by young people with a death wish. The one whose name gets drawn must commit suicide within two months. Ahriman supplies the students with LSD, philosophises with them about death, and encourages them to commit suicide.³⁶ According to many contemporaries, the author was alluding to Dušan Pirjevec.³⁷ The poet and Pirjevec's friend Boris A. Novak is convinced that the entire Slovenian public recognised Dušan Pirjevec in the figure of Ahriman, who is constantly talking about nothingness. "Thus, his lectures on the nihilism of European metaphysics also became subjected to a terrible, literally nihilistic fabrication and abuse."³⁸

According to Jure Ramšak, a historian of social criticism in socialist Slovenia, the Slovenian authorities resorted to Javoršek's judgmental writing several times in the 1970s to deal with the cultural opposition.³⁹ Javoršek touched upon the issue of suicide again in 1978 in his epistolary novel titled *Nevarna razmerja* (Dangerous Liaisons), which became a bestseller, partly due to its spicy details and bold accusations. This time, Javoršek set out to retaliate against Professor Dušan Pirjevec, who had already been deceased since 1977. He described the social situation in the 1960s as a "frantic seething" of the young generation: beatniks, hippies, and student movements – the entire uncontrolled youth revolution unleashed the previously unknown forces in society. In Slovenia, Javoršek argued, it had mainly unleashed the suicidal drive. He wrote that he should have talked to Pirjevec "about suicidal tendencies in Slovenia, especially their sociological foundations." The echo of the youth revolutions (and the misunderstood surrealism worshipped by young avant-garde artists) triggered a true national catastrophe in Slovenia. Javoršek revealed that less than a month before his

34 Andrej Inkret, "Ahac," in *Ahac, knjiga o Dušanu Pirjevcu*, ed. Andrej Koritnik (Ljubljana: Beletrina 2021), 238.

35 Dornik Šubelj, "Aleš Kermavner," 86.

36 Matej Bor, "Šola noči," *Sodobnost* 19, No. 12 (1971): 1169–96, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-W7W2Y1TE>.

37 Peter Vodopivec, "Profesorjev dosje," in *Ahac, knjiga o Dušanu Pirjevcu*, 344.

38 Boris A. Novak, "Govorilne ure pri profesorju Pirjevcu," in *Ahac, knjiga o Dušanu Pirjevcu*, 377.

39 Jure Ramšak, *(Samo)upravljanje intelekta, Družbena kritika v poznosocialistični Sloveniji* (Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2019), 166.

son's suicide, Pirjevec had visited his home because of some new books by the French poet Michel Butor. Instead of discussing the French poet, Pirjevec mainly talked about the issue of death with Javoršek's son Svit.

“The professor's assertion that suicide is the only real philosophical question /.../ and the only solution to the horrors of the Slovenian society – and that those who refuse to see this solution should be beaten over the head with a hammer until they die – must have certainly made an impact upon the young mind.”⁴⁰

Javoršek admitted that after his son's death, he had accused Pirjevec of being morally responsible for the suicide of his son and other young people without any evidence. He wondered what might have happened had they had an opportunity to discuss suicide. Javoršek believed that Pirjevec would certainly have intellectualised and discussed death as a general characteristic of humanity, while Javoršek would have tried to persuade him that the question of how to prevent death should have been the primary concern. Slovenian intellectuals should ask themselves where the blame lies for Slovenia's leading position in the shameful global suicide ranking. “Dear God, how I've come to hate him again,” sighed Javoršek.⁴¹

On 27 October 1982, the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts organised an interdisciplinary consultation titled *Suicide and Slovenians*, chaired by the most eminent Slovenian expert on the subject, Lev Milčinski. The participants were recognised experts in various scientific fields, concerned in one way or another with the issue of suicidality, including the sociologists Jože Goričar and Marko Kerševan, literary historian Boris Paternu, philosopher Božidar Debenjak, and psychologist Anton Trstenjak. Lev Milčinski later wrote that they had decided to hold an interdisciplinary consultation also because suicidality in Slovenia had acquired the connotation of a relevant socio-pathological phenomenon, and therefore, they could not afford to examine it only in the context of medicine or psychiatry. It would also have been unacceptable for medical experts to intervene in the areas where they had no expertise.⁴² The consultation attempted to bring together two very different perspectives on suicide: the medical-scientific, statistical perspective and the humanistic, cultural or literary perspective. The collection of papers from this consultation reveals that there was little communication between the two perspectives on suicide.

In the social sciences and humanities part of the collection, the contribution of the philosopher, theologian, and psychologist Anton Trstenjak (1906–1996) is of particular interest to our topic. Trstenjak had built his academic career already before the war, while after it, he lectured at the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana. Although he was a priest and had a lifelong attachment to the Catholic Church, he was highly respected in the academic sphere and in the society of socialist Slovenia. In addition to his psychological works, he was known for his books on integral philosophical anthropology, and he also deliberated at length on the Slovenian national character.

40 Jože Javoršek, *Nevarna razmerja* (Maribor: Založba Obzorja, 1978), 378.

41 Ibid., 381.

42 Lev Milčinski, *Samomor in Slovenci* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1985), 5.

In his paper, presented at the Suicide and Slovenians consultation, Trstenjak develops the idea that suicide is not a symptom of the crisis of drives but an expression of the crisis of human culture. Suicide is a civilisational problem rather than a biological one. Suicide is unknown in the animal world. It is also evident, Trstenjak argues, that the suicide rate rises in proportion to the higher living standard. The higher the level of aspiration, the greater the risk of frustration – and suicide is a degenerative symptom of a developing civilisation. In this context, Trstenjak faces a narrower, specifically Slovenian dilemma: why is the suicide rate higher in Slovenia than in the rest of Yugoslavia? He sees the reasons either in the individual structure of Slovenians or in the historical circumstances that have shaped the Slovenian character. Slovenians resemble “model children” who live in constant fear of derailment and frustration, lest they disappoint the expectations of those around them, Trstenjak explains. Slovenians are one of the most disciplined nations. For a thousand years, they lived in the context of the Inner Austrian provinces and became accustomed to discipline. Slovenians always want to be perfectionists: meticulous at work, demanding in their family life, and conscientious in the economy – which is exactly why they are narrow-minded and timid, constantly afraid, unable to tolerate defeat, filled with a sense of inferiority, and sinking into depression. The Slovenians’ fellow citizens from other parts of Yugoslavia, especially in the south, are completely opposite. Judging from the relevant statistics, they are more outwardly aggressive and more likely to lay a hand on others than on themselves. Slovenia has ten times the number of suicides than Kosovo, while Kosovo has the highest homicide rate in Yugoslavia.⁴³

In the second and updated edition of *Suicide and Slovenians*, Lev Milčinski devotes the last chapter to the Slovenian national character. “These reflections are, in fact, quite risky, but they may represent a path to a better understanding of this Slovenian peculiarity,” Milčinski is cautious. The notion of national character is problematic and, therefore, rejected by some, but we all use it tacitly in our daily lives. For Milčinski, national character is

“that persistent basic mood which is common to most members of a nation and which (mainly through extra-conscious channels) influences (along with other more obvious factors) the formation of people’s value system and thus also their world view, interpersonal relationships, etc. This mood is permanent, or rather, it changes very slowly, because it is partly related to the organismic (racial) characteristics of a large part of that population, while, to a large extent, this pattern is transmitted from generation to generation through stereotypes of childcare and upbringing.”⁴⁴

Milčinski quotes the philosopher Debenjak, who, as early as 1969, reflected on the fact that the centuries of repression that the Slovenian nation had endured had led its aggressive impulses to turn inward.⁴⁵ He also mentions the literary historian Paternu,

43 Anton Trstenjak, “Okvirne dileme v etiologiji samomora,” in Lev Mičinski (ed.). *Samomor in Slovenci* (Ljubljana: SAZU, Univerzitetna psihiatrična klinika v Ljubljani, 1983), 251–58.

44 Milčinski, *Samomor in Slovenci*, 220.

45 Božidar Debenjak, “Nacionalnost in represija,” *Anthropos* 1, No. 1–2 (1969): 115–18.

who writes about the dogmatic habitus of the Slovenians. Constantly threatened, Slovenians time and again sought salvation in elated, redemptive ideologies but were ultimately betrayed by both Rome and Moscow. Anton Slodnjak, who predominantly observed fatalism and Jansenist determinism in Slovenians, shared a similar opinion.⁴⁶ The sociologist Marko Kerševan explains the high suicide rate among Slovenians in terms of the social circumstances of small societies in modern times. Industrialisation severs the old connections and promises the possibility of progress but also brings downfalls for individuals. In a sizable socio-geographical space, one can always “start again”, while in a small territory, this is very difficult – the possibilities of escape using alcohol or resorting to suicide come to the fore.⁴⁷

In addition to the traits perceived as Slovenian, the characteristics that Slovenians adopt because of the modern way of life or their coexistence in the Yugoslav federal state can also be problematic. Milčinski quotes Javoršek’s observations about the “customs coming from the south”, for example imprecision and unreliability, or Slovenians adopting a culture of “dolce far niente balcanese”. Apart from Balkanisation, consumerism is also a threat to Slovenia, as the accumulation of material wealth results in neuroticism, psychosomatic diseases, atomisation, and ethical cultural impoverishment. The principle of “relying on oneself”, which often saved Slovenians when their nation was endangered, has become a petty bourgeois hustle for a higher standard in the relaxed atmosphere of the new state community. Such an orientation in the socialist self-governing community that Yugoslavia has chosen cannot serve as a productive foundation for forming the appropriate consciousness. The latter calls for individual responsibility and, simultaneously, an emotional connection with one’s fellow citizens. “It is a consciousness that actually brings together the best values of the West and the East. The building of such consciousness is precisely what we can envision as the future cultural mission of Slovenia and Slovenians,” Lev Milčinski reflected. “However, even in the future, they will have to endure the anxiety of a small nation.” He believed that “the gloominess of this situation” was beautifully illustrated by the Slovenian poet Ervin Fritz:

*“... seen from America or Paris:
it is impossible to live in this country;
on the rosary of the centuries that God keeps heaping on them as penance,
not a decade goes by without being worthy of cursing;
their whole history some ancient, stifled peasant uprising,
all their culture a little bit of wistful sobbing poetry,
their entire present a great revolution that barely keeps glimmering,
everything else protracted drunkenness, despair, and gradual suicide...”*⁴⁸

Was the poet expressing his experience of Durkheim’s collective suicidal tendencies, Milčinski asked, or was it a projection of personal distress? The author concludes

46 Milčinski, *Samomor in Slovenci*, 222.

47 *Ibid.*, 225.

48 *Ibid.*, 230.

that it is most likely a combination of both. How to successfully prevent suicide in Slovenia? The efforts of the medical and social services are definitely important, but more attention should be paid to the prevention of alcoholism, which has a self-destructive basis. We should also support those sections of the peasant population that are the most disadvantaged and vulnerable to suicide. Prevention would ideally start by internalising the following thought: “Suicide is alien to those who can accept suffering and death as a common human condition, without this Sisyphean knowledge robbing them of their joy of life.”⁴⁹

The Issue of Suicide as a Critique of Slovenian Socialist Society

In the 1980s, the issue of suicide preoccupied a group of Slovenian oppositional intellectuals from the circle of the *Nova revija* magazine (1982), defined by the communist authorities as the “bourgeois right wing”.⁵⁰ This group of intellectuals used the presence of the crisis discourse in the Slovenian and Yugoslav publics to shape their oppositional political agenda. The group’s core consisted of the intellectuals also known as the critical generation, who had contributed to two cultural magazines in the 1950s and 1960s: *Revija 57* and *Perspektive*. They highly valued the work and tradition of the frequently mentioned intellectual Dušan Pirjevec, whose charisma and original synthesis of phenomenology, Kardelj’s version of Marxism, and original interpretation of the Slovenian literary canon provided the critical generation with an attractive alternative paradigm through which they could form a critical attitude towards the realities of self-management socialism.⁵¹

After the death of Dušan Pirjevec in 1977, his intellectual legacy was continued by the philosophers of the phenomenological tradition, Tine Hribar and Ivo Urbančič, as well as by the sociologist of culture and comparatist Dimitrij Rupel.⁵² Ivo Urbančič analysed Pirjevec’s theory of nations, endeavouring to develop it as a basis for alternative politics. On the other hand, Dimitrij Rupel refined Pirjevec’s literary-historical thesis on the so-called “Prešeren structure”. Pirjevec defined Slovenian literature as the only sphere of Slovenian self-assertion and legitimation until the 20th century. In the 19th century, Slovenians did not possess their own state and its institutions as a nation. Therefore, they were “mostly a movement”, “blocked or inhibited” because of their political subordination. On this basis, Dimitrij Rupel developed the concept of

49 Ibid., 231.

50 Igor Omerza, *Veliki in dolgi pohod Nove revije* (Celovec: Mohorjeva, 2015), 18–110.

51 Balázs Trencsényi, Michal Kopeček, Luka Lisjak Gabrijelčič, Maria Falina, Monika Baar and Maciej Janowski, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe. Vol. 2, Negotiating Modernity in the Short Twentieth Century and Beyond. Pt. 1, 1918–1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 401.

52 Balázs Trencsényi, Michal Kopeček, Luka Lisjak Gabrijelčič, Maria Falina, Monika Baar, Maciej Janowski, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe. Vol. 2, Negotiating Modernity in the Short Twentieth Century and Beyond. Pt. 2, 1968–2018* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 112.

the “Slovenian cultural syndrome” (1976), according to which the Slovenian activities in the 19th century had manifested themselves mainly through literature. Thus, literature had not only been an art form, but also a substitute for politics.⁵³

Unsurprisingly, Taras Kermavner joined the *Nova revija* magazine’s circle. However, in 1987, he parted ways with his colleagues from that circle – partly because of their national political ambitions.⁵⁴ In his book of diary notes from 1982, he reflected on the aesthetically revolutionary spectacle that had asserted itself in the Slovenian art scene at the end of the 1960s with the interventions of the neo-avant-garde group OHO, in which his late brother Aleš Kermavner had also participated. Taras Kermavner wrote that his brother had wanted to set himself on fire in front of the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana already in 1965. The “suicide epidemic” supposedly radicalised aesthetic freedom. According to T. Kermavner, with their extreme gesture, these suicides marked the peak of dehumanisation as the truth of Stalinism and achieved existence in nothingness, in annihilation, with the only absolute act available to man. He therefore believed that all those who condemned these acts as criminal through the eyes of Catholic morality were wrong. Anyone who thought like that deprived these young people, who had chosen to die euphorically, of the implications of their decision and the meaning of their lives. Taras was convinced that his brother’s suicide was “a conscious religious, philosophical act of immense power.”⁵⁵

The writer, sports activist, and essayist Marjan Rožanc, who was not known as a supporter of Yugoslav socialism, was also a member of the *Nova revija* magazine’s intellectual circle. When Rožanc was confronted with the unexpected suicide of a friend from the theatre scene in 1984, he mainly contemplated existential questions in his diary entries and did not reflect on suicide in a metaphorical sense.⁵⁶ That changed in January 1985, when he presented a paper on the “beautiful death” at the symposium on the Slovenian nation and culture. It is not only Slovenians who are dying but the entire baroque Central European area from the Baltic to Trieste: Croats, Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, and Poles, Rožanc claimed. They are dying not only because of their separation from the cradle of Western Europe and Soviet totalitarianism but also because of the Central European culture itself. Caught between the German and Russian pressure, these nations cling to solidarity instead of superiority, turn inwards instead of outwards, and devote themselves to culture instead of politics. In Rožanc’s view, Central Europe’s culture is predominantly cosmopolitan, and its spirit is alien to Eastern European totalitarianism, as it is alien to Western European Protestantism. The Party’s strength is based on a lazy and lethargic people, a people defined by the Central European culture that wants only loyalty to itself and a beautiful death. Rožanc’s pessimism reveals not only the symbolic geography of the Slovenian nationalist intellectuals

53 Marko Juvan, “Slovenski kulturni sindrom v nacionalni in primerjalni literarni vedi,” *Slavistična revija* 56, No. 1 (2008): 1–17.

54 Aleš Čar and Mitja Čander, “Jaz sem kritik iz Beckettove in Rodetove kante,” *dnevnik.si*, November 4, 2006, <https://www.dnevnik.si/210090>.

55 Taras Kermavner, *Med prijatelji, med sovražniki* (Murska sobota: Pomurska založba, 1986), 144.

56 Marjan Rožanc, *Svoboda in narod, dnevniški zapiski* (Maribor: Založba obzorja, 1986), 15.

who revered the notion of Central Europe⁵⁷ but also his awareness of the fatalistic and melancholic nature of the Central European spirit, which is original and beautiful, yet, according to Rožanc, also marked for certain death for the very same reason.⁵⁸

The intellectuals from the *Nova Revija* magazine's circle maintained excellent relations with the Serbian nationalist intellectuals until they disagreed over their views on the Yugoslav state at a meeting in Ljubljana in November 1985.⁵⁹ In September 1986, a media scandal broke out over a draft memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, which exposed the nationalist nature of the Serbian intellectual elite. In the spring of 1987, the *Nova Revija* circle entered the political arena by publishing the 57th issue of the *Nova Revija* magazine (Contributions for the Slovenian National Programme), where they demanded greater sovereignty for Slovenia, the abolition of the communist monopoly, and a free economy. In this publication, regarded by the Slovenian historiography as the canonical text of Slovenia's democratisation and emancipation, the *Nova Revija* intellectuals upgraded the oppositional crisis discourse into the Slovenian national programme.⁶⁰

The poet, editor, and essayist Niko Grafenauer wrote a contribution for the 57th issue of *Nova revija*, titled *Oblike slovenskega samomora* (The Forms of Slovenian Suicide). Before writing this essay, Grafenauer took on an outstanding preparatory work – he studied philosophical texts, ancient literature, classical and Slovenian literary history, Slovenian statistics, and sociological and psychological analyses of suicide. In the first part of the essay, he reflects on the elemental sense of “alienation” or “loneliness” that overwhelms the future suicide victim. As a starting point for his reflection on the sense of “alienation”, Grafenauer chose two literary examples: *The Death of Empedocles*, an unfinished play by the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), and *Tujci* (*Strangers*), the first novel by Ivan Cankar (1876–1918). Hölderlin's play focuses on the suicide of the Greek pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles, who, according to legend, threw himself into the crater of the Mount Etna volcano. Cankar's novel describes the fate of Silvar, a Slovenian sculptor who finds no opportunities in his native land and seeks his fortune in Vienna. He endures a sense of alienation, although he even falls in love and gets married there. Silvar's work in Vienna, which is more artisanal than artistic, calls for a conformist adaptation of his aesthetic sense, which he refuses to give up. Consequently, he becomes completely alienated and eventually decides to commit suicide. Both Empedocles and Silvar are strangers in the world, although both enjoy social recognition. Society, however, is not the same as the world. The world, conceived in such a manner, is what saves people from alienation and loneliness. Such a world is only possible in the context of society and is based on

57 Marko Zajc, “Samoumeščanje slovenskih intelektualcev v simbolno geografijo Evrope v osemdesetih letih,” *Annales. Series historia et sociologia* 27, No. 4 (2017): 769–76.

58 Marjan Rožanc, “Umreti lepo,” in Tone Partljič (ed.), *Slovenski narod in kultura* (Ljubljana: Društvo slovenskih pisateljev, 1985), 78–87.

59 Nick Miller, *The Nonconformists, Culture, Politics and Nationalism in a Serbian Intellectual Circle, 1944–1991* (Budapest, New York: CEU Press, 2007), 310, 311.

60 Aleš Gabrič, “Zaostrenost mednacionalnih odnosov,” in Jasna Fischer et al. (eds.), *Slovenska novejša zgodovina 1848–1992* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino; Mladinska knjiga, 2005), 1171.

individuality and a homeland, which is not only a matter of birth but also of eroticism that functions as a binding force in all circumstances, either good or bad. If suicide requires alienation, then this alienation is also the predominant characteristic of the social world in which one decides to commit suicide, Grafenauer is convinced.⁶¹

Grafenauer summarises Lev Milčinski and other experts in suicidology and comes to the conclusion that Slovenian society harbours “an incredible degree of widespread alienation.” In his view, in the case of socialist Slovenia, it is possible to speak about the absence of the world, as he defines it in the first part of his essay, referring to Cankar and Hölderlin. Slovenian people live in a social system rather than in a world that offers the possibility of fully exercising the individual way of being.⁶² In a brief historical overview, Grafenauer examines the expert findings about the increasing number of suicides among Slovenians and acknowledges the impact of global trends associated with industrialisation and the disintegration of the old world. However, he pays more attention to the specific Slovenian causes. Referring to Dušan Pirjevec’s theory of nation, Grafenauer believes that the position of Slovenians as a nation without a true historical retrospective and a vague national perspective negatively impacts the nation’s self-confidence. The Slovenian public opinion proves, Grafenauer argues, that Slovenians do not work to achieve inner satisfaction but only to ensure their own and their children’s survival. They have no particular interest in investing their property in the economy. The Yugoslav system of “associated labour” presupposes undefined individual labour, which is why it is not surprising that workers are indifferent to the reallocation of capital to cover economic losses. Slovenians vegetate at work and are pessimistic about the future.⁶³

Niko Grafenauer is also concerned about the biological reproduction of the Slovenian nation, as he identifies an unstoppable birth rate decline, which he regards as a “decrease of social eroticism” that latently affects the suicide rate. Slovenians, the author notes, “are burdened with a kind of a permanent parasuicidal syndrome.” Why is Slovenian society pathological? The first feature of the social pathology that Grafenauer identifies is full employment in Slovenia, with many people, especially women, also working outside regular hours. Thus, in his opinion, “children’s individual family upbringing is significantly impaired” as society takes care of them. Slovenian children lack an individualistic and pluralistic education that considers personal differences, Grafenauer reflects. Half of Slovenian children attend religious instruction classes and are therefore exposed to the pressures of two mutually exclusive ideologies (the communist and the Catholic) from an early age. As the intermediate link between children and society, the family is not doing its job, which is why children face constant distortions in their experience of the world, affecting the mentality of young people.⁶⁴ Education, the author continues, is ideologically tailored to the ruling communist politics; the creative potential of the younger generation is suppressed in the service of

61 Niko Grafenauer, “Oblike slovenskega samomora,” *Nova revija* 6, No. 57 (1987): 229–46.

62 *Ibid.*, 233.

63 *Ibid.*, 236.

64 *Ibid.*, 238.

spiritual egalitarianism; the country is suffering a brain drain; and the level of academic knowledge is decreasing.⁶⁵ There is a blockage between the “living social currents” and the political system due to the political monopoly, while epistemological frustration and inhibition cripple the full social inclusion of individuals in the fabric of the nation. Slovenian social space is paternalistically dominated by the League of Communists and the Catholic Church. Both provide people with well-defined sacral roles: they place social meaning above the meaning of people’s individual lives. When people, trapped in the demands of the social subject, become aware of the specificity of the individual life that differs from the ideological “life task”, they experience their condition as their own betrayal. Many suicide victims are pensioners and housewives who experience a loss of meaning in life. True individualism is only possible if one is aware of the uniqueness of life, while people, accustomed to constant social indoctrination, do not know what to do with their existence. Egalitarianism, as Grafenauer makes clear, is fundamentally opposed to the diversity of individual life and “is accompanied by the stench of death.”⁶⁶ Suppressing individual interests in the name of an egalitarian social interest does not allow society to establish itself as a homeland of individuals.⁶⁷

Slovenians as a nation are defined by culture in the broadest sense – not as a nationalist ideology but as a dynamic structure of different interests. This means integration into the modern division of labour on the integrative basis of one’s own culture, all of which is only possible through national sovereignty in one’s own statehood. Post-modern society makes it possible to maintain differences while simultaneously integrating itself into the global society. Suicide is an individual act, but the disintegrative pressure of the social system is also decisive. For Slovenians, suicidality is linked to disintegration, based on the gap between social values and reality. As Grafenauer reflects, Slovenian society certainly cannot be defined as a “social brotherhood” that brings people together in the name of a particular idea, nor can it be defined as a modern post-industrial society. “Slovenian society is at a critical point when it is neither one nor the other,” he notes, and adds: “This situation is ambivalent, exposed to crises on all sides, and therefore, in the absence of individualistic self-consciousness, threatening to both individuals and society as a whole.”⁶⁸

The publication of the 57th issue of the *Nova Revija* magazine was followed by a reaction from the Slovenian political leadership that decided to fight the critical voices on the ideological battlefield. It organised a discussion about the magazine with the regime intellectuals, who strongly attacked the oppositional theses published in the magazine. Interestingly, Grafenauer’s deliberation on suicide was not commented upon.⁶⁹ It is not surprising, however, that suicide as a Slovenian metaphor was contemplated by the writers who belonged to the cultural elite of the time. The literary historian and professor Matjaž Kmecl counts among them. His book of essays titled

65 Ibid., 239.

66 Ibid., 343.

67 Ibid., 244.

68 Ibid., 246.

69 “Obravnava in zavrnitev nesprejemljivih stališč,” *Delo*, March 5, 1987, 7–9.

Slovenska postna premišljevanja (Slovenian Lenten Meditations) from 1987 includes the essay *O slovenskem samoubijanju* (On Slovenian Self-Killing). In it, Kmecl interweaves his own experiences of the suicides committed by his loved ones with examples from Slovenian literary history. If self-killing becomes a national characteristic, Kmecl reflects, it results from a powerful inner life. In Slovenians, the Freudian libido has not manifested itself through military and aggressive actions – i.e. outwardly – but inwardly, through spirituality and art. The long line of Slovenian suicide victims horrifies Kmecl but also fills him with a sort of disturbed pride. These suicides are, in his view, a terrible testament to the inner strength of a small body. He recalls the suicide of the elderly former mayor of Ljubljana, Ivan Hribar, who threw himself into the river Ljubljanica during the Italian occupation in 1941, and the Partisans who chose voluntary death rather than suffering in captivity. That is why Kmecl is not ashamed of his friends who took this terrible step. He feels sad and guilty for not noticing their self-destructive drive and would do anything to bring them back.⁷⁰

Conclusion

In 1978, the same year that Javoršek published his book *Nevarna razmerja* (Dangerous Liaisons), Susan Sontag's global bestseller *Illness as Metaphor* also came out. Apart from the year of publication, the two books have more in common than it seems. Both Javoršek and Sontag used examples from the literary canon to argue their theses, thus ascribing them a broader social significance. While Sontag, who wrote about illness from her own experience, warned against using metaphors about illness, Jože Javoršek chose a different path. He tried to rationalise the terrible loss of his son to suicide by resorting to deeper national-political and philosophical reasons while simultaneously indulging in accusations against his former comrades. The creation of the Slovenian suicide metaphor was a collateral consequence of his efforts. As we can see from the introductory quotation, Javoršek, by writing about suicide as a specifically Slovenian issue, attempted to promote a sense of national shame. If Slovenians opened their eyes and accepted this shame, they might be able to change something. In Susan Sontag's perspective, shame is part of the problem, as it promotes stigmatisation and hinders solutions.

The various uses of the Slovenian suicide metaphor are also interesting from the perspective of political thought. Jože Javoršek was a supporter of Yugoslav socialism and also of the Slovenian socialist nationalism of the Partisan generation, proud to have created Slovenia as a state, albeit within the Yugoslav federation. In his opinion, suicides were just the tip of the iceberg of undesirable phenomena (together with phenomenological philosophy, neo-avant-garde art, petty bourgeoisie, Catholic and Habsburg traditions) that were spoiling the well-conceived socialist project, which – in accordance with Edvard Kardelj's theory – was crucial for the successful realisation

⁷⁰ Matjaž Kmecl, *Slovenska postna premišljevanja* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1987), 138.

of the Slovenian nation.⁷¹ While Javoršek tried to consolidate the socialist system by exposing Slovenian suicidal tendencies, Niko Grafenauer used the topos of Slovenians as a suicidal nation to criticise the socialist authorities. Like Javoršek (and Sontag), Grafenauer used literary examples to confront an unwanted reality. Although he was certainly well aware of Javoršek's theses on Slovenian suicide, Grafenauer did not quote them in his essay. The reasons for this were not only political, as Javoršek was also rejected as an artist and a man of dubious principles by the group around *Nova revija*, which worshipped Dušan Pirjevec. That is why Niko Grafenauer had to do his best to create his own Slovenian suicide metaphor. Grafenauer understood the pathological phenomenon of suicide in Slovenian society as a consequence of the tension between the cold and alienated society of real socialism and the "world" based on the individual's meaning of life. His message was clear: the socialist system and the leading role of the communists (together with the specific characteristics of the Slovenian nation) encourage suicidal behaviour. Grafenauer's writing can also be understood as a worship of individualism, which is important for the good functioning of society and economy as well as for a positive sense of belonging to a nation. In his view, individualism in Slovenia is threatened by two dominant organisations: the League of Communists and the Catholic Church.

The distance from the Catholic Church brings Grafenauer's critique of socialism interestingly close to Javoršek's theses on the corrupting influence of Catholicism on socialist Slovenian society. However, the two intellectuals' mutual dislike of the Catholic Church was not the only common point in their texts on Slovenian suicide. From the viewpoint of nationalism studies, which take into account the modernist and constructivist paradigms, both intellectuals could be defined as Slovenian nationalists, although they would undoubtedly disagree with this label. For example, in his dialogue with his dead son, Javoršek wrote: "My Slovenian pride and nobility derive from the terrible truth that, as a nation that has gone through all the tortures of history, we have nevertheless preserved ourselves as something distinct and alive. You know me: I am no nationalist, no separatist, but neither am I the kind of cosmopolitan who, for who knows what reasons, forgets or denies his essence."⁷² In a documentary film on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the *Nova Revija* magazine, Ivo Urbančič (Grafenauer's close associate in the *Nova revija* circle) commented that while the magazine's editorial board feared that their writing would encourage nationalism, they also believed that "given the nationalist developments in other republics, especially in Belgrade, it was essential to activate people in this direction, although we were not like that in any way... As a philosopher, I cannot be a nationalist by conviction, as it is contradictory – it does not fit, I have never been nor will I ever be one."⁷³ The English theorist of nationalism and the state, John Breuilly, defined nationalism as a political doctrine built upon three basic assertions: (1) there exists a nation with an

71 Edvard Kardelj, *Razvoj slovenskega narodnega vprašanja* (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1957), XLVII.

72 Javoršek, *Kako je mogoče*, 140.

73 "Črno na belem – 25 let Nove revije, dokumentarna oddaja," RTV 365, <https://365.rtvlo.si/arhiv/dokumentarni-filmi-in-oddaje-izobrazevalni-program/4708640>, accessed on June 23, 2024.

explicit and peculiar character; (2) the interests and values of this nation take priority over other interests and values; (3) the nation must be as independent as possible.⁷⁴ Rogers Brubaker underlines that nationalism is, first and foremost, a perspective, a way of perceiving, interpreting, and representing the social world.⁷⁵ According to this logic, Javoršek and Grafenauer perceived and interpreted the phenomenon of suicide in nationalist terms and represented it as such, even though their doctrines differed and they did not consider themselves nationalists.

The most intriguing similarity between Javoršek's and Grafenauer's theories of Slovenian suicide is revealed by the gender perspective. All of the abovementioned intellectuals were men, and during the period in question, women discussed suicide as experts in more specific fields. Two women participated in the 1982 interdisciplinary consultation on suicide: the economic statistician Neva Maher and the ethnologist Marija Makarovič, an expert on rural life and folklore.⁷⁶ In their discussions on suicide, Javoršek and Grafenauer both problematised the low birth rate. While Javoršek vehemently attacked the established practice of contraception and abortion, Grafenauer pointed to the full employment of the Slovenian population, which, in his opinion, was responsible for the lack of family upbringing. It is possible to conclude with a high degree of certainty that Grafenauer was mainly bothered by the high employment rate of Slovenian women. Patriarchal outlooks can also be identified as a common point in Javoršek's and Grafenauer's reflections on suicide.

In the Slovenian socialist public, the notion of suicide evolved from a signifier of a horrific social phenomenon into a metaphor that can also be understood as an "empty vessel" for various cultural and socio-political agendas. At the moment when – often imperceptibly – the issue of suicide took on metaphorical dimensions, the negative consequences of this process, in Susan Sontag's sense, became relevant as well: the promotion of stigmatisation, shame, and guilt.⁷⁷

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74 John Breuilly, *Nation and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 2.

75 Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Harvard: Harvard University press, 2004), 81.

76 Marija Makarovič, "Prispevek etnologije k razpravi o samomorilnosti v Sloveniji," in *Samomor in Slovenci*, 218–24. Neva Maher, "Povezanost med značilnostmi samomorilnih oseb in družbeno-ekonomskimi karakteristikami," in *Samomor in Slovenci*, 259–76.

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Marko Zajc

SAMOMOR KOT SLOVENSKA METAFORA: K INTELEKTUALNI ZGODOVINI SAMOMORA KOT METAFORE V SOCIALISTIČNI SLOVENIJI

POVZETEK

Med šestdesetimi in osemdesetimi leti 20. stoletja se je o samomoru v slovenskem javnem prostoru pogosto govorilo kot o pomembnem družbenem vprašanju, kar je privedlo do uveljavitve ideje o Slovencih kot »samomorilskem narodu«. Susan Sontag v svoji knjigi *Bolezen kot metafora* preučuje, kako družba uporablja bolezen kot metaforo za moralna, psihološka in politična stanja, kar pogosto vodi v stigmatizacijo

bolnikov. Njena perspektiva je dragocena za razumevanje reprezentacij samomora v socialistični Sloveniji. Članek preučuje vpliv metafore »samomorilskega naroda« na politično misel in diskurz v socialistični Sloveniji. Analizira, kako so intelektualci v svojih razpravah uporabljali ali zavračali to idejo ter kako so strokovne razprave in statistične podatke prilagajali svoji politični agendi. Koncept samomora kot »slovenskega problema« se je pojavil konec šestdesetih let 20. stoletja in je bil podprt s statističnimi podatki in odmevnimi primeri samomorov med mladimi iz uglednih kulturnih in političnih družin. Med vidnimi intelektualci, ki so samomor obravnavali kot slovenski problem, sta bila Jože Javoršek in Niko Grafenauer. Javoršek, zagovornik jugoslovanskega socializma, je samomor obravnaval kot simptom družbenih patologij, ki ogrožajo socialistični projekt. Kritiziral je fenomenološko filozofijo, neoavantgardno umetnost, malomeščanske vrednote ter katoliško in habsburško tradicijo kot škodljive za socializem. Po drugi strani pa je Grafenauer s prisposodbo slovenskega samomora kritiziral socialistično oblast in videl samomore kot posledico napetosti med socialistično družbo in cilji posameznika. Kritiziral je tako Zvezo komunistov kot Katoliško cerkev zaradi omejevanja individualizma. Zanimivo je, da je bil obema intelektualcema skupen patriarhalni pogled. Javoršek je obsojal kontracepcijo in splav, Grafenauer pa je kritiziral visoko stopnjo zaposlenosti žensk, ki je po njegovem mnenju povzročila pomanjkanje družinske vzgoje. Kljub različnim političnim pristopom sta si Javoršek in Grafenauer delila kritičen odnos do Katoliške cerkve in etnocentrično razlago pojava samomora.

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Media Portrayals of Suicide's Risk and Protective Factors in Slovenia (1959–1999)^{*****}

IZVLEČEK

MEDIJSKI PRIKAZ DEJAVNIKOV TVEGANJA IN VAROVALNIH DEJAVNIKOV ZA SAMOMOR V SLOVENIJI (1959–1999)

Študija preučuje zgodovinske spremembe v stališčih slovenske splošne javnosti do samomora z analizo medijskega poročanja v dveh glavnih slovenskih časopisih od leta 1959 do 1999. Članki so se sistematično iskali v podatkovnih bazah časopisov, na podlagi kriterijev pa je bila opravljena analiza 1.785 relevantnih člankov iz prvotnega nabora 13.042 zadetkov. Ugotovitve kažejo, da so mediji v štirih obravnavanih desetletjih pogosteje poročali o dejavniki tveganja za samomor kot o varovalnih dejavniki. Najpogosteje omenjeni dejavniki tveganja so vključevali individualne značilnosti, kot so spol in težave z duševnim zdravjem, pri čemer so v poznejših letih postali izrazitejši tudi dejavniki, povezani s skupnostjo. Pri varovalnih dejavniki je bil poudarek vzporeden z individualnimi dejavniki tveganja; o dejavniki, povezanih z medosebnimi odnosi, se je pogosteje poročalo v šestdesetih letih, v devetdesetih pa je naraščalo poročanje o dejavniki, povezanih s skupnostjo. Izsledki kažejo na premik k celostnejšemu razumevanju dejavniki tveganja in varovalnih dejavniki ter

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k pristopom, ki temeljijo na pomenu skupnosti pri preprečevanju samomora, kar odraža razvoj javnozdravstvene paradigme.

Gljučne besede: samomor, dejavniki tveganja, varovalni dejavniki, mediji, stališča

ABSTRACT

This study examines the historical shifts in Slovenian public attitudes towards suicide by analysing the media coverage in two major Slovenian newspapers published between 1959 and 1999. We conducted a database search and analysed 1,785 relevant articles from an initial pool of 13,042 hits. Our findings revealed that, for decades, the media reported more frequently on suicide risk factors than on protective factors. The most frequently mentioned risk factors included individual characteristics such as gender and mental health issues, with community factors becoming more prominent over time. Regarding protective factors, the focus was comparable to the emphasis on individual risk factors. Interpersonal factors were primarily reported in the 1960s, while community factors became more widely recognised by the 1990s. This underscores a broader shift towards a holistic understanding of the risk and protective factors with community-based approaches to suicide prevention, reflecting the evolving public health paradigms.

Keywords: suicide, risk factors, protective factors, media, attitudes

Introduction

More than 700,000 individuals die by suicide every year,¹ surpassing the combined number of deaths due to homicide and war. In most European countries, suicides outnumber fatalities from road traffic accidents.² Additionally, non-fatal acts of deliberate self-harm are even more common, where international estimates suggest a ratio of around 10-20 such acts for every suicide.³ Therefore, suicidal behaviour is a significant public health and social concern, impacting individuals and extending its effects to families, friends, and communities.⁴

1 World Health Organization, *Preventing Suicide: A Global Imperative* (World Health Organization, 2014).

2 Keith Hawton, *Prevention and Treatment of Suicidal Behaviour: From Science to Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

3 Keith Hawton and Kees van Heeringen (eds.), *The International Handbook of Suicide and Attempted Suicide* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2002). World Health Organization, "Suicide Huge but Preventable Public Health Problem, Says WHO. World Suicide Prevention Day—10 September," *Cent Eur J Public Health* 12, No. 4 (2004): 196, 200, 206.

4 World Health Organization, *Preventing Suicide: A Global Imperative*.

Slovenia ranks among the more vulnerable countries, as we record a higher mortality due to suicide than the European average.⁵ Differences in suicide mortality worldwide can partly be attributed to variations in data recording and monitoring,⁶ but certainly also result from different risk factors (factors that increase a person's vulnerability to suicidal behaviour), protective factors (factors that improve resilience) and responses to them. Given that suicide is viewed as a behavioural phenomenon rather than a manifestation of a disease, it is noteworthy that cultural factors have even greater influence over behaviours like suicide, in comparison to their influence on disease patterns,⁷ reflecting the zeitgeist of the time.⁸

Suicide in Latter Half of the 20th Century in Slovenia

In the latter half of the 20th century, Slovenia witnessed a puzzling trend in suicide rates, as outlined by the inverted U-shaped pattern of suicide rates between 1965 and 2020. The rates gradually ascended until Slovenia's independence in 1991, then began a steady decline after 1997. During the period from 1985 to 1994, the average suicide rate stood at 31 per 100,000, placing Slovenia among the top four countries in Europe with the highest suicide mortality rates.⁹ This phenomenon could reflect significant societal changes during those years. However, understanding the gravity of the issue was hindered by historical circumstances. While systematic research on suicide commenced in the 1960s, Slovenia, as part of Yugoslavia, concealed its high suicide rates within the broader statistical average of this state. The emergence of independent research in Slovenia post-World War II shed light on the alarming trend, with rates surpassing 25 per 100,000 in the 1960s and exceeding 30 per 100,000 in the 1970s.¹⁰ In comparison to other regions of Yugoslavia, Slovenia consistently exhibited markedly higher suicide rates.

Lev Milčinski, a prominent Slovenian psychiatrist and suicidologist, made significant contributions to the understanding of suicide and its underlying factors. His pioneering studies, particularly in the late 20th century, delved into societal attitudes towards suicide, suggesting that even then, around 30.5% of respondents viewed suicide as a plausible solution to life's challenges.¹¹ This finding emphasises the persistent presence of suicide as a socio-cultural phenomenon that goes beyond purely clinical

5 Lev Milčinski, *Izbrana dela* (Ljubljana: Univerzitetna psihiatrična klinika Ljubljana, 2016).

6 Erwin Ringel, "The Presuicidal Syndrome," *Suicide Life Threat Behav* 6, No. 3 (1976): 131–49, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1943-278X.1976.tb00328.x>.

7 Christopher H. Cantor, "Suicide in the Western World," in Keith Hawton and Kees van Heeringen (eds.), *The International Handbook of Suicide and Attempted Suicide* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 9–28.

8 Ermina Colucci and David Lester (eds.), *Suicide and Culture: Understanding the Context* (Hogrefe Publishing, 2012).

9 Andrej Marušič, "Suicide in Slovenia: Lessons Learned for Cross-cultural Psychiatry," *Int Rev Psychiatry* 11 (1999): 212–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540269974393>. World Health Organization, *European Mortality Database (MDB)*, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2006, <https://gateway.euro.who.int/en/datasets/european-mortality-database/>.

10 Lev Milčinski, *Samomor in Slovenci* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1985).

11 Ibidem.

or biomedical explanations. Milčinski explored the philosophical, religious and ethical dimensions of suicide and offered a holistic perspective that integrated different disciplines. Despite the methodological limitations of his time, Milčinski's findings remain relevant and offer valuable insights into complexity of understanding suicide in Slovenia throughout the latter half of the 20th century.

Suicide Within the Historical Context

The narrative of suicide within public discourse has always been deeply entwined with the historical context of its times. Media, acting as the society's mirror and architect, plays a pivotal role in shaping and reflecting the collective consciousness regarding suicide.¹² From the early moral condemnations to the contemporary biomedical and psychosocial interpretations, the representation of suicide in media has evolved, revealing the underlying attitudes and beliefs of different eras.¹³ This relationship is particularly pronounced in societies undergoing significant political and social change, as has been the case with Slovenia through the latter half of the 20th century. The change in the way the media reported on suicide topics was orchestrated by evolving societal attitudes and a growing understanding of mental health. This transition was influenced by significant contributions from mental health professionals and researchers who advocated for a broader understanding of health that includes psychological and social factors alongside biological ones. The groundbreaking work of George Engel in the 1970s,¹⁴ who introduced the biopsychosocial model, played a crucial role in this paradigm shift.

Political and social changes

The socialist mentality that prevailed in Slovenia after World War II emphasized values of responsibility, industriousness, moral and mental strength, and sacrifice for the community, alongside bourgeois morality.¹⁵ Suicides were viewed as national betrayal, indicative of losing faith in the socialist future. Socialism regarded suicide as bourgeois decadence, seeking reasons for its persistence amidst a crisis of traditional values, rapid industrialization, increasing urban isolation, weakening influence of the Catholic Church, and alcoholism.

In the 1960s, a notable phenomenon emerged with a series of suicides among the children of leading officials, shocking the public as they were predominantly educated,

12 Steven Stack, "Suicide: A 15-year Review of the Sociological Literature Part I: Cultural and Economic Factors," *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* 30, No. 2 (2000): 145–62.

13 Jane Pirkis and Richard Warwick Blood, "Suicide and the Media. Part I: Reportage in Nonfictional Media," *Crisis* 22, No. 4 (2001): 146–54, <https://doi.org/10.1027//022-5910.22.4.146>.

14 George L. Engel, "The Need for a New Medical Model: A Challenge for Biomedicine," *Science* 196, No. 4286 (1977): 129–36, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.847460>.

15 Božo Repe, "Modernizacije pri Slovencih," *Acta Histriae*, 25, No. 3 (2017): 581–596.

cultured, and often privileged individuals. Public discourse oscillated between the prevailing view of suicide as a senseless act of the pampered and cowardly, and the perspective of many intellectuals who argued that youth suicides were rational decisions and a critique of societal conditions.¹⁶ This period also saw broader social and political change, influenced by global movements and internal demands for liberalisation. The influence of the Prague Spring and other liberal movements throughout Eastern Europe began to permeate Slovenian society, creating an environment in which dissent and alternative viewpoints were more openly expressed.¹⁷

Moving to the 1980s, a new shift occurred with the rise of anti-communist discourse¹⁸. Suicide became a means of resistance against communist rule. Its prevalence was seen as evidence that Slovenes no longer could or wanted to live within Yugoslavia. Socialism, its repression and associated national, demographic, religious, and economic policies were directly attributed to the high suicide rates¹⁹. This decade also saw an increased engagement with Western ideas and a gradual weakening of strict socialist controls, culminating in the rise of political pluralism and national movements.²⁰ Furthermore, research in the field suggests that the phenomenon of suicide in socialist societies often intersected with broader political, economic, and social factors. Pressures to conform to state ideology, economic instability, and restricted personal freedoms could contribute to feelings of despair and hopelessness, influencing suicide rates.²¹ Comparative studies, such as the study of suicide rates in Finland, emphasise the effects of social isolation and economic pressures prevalent in similar socialist contexts.²²

During Slovenia's path to gaining independence in the early 1990s, discourse on suicide played a complex role. Slovenia, as one of the constituent republics of Yugoslavia, went through a turbulent period during the dissolution of the country.²³ The historical background of this era was characterised by significant political upheaval and a strong nationalist aspiration, fuelled by the collective memory of historical grievances and the desire for self-determination.²⁴ This period was marked by political tensions, economic instability, and social change, all of which contributed to a sense of uncertainty and despair among some segments of the population. The process of gaining independence was accompanied by political tensions. Discussions might have

16 Ljuba Dornik Šubej, *Med politiko in zgodovino: življenje in delo dr. Dušana Kermavnerja (1903–1975)* (Ljubljana: SAZU, 2005). Meta Remec, "Traitors, Cowards, Martyrs, Heroes: Youth Suicide as a Socio-Historical Phenomenon in the 1960s Slovenia," *Studia Historica Slovenica* 23, No. 1 (2023): 203–38.

17 Peter Vodopivec. "The Conflicting Politics of History and Memory in Slovenia since 1990," *Slovene Studies: Journal of the Society of Slovene Studies* 36, No. 1 (2015): 3–19.

18 Repe, "Modernizacije pri Slovencih."

19 Niko Grafenauer, "Oblike slovenskega samomora," *Nova revija* 6, No. 57 (1987): 229–46.

20 Božo Repe, "Regional Differences, Slovene National Identity, and the Foundation of the Slovene State," *Slovene Studies: Journal of the Society of Slovene Studies* 30, No. 2 (2008): 57–70.

21 Tomas E. Joiner, *Why People Die by Suicide* (Harvard University Press, 2005). Stack, "Suicide: A 15-year Review of the Sociological Literature Part I: Cultural and Economic Factors."

22 Finnish Report, *Suicide Methods in Finland* (Helsinki: Public Health Institute, 2001).

23 Repe, "Modernizacije pri Slovencih."

24 Vodopivec, "The Conflicting Politics of History and Memory in Slovenia since 1990."

revolved around the uncertainty of the future, fears of conflict, and the desire for stability. Political instability and conflict can also have profound effects on mental health and suicide rates. A study by Kohrt et al.²⁵ examined the impact of political violence on suicide rates in Nepal and found a significant association between exposure to violence and suicide risk. Discussions during Slovenia's independence process may have reflected fears and anxieties related to political tensions and the potential for conflict. Similar trends have been found in other regions of political upheaval, where national crises have exacerbated mental health problems and led to increased suicide rates.²⁶

Slovenia, like other parts of Yugoslavia, also faced economic challenges during the transition period. Unemployment, inflation, and economic uncertainty could have heightened feelings of hopelessness for some individuals. The economic transition was a major challenge, marked by the collapse of traditional industries and the struggle to integrate into the global market economy.²⁷ Research has highlighted the link between economic recessions, unemployment, and suicide rates. For example, a study by Stuckler et al.²⁸ found that each 1% rise in unemployment was associated with a 0.79% increase in suicide rates in European countries. Slovenia, undergoing economic challenges during its transition to independence, likely experienced similar pressures.

Slovenian independence movement also brought significant social changes to Slovenia. Discussions might have focused on questions of identity, belonging, and the impact of rapid societal transformations on individual well-being. Societal transitions can lead to feelings of dislocation and uncertainty, which can impact mental health outcomes. During this period, there was a redefinition of national identity and a re-engagement with Slovene cultural and historical narratives, emphasising Slovenia's unique path compared to the other former Yugoslav republics.²⁹ Research by Karam et al.³⁰ explored the mental health consequences of social change and found increased rates of depression and anxiety. Similar dynamics may have been at play in Slovenia during its transition period. In addition, the wider European context of societal change during this period has also highlighted similar mental health challenges, as noted in studies of post-socialist transitions across Eastern Europe.³¹

25 Brandon A. Kohrt, Daniel J. Hruschka, Carol M. Wörthman, Richard D. Kunz, Jennifer L. Baldwin, Nawaraj Upadhaya, Nanda Raj Acharya, Suraj Koirala, Suraj B. Thapa, and Wietse A. Tol, "Political Violence and Mental Health in Nepal: Prospective Study," *Br J Psychiatry* 201, No. 4 (2012): 268–75, <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.111.096222>.

26 Balkan Report. "Comparative Analysis of Suicide Trends in the Balkans," *Journal of European Sociology* 38, No. 4 (1997): 567–85.

27 Oto Luthar, *The Land Between: A History of Slovenia* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

28 David Stuckler, Sanjay Basu, Marc Suhrcke, Adam Coutts and Martin McKee, "The Public Health Effect of Economic Crises and Alternative Policy Responses in Europe: An Empirical Analysis," *The Lancet* 374, No. 9686 (2009): 315–23, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(09\)61124-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(09)61124-7).

29 Repe, "Regional Differences, Slovene National Identity, and the Foundation of the Slovene State."

30 Elie G. Karam, Zeina N. Mneimneh, Hani Dimassi, John A. Fayyad, Aimee N. Karam, Soumana C. Nasser, Somnath Chatterji and Ronald C. Kessler, "Lifetime Prevalence of Mental Disorders in Lebanon: First Onset, Treatment, and Exposure to War," *PLoS Medicine* 11, No. 4 (2014): e61, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0050061>.

31 European Report. "Mental Health and Societal Change in Post-Socialist Europe," *European Public Health Journal* 44, No. 3 (2005): 220–37.

From Biomedical to Bio-Psycho-Social perspective

The change in understanding of suicide from strictly biomedical causes to a more nuanced bio-psycho-social model has significant implications for public health policies and preventive strategies. The shift from the biomedical paradigm to the biopsychosocial paradigm in medicine has been a gradual process that has evolved over several decades. The biomedical model, which dominated medical thinking for much of the 20th century, focused primarily on the biological aspects of disease and illness, often neglecting the psychological and social factors that can also influence health outcomes. The biopsychosocial model, on the other hand, emerged as a response to the limitations of the biomedical approach. It recognizes that health and illness are influenced by a complex interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors. This holistic approach considers not only the biological mechanisms of disease but also the psychological and social factors that contribute to an individual's health and well-being.³²

One significant milestone in the acceptance of the biopsychosocial model was the publication of Dr. George Engel's seminal paper titled "The Need for a New Medical Model: A Challenge for Biomedicine" in the journal *Science* in 1977.³³ In this paper, Engel argued for a broader understanding of health and illness that incorporates psychological and social factors alongside biological ones. Since then, there has been growing recognition among healthcare professionals and institutions of the importance of addressing the psychological and social dimensions of health. Medical schools have increasingly incorporated training in areas such as communication skills, cultural competence, and understanding the social determinants of health into their curricula.

Overall, while the biomedical model still holds influence in certain aspects of medicine, in latter half of the 20th century there has been a notable shift towards a more holistic and integrated approach to healthcare with the widespread acceptance of the biopsychosocial paradigm.

Factors Associated with Suicide in Public Perspective

In each historical era, the perception and interpretation of suicide have been profoundly shaped by the dominant beliefs, values, and socio-cultural norms of that time. As a result, the risk and protective factors associated with suicide have often been examined through the prism of the prevailing societal mindset. Consequently, through various historical periods, different risk and protective factors for suicide have been highlighted in the lay public, reflecting prevailing attitudes towards suicide and understanding of the suicide phenomenon within specific cultural contexts. Media

32 Heidi Hjelmeland and Birthe Loa Knizek, "The Emperor's New Clothes: A Critical Look at the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide," *Death Studies* 44, No. 3 (2020): 168–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2018.1527796>.

33 Engel, "The Need for a New Medical Model: A Challenge for Biomedicine."

reports, in their portrayal of these risk and protective factors, offer insights into the evolving public narrative and highlight the importance of these factors in both public and academic debates.³⁴

Risk factors

Risk factors can contribute to suicidal behaviours directly, but can also contribute indirectly by influencing individual susceptibility to mental disorders. Identifying these factors and understanding their roles in suicidal behaviour is central to preventing suicides.³⁵ There are a number of specific characteristics that are closely associated with a heightened risk for suicidal behaviour. We can divide them into four groups: individual risk factors, interpersonal, community and societal factors. Risk for suicide can be influenced by individuals' vulnerability or resilience, where individual risk factors are related to the likelihood of a person developing suicidal behaviours in the future. Further, relationships with family, close friends and significant others can have an important impact on suicidal behaviour. Additionally, the communities that people live in also have an association with suicide risk factors. Last but not least, different cultures, religions, historical and legal factors have shaped the understanding and status of suicide, leading to the identification of a wide range of factors that influence suicide risk.³⁶

The focus on risk factors for suicide has historically been dominated by an emphasis on individual pathology, including mental illness and personal crises.³⁷ However, the latter half of the 20th century witnessed a paradigmatic shift, acknowledging the influence of socio-economic and interpersonal factors.³⁸ The evolution of this discourse in media representation provides an invaluable lens through which to observe changing public attitudes.

Protective factors

Even though protective factors have not been studied as extensively as risk factors, identifying and understanding them is equally as important as researching risk factors,

34 Thomas Niederkrotenthaler, Martin Voracek, Arno Herberth, Benedikt Till, Markus Strauss, Elmar Etzersdorfer, Brigitte Eisenwort and Gernot Sonneck, "Role of Media Reports in Completed and Prevented Suicide: Werther v. Papageno Effects," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 197, No. 3 (2010): 234–43, <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.109.074633>.

35 Diego De Leo, Jose Bertolote and David Lester, "Self-directed Violence," in Etienne G. Krug, Linda L. Dahlberg, James A. Mercy, Anthony B. Zwi and Rafael Lozano (eds.), *World Report on Violence and Health* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2002), 183–212.

36 World Health Organization, *Preventing Suicide: A Global Imperative*.

37 Edwin S. Shneidman, *Suicide as Psychache: A Clinical Approach to Self-Destructive Behavior* (Jason Aronson, 1993).

38 Keith Hawton and Kees van Heeringen, "Suicide," *The Lancet* 373, No. 9672 (2009): 1372–81, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(09\)60372-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(09)60372-X).

since protective factors buffer individuals from suicidal thoughts and behaviour. Some protective factors counter specific risk factors while others protect individuals against a number of different suicide risk factors.³⁹

Protective factors, though less frequently highlighted in the media, are essential to understanding and preventing suicide. The gradual introduction of protective factors such as community connectedness into the media narrative indicates a significant shift towards a more nuanced understanding of suicide prevention⁴⁰ at the end of the 20th century. This shift is in line with prevention strategies that have increasingly focused on enhancing resilience and protective factors.

Aims of the Study

In our study, we aim to comprehensively investigate the multifaceted relationship between risk and protective factors associated with suicidal behaviour as portrayed in media reports spanning four decades, between 1959 and 1999. Through a systematic analysis, we seek to uncover the intricate patterns that underlie Slovenian societal attitudes towards suicide over time. By employing a rigorous scientific methodology, our research endeavours to clarify the underlying dynamics driving changes in public perception and understanding of suicide. Ultimately, our findings hold the potential to inform the development of targeted, evidence-based suicide prevention strategies tailored to the unique needs of different populations and historical contexts.

Method

Our research conducted content analysis of articles on suicide in two prominent Slovenian newspapers Delo⁴¹ and Večer⁴² between 1959 and 1999. The time frame from 1959 to 1999 was chosen since the year 1959 marks the start of Delo, a major Slovenian daily newspaper, which is a consistent source for analysing media coverage of suicide. This period encompasses key social and political changes, including liberalisation in the 1960s, socialism and Slovenia's transition to democracy and independence in the 1990s. The conclusion in 1999 provides a comprehensive view of media narratives up to the end of the 20th century, reflecting modern public health paradigms and suicide prevention strategies. Also, the focus on newspapers Delo and Večer was intentional since Delo, a central daily newspaper with a wide reach, provides a national perspective, whereas Večer, an important regional newspaper offers a regional viewpoint, and we aimed to incorporate both of these perspectives. Although the inclusion

39 World Health Organization, *Preventing Suicide: A Global Imperative*.

40 Rory C. O'Connor and Matthew K. Nock, "The Psychology of Suicidal Behaviour," *The Lancet Psychiatry* 1, No. 1 (2014): 73–85, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(14\)70222-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(14)70222-6).

41 *Digitalna knjižnica Slovenije - dLib*, <https://www.dlib.si>.

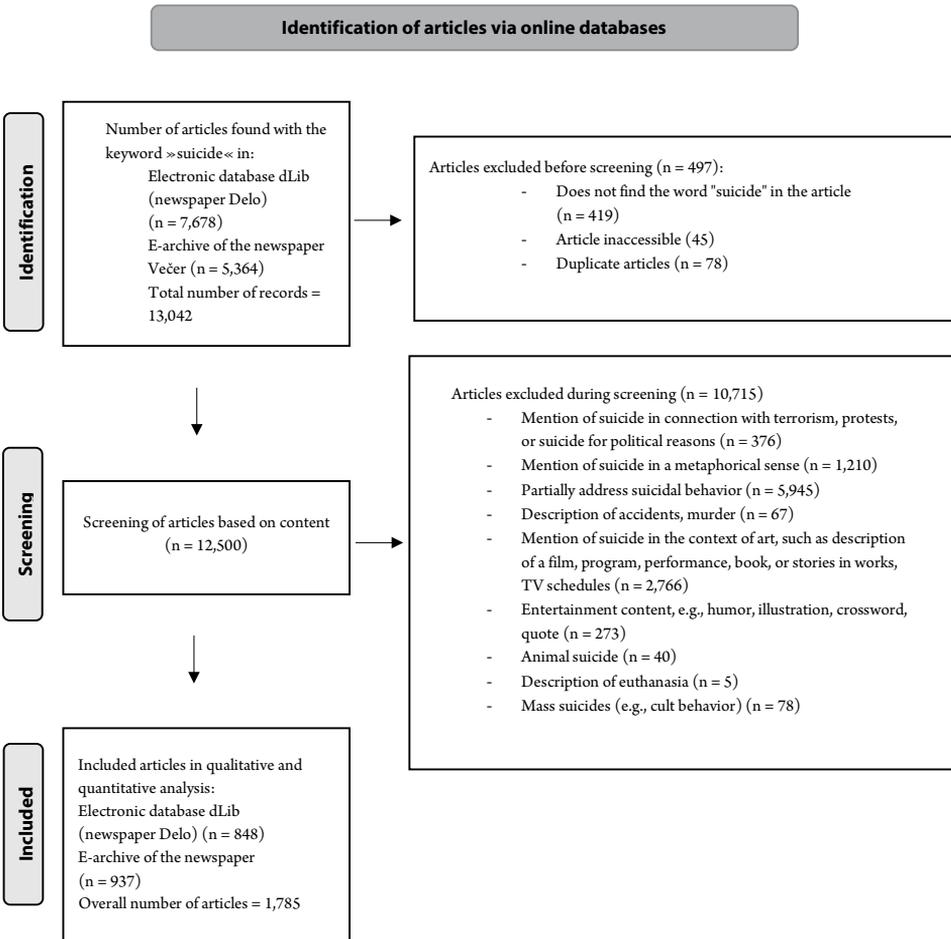
42 Večer, "Arhiv", <https://ris2016-vecer-com.eviri.ook.sik.si/arhivi/arhiv.aspx>.

of other regional newspapers could enrich the study, Delo and Večer were selected due to their significant influence, representativeness and data availability.

Procedure

We used the term *suicide* to search for the articles. A total of 13,042 hits were reviewed, but only 1,785 articles that met our predetermined inclusion criteria were included in the analysis. Identification of articles via online databases and the exclusion process are presented on PRISMA flow diagram in Figure 1.

Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram.



We applied exclusion criteria to select articles directly relevant to our study. Exclusion criteria included suicide related to terrorism, metaphorical use of suicide, articles with minimal focus on suicidal behaviour, descriptions of accidents, suicide in the context of art, suicide as a form of protest, entertainment content (such as advertisements, crosswords, humour, illustrations), animal suicide, mass suicide, as well as duplicated articles. By implementing these exclusion criteria, we aimed to ensure that only articles directly addressing the topic of suicide were included in our analysis. This approach allowed for a more accurate and focused research study.

Analysis of data

In each article, we analyzed the inclusion of risk and protective factors for suicide. These factors were categorized into four groups: (i) individual factors (characteristics or attributes of an individual that may increase or decrease the likelihood of developing suicidal behaviour, e.g. mental health conditions, genetic predispositions, personality traits, resilience, problem-solving skills, or coping strategies), (ii) interpersonal factors (relationships and interactions between individuals and their social environment, e.g. quality of relationships with family, friends, and peers, social support networks, communication skills, connectedness to others, and exposure to suicidal behaviours within one's social circle), (iii) community factors (characteristics and resources within the broader community that can influence an individual's well-being, e.g., healthcare services, mental health resources, educational opportunities, employment prospects, social and economic inequality, community norms and attitudes towards suicide, and the presence of support networks and community organizations), and (iv) societal factors (broader social, cultural, and environmental influences, e.g. cultural norms and beliefs, media representation of suicide, public policies related to mental health, availability of social services, economic conditions, and societal attitudes towards mental health and help-seeking).

Furthermore, we aggregated the data from all the reviewed articles, organized them by individual decades, and focused on quantitative analysis, including the number of risk and protective factors included in articles in each decade, and which group of risk and protective factors was most frequently reported in each decade. Additionally, we conducted qualitative analysis of the content of the articles. We identified which risk and protective factors were mentioned in each article. For each article, we listed all identified factors on the assessment form. To ensure a systematic approach to the analysis, i.e. to ensure that each risk and protective factor was recognized, randomly selected articles were evaluated and cross-checked for these factors by two separate groups of researchers conducting a content analysis. This was to ensure that regardless of who analysed the article, all factors present were consistently identified.

Results

In the present study, we analysed 1,785 newspaper articles, published in two prominent Slovenian newspapers between 1959 and 1999. Most articles described a death by suicide or a suicide attempt by one or more people. The articles described suicidal behaviour of 1,097 males and 329 females with the average age of 35.47.

Table 1: N of analysed articles per studied period for Večer and Delo.

Studied period	N of analysed articles		
	Večer	Delo	Total
1959-1969	270	142	412
1970-1979	248	260	508
1980-1989	142	199	341
1990-1999	277	247	524
All periods combined	937	848	1,785

Table 2: Proportion of factors per N of articles in each period for Večer and Delo combined.

Studied period	Risk factors		Protective factors	
	Frequency (<i>f</i>)	Proportion of factors per N of articles	Frequency (<i>f</i>)	Proportion of factors per N of articles
1959-1969	422	1.02	38	0.09
1970-1979	638	1.26	50	0.10
1980-1989	616	1.81	58	0.15
1990-1999	1,106	2.11	134	0.26
All periods combined	2,782	1.56	280	0.16

Table 1 shows the number of analysed articles (*N*) per studied period for both Večer and Delo. We can see that the number of analysed articles is the highest in the period between 1990 and 1999, and the lowest between 1980 and 1989. Table 2 shows the frequency and proportion of factors per *N* of articles in each period for Večer and Delo combined. We can see that the proportion of both risk and protective factors increases across studied periods. We also tested whether the frequencies of risk and protective factors across all periods are statistically different from each other, and found that they are not statistically different ($\chi^2_3 = 7.71, p = .05$).

Figure 2: Frequency of cases within risk factor category per studied period.

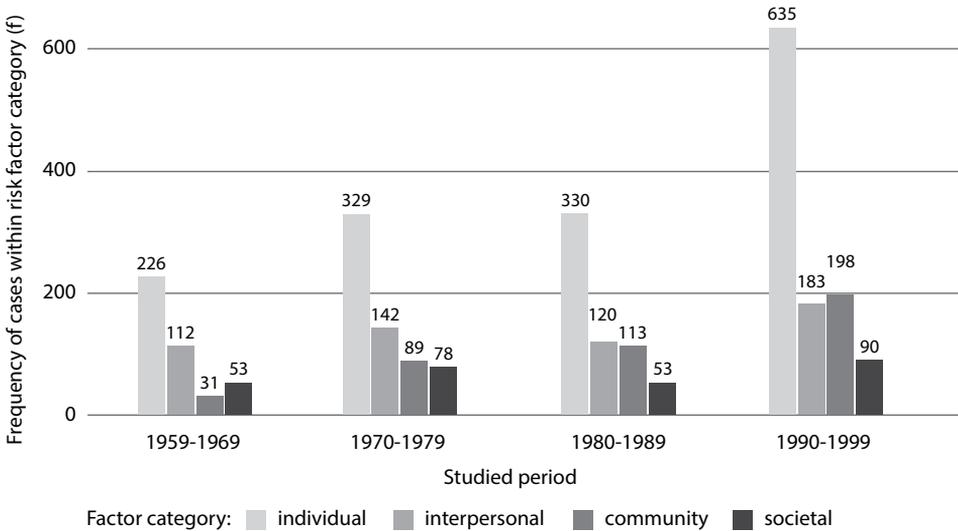
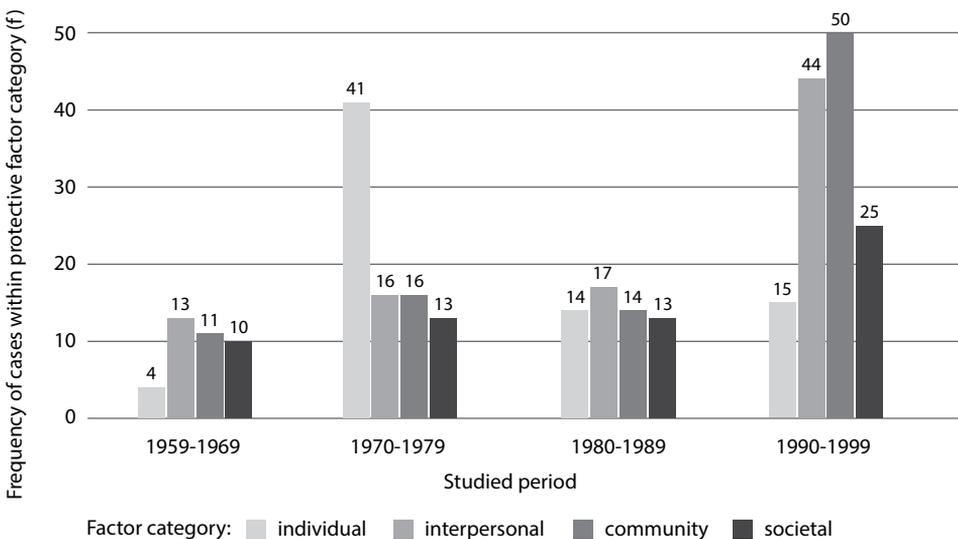


Figure 2 shows the distribution of risk factor categories across studied periods. Most risk factors were included in articles published between 1990 and 1999, and least in articles published between 1959 – 1969. Further, we tested whether the frequencies of risk factors categories across all periods are statistically different from each other, and found that they are statistically different ($\chi^2(9) = 57.69, p < 0.01$). When testing each newspaper separately we found, that for both Večer and Delo frequencies of risk factors categories across all periods are statistically different from each other ($\chi^2(9) = 26.23, p < .01$; $\chi^2(9) = 53.12, p < .01$, respectively).

Figure 3: Frequency of cases within protective factor category per studied period.



The distribution of categories of protective factors is shown in categories across studied periods (Figure 3). The highest frequency of protective factors is seen in 1990 – 1999. When testing whether the frequencies of protective factors categories across all periods are statistically different from each other, and found that they are not statistically different ($\chi^2(9) = 12.34, p = 0.19$). When testing each newspaper separately, we found that for Večer frequencies of risk factors categories across all periods are statistically different from each other, but they are not statistically different for Delo ($\chi^2(9) = 26.23, p < .01$; $\chi^2(9) = 23.23, p < .01$, respectively).

Figure 4: Percentage of cases in risk factor category per studied period.

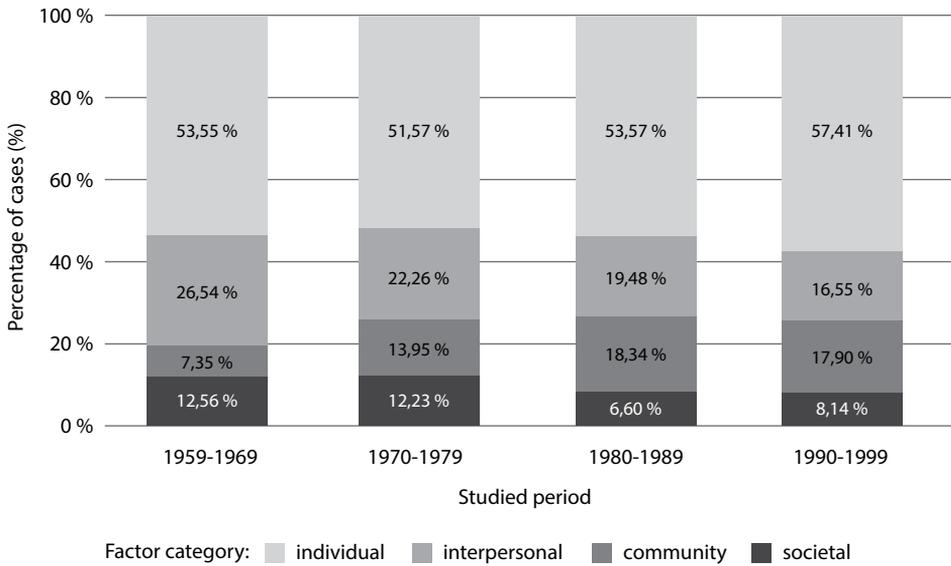


Figure 4 shows the percentage of cases in the risk factor category per studied period. Individual factors seem to be most prominent in all studied periods. Interpersonal factors and societal factors seem to decrease in % of cases, whereas community factors seem to increase in time. When testing whether the percentage of cases in the risk factors category per studied period are statistically different from each other, and found that they are statistically different ($\chi^2(9) = 57.69, p < 0.01$).

Figure 5: Percentage of cases in protective factor category per studied period.

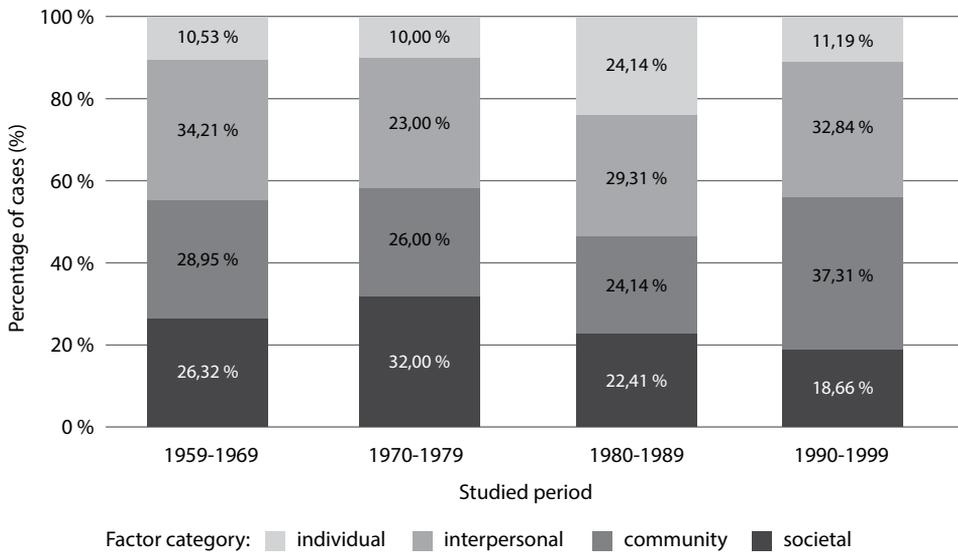


Figure 5 shows the percentage of cases in protective factor category per studied period. Interpersonal factors seem to be most prominent in studied period between 1959 and 1969 and period between 1980 – 1989. In 1970 – 1979 most prominent are both interpersonal and societal. In 1990 – 1999 the most prominent factors are community factors. When testing whether the percentage of cases in protective factor category per studied period are statistically different from each other, it was found that they are not statistically different ($\chi^2(9) = 12.34, p = 0.19$).

Discussion

The quantitative data combined with qualitative analysis of the content of the articles presents a detailed analysis of media coverage of risk and protective factors associated with suicide from the 1960s through the 1990s in Slovenia. It highlights a significant shift in the frequency and depth of reporting on these factors, suggesting a growing public and journalistic awareness of the complexities involved in suicide risk and prevention.

Changes in the frequency of risk and protective factors

The quantitative data show an increase in media coverage of risk factors, from an average of 1.02 to 1.26 mentions per article in the 1960s and 1970s to approximately 1.81 to 2.11 in the 1980s and 1990s. This trend correlates with the research discussed

in the introduction, which notes a high prevalence of suicide in Slovenia. This was particularly noted during the latter half of the 20th century, when suicide rates followed a puzzling trend that reflected significant societal changes.⁴³ The growing media focus on risk factors parallels these societal changes, supporting the notion that increased public awareness could be linked to the shifting dynamics within Slovenian society and its media.

Similarly, protective factors, which received less emphasis in earlier decades, also showed a gradual increase in media attention. Articles in the 1960s mentioned just over 0.09 protective factors on average, while by the 1990s, they mentioned around 0.26 protective factors on average. This aligns with the shift toward a more holistic understanding of suicide, moving from a biomedical model to a biopsychosocial model, as discussed in the introduction.⁴⁴ The media's role in shaping public perceptions, as highlighted by Pirkis and Blood,⁴⁵ underscores the importance of expanding the narrative to include factors that promote mental health resilience, reflecting a broader societal shift toward preventive strategies.

The increase in media attention to both types of factors can be seen as a reflection of the broader socio-cultural shifts discussed in the introduction. For instance, Milčinski⁴⁶ and Hawton and van Heeringen⁴⁷ discuss the complex interplay of cultural, social, and individual factors influencing suicide rates, suggesting a shift in public and academic discourse toward recognizing a broader array of influences beyond individual pathology. The gradual increase in suicide rates until Slovenia's independence and their subsequent decline correlate with the increasing complexity of media reporting on suicide, suggesting that media narratives might have contributed to or reflected a broader public awareness and understanding.

Changes in the content of risk and protective factors

Our examination of the frequency distribution of both risk and protective factors by different content categories across four decades provides a comprehensive view of how these factors have evolved. In the 1960s, individual risk factors dominated the narrative, accounting for 53.55% of risk factors mentioned, aligning with the historical emphasis on individual pathology in suicide discourse.⁴⁸ Additionally, qualitative data from the 1960s, extracted from the newspapers *Delo* and *Večer*, reveal that articles predominantly emphasized individual and interpersonal risk factors like 'mental confusion' and the loss of significant loved ones.

43 Milčinski, *Samomor in Slovenci*. World Health Organization, *European Mortality Database (MDB)*.

44 Hjelmeland and Knizek, "The Emperor's New Clothes: A Critical Look at the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide." Engel, "The Need for a New Medical Model: A Challenge for Biomedicine."

45 Pirkis and Blood. "Suicide and the Media. Part I: Reportage in Nonfictional Media."

46 Milčinski, *Samomor in Slovenci*.

47 Hawton and van Heeringen, "Suicide."

48 Shneidman, *Suicide as Psychache: A Clinical Approach to Self-Destructive Behavior*.

As we transitioned into subsequent decades, the prominence of individual risk factors persisted, indicating a sustained interest in personal aspects of risk. The dominance of individual risk factors in public discourse reflects a historical preoccupation with internal, psychological determinants of suicide, overshadowing broader socio-economic and interpersonal influences.⁴⁹ Similarly, qualitative data from the 1970s from Delo and Večer continued to focus on individual risk factors such as despair and mental illness, often linked to personal crises like failed relationships and career setbacks. However, these reports also began to explore societal factors, albeit less frequently, such as the challenges posed by incarceration and economic hardships, reflecting a growing awareness of the broader social influences on suicide. By the 1980s, the focus remained predominantly on individual despair and stresses related to personal circumstances such as job losses or traumatic events. The media portrayal during this decade continued to lack depth in addressing community and societal factors, which could have contributed to a more rounded understanding of suicide prevention. However, the qualitative data from Delo and Večer in the 1990s, a transformative period for Slovenia post-independence, reveals a complexity of risk factors, including those related to socio-political changes and gender dynamics.

In regard to protective factors, the focus on these factors mirrored the emphasis on individual risk factors, with interpersonal factors predominantly reported in the 1960s, accounting for 34.21% of all protective factors mentioned. Similarly, qualitative data from newspapers Delo and Večer reveal that only incidental references to interpersonal support, such as contact with a former spouse, were mentioned during the 1960s. This period recognized the importance of familial and social relationships in mitigating suicide risk, reflecting prevailing attitudes toward the significance of interpersonal bonds in mental well-being.⁵⁰

However, as we progressed into the 1970s and beyond, there was a shift toward a more balanced representation of protective factors across interpersonal, community, and societal categories. This transition reflects a broader acknowledgement of the multifaceted nature of suicide prevention, encompassing not only individual relationships but also community resources and societal structures.⁵¹ Notably, the 1990s marked a significant turning point, with a pronounced emphasis on community factors in protective narratives. Qualitative data from newspapers Delo and Večer during the 1990s shows a shift toward discussing protective factors, particularly the role of family cohesion and peer support networks, although these aspects were still underrepresented in the media narrative. This shift coincided with Slovenia's journey to independence, highlighting the impact of political and social changes on suicide discourse. The growing recognition of community factors underscores a broader shift toward holistic, community-based approaches to suicide prevention, reflecting evolving public health paradigms.⁵² Protective factors evolved over the four decades included in our

49 Hawton and van Heeringen, "Suicide."

50 Joiner, *Why People Die by Suicide*.

51 World Health Organization, *Preventing Suicide: A Global Imperative*.

52 O'Connor and Nock, "The Psychology of Suicidal Behaviour."

analysis, with a growing recognition of the importance of community factors and a decreasing emphasis on societal factors, especially in the 1990s when Slovenia gained independence.

Conclusions

This analysis, combining both quantitative increases in media mentions and qualitative shifts in the portrayal of risk and protective factors, illustrates a gradual but significant transformation in how suicide is understood and reported in Slovenia.

Main findings of our research highlighted the evolving distribution of risk and protective factors in suicide discourse, reflecting shifting societal attitudes toward individual agency, social support, and community resilience.⁵³ The media has played a critical role in this evolution, progressively shifting from a focus predominantly on individual pathology to a broader consideration of the interplay between personal vulnerabilities and societal structures. While individual risk factors remained prominent in media portrayals, the end of the 20th century saw a shift towards recognizing community and societal factors, reflecting a broader public health approach to suicide prevention. Additionally, from the 1960s through the 1990s, media attention on protective factors increased, highlighting community connectedness and resilience, and shifting focus towards strengthening community ties and support networks.

By including the comprehensive time frame of over four decades, our research offers a robust longitudinal perspective essential for discerning shifts and developments in media reporting. The employment of both quantitative and qualitative analyses enhances the depth of findings, ensuring that numerical data is richly contextualized with the content of the media coverage. The study's focus on a single country allows for an exploration of societal influences on media narratives, particularly in the context of Slovenia's unique socio-political landscape.

However, one notable weakness of our research is the potential for selection bias, as the research relies on articles from only two newspapers, which may not represent the full spectrum of media coverage. The scope of the research is also limited to print media, excluding television, radio, and online platforms that have become increasingly influential. Additionally, the study's focus on media coverage does not directly measure public perception, leaving a gap between reported narratives and societal beliefs.

For future research, it would be valuable to extend the analysis to include a broader range of newspapers. Longitudinal studies could benefit from incorporating public opinion surveys to correlate media trends with changes in public awareness and attitudes toward suicide. Additionally, cross-cultural comparisons could provide valuable insights into how different societies discuss and understand suicide, offering a global perspective on the impact of media narratives.

53 Engel, "The Need for a New Medical Model: A Challenge for Biomedicine." Hjelmeland and Knizek, "The Emperor's New Clothes: A Critical Look at the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide."

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**Nuša Zadavec Šedivy, Polonca Borko,
Vanja Gomboc, Vita Poštuvan**

**MEDIJSKI PRIKAZ DEJAVNIKOV TVEGANJA
IN VAROVALNIH DEJAVNIKOV ZA SAMOMOR
V SLOVENIJI (1959–1999)**

POVZETEK

Študija predstavlja analizo sprememb odnosa javnosti do samomora na podlagi poročanja dveh največjih slovenskih časopisov med letoma 1959 in 1999. V skladu z ugotovitvami so mediji dejavnike tveganja za samomor navajali pogosteje kot varovalne dejavnike. Ključni dejavniki tveganja vključujejo spol in težave z duševnim zdravjem, sčasoma pa so postali pomembni tudi vidiki skupnosti. Zgodnje poročanje je bilo bolj osredotočeno na individualne dejavnike tveganja. V šestdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja so se obravnavali predvsem medosebni dejavniki, v devetdesetih pa so postali pomembnejši dejavniki skupnosti.

V Sloveniji, za katero je značilna višja umrljivost zaradi samomora od evropskega povprečja, se kaže zapleteno razmerje med družbenim odnosom do samomora in številom samomorov. Prikazovanje samomora v medijih se je razvilo od prvotnega strogega poudarjanja biomedicinskega vidika do upoštevanja bolj niansiranega biopsihosocialnega vidika, ki vključuje mešanico individualnih, medosebnih in skupnostnih dejavnikov.

V študiji je poudarjeno, da so bili v medijskem poročanju individualni dejavniki tveganja sicer vedno konstantno v ospredju, vendar lahko proti koncu dvajsetega stoletja opazimo precejšno spremembo v smeri prepoznavanja skupnostnih in družbenih dejavnikov. To kaže na pomemben premik v javnozdravstvenih pristopih k preprečevanju samomora, ki poudarjajo celostno razumevanje dejavnikov tveganja in varovalnih dejavnikov ter pomen intervencij, ki temeljijo na skupnosti.

Pozornost medijev v zvezi z varovalnimi dejavniki se je postopno povečevala od šestdesetih do konca devetdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja. V medijih so se začele pojavljati razprave o povezanosti in odpornosti skupnosti, kar kaže na premik k preventivnim strategijam, ki se ne osredotočajo le na individualno tveganje, temveč tudi na krepitev vezi v skupnosti in podpornih mrež.

Raziskava poudarja ključno vlogo medijev pri oblikovanju javnega dojemanja in odnosa do samomora, iz česar so razvidne širše družbene in kulturne spremembe. Z dokumentiranjem razvoja medijskega poročanja o samomoru skozi štiri desetletja ta študija omogoča dragocen vpogled v dinamično interakcijo med medijskim prikazovanjem in javnim razumevanjem samomora, zaradi česar ima pomen za prihodnje strategije preprečevanja samomora, ki so prilagojene kulturi in kontekstu.

Ugotovitve kažejo, da bi lahko trajna zavezanost uravnoteženemu prikazovanju dejavnikov tveganja in varovalnih dejavnikov v medijih izboljšala javno razumevanje

in prispevala k učinkovitejšim prizadevanjem za preprečevanje samomora. Študija poziva tudi k nadaljnjim raziskavam, ki bi vključevale digitalne in družbene medijske platforme, da bi lahko razumeli njihovo vlogo pri oblikovanju sodobnega diskurza o samomoru in duševnem zdravju.

Na splošno ta raziskava bogati naše razumevanje tega, kako mediji vplivajo na javno dojetje in oblikovanje javnozdravstvenih politik glede preprečevanja samomora, ter osvetljuje, kako lahko mediji pripomorejo k ustvarjanju bolj informiranega in podpornega okolja za reševanje izzivov duševnega zdravja.

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Narratives at the Crossroads: Media Reporting on Suicide in Slovenia in the Context of Socio- political Changes in 1959-1999^{*****}

IZVLEČEK

PRIPOVEDI NA RAZPOTJU:
MEDIJSKO POROČANJE O SAMOMORU V SLOVENIJI V KONTEKSTU
DRUŽBENO-POLITIČNIH SPREMEMB MED LETOMA 1959 IN 1999

Raziskava preučuje prikazovanje samomora v slovenskih časopisih med letoma 1959 in 1999. To je obdobje, ki ga zaznamujejo globoke družbenopolitične spremembe. Z analizo 1.785 člankov, pridobljenih iz arhivov dveh glavnih časopisov, Dela in Večera, identificira dinamičen odnos med načinom medijskega poročanja o samomoru in razvijajočim se družbenim kontekstom. Ugotovitve nakazujejo na prehod od pretežno provokativnega k bolj preventivnemu poročanju o samomorih skozi desetletja. Kljub splošnemu trendu k bolj preventivnemu poročanju pa je razmerje med provokativnimi in preventivnimi vidiki v posameznih člankih dosledno nakazovalo na prevladovanje provokativnega poročanja, in to v vseh preučevanih obdobjih. V zgodnjih letih, ki so bila predmet preučevanja v okviru te študije, je bilo poročanje o samomoru pogosto senzacionalistično, kar bi lahko pripisali

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različnim dejavnikom, med drugim tudi manj ozaveščenim medijskim praksam. V devetdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja pa je opaziti presenetljiv porast preventivnega in provokativnega poročanja, kar sovpada z osamosvojitvijo Slovenije in liberalizacijo medijev. Nihanje trenda poročanja je v nasprotju z izsledki globalnih študij, a poudarja povezanost med mediji, družbenopolitičnimi spremembami in javnim dojemanjem samomora. Raziskava poudarja pomen medijev ter izziv uravnavanja javnega interesa in družbene odgovornosti pri poročanju o samomoru.

Ključne besede: samomor, poročanje, mediji, provokativni vidiki, preventivni vidiki

ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of suicide in Slovenian newspapers from 1959 to 1999, a period characterised by profound socio-political changes. By analysing 1,785 articles from the archives of two major newspapers, Delo and Večer, we identified a dynamic relationship between the style of media reporting on suicide and the evolving societal context. Our findings suggest a transition from predominantly provocative to increasingly preventive reporting on suicide over the decades. Interestingly, despite an overall trend towards preventive approaches, the ratio of provocative to preventive aspects per article consistently favoured provocative reporting in each period studied. In the early years studied, reporting on suicide tended to be sensationalised, which could be due to a variety of factors, including less informed media practices. In the 1990s, however, a surprising increase in both preventive and provocative reporting was observed, coinciding with Slovenia's independence and the liberalisation of the media. This mixed trend contrasts with worldwide studies, but underlines the link between media, socio-political changes and public perception of suicide. The study highlights the significance of the media, and the challenge of balancing public interest and social responsibility when reporting on suicide.

Keywords: suicide, reporting, media, provocative aspects, preventive aspects

Introduction

Suicide is a major public health problem with profound consequences for individuals, families, and communities.¹ Suicide not only leads to loss of life, but also has a significant impact on the bereaved (e.g., family, and friends) who often experience profound grief and feelings of guilt. The economic impact is also notable, affecting the wider socio-economic structure of communities. According to the World Health

1 World Health Organization, *Suicide in The World: Global Health Estimates* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2019).

Organization, more than 700,000 people die by suicide every year, making it the fourth leading cause of death among those aged 15-29 globally.² Recent studies suggest that up to 135 individuals can be affected by each suicide.³ Suicide is the result of a complex interplay of individual, social, psychological, cultural, and biological factors. This complexity highlights the critical need for comprehensive and multifaceted preventive strategies. Effective mitigation of suicide risks often requires comprehensive community and policy-level interventions that address these diverse contributing elements.⁴

Slovenia Between 1959 and 1999

Historically, Slovenia has one of the highest suicide rates in Europe and the world, a trend that has been influenced by a variety of cultural, economic and historical factors⁵. The systematic collection of data on deaths by suicide in Slovenia began in the 1960s. In the 1970s and 1980s, the suicide rate consistently exceeded 30 per 100,000 individuals per year, reaching a peak in 1984 (35.8 per 100,000 individuals) and 1989 with one of the highest rates in Slovenian history (35.2 per 100,000 individuals).⁶ In the last two decades, however, we observed a gradual but steady decline in these rates, with recent averages at around 20 per 100,000 individuals per year.⁷ This fluctuation in suicide rates can be attributed to several factors, including increased alcohol consumption and its availability,⁸ societal stress related to the transition from socialism to market economy,⁹ public discourse on the issue, improved availability of mental health services in recent years, comprehensive public health strategies, and targeted national suicide prevention measures.¹⁰

In the late 1950s and 1960s, Slovenia, within Yugoslavia, became rapidly industrialised and urbanised.¹¹ By adopting a unique socialist model with a model of market liberalisation and opening up to foreign investment, Yugoslavia diverged from Eastern Europe

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- 2 World Health Organization, *Suicide* [WHO, 2023], <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide>.
 - 3 Julie CereI, Margaret M. Brown, Myfanwy Maple, Michael Singleton, Judy van de Venne, Melinda Moore and Chris Flaherty, "How Many People Are Exposed to Suicide? Not six," *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* 49, No. 2 (2019): 529–34, <https://doi.org/10.1111/sltb.12450>.
 - 4 World Health Organization, *Suicide in The World: Global Health Estimates*.
 - 5 Andrej Marušič, "History and geography of suicide: Could genetic risk factors account for the variation in suicide rates?," *American Journal of Medical Genetics Part C: Seminars in Medical Genetics* 133, No. 1 (2005): 43–47, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajmg.c.30045>.
 - 6 Marušič, "History and geography of suicide." Onja Tekavčič Grad, "Zgodovina suicidologije na Slovenskem," in Saška Roškar and Alja Videtič Paska (eds.), *Samomor v Sloveniji in svetu: OpredeIitev, raziskovanje, prepečevanje in obravnava* (Ljubljana: Nacionalni inštitut za javno zdravje, 2021). Mira Virant-Jaklič, "Samomor v Sloveniji med letoma 1970 in 1991," *Obzornik zdravstvene nege* 29, No. 1/2 (1995): 15–18.
 - 7 Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, "Deaths by Underlying Cause of Death (ICD-10, Chapters I-XIX), Sex and Age Groups, Slovenia, Annually." Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, n.d., <https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/en/Data/-/05L3004S.px>.
 - 8 William Alex Pridemore and Aleksandra J. Snowden, "National Alcohol Policy in Slovenia: An Interrupted Time-Series Analysis," *American Journal of Public Health* 99, No. 5 (2009): 915–20, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2008.146183>.
 - 9 Mojmir Mrak, Matija Rojec and Carlos Silva-Jáuregui, *Slovenia: From Yugoslavia to the European Union* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank Publications, 2004).
 - 10 Slavko Zihelr and Peter Pregelj, "Samomorilnost v Sloveniji," *Zdravniški vestnik* 79, No. 7/8 (2010): 559–62.
 - 11 Božo Repe, "Modernizacije pri Slovencih," *Acta Histriae* 25, No. 3 (2017): 581–596.

and oriented itself towards Western markets.¹² The shift from rural to urban areas also significantly changed social structures, impacting community ties and individual identity,¹³ which are critical factors for the psychological well-being of individuals. Despite successfully navigating Cold War politics, Yugoslavia showed signs of economic stagnation and recession in the late 1970s, reflecting the general global economic downturn. This phenomenon became even more pronounced during the 1980s, a decade characterised by significant socio-economic and political turbulence for Slovenia and the broader Yugoslav federation. Following Tito's death in 1980, the federation began to disintegrate, facing severe economic problems characterised by high inflation and unemployment. This led to widespread social unrest and halted social services and infrastructure investment. Many struggling companies laid off their employees, and household incomes and savings rapidly declined.¹⁴ Simultaneously, Slovenia experienced a cultural renaissance with growing calls for democratisation and independence.¹⁵ In 1991, Slovenia transitioned from a Yugoslav socialist republic to an independent democratic republic, marked by a declaration of independence and a brief 10-day war. This shift enabled the creation of a new national identity, independent political institutions and integration into international economic systems. Slovenia joined the UN in 1992 and became an associate member of the EU in 1996, leading to full membership in 2004. This period also saw significant political, social and economic reforms, stabilising the economy.¹⁶

The political and economic changes were accompanied by significant shifts in media freedom and journalistic practices, leading to changes in the media landscape, more freedom of expression and a diversification of viewpoints in public discourse. Journalistic practices also began to move more towards independent and investigative journalism.¹⁷

Media Reporting on Suicide

Media reporting on suicide has been studied extensively due to its potential impact on public behaviour and policy.¹⁸ Research has shown a correlation between media portrayal of suicide and subsequent suicide rates, suggesting that irresponsible reporting can lead to imitation among vulnerable individuals.¹⁹

12 S. L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After The Cold War* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1995). John Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country, Second Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

13 Repe, "Modernizacije pri Slovencih."

14 Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*.

15 Repe, "Modernizacije pri Slovencih." Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*.

16 Repe, "Modernizacije pri Slovencih."

17 Sandra Bašić-Hrvatina and Lenart J. Kučić, "Slovenia," in *Media Ownership and Its Impact on Media Independence and Pluralism*, ed. Brankica Petković (Ljubljana: Peace institute, 2004).

18 Jane Pirkis and Richard W. Blood, "Suicide and The Media," in Stephen H. Koslow, Pedro Ruiz, and Charles B. Nemeroff (eds.), *A Concise Guide to Understanding Suicide: Epidemiology, Pathophysiology and Prevention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

19 David P. Phillips, "The Influence of Suggestion on Suicide: Substantive and Theoretical Implications of the Werther Effect," *American Sociological Review* 39, No. 3 (1974): 340–54.

The influence of the news and informational media is considerable, as they shape society's perceptions and can change individuals' attitudes and behaviour.²⁰ This influence is particularly significant in the context of suicide, a topic surrounded by myths, that can impact vulnerable populations.²¹ Given the high level of public interest in suicide, such stories often attract media attention and lead to extensive coverage, which can increase the risk of imitation.²² Additionally, the manner in which suicide is reported can shape public opinion on research priorities and social policy.²³ This is evident as media coverage often directs public attention and legislative focus toward high-priority public health issues,²⁴ underscoring the essential role that media plays in shaping discourse and policy related to suicide prevention.

Historically, Phillips²⁵ was the first to systematically examine the link between media reporting on suicide and actual suicide rates in the public. In 1974, he demonstrated that suicides in the United States increased following media reports on suicide. He termed this phenomenon the Werther effect, named after the protagonist in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's novel "The Sorrows of Young Werther," who dies by suicide. The Werther effect remains one of the most well-researched phenomena in media influence on suicide. Similarly, as Phillips noted in 1974, the publication of Goethe's novel in 1774 was associated with a notable increase in copycat suicides among young men, mirroring Werther's fate.²⁶ This effect demonstrates that detailed and sensationalized depictions of suicide in the media can lead to an increase in suicide rates, especially among individuals who find aspects of their own lives reflected in the articles. Identification with the individual or circumstances, reported in news articles, can amplify the impact of the media portrayal²⁷ and underline the need for responsible reporting on suicide. Following the publication of Phillips' article in 1974,²⁸ research on media reporting of suicide began, initially focusing on Western countries, particularly the United States, until around 1990.²⁹ Later, studies expanded to Asia, Europe, and, in some cases, Australia.³⁰ The first prospective study in this area was conducted in Vienna. After the Vienna subway opened in 1978, it became a 'popular' location for suicides in the 1980s. Most of the suicide cases that occurred there were

20 Pirkis and Blood, "Suicide and The Media."

21 Mark Sinyor, Ayal Schaffer, Yasunori Nishikawa, Donald A. Redelmeier, Thomas Niederkrotenthaler, Jitender Sareen, Anthony J. Levitt, Alex Kiss and Jane Pirkis, "The Association Between Suicide Deaths and Putatively Harmful and Protective Factors in Media Reports," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 190, No. 30 (2018): 900–07, <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.170698>.

22 Pirkis and Blood, "Suicide and The Media."

23 Merike Sisask and Airi Värnik, "Media Roles in Suicide Prevention: A Systematic Review," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 9, No. 1 (2012): 123–38, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph9010123>.

24 Melanie A. Wakefield, Barbara Loken and Robert C. Hornik, "Use of Mass Media Campaigns To Change Health Behaviour," *The Lancet* 376, No. 9748 (2010): 1261–71, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(10\)60809-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(10)60809-4).

25 Phillips, "The Influence of Suggestion on Suicide."

26 Ibidem.

27 Steven Stack, "Media Coverage As a Risk Factor In Suicide," *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 57, No. 4 (2003): 238–40, <https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.57.4.238>.

28 Phillips, "The Influence of Suggestion on Suicide."

29 Steven Stack, "The Effect of the Media on Suicide: Evidence From Japan, 1955-1985," *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* 26, No. 2 (1996): 132–42. Sisask, and Värnik, "Media Roles in Suicide Prevention."

30 Sisask, and Värnik, "Media Roles in Suicide Prevention."

reported dramatically and extensively in the media. Initially, there were only a few suicides and suicide attempts, but both increased significantly after 1983. A media campaign in mid-1987, which focused on informing journalists about the possible negative effects of their reporting, was associated with a significant decrease in suicide rates and attempts, which continued until 1992.³¹ Other studies from America, Asia, and Europe have generally confirmed the association between media reporting on suicide and actual suicide rates among the general public. These studies suggest that the more prominently a suicide is reported (e.g. on the front page or in several articles in different newspapers), the higher the number of suicides. The risk of copycat behavior is also higher if readers can easily identify with the person reported in the article.³²

Conversely, studies have found the opposite effect. The ‘Papageno Effect’, named after a character in Mozart’s opera “The Magic Flute”, represents the potentially positive effects of a responsible portrayal of suicide in the media. Papageno, who is thinking about suicide after the loss of his loved one, finds a way to live through the hope and effective coping strategies, supported by his friends.³³ Media highlighting stories of overcoming suicidal crises through supportive interventions can foster resilience and provide hope to those affected or in distress, thus potentially reducing suicide rates.³⁴

Aim of the Study

These phenomena underscore the dual impact that the media can have on public health and emphasize the need for careful, considerate reporting that prioritizes preventative measures over sensationalism. Empirical research suggests that the manner in which suicide is depicted in the media can significantly influence imitative behaviour. Sensational and inappropriate reporting can exacerbate this risk, while responsible portrayal that emphasizes prevention and support resources can help reduce it. However, there are no studies in Slovenia that examine how suicide was reported in the media in the years before 2000. This study is thus the first to analyse the changes in media reporting on suicide in Slovenia from 1959 to 1999, a period marked by political and social changes that need to be taken into account when discussing (media reporting on) suicide. To this end, both provocative and preventative aspects in the articles were analyzed and the results were placed in the broader context of life in Slovenia and attitudes towards suicide during these periods.

31 Elmar Etzersdorfer and Gernot Sonneck, “Preventing Suicide by Influencing Mass-Media Reporting: The Viennese Experience 1980–1996,” *Archives of Suicide Research* 4, No. 1 (1998): 67–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1381119808258290>.

32 Phillips, “The Influence of Suggestion on Suicide.”

33 Thomas Niederkrotenthaler, Martin Voracek, Arno Herberth, Benedikt Till, Markus Strauss, Elmar Etzersdorfer, Brigitte Eisenwort and Gernot Sonneck, “Role of Media Reports in Completed and Prevented Suicide: Werther v. Papageno Effects,” *British Journal of Psychiatry* 197, No. 3 (2010): 234–43, <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.109.074633>.

34 Niederkrotenthaler, Voracek, Herberth, Till, Strauss, Etzersdorfer, Eisenwort and Sonneck, “Role of Media Reports in Completed and Prevented Suicide.” Benedikt Till, Ulrich S. Tran, Martin Voracek and Thomas Niederkrotenthaler, “Beneficial Effects of Non-Sensationalizing Media Portrayals of Suicide: The Role of Papageno Effects,” *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 77, No. 6 (2016): e738–e46.

Method

Sample and Procedure

In this study, the methodology emphasizes a comprehensive approach to identifying and analyzing media representations of suicide, ensuring a systematic collection and a focus on articles that directly relate to the intended research objectives. Since the procedure of this study is described in detail in another article of this study,³⁵ we only summarize it here.

Upon conducting an initial search through electronic archives of two prominent Slovenian newspapers, *Delo* and *Večer*, a total of 13,042 articles were retrieved using the keyword 'suicide.' This search covered the period from October to November 2022 for both publications and was repeated for *Večer* between March and May 2023. 497 articles were immediately excluded for reasons such as irrelevance of the keyword, inaccessibility or duplicates, leaving 12,545 articles that were subjected to a detailed content review. The approach to collecting relevant articles was similar to methods reported in other studies.³⁶

A rigorous screening was then conducted, focusing on the content relevance and context of suicide in each article. A total of 10,715 articles were excluded during this phase for depicting suicide in contexts such as terrorism, political protests, metaphorical use and art, or were part of entertainment content such as humour or crossword puzzles. Articles that only marginally dealt with suicidality or described unrelated phenomena such as accidents, murder or euthanasia were also excluded.

After this meticulous process, 1,785 articles (1959-1969: 412 articles, 1970-1979: 508 articles; 1980-1989: 341 articles; 1990-1999: 524 articles) remained that were considered relevant for an in-depth qualitative and quantitative analysis. These included 848 articles from the dLib database of the newspaper *Delo*³⁷ and 937 from the e-archive of the newspaper *Večer*,³⁸ ensuring a comprehensive analysis of suicide reporting practices in the selected periods.

The final sample of 1,785 newspaper articles published in two well-known Slovenian newspapers between 1959 and 1999 predominantly documented either a suicide or a suicide attempt involving one or more individuals (1,097 men and 329 women with an average age of 35.47 years).

35 Nuša Zadavec Šedivy, Polonca Borko, Vanja Gomboc and Vita Poštuvan, "Media Portrayals of Suicide's Risk and Protective Factors in Slovenia (1959–1999)." Published Here.

36 Vanja Gomboc, Diego De Leo and Vita Poštuvan, "Responsible Reporting on Suicide in Slovenia: Are We There Yet?." In press. Saška Roškar, Alenka Tančič Grum, Vita Poštuvan, Anja Podlesek and Diego De Leo, "The Adaptation and Implementation of Guidelines for Responsible Media Reporting on Suicide in Slovenia," *Zdravstveno varstvo* 56, No. 1 (2017): 31–38, <https://doi.org/10.1515/sjph-2017-0005>.

37 *Digitalna knjižnica Slovenije – dLib.si*, <https://www.dlib.si>.

38 The archive of the newspaper *Večer* is accessible at *Prijava za oddaljeni dostop do informacijskih virov*, <https://ris2016-vecer-com.eviri.ook.sik.si/arhivi/arhiv.aspx>.

Instruments and statistical analysis

To evaluate the reporting style in terms of preventive and provocative aspects, we performed a systematic content analysis of the individual articles using an evaluation form developed specifically for this study. This analysis aimed to determine the type of suicidal behaviour reported as well as the gender and age of the individuals involved. We assessed the inclusion of four provocative aspects (outlined in Table 2) and nine preventive aspects (detailed in Table 3) in line with the methodology of other studies in this area.³⁹ These provocative and preventive aspects are discussed in the guidelines for responsible reporting on suicide⁴⁰, which advocate a more conscientious approach to media reporting on suicide and thus contribute to the prevention of suicidal behaviour.

The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0, calculating descriptive statistics and examining variations in frequencies using the chi-square test.

Results

The results of this study provide a comprehensive overview of the portrayal of suicide in two prominent Slovenian newspapers from 1959 to 1999. The content analysis, conducted on a final sample of 1,785 newspaper articles, revealed nuanced patterns in reporting styles across four decades, with a focus on assessing the balance between provocative and preventative aspects of reporting.

Table 1 shows the frequencies of provocative and preventive aspects for four time periods as well as the sum of the aspects identified in each period. Analyses indicate that there are statistically significant differences in the number of preventive and provocative aspects in the four time periods measured ($\chi^2(3) = 62.04, p < .001$). When looking at the provocative or preventive aspects separately, there are also differences between these four time periods (provocative aspects: $\chi^2(3) = 155.91, p < .001$; preventive aspects: $\chi^2(3) = 177.76, p < .001$).

39 Gomboc, De Leo and Poštuvan, "Responsible Reporting on Suicide in Slovenia." Roškar, Tančič Grum, Poštuvan, Podlessek and De Leo, "The Adaptation and Implementation of Guidelines for Responsible Media Reporting on Suicide in Slovenia."

40 Saška Roškar, Alenka Tančič Grum and Vita Poštuvan, *Spregovorimo o samomoru in medijih: preprečevanje samomora – strokovne smernice za odgovorno novinarsko poročanje* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za varovanje zdravja, 2010).

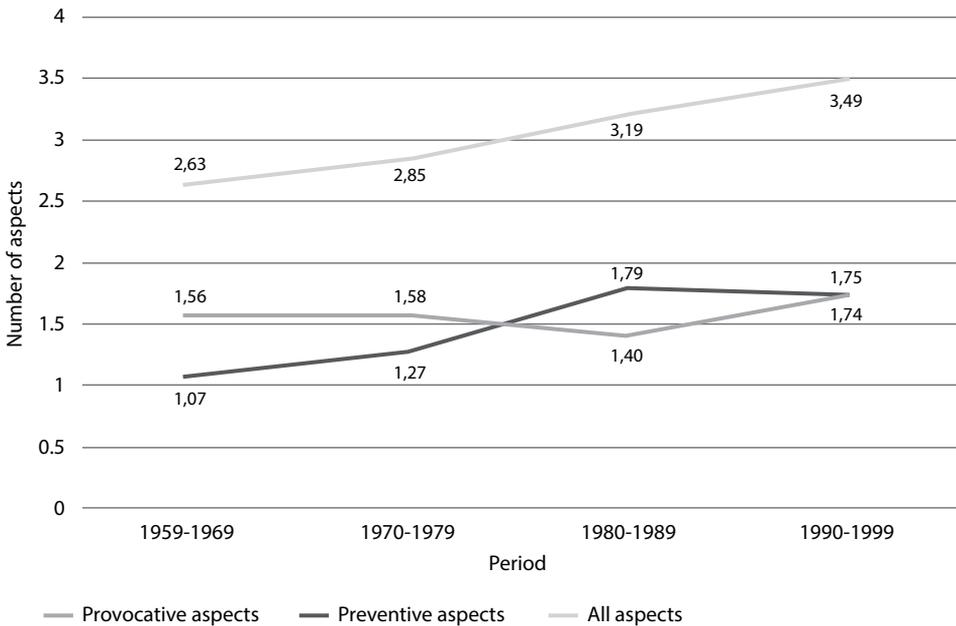
Table 1: Inclusion of provocative and preventive aspects of media reporting on suicide according to four periods.

	Provocative aspects		Preventive aspects		All aspects
	<i>f</i>	% per all aspects	<i>f</i>	% per all aspects	<i>f</i>
1959-1969	644	59.46	439	40.54	1083
1970-1979	801	55.36	646	44.64	1447
1980-1989	476	43.87	609	56.13	1085
1990-1999	918	50.11	914	49.89	1832

Source: The table is the property of the authors and is based on research data collected in this study.

Figure 1 displays the average number of provocative and preventive aspects included in each article on suicide for each period. When examined by individual period, no statistically significant differences were observed between the average number of included provocative and preventive aspects per article ($\chi^2(3) = 0.93, p = .819$). Similarly, no statistically significant differences were detected when only provocative or preventive aspects were examined in four different periods (provocative aspects: $\chi^2(3) = 0.43, p = .934$; preventive aspects: $\chi^2(3) = 0.67, p = .881$).

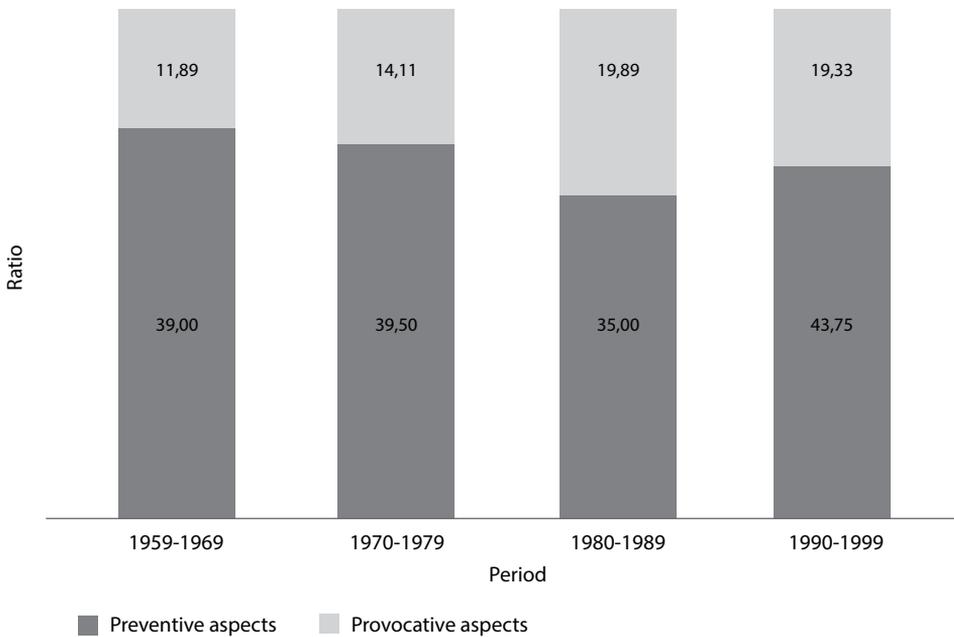
Figure 1: Number of aspects per article for each period.



Source: The table is the property of the authors and is based on research data collected in this study.

Figure 2 illustrates the ratio of actual provocative aspects to the maximum possible provocative aspects per article as well as the actual proportion of preventive aspects per article to the maximum possible number of preventive aspects in a single article. No article included all provocative and preventive aspects. On average, across all four periods, the articles contained 39.31% of all potential provocative aspects and 16.31% of preventive aspects. When examined by individual periods, as shown in Figure 2, the number of preventive aspects in an article has increased over the years. A different trend can be observed for provocative aspects. The lowest number of provocative aspects was recorded between 1980 and 1989, with the highest occurring in the last period, 1990–1999.

Figure 2: The ratio of included provocative and preventive aspects in media reporting on suicide across four periods.



Source: The table is the property of the authors and is based on research data collected in this study.

Table 2 and Table 3 provide detailed insights into the provocative and preventive aspects of media reporting on suicide. Each table lists specific aspects and the corresponding percentage of articles that included these aspects during the examined periods, highlighting how frequently certain elements appear in coverage over time.

Table 2: Individual provocative aspects of reporting on suicide across four periods.

	1959-1969		1970-1979		1980-1989		1990-1999		All		X ²	df
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
The title of the article is sensationalist, using the word suicide.	293	71.12	318	62.6	216	63.34	367	70.04	1194	66.89	39.90**	3
Inappropriate choice of pictorial material (e.g. depiction of method, location of suicide).	16	3.88	31	6.1	11	3.23	77	14.69	135	7.56	80.32**	3
Includes a detailed description of the method of completed or attempted suicide.	220	53.4	278	54.72	138	40.47	301	57.44	937	52.49	67.61**	3
Includes a detailed description and information about the location of the attempted or completed suicide.	164	39.81	174	34.25	111	32.55	173	33.02	622	34.85	17.37**	3

Note. ** $p < .001$.

Source: The table is the property of the authors and is based on research data collected in this study.

Several important findings emerged from the analysis of media reporting on suicide in four time periods (Table 2). The prevalence of sensationalist headlines using the word “suicide” varied across the periods, with a peak of 71.12% in the period 1959-1969 and a marked decline to 62.60% in the period 1970-1979, before rising again in the following decades. The use of inappropriate imagery, such as depicting the method or location of suicide, also increased significantly, from 3.88% in the period 1959-1969 to 14.69% in the period 1990-1999, indicating a shift towards more provocative content in later years. There were also fluctuations in the detailed descriptions of the method and location of suicide, with the 1980-1989 period showing the least provocative reporting on suicide in the media, while it increased significantly in the following period.

Table 3: Individual preventive aspects of reporting on suicide across four periods.

	1959-1969		1970-1979		1980-1989		1990-1999		All		X ²	df
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Informing and raising public awareness about the phenomenon and causes of suicide.	64	15.53	119	23.43	147	43.11	261	49.81	591	33.11	139.88**	3
Avoiding sensationalist language that presents suicide as acceptable or presents it as a solution to problems.	138	33.5	190	37.4	207	60.7	304	58.02	839	47	68.79**	3
Avoiding emphasis and unnecessary repetition of stories.	175	42.48	274	53.94	199	58.36	267	50.95	915	51.26	31.85**	3
Reporting on celebrity suicides in a thoughtful and careful manner.	18	4.37	27	5.31	29	8.5	19	3.63	93	5.21	3,99	3
Show care, empathy and respect for those bereaved by suicide.	24	5.83	17	3.35	3	0.88	12	2.29	56	3.14	16.71**	3
Information on where to seek help for mental health problems.	8	1.94	9	1.77	10	2.93	19	3.63	46	2.58	6,7	3
General advice is given on how to help.	8	1.94	8	1.57	5	1.47	19	3.63	40	2.24	11.4*	3

	1959-1969		1970-1979		1980-1989		1990-1999		All		X ²	df
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Stories of people who have overcome difficulties.	6	1.46	2	0.39	5	1.47	8	1.53	21	1.18	3,57	3
Consideration of the fact that journalists and other members of the media may be involved in stories about suicide.	4	0.97	0	0	4	1.17	5	0.95	13	0.73	0,15	3

Note. ** $p < .001$. * $p < .05$

Source: The table is the property of the authors and is based on research data collected in this study.

Conversely, the data revealed a progressive increase in the inclusion of preventive aspects in reporting (Table 3). The percentage of articles informing and raising public awareness about the phenomenon and causes of suicide increased significantly: from 15.53% in the period 1959-1969 to 49.81% in the period 1990-1999. Efforts to avoid sensationalist language that presents suicide as an acceptable solution have also improved. This was particularly noticeable from the 1980s onwards when the percentages rose from 33.50% to 58.02% by the end of the study period. However, despite these positive trends, four out of nine preventive aspects showed no significant changes over time.

Discussion

Historic and socio-political changes in Slovenia illustrate the complex interplay of societal transformations, providing a unique context to explore, how suicide reporting and perceptions varied across different political and cultural climates.

The fluctuations in the balance between provocative (e.g., suicide is presented in the article as a solution: 'Death as the only way'; simplistic presentation of suicide: 'He gave up on life because he could not find personal warmth in it.') and preventative aspects (e.g., suicide is discussed as a problem that can be solved: 'Recognize the signs', 'Be ready to listen', 'Help find help'; provision of sources of help: 'Before you think of suicide, call us. We have a phone number...') of media reporting on suicide observed in this study are consistent with national and global trends observed in other studies

with more recent data.⁴¹ Studies repeatedly confirm that there is a large discrepancy between the number of provocative and preventive aspects in media articles on suicide, although the number of preventive aspects included in each article has increased over the last decade. This was also observed in the only two comprehensive studies on media reporting on suicide in Slovenia.⁴² Both studies concluded that a positive change (more preventive information in articles) was observed after the guidelines for responsible media reporting on suicide were introduced in Slovenia in 2010.

In the current study, we observed an increase in preventive reporting and a significant decrease in provocative content during the 1980s. Conversely, the following decade (1990-1999) saw a notable rise in provocative reporting. This finding is unexpected and deviates from results reported in other studies. The trend, observed in our study, is particularly noteworthy given that epidemiological data indicate a peak in suicide rates in the mid-1980s, a period marked by economic challenges and substantial societal changes.⁴³

Further analysis of the data shows that the cumulative presence of preventive aspects in articles from 1980 to 1989 exceeds that of provocative aspects when both are considered together. However, this observation must be interpreted with caution. Given that our framework includes nine preventive and only four provocative aspects, the apparent predominance of preventive content may not fully reflect the overall balance of reporting. A more detailed analysis at the level of individual articles shows that the number of provocative aspects per article actually surpasses that of preventive aspects, suggesting a potentially more complex interaction between media portrayal and societal impact than initially assumed.

The higher suicide rates during this period may be due to several factors, including recession, inflation, unemployment and broader societal changes, as noted in the existing literature.⁴⁴ The peak in suicide rates in Slovenia is consistent with observations from Vienna for a similar period (between 1984 and 1987), where the portrayal of provocative aspects in the media was among the factors associated with fluctuations in suicide rates.⁴⁵

While in the 1990s the proportion of preventive aspects in media reporting on suicide remained similar to the previous period, there was a notable increase in provocative aspects per article, with both aspects occurring more frequently in this period compared to previous decades. This period coincided with significant socio-political upheavals as Slovenia transitioned from a socialist republic within the Yugoslav

41 Gomboc, De Leo and Poštuvan, "Responsible Reporting on Suicide in Slovenia." Niederkrotenthaler, Voracek, Herberth, Till, Strauss, Etzersdorfer, Eisenwort and Sonneck "Role of Media Reports in Completed and Prevented Suicide." Roškar, Tančič Grum, Poštuvan, Podlesek and De Leo, "The Adaptation and Implementation of Guidelines for Responsible Media Reporting on Suicide in Slovenia."

42 Gomboc, De Leo and Poštuvan, "Responsible Reporting on Suicide in Slovenia." Roškar, Tančič Grum, Poštuvan, Podlesek and De Leo, "The Adaptation and Implementation of Guidelines for Responsible Media Reporting on Suicide in Slovenia."

43 Repe, "Modernizacije pri Slovencih." Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*.

44 Ibid.

45 G. Sonneck, E. Etzersdorfer and S. Nagel-Kuess, "Imitative Suicide on The Viennese Subway," *Social Science & Medicine* 38, No. 3 (1994): 453-57, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(94\)90447-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(94)90447-2).

Federation to an independent democratic state, culminating in a short but impactful 10-day war. Gaining independence led to profound changes in national identity, the establishment of autonomous political institutions and integration into the global economic systems that ushered in the transition to a market economy.⁴⁶ These changes had a significant impact on Slovenian society and its institutions, including the media.

The increasing presence of both provocative and preventive aspects in media reporting on suicide in the 1990s may be partly due to these changes. The newfound independence may have influenced journalistic practices in various ways, possibly reflected in the different ways in which suicide was portrayed. Moreover, the changes occurring within Slovenian society itself during this period were probably reflected in the media's approach, suggesting that internal societal dynamics and external representation in the media were closely linked. This period of intense national redefinition and media development underlines the complex relationship between societal changes and media practices.

During the decade from 1959 to 1969, media reporting on suicide in Slovenia exhibited a notably high proportion of provocative content and the lowest proportion of preventive aspects. This period was marked by considerable social and economic upheavals after the Second World War when the country experienced rapid industrialization and urbanization.⁴⁷ The portrayal of suicide in the media during these years likely reflected the public's challenges in adapting to these changes. The high incidence of provocative reporting during this period may also reflect a lack of systematic data on suicide. Formal and systematic data collection on deaths by suicide in Slovenia began in the middle of this period.⁴⁸ Prior to this, there was no comprehensive tracking of suicide rates, which likely contributed to less informed media practices. Without data, media professionals and policymakers may have been less aware of the consequences of provocative reporting on suicide. This lack of information may have exacerbated the problem, as the media may not have fully understood the impact of their reporting style on the public's behaviour and attitudes toward suicide.

Furthermore, the low availability of prevention information in the media indicates a limited awareness of suicide prevention strategies and their importance. This omission points to a critical gap in media reporting on suicide and underscores the need for more balanced and responsible reporting that not only informs the public about the realities of suicide, but also provides resources and guidance on prevention. The combination of intense societal changes and lack of guidance for the media during this period thus set the stage for a media landscape that could inadvertently exacerbate societal pressures rather than alleviate them.

When considering studies from other European countries and around the world, it appears that positive changes in Slovenian reporting on suicide occurred later than in countries such as Austria, the UK, and the USA.⁴⁹ Although changes in these studies

46 Repe, "Modernizacije pri Slovencih."

47 Lampe, "Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country, Second Edition."

48 Tekavčič Grad, "Zgodovina suicidologije na Slovenskem."

49 Sisask and Várnik, "Media Roles in Suicide Prevention." Etzersdorfer, and Gernot Sonneck, "Preventing Suicide by Influencing Mass-Media Reporting: The Viennese Experience 1980–1996." Gomboc, De Leo and

could be due to many factors, informing journalists and working with them to report on suicide more responsibly was an important factor.⁵⁰ In Slovenia, similar efforts were made, but they happened a few decades later,⁵¹ which could explain why the changes were observed later.

When analyzing each preventive and provocative aspect individually across the four periods, we observe patterns consistent with the broader trends previously discussed. Notably, sensationalist headlines and detailed descriptions of the location of suicides were most prevalent in the early period from 1959 to 1969. In contrast, the detailed description of the method and the inadequate imagery are most problematic in the period 1990-1999. All four aspects are among the most common in the two periods mentioned. In general, the title is the most common provocative aspect in the four decades, appearing in two-thirds of all articles, followed by a detailed description of the method. In contrast, inappropriate imagery was less frequently observed, which presents an interesting deviation from findings in another Slovenian study conducted by Roškar et al.⁵² This discrepancy could be attributed to the different periods covered by the two studies, which likely influenced the availability and use of visual material in media reporting.

In examining the specific preventive aspects of suicide reporting over the decades, clear patterns emerge, particularly in the recent periods (1980-1989 and 1990-1999). In these years, three important preventive aspects were increasingly included in media articles: Raising awareness of suicide, avoiding sensationalist language, and minimizing unnecessary repetition of the story. The other six preventative aspects were rarely included and generally appeared in no more than 5% of the articles for each period. This selective inclusion of preventative strategies suggests a gradual evolution of media practices, possibly influenced by the growing recognition of the impact of responsible reporting. Prior to the introduction of formal guidelines, there may have been less emphasis on a comprehensive preventative approach, as the direct public health benefits of such reporting were not as well documented or understood. This shift is consistent with the findings of other studies, such as those by Roškar et al.,⁵³ which show similar trends, particularly in the period prior to the introduction of responsible reporting guidelines. The gradual adoption of these practices likely reflects an increasing awareness within the media community of the potential for responsible reporting to positively influence public understanding and attitudes toward suicide and thus contribute to prevention.

Poštuvan, "Responsible Reporting on Suicide in Slovenia." Roškar, Tančič Grum, Poštuvan, Podlesek and De Leo, "The Adaptation and Implementation of Guidelines for Responsible Media Reporting on Suicide in Slovenia."

50 Sisask and Várnik, "Media Roles in Suicide Prevention."

51 Gomboc, De Leo and Poštuvan, "Responsible Reporting on Suicide in Slovenia." Roškar, Tančič Grum, Poštuvan, Podlesek and De Leo, "The Adaptation and Implementation of Guidelines for Responsible Media Reporting on Suicide in Slovenia."

52 Ibid.

53 Roškar, Tančič Grum, Poštuvan, Podlesek and De Leo, "The Adaptation and Implementation of Guidelines for Responsible Media Reporting on Suicide in Slovenia."

These results show that the interplay between historical and socio-political changes and the nature of media reporting can be collectively linked to the observed suicide rates in the periods studied. The nuanced dynamics of media influence on public health, as evidenced by shifts in suicide reporting, should be further explored to understand their implications on suicide prevention strategies. The findings from this study underline the need for continued advocacy and training for journalists on the implications of suicide reporting. While there has been progress, the enduring presence of provocative elements in media portrayals of suicide suggests areas for improvement. Future strategies should focus on enhancing the understanding among journalists of the ‘Papageno Effect’—where media portrayal of coping mechanisms and support can have a protective effect against suicide.

Conclusion

This study reaffirms the profound influence of the media on public understanding and behaviour regarding suicide. It highlights the significant responsibility that the media has in shaping social attitudes towards this sensitive issue.

However, when considering the findings of this study, several limitations should be taken into account. First, the scope is limited, as the findings are derived from only two major newspapers. It would be interesting to examine how more local newspapers have reported on the topic. The study provides an insight into the basic characteristics of the reporting, focusing primarily on the newspapers used. However, the potential to generalize these findings to the characteristics of reporting across Slovenia is limited by the narrow scope of the study, and caution is advised in interpreting these findings. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of suicide reporting during the study period, it would be beneficial to include a wider range of relevant and popular newspapers. The publishers involved in this study issued a variety of magazines and newspapers that ranged from less to more sensational in their coverage. By including not just a single newspaper, but other publications from the same publisher, one would gain a deeper insight into the characteristics of reporting on suicide, which would allow for a better understanding of certain changes during this period, such as the perceived decline in sensationalism. It is possible that the reporting itself did not change significantly, but rather that more problematic stories were selectively published in the tabloids of the same publisher. Previous research on media reporting and sensationalism attributes the rise of tabloids to lower publication costs and greater accessibility, which necessitated competitive strategies to attract readers. Sensationalism and the novelty of news content were crucial in this competition.⁵⁴ At the same time as the circulation of tabloids in Slovenia increased, so did the

54 Mariska Kleemans and Paul Hendriks Vettehen, “Sensationalism in Television News: A Review,” in *Meaningful Media: Communication Research on The Social Construction of Reality*, ed. Ruben Peter Konig, Paul Nelissen and Frank Huysmans (Ubbbergen: Tandem Felix, 2009).

sensational reporting observed in this study. Although we cannot confirm the relationship between tabloid circulation and sensational reporting on suicide in this study, we can hypothesize that the increase in sensational reporting in articles on suicide is partly due to the desire to remain competitive with the more tabloid-oriented newspapers, and not only due to the societal changes mentioned above (e.g., national independence). Consequently, extending the data set of this study to include tabloids could allow for a more comprehensive analysis. The initial search was based solely on the keyword ‘suicide,’ which might exclude relevant articles using different terminology or indirect references to suicidality. Additionally, the exclusion of a large number of articles for various reasons (e.g., metaphorical use, and irrelevant contexts) could omit content that still offers insights into societal attitudes and media practices surrounding suicide. However, despite these limitations, a systematic approach—including the simultaneous random analysis of articles by different researchers—was adopted to minimize the impact of these shortcomings.

The persistence of provocative aspects, particularly in the 1990s, underlines the challenges faced by the media in balancing compelling reporting with social responsibility. The fluctuating presence of provocative and preventive aspects through the decades points to ongoing debates and learning within the journalistic community about the public health implications of their work.

As Slovenia continues to develop its public health strategies, the role of the media remains central. Ensuring that reporting evolves and prioritizes preventative, informative and supportive content will be crucial in ongoing efforts to mitigate the impact of suicide on society.

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PRIPOVEDI NA RAZPOTJU: MEDIJSKO POROČANJE O SAMOMORU V SLOVENIJI V KONTEKSTU DRUŽBENO- POLITIČNIH SPREMENB MED LETOMA 1959 IN 1999

POVZETEK

Študija ponuja celovito analizo prikaza samomora v slovenskih časopisih v štirih desetletjih, upoštevajoč pomembne družbenopolitične spremembe v Sloveniji. Analiza 1.785 člankov, objavljenih v dveh večjih časopisih, Delu in Večeru, razkriva kompleksen vzorec prikaza samomora, ki ga zaznamuje prehod od pretežno provokativnega do vse bolj preventivnega poročanja. Ta razvoj poročanja odraža širše zgodovinske in družbenopolitične spremembe v Sloveniji, zlasti prehod iz socialistične republike v okviru jugoslovanske federacije v neodvisno demokratično republiko.

V šestdesetih in sedemdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja je bil samomor v časopisnih člankih večinoma senzacionaliziran. K temu je najverjetneje prispevalo več dejavnikov, med drugim pomanjkljivost strategij preprečevanja samomora in pomanjkanje sistematičnih podatkov o količniku samomora, ki so vodili k podcenjevanju tega problema. Medijsko poročanje o samomoru je bilo v tem obdobju zaznamovano z dramatičnim

podajanjem problema in odsotnostjo preventivne vsebine. Ta ugotovitev kaže na slabo informirane medijske prakse, ki bi lahko potencialno vodile k poslabšanju stisk ljudi in povečanju tveganja za posnemanje samomora.

Nasprotno pa je devetdeseta leta zaznamoval pomemben preobrat pri načinu poročanja o samomoru, ki je sovpadal z osamosvojitvijo Slovenije in posledično liberalizacijo medijev. Že proti koncu osemdesetih in v devetdesetih so članki vedno pogostejše vključevali preventivne informacije, med drugim poudarjanje pomena storitev s področja duševnega zdravja, programov za preprečevanje samomora in javnozdravstvenih kampanj. Kljub napredku pa je bilo opaziti tudi znatno povečanje provokativnih vsebin v primerjavi s prejšnjim desetletjem. Ti izsledki so v nasprotju s svetovnimi trendi, ki na splošno kažejo premik k odgovornejšemu poročanju. Sklepamo lahko, da se je z večjo medijsko svobodo povečala tudi kompleksnost uravnotežanja uredniške občutljivosti za takšne vsebine in javnozdravstvene odgovornosti.

Študija poudarja vpliv načina medijskega poročanja o samomoru na javno percepcijo in vedenje. Opozarja na pomen in vlogo medijev ter pasti neustreznega načina poročanja: z ustrežno obliko lahko predstavniki medijev spodbujajo ozaveščenost in preventivna prizadevanja, medtem ko lahko s senzacionalističnim in stigmatizirajočim modusom poročanja povečujejo tveganje za posnemanje vedenja. Da je o teh spoznanjih razpravljala tudi novinarska skupnost, kažejo nihanja med provokativnim in preventivnim poročanjem skozi desetletja.

Če povzamemo, ugotovitve te študije poudarjajo potrebo po nenehnem usposabljanju novinarjev in implementaciji medijskih smernic za odgovorno poročanje o samomoru z namenom izboljšanja kakovosti posredovanja informacij. Medijski pristop k poročanju o samomoru mora prioritizirati javno zdravje in etična načela, da bi učinkovito prispeval k preprečevanju samomora in ohranjanju novinarske neodvisnosti. To ravnovesje je ključno, saj Slovenija še naprej izpopolnjuje javnozdravstvene strategije in medijske prakse, upoštevajoč spreminjajoče se družbene razmere.

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Media Coverage of Suicidal Behaviour in the Context of Slovenian Independence*****

IZVLEČEK

MEDIJSKO POROČANJE O SAMOMORILNEM VEDENJU V KONTEKSTU SLOVENSKE OSAMOSVOJITVE

Slovenija je bila del Jugoslavije in se je po desetdnevni vojni leta 1991 osamosvojila. Imela je najvišjo stopnjo samomorov med vsemi jugoslovanskimi državami. Vsi mladi moški v jugoslovanskih republikah so služili vojaški rok zunaj domače republike in nekateri vojaki so se zaradi samomora vrnili v krsti. To je bil med drugim povod za razpravo o samostojnosti, v kateri so sodelovali tudi slovenski časopisi. Med vojno so stopnje samomorov običajno nižje, vendar se tudi vojaki soočajo z vrsto dejavnikov tveganja samomorilne ogroženosti. Namen študije je bil ugotoviti, katere zgodbe o samomorih so bile objavljene v slovenskih časopisih Delo in Večer. Analizirali smo obdobje pred osamosvojitvijo, med njo in po njej. Ugotovili smo, da prevladujejo tri teme: zgodbe o slovenskih vojakih, politična agenda in informativni članki. Pred osamosvojitvijo je bila v ospredju politična agenda, in sicer želja po osamosvojitvi, pozneje pa posledice osamosvojitve. Zgodbe o slovenskih vojakih so bile najpogostejše v obdobju osamosvajanja, pri čemer so se pojavljale pripovedi o dejanskih samomorih z uporabo strelnega orožja. V obdobju po osamosvojitvi smo večinoma našli članke, ki omogočajo vpogled v odnos družbe do samomora. Študija osvetljuje, kako so slovenski mediji prikazovali samomore v vojski pred osamosvojitvijo, med njo in po njej.

Ključne besede: osamosvojitvena vojna, vojska, politična agenda, samomor

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ABSTRACT

*Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia and became independent in 1991 after a ten-day war. Slovenia had the highest suicide rate of all Yugoslav member states. In Yugoslavia, all young men served in the military away from home in other Yugoslav republics. Some of them returned in coffins due to suicide. This was one of the factors resulting in the discussion about independence, in which Slovenian newspapers played a part. During wartime, suicide rates tend to be lower, though soldiers also face an array of suicide risk factors. The present study aimed to establish which stories about suicide were published in the Slovenian newspapers *Delo* and *Večer*. While analysing the period before, during, and after independence, we identified three predominant themes: stories about Slovenian soldiers, the political agenda, and informative articles. The political agenda – namely, the desire for independence and, later, the consequences of independence – was in the foreground before independence. Stories about Slovenian soldiers were most common during the period of Slovenian emancipation, with tales of actual suicides that involved firearms as the suicide method. In the post-independence period, though, we have mainly identified articles that provide insight into society's attitude towards suicide. This study sheds light on how suicide in the military was portrayed in the Slovenian media before, during, and after independence.*

Keywords: Independence War, the military, the political agenda, suicide

Introduction

“The Ten-Day War ... was a short and light conflict that hardly deserves such a heavy name.”¹

As this brief excerpt from the year following the Slovenian War of Independence shows, some approach the subject with awkwardness, as if a short period of war could not do much harm. Nevertheless, this short but intense period affected Slovenes in many ways. In this article, we address the issue of suicidality in the critical period of Slovenian independence.

Brief Background of Independence Period in Slovenia

Slovenia was founded as an independent state in 1991 after a period of political and economic insecurities in Yugoslavia. The death of the president of Yugoslavia led to escalating issues within the country. The Yugoslav military played an important role

¹ Alenka Puhar, “Vojna v Sloveniji: strahovi, panika in nočne more otrok,” *Delo*, February 4, 1992, 28, 13.

in promoting conflict between nations. The first call for Slovenian independence was published in 1987 in the 57th *Nova revija*, which called for democratization and resistance against centralist Yugoslavia.²

Some people opposed the idea and called it a political suicide for Slovenia, but that did not stop Slovenia,³ even though it also faced a war after the independence was announced. In this short War of Independence period Territorial Defence and the police were the main protagonists defending the state. Territorial Defence was later in 1994 renamed as the Slovenian Army.⁴

History of Suicide and Suicide Statistics in Slovenia

Milčinski, a distinguished Slovenian psychiatrist who focused professionally on the subject of suicide, notes that in the 19th century, Slovenia was not known as a particularly suicide-prone part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which are also the first known sources on suicide in Slovenia.⁵ The suicide rate is said to have been at 3.⁶ The rate increased after the First World War and reached the number of 26 in some parts of the country, yet Milčinski⁷ adds that the suicide rate reached its peak after the Second World War: more specifically, it increased after 1960. In the 1960s, there was a crisis in Slovenia with a large number of suicide deaths, especially among young people, which is said to have been a problem caused by social and political conditions.⁸ Milčinski notes that after 1970 the suicide rate was consistently above 30.7. In 1989, it was 35.2, and the following year it fell below 30 for the first time in fourteen years. In 1991 it was high again (33.5), when Slovenia became an independent country.⁹ One would expect suicide rates in Slovenia to change after independence, due to the social changes that came with the new country, but the rates remained similar. The suicide rate remained at around 30, which has continued to the early 2000s.¹⁰ A decline in suicide rates was observed during the last decades.¹¹

Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia until 1991 and at the time stood out from the other member states with the highest suicide rate.¹² But Marušič and Zorko note that suicide

2 Anton Grizold, *Obrambni sistem Republike Slovenije* (Ljubljana: Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve, Visoka policijsko-varnostna šola, 1999).

3 Anton Bebler, *Sodobno vojaštvo in družba* (Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, Založba FDV, 2011).

4 Grizold, *Obrambni sistem Republike Slovenije*

5 Lev Milčinski, *Samomor in Slovenci* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1985).

6 Meta Remec, "Epidemija samomorov? Odmevi na naraščanje stopnje samomorilnosti na Slovenskem v 19. in 20. stoletju," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 63 No. 1 (2023): 8–41. <https://doi.org/10.51663/pnz.63.1.01>.

7 Milčinski, *Samomor in Slovenci*.

8 Meta Remec, "Traitors, Cowards, Martyrs, Heroes: Youth Suicide as a Socio-Historical Phenomenon in the 1960s Slovenia," *Studia Historica Slovenica* 23, No. 1 (2023): 203–38, <https://doi.org/10.3287/SHS.2023-06>.

9 Natalija Fuchs Plemenitaš, *Samomori v slovenski vojski: diplomsko delo* (Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, 2003), <http://dk.fdv.uni-lj.si/dela/Plemenitas-Fuchs-Natalija.PDF>.

10 Andrej Marušič and Maja Zorko, "Slovenski samomor skozi prostor in čas," in Andrej Marušič and Saška Roškar (eds.), *Slovenija s samomorom ali brez* (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenija, 2004).

11 NIJZ, https://nijz.si/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/2023-08-29-Priloga-1_samomor.pdf, accessed on August 29, 2023.

12 Milčinski, *Samomor in Slovenci*.

rates in Slovenia became more transparent after Slovenia's independence. Overall statistics for Yugoslavia were lowered due to the southern countries, such as Montenegro, Kosovo or North Macedonia which had lower suicide rates.¹³

Risk Factors for Suicidal Behaviour

The risk factors for suicidal behaviour impact the suicide rates. These are usually divided into individual factors, interpersonal, community related and societal factors.¹⁴ Among the societal ones, Milčinski notes that the cultural meaning of suicide plays an important role. Suicide was stigmatised in the past, and the lack of suicide awareness or prevention activities may be the reason for the high suicide rates in Slovenia. At the same time the lack of acceptance might have also contributed to fewer suicides reports in the past.¹⁵

Some authors have linked Slovenian national character to the high Slovenian suicide rate,¹⁶ as more Slovenes die by suicide in Slovenia than people of other nationalities.¹⁷ National character can be defined as the enduring personality traits that are said to be characteristic of a particular nation. Musek, a contemporary Slovenian psychologist, rejects the 'national personality' and describes how Slovenes are as different and diverse as any other nation. Nevertheless, he points to certain "peculiarities" of the Slovenian nation, such as aggressiveness and introversion, which in his opinion create a personality basis for increasing suicidal tendencies.¹⁸ Slovenian philosopher and sociologist Debenjak explains that the hundred years of oppression that the Slovenian people had to endure led to the aggressive forces turning inwards.¹⁹ Trstenjak, who is known as a renowned Slovenian psychologist, philosopher and sociologist, points out that the auto-aggressiveness of Slovenes is more pronounced than the hetero-aggressiveness that is supposedly characteristic of other Yugoslav nations.²⁰

Army and Soldiers and Suicide Risk

Durkheim noted that the suicide rate decreases in countries involved in wars. The author presents the theory of social integration, which states that periods of political

13 Marušič and Zorko, "Slovenski samomor skozi prostor in čas."

14 "World Health Organization," *Preventing suicide: A global imperative*. World Health Organization, 2014. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241564779>.

15 Remec, "Traitors, Cowards, Martyrs, Heroes."

16 Janek Musek, *Psihološki portret Slovencev* (Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče, 1994).

17 Andrej Marušič, "Suicide in Slovenia: Lessons for cross-cultural psychiatry," *International Review of Psychiatry* 11, No. 2-3 (1999): 212-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540269974393>.

18 Marušič, "Suicide in Slovenia."

19 Božidar Debenjak, "Neka pitanja o revolucionarnoj antropologiji," *Praxis-Jugoslavensko izdanje* 01-02 (1969): 187-89, quoted in Milčinski, *Samomor in Slovenci*.

20 Anton Trstenjak, "Okvirne dileme o etiologiji samomora," in Milčinski, *Samomor in Slovenci*.

instability promote social cohesion, leading to lower suicide rates.²¹ The perceived threat to the group from outside can lead to greater integration of the group and consequently to lower suicide rates.²² However, there are studies that cite the negative effects of the war on the economic situation as more important factors in explaining suicidality.²³

If social integration is understood as involvement in defending the nation, it follows that soldiers are a less risky group than civilians. Soldiers may feel a greater sense of purpose in life during wartime, which could reduce their suicidal intentions.²⁴ However, we know that they are exposed to a range of stressful life experiences that are significantly associated with suicidality.²⁵

When considering the complex problems of military service suicides, it must be considered that the largest part of the military population of the Slovenian army consisted of young people between the ages of 18 and 22. Despite a certain maturity, young men are not necessarily ready for the many responsibilities and problems that come with military service. In the army, it is extremely easy to obtain weapons, and the isolation of the guard post might be another risk factor.²⁶ As Čuček also noted in his study, the army consisted mainly of young, single men who were at a higher risk of suicide due to their characteristics (e.g. gender, single, etc.). Suicide also visibly increased when conscription was introduced and soldiers were treated badly.²⁷

Due to the different periods of independence in different countries, there are not many similar studies, but there are some studies on suicide rates before and after the First World War and in the post-war period, when people are affected by shocks and economic crises.²⁸ A study of Estonian independence found that the suicide rate was low during this period.²⁹ A study in Finland found that political crises were not associated with suicide rise.³⁰ A study in Croatia shows that suicides with firearms increased

21 Émile Durkheim, *Suicide* (New York: Free Press, 1951), quoted in Frank Van Tubergen and Wout Ultee, "Political integration, war and suicide: The dutch paradox?," *International Sociology* 21, No. 2 (2006): 221–36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580906061377>.

22 Pat O'Malley, "Suicide and war: a case study and theoretical appraisal," *The British Journal of Criminology*, 15(4) (1975): 348–59.

23 Ira M. Wasserman, "Political Business Cycles, Presidential Elections, and Suicide and Mortality Patterns," *American Sociological Review*, 48 (1983): 711–20. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2094929>.

24 Sandra M. Escolas, Paul T. Bartone, Marek Rewers, Joseph M. Rothberg and J. Carter, "Why do soldiers kill themselves? Understanding suicide in the military," *The 7IF Advantage* 283 (2010).

25 Matthew K. Nock, Charlene A. Deming, Carol S. Fullerton, E. Gilman Stephen, Matthew Goldenberg, Ronald C. Kessler, James E. McCarroll et. al., "Suicide Among Soldiers: A Review of Psychosocial Risk and Protective Factors," *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes* 76, No. 2 (2013): 97–125, <https://doi.org/10.1521/psyc.2013.76.2.97>.

26 Karmen Samec, *Samomor kot družbeno-patološki pojav in problem samomora v JLA: diplomatska naloga* (Ljubljana: Fakulteta za sociologijo, politične vede in novinarstvo, 1991).

27 Filip Čuček, "Vojaški samomori v Avstriji od srede 19. stoletja do prve svetovne vojne (z nekaj slovenskimi primeiri)," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 63, No. 3 (2023): 117–34.

28 Hannes Leidinger, "Suicide Discourses: The Austrian Example in an International Context from World War I to the 1930s," in Jochen Bohler, Ota Konrad and Rudolf Kučera (eds.), *In the Shadow of the Great War: Physical Violence in East-Central Europe, 1917–1923* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2021).

29 Airi Värnik, "Suicide in Estonia," *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 84, No. 3 (1991): 229–32. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0447.1991.tb03135.x>.

30 Steven Stack, "The Effect of Modernization on Suicide in Finland: 1800–1984," *Sociological Perspectives* 36, No. 2 (1993): 137–48, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1389426>.

during the war period and that suicides decreased after independence.³¹ In the Baltic states, there was an increase in suicide rates during the period of independence, which was linked to the economic difficulties that came with it.³²

Aim of the Study

Since there is a lack of studies on suicide in times of independence, the aim of the study was to understand the narratives around suicide published in the main Slovenian newspapers. We studied the period before, during and after independence in relation to the topic of suicide and political and militant situation. We predicted that the topics would differ depending on the time period.

Method

Since the main topic of our research is suicide in the period of Slovenian independence, we have chosen three periods to analyze. One before the independence of Slovenia (1986–1988), one during (1989–1991) and one after (1992–1994). In our study, we analyzed newspaper articles from two of the largest Slovenian newspapers, *Delo* and *Večer*. The search word was *samomor*, the Slovenian word for suicide. Our exclusion criteria were: all articles that did not refer to the Slovenian War of Independence, the army and the political state in Slovenia and Yugoslavia, all articles that mentioned suicide in a metaphorical way, that were about an accident instead of suicide, that were about mass suicide or suicide of an animal. We used the PRISMA method to gather the relevant papers and later used the thematic analysis to study the content of the articles.

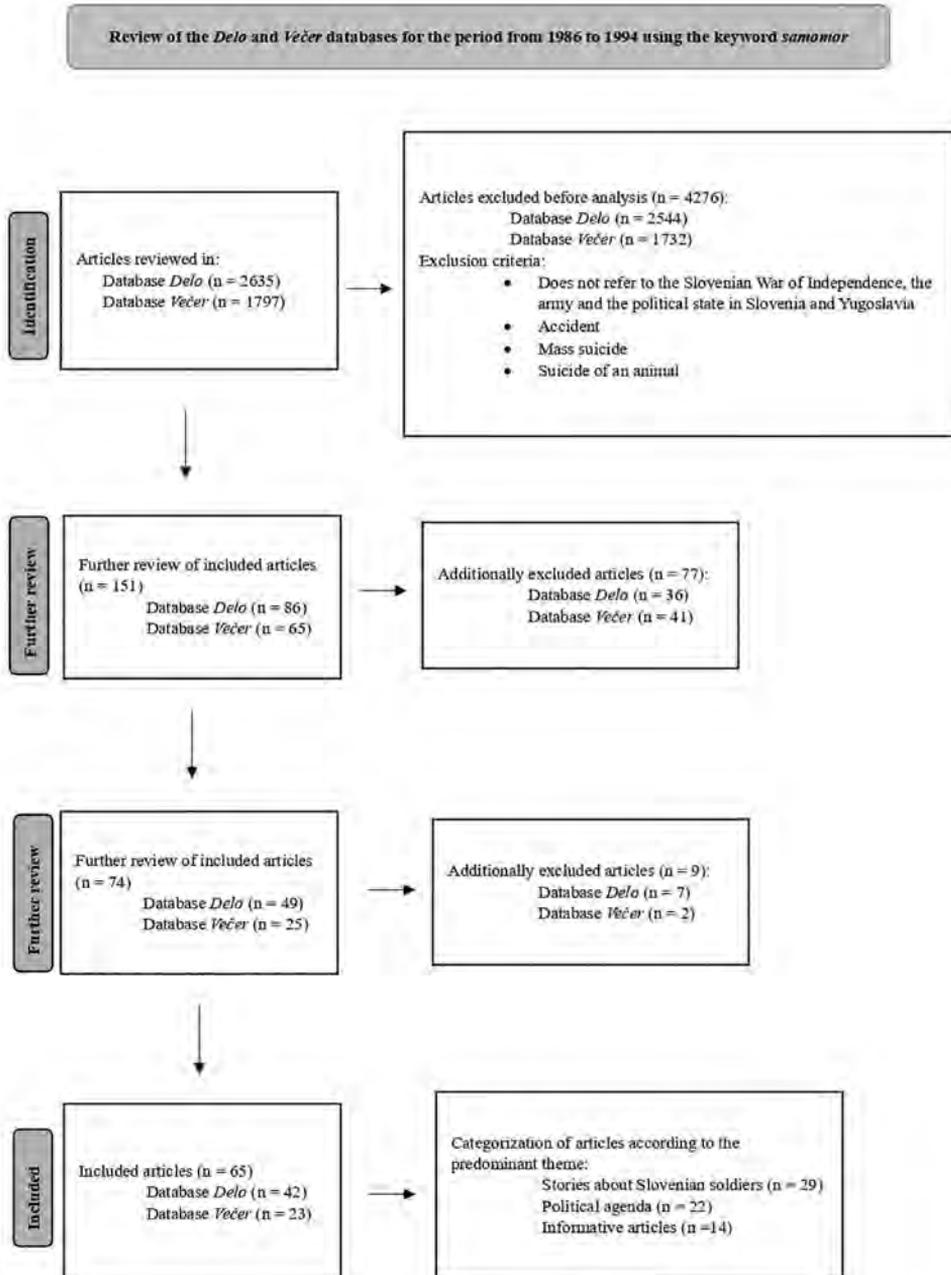
In total, we analysed 4432 articles, of which we excluded 4276 based on our exclusion criteria. We included 151 articles in our analysis, which we then re-examined and excluded a further 77 articles. In our third review, we excluded 9 articles, resulting in the inclusion of 65 articles, of which 42 were in *Delo* and 23 in *Večer*.

We then undertook a further review of the final articles and categorized them. We found three predominant themes, namely stories about Slovenian soldiers, political agenda and informative articles. Most of the articles were stories about Slovenian soldiers, the fewest were informative. We then carried out a thematic analysis, the results of which are listed below.

31 Miro Jakovljević, Biserka Sedić, Marko Martinac, Darko Marcinko, Dulijano Ljubicić and Herman Vukusić, "Update of suicide trends in Croatia 1966–2002," *Psychiatra Danubina* 16(4) (2004): 299–308.

32 Ramune Kalediene, Skirmante Starkuviene and Jadvyga Petrauskiene, "Mortality from external causes in Lithuania: looking for critical points in time and place," *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health* 32, No. 5 (2004): 374–80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14034940410024211>.

Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram



Results

In our analysis we included 65 articles, of which more than a half (52.31%) were from the period of independence (1989 – 1991). The second most were from the pre-independence period (32.31%), the fewest from the post-independence period (15.38%). Most of the articles were stories about Slovenian soldiers (43.08%), some were about the political agenda (33.85%) and few were informative (21.54%). Sub-themes that appeared most frequently in all three thematic categories were reasons for suicide, risk factors for suicide and the method of suicide. Method of suicide was mentioned 19 times and in all time periods we analyzed, accounting for less than a third of our articles (29.23%). The reasons for suicide were mainly mentioned in articles about Slovenian soldiers, which could also be categorized as risk factors, but they were more specific to a person who died by suicide. In the articles about the political agenda or in the informative articles, we categorized the reasons as risk factors because they were more general in nature, unless they were specific to a person who died by suicide. Reasons for suicide and risk factors together were mentioned 36 times and were the most common, accounting for more than half of all articles (55.38%).

Political Agenda

There were 22 articles that dealt with the topic of political agenda and military. In the period before independence, articles regarding political agenda were predominant: there was one in 1986, ten in 1987 and two in 1988. There were eight articles in the independence period and only one in the post-independence period.

In 1986, there was only one article on the political agenda, which contained a summary of the programme of the Liberation Front, which dealt with suicide and the Slovenian national character. Lev Milčinski said that the Slovenian character is characterized by depressive traits, which can lead to suicidal tendencies in the face of life's burdens. He explained: "... the Slovenian national character is dominated by depressive and obsessive traits as an expression of a twisted extensiveness (aggressiveness) and therein may lie a hidden readiness for a suicidal reaction ..."³³

In 1987, no. 57 *Nova revija* was published, which called for Slovenian independence for the first time. It stated that Slovenians are without perspective³⁴ and in a crisis, which was mentioned twice as a risk factor. Risk factors for suicide were also seen in the disarray of the current social and political situation in Slovenia,³⁵ the social order,³⁶ the pressure of the social system on the individual,³⁷ and the Slovenian character was mentioned twice. Additionally, also a lack of Slovenian soldiers because they were

33 Helena Grandovec, "Narod se odloča sam," *Večer*, November 7, 1986, 4.

34 J. T., "V nasprotju s programskimi usmeritvami," *Delo*, February 21, 1987, 2.

35 J. H., "Nova revija 57," *Delo*, February 26, 1987, 6.

36 Jože Horvat, "Kritično zanimanje za 'Prispevke'," *Delo*, February 27, 1987, 5.

37 Franc Šetinc, "Če elita programira," *Delo*, March 5, 1987, 4.

-serving their military service outside Slovenia:³⁸ “... they all express their concern about the crisis in which the Slovenes in Yugoslavia find themselves, which manifests itself in particular depression, mass emigration and a high suicide rate.”³⁹

This was also an attempt to politicize suicide,⁴⁰ as they referred to the negative consequences of the current social order,⁴¹ and wanted to achieve redemption through Slovenian independence. The Yugoslav newspaper reacted negatively to this: “It is almost incomprehensible ... that the existing social system ... in Slovenia is declared to be the main cause of ‘mass alcoholism, auto-aggression and suicides. /.../ It is necessary to illuminate from all sides /.../ the inhabitants of Slovenia, who have long been served these ‘promises of salvation’ in various ways.”⁴² Continuing with: “Today (suicide) is still on the increase, and it is extremely serious and tragic, but precisely because it is serious and tragic, I consider it dubious if we politicize it and to take it to extremes, because the reasons lies in the deepest essence of the Slovenian people.”⁴³

In 1988, newspapers wrote about the increase in loneliness, alcoholism and suicides due to social and political situation.⁴⁴ People began writing about the political suicide of Slovenes because they were thinking about independence, which was satirically linked to the already suicidal character of Slovenes:

“It is said that Slovenians like to go to the mountains and commit suicide... But there is another characteristic that is less known in the public consciousness: Slovenes have long shown a suicidal tendency in political life as well, and surprisingly, they persistently throw themselves into the abyss and not only into the mountains.”⁴⁵

In 1989, the satire about the high suicide rates of Slovenians continued in an article presenting Yugoslavia to tourists.⁴⁶ In addition, the army became a bigger and bigger part of political life, the attitude of Slovenians towards the Yugoslav national army called JLA (Yugoslav People’s Army) deteriorated due to the attacks of the JLA. Rumours arose that Slovenian boys in the army were returning home in coffins. This prompted the army to counter these rumours so as not to conceal any information: “The army has taken a strong step into political life / ... / the JLA should provide accurate information immediately after the death of each soldier.”⁴⁷

In 1990, there was an increasing talk of political suicide and a renewed link to Slovene suicide: “Confederation is a realistic political option for Slovenia, but secession would be - we Slovenes tend to commit suicide - a collective suicide!”⁴⁸

38 Žarko Rajković, “Več sodelovanja, manj nesoglasij,” *Delo*, March 25, 1987, 2.

39 Stack, “The Effect of Modernization on Suicide in Finland: 1800–1984.”

40 Ciril Zlobec, “Obravnava in zavrnitev nesprejemljivih stališč: Razprava o 57. številki Nove revije,” *Delo*, March 26, 1987, 4.

41 Zoran Polič, “Obravnava in zavrnitev nesprejemljivih stališč: Razprava o 57. številki Nove revije,” *Delo*, March 5, 1987, 8.

42 Jakovljević et al., “Update of suicide trends in Croatia 1966–2002.”

43 Zlobec, “Obravnava in zavrnitev nesprejemljivih stališč.”

44 France Forstnerič, “Različni pogledi na spravo,” *Delo*, January 25, 1988, 3.

45 Martin Ivanič, “Pravica Slovenca do samomora,” *Delo*, May 27, 1988, 10.

46 Tone Partljič, “Ne zamudite priložnosti, ogledite si skrajno državo skrajnosti,” *Delo*, March 9, 1989, 9.

47 Branko Soban, “Cilj politične ocene ZIS: žigisanje Slovenije,” *Delo*, May 11, 1989, 2.

48 Milan Balazic, “Odgovor gospodoma Pučniku in Drevenšku,” *Delo*, April 6, 1990, 5.

In 1991, there was talk of a national, political and economic suicide of the Slovenes.⁴⁹ There was talk of suicide and heroic death, both of which, according to the author, had a liberating effect: "After all, we should not forget that suicide and heroic death are also categories of liberation that are attainable at any time, and therefore it would not be necessary to wait for them."⁵⁰ The Slovenian character was brought up again as a risk factor, as well as the JLA being blamed for enlisting 18-year-old boys for military service.⁵¹

In 1992, a year after independence, we did not find any articles on the topic of a political agenda, but in 1993 there were wishes for a better and stronger Slovenian army. Author expressed concern that people do not want to fight for their country, but then many of them die by suicide: "It is perceived as unthinkable that someone would consider it is wise to fight for national interests and risk their life. But 500 Slovenians can die in traffic accidents every year, and just as many commit suicide. And half of these deaths are fault of politics: poor traffic conditions and the desperation of Slovenians."⁵²

In 1994 we again did not find any articles on the topic of a political agenda.

Stories about Slovenian Soldiers

There were 28 articles dealing with stories of Slovenian soldiers. Four of them were from 1986, 19 from 1990, three from 1991 and two from 1994. 26 articles are about a person who died or attempted to die by suicide, all of them male.

A recurring theme was the method of suicide, which was mentioned 15 times. The method was always shooting with a gun, such as: "Plut committed suicide, as evidenced by the position of his hands on the automatic rifle."⁵³ This theme was also the only one that appeared in all three periods of our analysis.

In 1986, the only year before independence in which articles about Slovenian soldiers appeared, the method was mentioned four times. Another topic was location of suicide or attempted suicide, which was mentioned four times. The media and their portrayal of the Slovenian situation were mentioned twice. The escape of a soldier was mentioned three times and the theft of a vehicle and/or weapon four times. In 1986, a murder was mentioned four times: "... killed inspectors of the Slovene Republic SNZ from ambush."⁵⁴ In addition, the good cooperation between the JLA and other authorities was mentioned twice, "Cooperation with the people in the area /.../ was good, as well as with the Republican Secretariat for Internal Affairs of Croatia and the JLA."⁵⁵

49 Draga Ahačić, "Odrpto pismo veleposlaniku ZDA gospodu Warrenu Zimmermanu in ...," *Delo*, May 15, 1991, 6.

50 Milan Maver, "Ne sprašujte me, kako bo," *Delo*, July 4, 1991, 14.

51 Marijan Pregl, "Vojna kot sindrom čelnega režnja," *Večer*, July 20, 1991, 26.

52 Marijan Poljšak, "Prejeli smo: Dve vrsti državljanov," *Delo*, December 2, 1993, 9.

53 B. A., "Poročilo še ni popolno," *Delo*, May 9, 1986, 24.

54 "Pobegli vojak Plut si je sam vzel življenje," *Delo*, May 6, 1986, 1.

55 Žarko Hojnik and Janez Kovačić, "Podrobnosti še niso znane," *Delo*, May 9, 1986, 8.

The period of independence contained the most articles, so the variety of topics was also the greatest. The method was mentioned nine times, all in 1990. Location was mentioned twice, in 1990, and there was one mention of the media, which was negative, also in 1990, "... the suicide of soldier Alojz Špendov was misused, which was done by a large number of media outlets."⁵⁶ In 1990, there were five instances where suicide was politized, two times it was mentioned as an abuse of the JLA, and three times the opposite, as a desire for the JLA to change. The most frequently mentioned topic was military service away from home, which was mentioned 11 times, once in 1991 and 10 times in 1990. Six times the wish was expressed that soldiers should serve closer to home, "... slightly less than 30 percent of Slovenian soldiers will serve in Slovenia... this percentage will increase, not decrease,"⁵⁷ and one article mentioned the same topic, yet was opposed to the request, all in 1990. The difficult conditions in the army were mentioned five times in 1990 and once in 1991: "Such education is psychologically cruel, difficult, and does not take the individual into account."⁵⁸ In 1990, the fear of parents when their children go to military service was mentioned twice. The bad attitude of the JLA towards Slovenian soldiers was mentioned twice in 1990 and once in 1991. In 1990 there was one mention of the issue of the army being a specific population so we cannot compare suicide figures: "The number of suicides in the army probably cannot be compared with the number of suicides in civilians, because it is a special population,"⁵⁹ and one statement of a stance against the JLA: "... proof of the lack of any political ear in the leadership of the army. This also shows that there is no future for Slovenia in Yugoslavia."⁶⁰

Reasons for suicide were mentioned eight times during the period of independence, seven times in 1990, four of which were the lack of a reason: "He had no reason to self-destruct,"⁶¹ and three times the statement that the reason had nothing to do with the army: "... the reasons for suicide have nothing to do with the military organization,"⁶² and once in 1991, namely an insult at a demonstration "... the protesters, who insulted /.../ shook the Slovene on guard so much that he decided to commit suicide."⁶³ In 1990, the responsibility of the JLA for the suicides was mentioned four times: "... the JLA should not and will not be able to avoid its responsibility for each individual death,"⁶⁴ and four mentions of the JLA's bad attitude towards Slovenia. In the same year, there were seven mentions of a request for an autopsy of a person who died by suicide and two mentions of parents not believing that the cause of death was suicide: "... that he committed suicide. Parents don't believe it."⁶⁵

56 Poveljstvo LK, "Odgovor na komentar Borisa Dolničarja," *Delo*, September 4, 1990, 5.

57 Veso Stojanov, "V armadi popuščajo zahtevam Slovenije," *Delo*, August 22, 1990, 1.

58 Slava Partlič, "Zakaj si vojak vzame življenje?," *Delo*, March 17, 1990, 2.

59 Jože Pučnik, "Izjava dr. Pučnika za Delo," *Delo*, April 13, 1990, 3.

60 Pučnik, "Izjava dr. Pučnika za Delo."

61 Ana Urbanija, "Pismo ob vojakovi smrti," *Večer*, September 22, 1990, 31.

62 "JLA ne verjame v zastrupitev," *Delo*, March 29, 1990, 2.

63 "Žrtve na obeh straneh," *Večer*, June 17, 1991, 16.

64 Programski kolegij Radia Slovenija, "Odgovor na odgovor poveljstva ljubljanskega korpusa," *Delo*, September 5, 1990, 7.

65 Jelka Zupanič, "Skupščina bo ocenila dogovor," *Večer*, August 22, 1990, 2.

In 1990, there were four mentions of suicidality as a general Slovenian characteristic, such as: "... the apparently suicidal Slovenian nation ...,"⁶⁶ and two criticisms of Slovenia's political steps, such as: "... cursed Slovenian humility and cowardice... can't you really do anything, Mr. Minister?."⁶⁷

In the same year, there were three mentions of the rigidity of procedures and regulations in the JLA and also a statement that there should be more coverage of suicide so that there would be fewer suicides: "... it is sometimes good to write down a few words about such cases... so that we might contribute to eliminating the causes, so that similar cases do not happen again."⁶⁸ In 1990, there were two mentions of a controversial eulogy of a JLA soldier at a suicide of a Slovenian soldier: "The soldier's eulogy was provocative and insulting."⁶⁹ In 1991, risk factors and protective factors were mentioned once. In the same year, soldiers' defence mechanisms were mentioned once and advice for soldiers' parents was mentioned once: "Instill optimism in them, tell them about the changes for the better in our political events."⁷⁰

In the period after Slovenian independence, which in this case is only 1994, because there were no articles about the stories of Slovenian soldiers in 1992 or 1993, the method of suicide was mentioned twice. There were also two mentions of the reason for suicide, which both times was an individual factor, namely personal distress, seen in the quote "... it is a suicide committed out of personal distress."⁷¹

Informative Articles

The last topic is related to 14 informative articles. Of these, two articles date from 1986, two from 1987, two from 1989, one from 1991, four from 1992, one from 1993 and two from 1994. Half of the articles are therefore from the period after independence.

Articles that raise awareness of the issue of suicide contain the following subtopics: the high suicide rate in Slovenia, the methods of suicide, the months in which the suicide rate is highest, individual and relational risk factors.⁷²

In the articles from 1986, we get an overview of the pre-war situation, with social risk factors (the economic crisis) being the dominant subtopics, "... there was a 'frightening depression' and a 'severe inner imbalance among the people,'"⁷³ as well as the Slovenian national character and the differences in suicide rates between the regions. Lev Milčinski confirmed the latter by pointing out the differences in suicide

66 "JLA ne verjame v zastrupitev."

67 Urbanija, "Pismo ob vojakovi smrti."

68 Franc Kramer, "Morda bi lahko prisluhnili," *Večer*, July 12, 1990, 24.

69 Ivanka Dernač-Špendov, "Kateri vojaki umirajo v JLA," *Delo*, September 13, 1990, 7.

70 Bogdan Žorž, "Duševne stiske vojakov," *Večer*, June 8, 1991, 30.

71 "Samomor teritorialca iz Tržiča," *Delo*, July 14, 1994, 17.

72 Marjan Skumavc, "Tudi v vzrokih samomorov je čedalje več individualnosti," *Delo*, November 15, 1989, 265, 12. Žarko Hojnik, "Samomor je za Slovence enako usoden kot vojna," *Delo*, July 27, 1991, 174, 7. Branko Žunec, "Dolga pijanost, obup, počasen samomor," *Večer*, May 7, 1994, 40.

73 Žarko Rajković, "Edinstveni smo v – napakah," *Delo*, September 23, 1986, 222, 2.

rates between the northern and southern parts of Slovenia: “Such observations make us doubt that it would be possible to speak of a uniform national character in Slovenia, and perhaps even in general, and of a high ‘suicide rate’ as a general Slovenian characteristic.”⁷⁴

In 1987, the sub-theme of negative labelling of the military was identified and individual risk factors were highlighted, within which the division of values among soldiers was particularly emphasised: “... many boys put on the uniform, torn between their sense of duty to their country and their pacifist (or other) convictions.”⁷⁵ In the same year, the differences between the Slovenes and other Yugoslav nations and possible conflicts with other Yugoslav nations were emphasised through a description of how some Serbs allegedly saw the Slovenes - as “arrogant, intruders, exclusivists, snobs, hegemonists with a messianic syndrome, separatists.”⁷⁶

In 1989, the sub-theme of differences between the Slovenes and the other Yugoslav nations was repeated: “The very different number of suicides in the Yugoslav republics also shows the diversity of character, thought and, in general, the diversity of mentality and culture.”⁷⁷ Another subtopic is high suicide rates,⁷⁸ individual risk factors⁷⁹ and differences in suicide rates between regions.⁸⁰

In the 1991 article, there is a sub-theme that negatively labels suicide while emphasising the negative consequences of suicide at the community level: “... it is a fact that any suicide can be fatal for a small nation like the Slovenes, as it can lead to the suicide of the whole nation.”⁸¹

The following themes are present this year: the decline in suicides:⁸² “After twenty years of extremely high suicide rates, Slovenians are showing a little more optimism or resilience in the face of adversity,”⁸³ and the negative labelling of suicide: “... a voluntary death is seen as even more senseless and cruel at a time when there are so many involuntary deaths.”⁸⁴ Additionally, we recognise subthemes of individual⁸⁵ and social risk factors and even war as a protective factor in times of such distress: “people gather all their defences and channel them into a ‘fight for survival.’”⁸⁶ The negative labelling of the army also reappears. An active sailor in the JVM (Yugoslavian navy) writes that he is confused by the contradictory reports and that he would “never stain his hands with the blood of his people” and that he “expects to commit suicide.”⁸⁷ In the same

74 “Misli o slovenskem značaju,” *Delo*, November 8, 1986, 261, 22.

75 “Ko se vojak ubije,” *Večer*, October 21, 1987, 4.

76 Melita Forstnerič-Hajšek, “Secirnice slovenstva,” *Večer*, August 8, 1987, 18.

77 Skumavc, “Tudi v vzrokih samomorov je čedalje več individualnosti.”

78 Janko Kostnapfel, “Odgovorni za to, kar počnemo, in za tisto, česar ne storimo,” *Delo*, August 9, 1989, 182, 5.

79 Hojnik, “Samomor je za Slovence enako usoden kot vojna.”

80 Kostnapfel, “Odgovorni za to, kar počnemo, in za tisto, česar ne storimo.”

81 Hojnik, “Samomor je za Slovence enako usoden kot vojna.”

82 A.P., “Samomorov je končno manj,” *Delo*, January 31, 1992, 25, 2. Sonja Merljak, “Niso krivi le sprememba sistema, revščina in vreme,” *Delo*, September 8, 1992, 207, 10. Puhar, “Vojna v Sloveniji: strahovi, panika in nočne more otrok.”

83 Merljak, “Niso krivi le sprememba sistema, revščina in vreme.”

84 Srečko Niederfer, “Slovenija nima kriminalne politike,” *Večer*, February 22, 1992, 31.

85 Puhar, “Vojna v Sloveniji: strahovi, panika in nočne more otrok.”

86 Niederfer, “Slovenija nima kriminalne politike.”

87 Ibidem.

year, we also recognise the undercurrent of the Slovenian national character and the differences between the Slovenes and other Yugoslav nations: "The Slovenian nation is generally not so violent /.../. This is also reflected in the suicide rate, which indicates inward aggression /.../ The opposite is true for the other nations of the former Yugoslav community."⁸⁸

In 1993, there are mentions of high suicide rates, motives and methods of suicide.⁸⁹ Additionally, Slovenian national character is again mentioned: "The reflection /.../ raises many questions ... about our social reality and about us Slovenes ourselves."⁹⁰

In 1994, there is the sub-theme of high suicide rate, social risk factors and alcohol abuse as individual risk factor - "another manifestation of a civilization derailed by auto-aggression."⁹¹ The problem of increasing mental problems was explained: "... it is undoubtedly related to the social, economic and political conditions or their consequences that exacerbate psychological problems."⁹²

Most of the sub-themes appear in all three time periods. The sub-theme of possible conflicts with other Yugoslav nations appears only before the war of independence. The sub-themes Slovenian national character and social risk factors only appear in the period before and after the war of independence. The sub-theme of high suicide rate in Slovenia appear only in the period of independence and in the post-independence period. The decrease in suicides is only reported in 1992, after independence.

Discussion

The analysis of 65 articles from the pre-independence, independence and post-independence periods of Slovenia offers a range of topics, with a particular focus on Slovenian soldiers, the political agenda and informative articles. In the following, we will explore each of the three topics in more detail.

Political Agenda

In 1986, the reason for the suicide was mainly attributed to the Slovenian character.⁹³ After the publication of the 57th *Nova revija*, responsibility for the suicides was transferred on social order and political situations. This was in line with the fact that people wanted to portray Yugoslavia as the culprit for people's personal misery and the country's independence as the solution. However, this led to various disagreements on the part of Yugoslavia and within Slovenia. In 1987 and 1988, articles

88 Ibid.

89 Borko De Corti, "Zakaj se je ustrelil Viktor Avbelj?," *Večer*, April 30, 1993, 48.

90 Žunec, "Dolga pijanost, obup, počasen samomor."

91 Ibid.

92 Slavica Crnica, "Stiske zaradi družbenih napetosti," *Delo*, December 22, 1994, 297, 15.

93 Musek, *Psihološki portret Slovencev*.

appeared supporting or rejecting the view that the social order was responsible for the rising number of suicides. Due to the increasing talk of independence, the Yugoslav army became even more involved in the political events. The pre-independence period was an important period for political influence, as it could influence the decision for independence.⁹⁴

In 1989, accusations against the army began by parents who had lost their children while serving in the Yugoslav army. More people began to write about the political suicide of the Slovenes, especially in 1990, shortly before independence. Immediately after independence, in 1991, the reason for the high suicide rate was the economic and national crisis, and more people began to emphasize the issue of military service among young boys. This was because between 1990 and 1991 obligated military serving was abolished outside the country and the suicide rate fell during this period.⁹⁵

In 1993, the post-independence period, the desire for a strong Slovenian army was expressed, which was accomplished in 1994.⁹⁶ At the same time the negative consequences of independence and the associated reasons for suicide were also mentioned, but there was no actual increase in suicide rate.⁹⁷

Stories about Slovenian Soldiers

Most of the articles dealing with stories about Slovenian soldiers date from the period of independence, when the army and the situation of Slovenian soldiers were most prominent. Most articles mentioned a specific person who died by suicide. They were all male and young, which corresponds to the thematic category. The method of suicide was consistently mentioned throughout the articles. It was always shooting with a gun, which fits the theme, because soldiers have the access to means for suicide, which is also a risk factor on a societal level.⁹⁸

In the period before independence, there were only a few articles about Slovenian soldiers and suicide, all of which dealt with the same case. The articles were descriptive in nature and mentioned the cooperation of the JLA and other authorities, people and media.

The shift in the narrative can be seen in the independence period. There were articles about the politicisation of suicides, namely of some Slovenian soldiers, which included opinions that suicide was used as an abuse of the JLA, which came from the JLA and its media. There were also opinions that the use or politicisation of suicide was not necessarily a bad thing, as it could be seen as a desire for much needed changes in the JLA. Military service away from home was most prominent in those years, as it had become a problem for Slovenian soldiers. This gave rise to the narrative that their

94 Bebler, *Sodobno vojaštvo in družba*.

95 Ibid.

96 Grizold, *Obrambni sistem Republike Slovenije*.

97 Marušič and Zorko, "Slovenski samomor skozi prostor in čas."

98 World Health Organization, *Preventing suicide: A global imperative*.

service far from home was one of the reasons for suicides in the army. The mention of this topic decreased after 1990, when the percentage of soldiers serving far from home decreased.⁹⁹ With the suicides of Slovenian soldiers also came the mention of the difficult conditions in the army and the bad attitude of the JLA towards Slovenian soldiers and Slovenia. The reasons given by the JLA were that the suicide had nothing to do with the army. In response, the families of the deceased came forward and stated that the deceased had no reason to commit suicide and were happy before serving in the army. The articles also mentioned that some parents refused to believe that suicide was the cause of death and demanded an autopsy. As a result, the JLA was asked to take responsibility for the deaths of the soldiers who died by suicide. The articles thus mainly expressed people's dissatisfaction with the JLA and the desire for change, respect for Slovenia and Slovenian soldiers, and the emerging question of Slovenia's place in Yugoslavia through stories about Slovenian soldiers.

In the post-independence period, there were only two articles about Slovenian soldiers in which the same case of suicide of a soldier was mentioned, which was attributed to personal reasons that could have been exacerbated by the stress factors of the army.¹⁰⁰ We can therefore conclude that stories about Slovenian soldiers were most prevalent during the period of independence, when they also expressed the desire for better conditions in the army and dissatisfaction with the JLA in general.

Informative Articles

Informative articles are found in all three periods, but most frequently in the post-independence period.

Tito's death was followed by a major political and economic crisis, which took place in the pre-independence period.¹⁰¹ The articles link these social factors to the deterioration of people's mental health. At this time, the desire for independence began to take shape, and with it came statements about the Slovenian national character. Moreover, the differences between the Slovenian nation and the other Yugoslav nations were emphasized, which can be seen as an expression of the political crisis,¹⁰² but also as a justification for the idea of Slovenian independence.

At the time of independence, the talk about the differences between the Slovenes and the other Yugoslav nations continued. However, when the high suicide rate is mentioned, it is no longer so much social factors that are emphasised, but individual ones. In articles referring to suicides in the period of independence, suicide is characterised negatively at the level of the Slovenian community as a whole. This is justified by the statements that for such a small nation, any loss is too great. It seems that it was precisely through expressions of this kind that the desire to be united was indicated.

⁹⁹ Grizold, *Obrambni sistem Republike Slovenije*.

¹⁰⁰ Nock et. al. "Suicide Among Soldiers: A Review of Psychosocial Risk and Protective Factors."

¹⁰¹ Bebler, *Sodobno vojaštvo in družba*.

¹⁰² Durkheim, *Suicide*, quoted in Van Tubergen and Ultee, "Political integration, war and suicide: The dutch paradox?"

Only in the first year after independence is there a decline in suicides. This decline may have been due to the war, but also to the optimism of entering a new era of independence – both of which may have served as protective factors.¹⁰³ However, high suicide rate recurred in the following years. The content of the articles is more at the awareness level, as they often describe risk factors, especially social factors. The Slovenian national character and the differences between Slovenes and other ex-Yugoslav nations are discussed again. The presence of these two sub-themes could indicate a desire for reflection on a new identity of Slovenes in their independent country.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study contributes to our understanding of suicidality in the critical period of Slovenian independence by highlighting three important topics that were frequently reported in the Slovenian newspapers *Delo* and *Večer*. Moreover, it provides a better understanding of how suicide in the military was reported and discussed in the Slovenian media during an important period with many political and economic changes. As we anticipated, there were differences in recognized topics depending on the time period. It is important to emphasize that the issue of suicide was instrumentalized and distorted for political reasons in order to reinforce the sense of crisis and promote an unfavorable attitude towards the Yugoslav People's Army. The lack of studies in times of independence and its suicide rates limits us from creating a more comprehensive picture.

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MEDIJSKO POROČANJE O SAMOMORILNEM VEDENJU V KONTEKSTU SLOVENSKE OSAMOSVOJITVE

POVZETEK

Pred letom 1991 je bila Slovenija del Jugoslavije, ki je po smrti voditelja počasi začela razpadati. Slovenija je začela o samostojnosti razpravljati leta 1987, ko je skupina intelektualcev objavila program, ki je pozival k demokratizaciji in decentralizaciji. Vsi Slovenci te zamisli niso podpirali, vendar republike to ni ustavilo, da se ne bi osamosvojila v kratki, a intenzivni osamosvojitveni vojni.

V Jugoslaviji so bili vsi mladi moški, tudi Slovenci, poslani v druge republike na obvezno služenje vojaškega roka v Jugoslovanski ljudski armadi (JLA). Nekateri od teh vojakov so se zaradi samomora vrnili v krsti.

Slovenija je med jugoslovanskimi republikami izstopala z najvišjo stopnjo samomorov. Število samomorov se je med svetovnimi vojnama povečalo in je bilo vedno zelo visoko. Zmanjšalo se je leta 1989 in naslednje leto je bilo precej nižje, leta 1991, ko se je Slovenija osamosvojila, pa se je začelo rahlo povečevati.

Pomembno vlogo pri osamosvojitvi so imeli tudi časopisi, saj so imeli moč spodbujanja narativa. Za oblikovanje mnenja je bilo pomembno zlasti njihovo poročanje o stopnjah samomorov v povezavi z vojno.

Med vojno je število samomorov običajno nižje, kar je mogoče razložiti s teorijo družbene integracije, v skladu s katero politična nestabilnost spodbuja družbeno kohezijo, vojaki pa so manj tvegana skupina kot civilisti. Vseeno pa tudi vemo, da so izpostavljeni številnim stresnim izkušnjam, ki so pomembno povezane s samomorilnostjo. Poleg tega je v vojski zelo enostavno priti do orožja, dodaten dejavnik tveganja pa je lahko tudi izoliranost stražnega mesta.

Namen študije je bil ugotoviti, katere zgodbe o samomorih so bile objavljene v osrednjih slovenskih časopisih *Delo* in *Večer*. Ker je glavna tema raziskave samomor v obdobju slovenske osamosvojitve, smo za analizo izbrali tri obdobja: obdobje pred osamosvojitvijo Slovenije (1986–1988), obdobje med njo (1989–1991) in obdobje po njej (1992–1994). V raziskavi smo analizirali časopisne članke iz dveh osrednjih slovenskih časopisov, *Dela* in *Večera*. Ugotovili smo, da prevladujejo tri teme – zgodbe o slovenskih vojaki, politična agenda in informativni članki.

Rezultati so pokazali, da je politična agenda pogosta tema v obdobju pred osamosvojitvijo. Članki, opredeljeni v okviru te teme, se osredotočajo predvsem na razpravo o želji po osamosvojitvi Slovenije, pozneje pa vse bolj na posledice teh političnih sprememb, pri čemer kot glavni razlog za samomore poudarjajo politične dejavnike. Članki, ki so bili pogosto objavljeni med osamosvajanjem, prikazujejo zgodbe slovenskih vojakov. Gre za tragične zgodbe o samomorih, v katerih med umrlimi

izstopajo moški. V člankih se prepletajo opisi služenja vojaškega roka in stiske vojakov zaradi različnih dejavnosti JLA. V obdobju po osamosvojitvi pa smo večinoma našli članke, ki omogočajo vpogled v odnos družbe do samomora. Včasih je njihov cilj ozaveščanje o problemu samomorilnosti, v drugih primerih pa je pereče vprašanje samomorilnosti negativno poudarjeno.

Članek omogoča boljši vpogled v to, kako so v pomembnem obdobju številnih političnih in gospodarskih sprememb slovenski mediji poročali in razpravljali o samomorih v vojski.

Jubileji – Jubilees

Vida Deželak Barič – sedemdesetletnica



Letošnjega 17. junija je pomemben življenjski jubilej, sedemdesetletnico, praznovala dr. Vida Deželak Barič, upokojena znanstvena sodelavka Inštituta za novejšo zgodovino. Na inštitutu in inštitutu je posvetila vso svojo delovno dobo in predvsem vso delovno energijo. Mnoga od svojih več kot štiridesetih let delovne dobe pa si je ob tem tudi prizadevala, da bi ji zdravje omogočilo polno delovno obremenitev. Zagnanosti in trme ji ne manjka še danes, še manj pa ji jo je manjkalo v časih, ko se je uveljavljala kot vztrajna raziskovalka vodilne politične in organizacijske sile slovenskega odporniškega gibanja – Komunistične partije Slovenije.

To je bil njen temeljni raziskovalni opus, ki se mu je posvečala štiri desetletja, mu namenila magisterij znanosti in doktorsko disertacijo ter v številnih razpravah in člankih obdelala mnoge specialne in obče teme.

Pogosto se slepimo, da je zgodovinarjevo delo neodvisno od osebnih in družbenih razmer in okolja; tudi Vida Deželak Barič je predvsem korenita sprememba družbenega okolja v devetdesetih letih odprla tudi dvome o smiselnosti in družbeni relevantnosti raziskovanja prav te tematike. Lahko rečem, da je vztrajala, ne glede na splošen obrat, ki ga je v družbenem pomenu te raziskovalne tematike povzročil prelomni čas sočasnega izteka socialističnega reda in vzpostavitve osamosvojene demokratične Slovenije. Ob dozorelosti svojega znanja in razumevanja delovanja in organizacijskih sprememb te politične revolucionarne stranke je ostajala pri tematiki, v katero je že vložila toliko raziskovalnega truda in o njej zbrala toliko pomembnega gradiva v slovenskih arhivih in arhivih v Beogradu, jo je pa hkrati tudi v marsičem znova premislila.

V magistrskem delu (znanstveni magisterij) se je spopadla s hevristično in interpretativno najtežjim delom opusa, organizacijskim razvojem KPS v obdobju med aprilom 1941 in septembrom 1943. Ob v začetku oteženih dostopih do dokumentov (za nekatere je bilo dopuščeno zgolj ročno izpisovanje!) je zbirala številne izjave še živečih medvojnih članov KPS in spominske izjave. Rezultat tega minucioznega, pravzaprav tudi mukotrpnega dela je bil zanesljiv pregled organizacijskega razvoja in hkratne rasti

politične organizacije ki je temeljila na trdni strankarski disciplini članstva in vodstev, na hierarhično organizirani skupini, ki je skupaj z načelom demokratičnega centralizma in notranjestransko kritiko (in samokritiko) usmerjala in vodila odporniško gibanje. Deželak Barič je opozorila na še en hkraten proces, njeno številčno in socialno širitev, saj je ob vseh izgubah članstva početverila svoj obseg in doseg, segla z novim članstvom v kmečke in malomeščanske sloje, saj je sčasoma merilo za sprejem v članstvo postajalo delovanje v odporniškem gibanju ob voljnem sprejemanju vodilne vloge stranke. Magistrsko delo je objavila v vrsti študij o razvoju KPS po posameznih okupacijskih pokrajinah, saj so prav te jasno pokazale in še poglobile že prej obstoječe razlike v moči in politični usidranosti v različnih slovenskih okoljih, in dopolnjenega v monografski obliki. (Komunistična partija Slovenije in revolucionarno gibanje 1941–1943, (Razpoznavanja, 7). Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2007).

Doktorsko delo je poseglo širše kot zgolj v obravnavo organizacijskega vidika, Deželak Barič ga je koncipirala kot vprašanje, kako se je organizacijski problem sploh odražal v politični strategiji in taktiki KPS. Žal je njeno brez dvoma najpomembnejše delo, doktorska disertacija Organizacijsko vprašanje Komunistične partije Slovenije 1941–1945 (Ljubljana 1999, 468 f.), še vedno brez monografske knjižne objave.

Ob tem se je s svojim poznavanjem te danes specifične tematike v novem času intenzivnega preverjanja vseh dotedanjih zgodovinskega ugotovitev trudila odgovarjati tudi na vprašanja o razmerju KPS in sploh odporniškega gibanja do revolucije (Osvobodilni boj kot priložnost za izvedbo revolucionarnih ciljev. Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino, 1995, 35, št. 1/2, str. 137–162) in prevzema oblasti (Priprave in izvedba revolucionarnega prevzema oblasti na Slovenskem leta 1945. *Studia Historica Slovenica*: 2016, 16, št. 2, str. 367–398). Pokazala pa je tudi na sočasno postavljanje temeljev ljudskofrontovske zasnove prav na enem od njenih osnovnih gradnikov – človekovih pravicah (Opredelitve človekovih pravic ter dolžnosti v okviru Osvobodilne fronte slovenskega naroda med drugo svetovno vojno. V: *Človekove pravice in temeljne svoboščine: za vse čase!*: zbornik prispevkov z znanstvenega posveta. Ljubljana: Študijski center za narodno spravo, 2017, str. 64–81). In ni odveč poudariti, da je Deželak Barič prispevala tudi večino na problematiko delovanja Komunistične partije Slovenije nanašajočih se tekstov za inštitutsko monografijo Slovenska novejša zgodovina: od programa Zedinjena Slovenija do mednarodnega priznanja Republike Slovenije: 1848–1992 (1. izd. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga; Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2005, 2006), v katerih je podala pogosto prve sintetične interpretacije svojega dotedanjega raziskovalnega dela.

Svoje poznavanje virov je pokazala s komentirano objavo virov o delovanju Komunistične partije Slovenije na Primorskem, kjer sta se njeni internacionalistična usmerjenost in zavezanost načelom mednarodnega komunističnega reda v Kominterni srečevali s problemom samoodločbe in zavezanosti priključitvi etnično slovenskega območja k Sloveniji (Pokrajinske konference Komunistične partije Slovenije na Primorskem: 1942–1944, (Viri, 16). Ljubljana, Arhivsko društvo Slovenije, 2001, 179 str.). V komentirani objavi zapisnikov in drugega materiala dveh pokrajinskih

partijskih konferenc se zrcali ne le delovanje KPS na območju, ki je bilo že več kot dve desetletji v sestavi italijanske države, pač pa tudi vprašanje odnosa s KP Italije, s katero se je KPS stikala v bližnjih mestih Trstu in Gorici, ter vprašanje sodelovanja obeh odporniških gibanj ob jasni zahtevi slovenskega, da se Primorska priključi Sloveniji. Ni pa to edino njeno delo pri pripravah virov, vključena je bila v več priprav komentiranih izdaj virov, ki jih je pripravljala inštitut, tudi za nedokončana Zbrana dela Edvarda Kardelja.

Kljub temu da se je jubilatka ukvarjala z organizacijo kot celoto, pa je pokazala tudi poseben posluš za položaj ženske v družbi in odporniškem gibanju. Med rezultati velja omeniti sintetične preglede Vloga in položaj žensk na Slovenskem v narodnoosvobodilnem boju in revoluciji 1941–1945 (V: Naše žene volijo. Ljubljana: Urad za žensko politiko, 1999, str. 21–40), Uresničevanje ženske enakopravnosti na Slovenskem med drugo svetovno vojno in po njej. (Borec, 61, 2009, št. 657/661, str. 236–268) in Politizacija ženske na Slovenskem v času druge svetovne vojne (V: Ženske skozi zgodovino: zbornik referatov 32. zborovanja slovenskih zgodovinarjev, Celje, 30. september – 2. oktober 2004. Ljubljana: Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije, 2004, str. 317–322) ter tudi več biografij politično uveljavljenih žensk tega obdobja; predvsem pa študijo o enem redkih dogajanj v vojnem času, ki so ga vodile in se ga udeleževale predvsem ženske – demonstracijah za izpust političnih zapornikov v Ljubljani leta 1943 (Na svidenje prihodnje sredo: ženske demonstracije v Ljubljani 1943. Ljubljana: Zgodovinsko društvo, 2005), ki jo je razvila iz dela v več strokovnih komisijah, ki so se ukvarjale s problemi spomenika medvojnimi demonstracijam v mestu.

V teh letih je Vida Deželak Barič začela tudi temo, ki je v njenem strokovnem in znanstvenem delu v naslednjem desetletju za več let postala njena poglavitna delovna naloga. V razpravi Osvobodilni boj kot priložnost za izvedbo revolucionarnih ciljev je med drugimi sodelavci inštituta, ki so pripravljali projekt popisa žrtev druge svetovne vojne in povojnih pobojev, odprla vprašanje žrtev med članstvom KPS, pa tudi odnosa KPS do velikih žrtev med pripadniki odporniškega gibanja, ki jih je terjalo tako intenzivno odporništvo. Postala je vodja ciljnega raziskovalnega projekta, ki si je po več letih zbiranja podatkov iz literature in dokumentarnega gradiva zastavila nalogo, da po zakonsko omogočenem dostopu do matičnih podatkov za ta posebni primer, preveri podatke že ugotovljenih smrtnih žrtev in hkrati odkrije vse nove. Tedaj je namreč bilo med raziskovalci še živo predvidevanje, da bo prav gradivo matične službe razrešilo odprte probleme pomanjkljivih in dvomljivih podatkov o osebah, ubitih ali padlih med drugo svetovno vojno in zlasti pobitih v letu 1945, ko je prišlo do povojnih množičnih pobojev. Deželak Barič je zapored vodila dva taka projekta, v katerih so tri sodelavke v petih letih pregledale gradivo o umrlih osebah celotnega sistema matične službe v Sloveniji, kar je bilo skrajno zahtevno. Vodstveno nalogo je opravila učinkovito, a s človeško občutljivostjo. Na razočaranje vseh se je pokazalo, da so bile tudi državne evidence smrtnih žrtev v času druge svetovne vojne le delen odgovor na raziskovalni cilj – približati se 100 odstotkom dejanskih žrtev. Njeno poglabljanje v problematiko žrtev druge svetovne vojne in prvega povojnega obdobja je vodilo tudi v vrsto znanstvenih

objav o tej problematiki, ne le številnih intervjujev, drugih javnih nastopov in strokovnih člankov. Med njimi je treba posebej omeniti njeno vodenje celotnega podprojekta in souredništvo publikacije *Žrtve druge svetovne vojne v Zasavju*, ki je plod sodelovanja Zasavskega muzeja in Inštituta za novejšo zgodovino (Trbovlje, 2012 (2013)). S to publikacijo je raziskovalna skupina inštituta, ki se je ukvarjala s temo žrtev druge svetovne vojne, izvedla pilotno raziskavo na manjšem območju, v kateri je pridobila izkušnje za zastavljeno študijo o žrtvah druge svetovne vojne in prvega povojnega leta v Sloveniji. Celovito interpretacijo smrtnih žrtev druge svetovne vojne in prvega povojnega obdobja na Slovenskem pa je Deželak Barič podala v referatih na posvetih Represija med drugo svetovno vojno in v povojnem obdobju v Sloveniji in v sosednjih državah (Posledice vojnega nasilja: smrtne žrtve druge svetovne vojne in zaradi nje na Slovenskem. V: *Nasilje vojnih in povojnih dni. Vpogledi 8*. Ljubljana, Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2014, str. 11–36) in *Odstiranje zamolčanega. Smrtne žrtve druge svetovne vojne na Slovenskem in notranji obračun* (V: *Odstiranje zamolčanega: zbornik prispevkov*. Ljubljana: Študijski center za narodno spravo, 2013, str. 69–84.) Tematiko vojnih in povojnih žrtev je predstavila tudi v revijah in prispevkih v tujini.

Čeprav je ostalo vojno obdobje v razvoju KPS Vidina osrednja tema, pa je posegla tudi v predzgodovino marksističnih političnih skupin in strank na Slovenskem. V teh razpravah so zajeta zadnja sintetična spoznanja o več kot polstoletnem delovanju tako socialistov kot predhodnih generacij komunistov, iz katerih je z uspešnim sodelovanjem, vodenjem in prevzemom oblasti zrasla in se uveljavila generacija, ki je bila v osredju njenega raziskovanja (Oris idejnopolitičnih in socialnogospodarskih usmeritev marksističnega tabora v letih 1896–1941. V: *Narod - politika - država: idejnopolitični značaj strank na Slovenskem od konca 19. do začetka 21. stoletja*. Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2020, str. 73–99; in *Questions of OF democracy and coexistence in the opinion of slovenian Marxists 1918–1941*. V: *Between the House of Habsburg and Tito: a look at the Slovenian past 1861–1980*. Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino: = *Institute of Contemporary History*, 2016, str. 85–101). Prav njenemu oblikovanju je posvetila obširen pregled, v katerem je pokazala na silnice, ki so vodile do njenega naziranja o revoluciji kot razrešitvi družbenega položaja (Temeljne usmeritve slovenskih komunistov in vprašanja družbene radikalizacije oziroma sobivanja v razdobju med svetovnima vojnama. V: *Revolucionarno nasilje, sodni procesi in kultura spominjanja: zbornik prispevkov z znanstvenega posveta*. Ljubljana: Študijski center za narodno spravo, 2014, str. 9–27).

Podpisani, eden od peterice, ki smo sestavili zadnjo inštitutsko generacijo pred uvedbo inštituta mladih raziskovalcev, se hkrati z nostalgijo oziram na z Vido prehojeno pot; sredine kolokvije pri istem mentorju, pogoste strokovne in tudi osebne pogovore, kave in druženja v mogočni stavbi Kazine. Slavljenci dr. Vidi Deželak Barič kolegice in kolegi ob življenjskem jubileju iskreno čestitamo. V pokoju ji želimo notranjega zadovoljstva v krogu družine in trdnega zdravja!

Damijan Guštin

Jurij Perovšek – sedemdesetletnik; Deutsch-Slowenische Begegnungen



Po navadi se slavnostni zapisi ob častitljivih obletnicah častitljivih kolegov začnejo s prisrčnimi anekdotami, toda jaz bom začel s trdimi dejstvi, kot zgodovinar, kakor me je vrli Jurij Perovšek učil; po kronološkem zaporedju. Jurija sem prvič srečal pred več kot triindvajsetimi leti v Cutty Sarku. V družbi Janeza Cvirna in Andreja Studna je razpravljal o slovenskem nacionalnem vprašanju, svoji najljubši temi, ko ga je ravno poklical Milan Kučan, tedanji predsednik republike. To se je vsaj meni zdelo blazno nobel, drugim niti ne, saj so vneto razpravljali naprej. Nedolgo zatem sem se razpravam pridružil tudi sam, a sem raje bil bolj molčeč.

Jurij Perovšek je tedaj namreč (že) bil eden izmed najbolj uveljavljenih zgodovinarjev 20. stoletja, strokovnjak še posebej za jugoslovansko kraljevino. Ponašal se je z bogatim opusom, tematsko pestrim, predvsem pa problemsko globokim in hermenevitično ter fontološko brezhibnim. Ko je Jurij analiziral časopise, ni izpustil ničesar, njegove trditve se lahko merijo le s sodobnimi dosežki korpusne lingvistike. Trditev je podkrepil do članka in besede natančno (in najbrž belil lase kakšnemu uredniku). Zame, ki sem kasneje postal njegov mladi raziskovalec, je to bilo malo frustrirajoče.

Do takrat, ko sem ga spoznal, je Jurij obdelal poglede slovenskih komunistov na črnogorsko, makedonsko, muslimansko nacionalno vprašanje, prispeval temeljne študije o Državi SHS, tvorno sooblikoval Enciklopedijo Slovenije in Kroniko XX. stoletja Nove revije, posebno pozornost pa posvečal svoji dolga leta osrednji temi – liberalnemu političnemu polu. Osvetljeval ga je s številnih plati, idejne temelje je iskal tudi v Nemčiji, v Mainzu, kjer je spoznal Andreasa Schulza, strokovnega kolega in prijatelja vse do današnjih dni.

Skozi inštitutske dni se je Jurij Perovšek prebijal z ramo ob rami z Zdenkom Čepičem; skupaj sta v sedemdesetih letih prišla na tedanji Inštitut za zgodovino delavskega gibanja kot »greenhorna« (kot po Karlu Mayu vedno reče Zdene).

Ob Jurijevi šestdesetletnici je prav Zdenko pripravil daljši zapis, v katerem je podrobno in poglobljeno predstavil Jurijevo delo ter ga umestil v širši historiografski kontekst. Nanj tudi zdaj usmerjam »link«, v tistem zapisu o Juriju zgodovinarju je vse, kar bo bralec pogrešal v pričujočem zapisu. Zdenko je tedaj zapisal, da je Jurij eden tistih zgodovinarjev, ki »oblikujejo podobo in značaj slovenskega zgodovinarstva«. Z oceno povsem soglašam, ne le v raziskovalnem smislu, Jurij je namreč bil tvorno vpleten tudi v organizacijsko delo, v začetku tisočletja je med drugim vodil Zvezo zgodovinskih društev Slovenije, sodeloval je pri upravljanju inštituta in dolga leta vodil programsko skupino, ki jo danes imenujemo Politična zgodovina.

Njegov opus je v naslednjih letih, ko sva že bila sodelavca, rasel in rasel, a zme-rom ohranjal temeljno usmeritev v staro Jugoslavijo. Marsikaj sva pripravila skupaj, marsikaj tudi preživela. Posebej nepozabne so – vsaj zame – bile mnoge poti v Arhiv Jugoslavije v Beogradu in v zadnjih letih na konferenci v Berlin.

Perovškovo delo govori zase, o tem sem prepričan, deloma govorijo o njem tudi nagrade, omenil bom le Zoisovo priznanje, pa vendar bi tukaj le opozoril na tiste njegove rezultate, ki so vsaj meni najbolj pri srcu. Izbor ni enostaven, Jurijev opus je velik, le v zadnjem desetletju njegova bibliografija obsega več kot 200 enot, med drugim je v tem času spisal kar tri monografije: *Politika in moderna*, kjer po »perovškovski«
secira idejnopolični razvoj in delovanje v slovenski politiki od konca 19. stoletja do druge svetovne vojne, *Slovenci in slovanski svet*, v kateri razkriva slovenski pogled na slovanstvo, ter *Slovenski prevrat 1918*, kjer znova premisli in analizira eno od svojih zgodnejših, vendar zmeraj aktualnih tem – položaj Slovencev v Državi SHS.

Izjemnemu opusu navkljub bom vendarle poudaril dva rezultata, najbrž bo vsakdo tukaj uganil, kateri bo prvi. Prvo Jurijevo delo po mojem izboru je seveda knjiga *Programi političnih strank, organizacij in združenj na Slovenskem v času Kraljevine SHS (1918–1929)*. Kaj več si lahko zgodovinar želi? Zbran in urejen vir, prepisan, komentiran, s temeljito uvodno študijo, grafičnimi prikazi, podrobnimi pojasnili, povednimi biografijami. Zlobneži pravijo, da je to največja neumnost, ki jo lahko zgodovinar naredi. Izda vir, ki vsem analfabetom omogoča, da pametujejo o stvareh, o katerih se jim ne sanja. Perovšku pa se je to zdelo celo fino in v tistih norih časih je še denar za knjigo zbiral sam. No, danes ta ugotovitev ne velja več, pandemija koronavirusa je pokazala, da se ljudske množice ne spoznajo zgolj na politiko, zgodovino, pravo, nogomet in vladne posle, marveč tudi na epidemiologijo, imunologijo, sintezno biologijo, infektologijo in še kaj.

Moja druga najljubša knjiga je »V zaželjeni deželi«, s katero razblini marsikateri mit o nama obema ljubi jugoslovanski državi. V knjigi poda suho, a temeljno misel, kako je v prvi Jugoslaviji bila oblikovana »dovolj čvrsta narodnoemancipacijska podlaga, na podlagi katere so lahko Slovenci, obenem z dejanji dokazano narodnoosvobodilno voljo in vojaško sposobnostjo v drugi svetovni vojni, pričeli samozavestno živeti svojo naslednjo jugoslovansko izkušnjo«. S tem bom sklenil.

Dragi Jure, pridi iz Andraža kaj pozdravit na inštitut in – o tem ne dvomim – ostani pišoč še naprej. Predvsem pa pazi na hrbet in družino. V imenu vseh sodelavcev se ti zahvaljujem za tvoj doprinos inštitutu in ti želim še veliko uspehov (in veliko užitkov ob sproščujočem branju znanstvene fantastike)!

Kot drobno darilo in znamenje pozornosti pa prejmi spodnje besedilo, ki ga je na mojo prošnjo z velikim veseljem zate napisal tvoj prijatelj Andreas Schulz, trenutno v »penzijo«
odhajajoči generalni sekretar berlinske Komisije za zgodovino parlamentarizma in političnih strank (Kommission für Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der politischen Parteien). Besedilo Nemško-slovenska srečevanja ravno tako kot pričujoče besedilo vsebuje veliko zgodovinskih dejstev in še več osebnih opažanj, sporočil in občutenj ob Juriju in o njem. Objavljeno je v izvorniku, ne le zato, ker je

vendarle napisano v zgodovinarjem še vedno razumljivem jeziku, marveč tudi zato, ker želi uredništvo za slavljence in druge bralce v prvi vrsti ohraniti vse drobne nianse in čudovite jezikovne konstrukcije, zgovornejše kot suha informacija, ki je zapisana. Prevod bi mnoge zabrisal.

Sam sem ga sicer skušal prevesti, a sem se pri spodnjem pasusu, opisu prvega srečanja z mladim Jurijem P., dokončno ustavil:

»Im diffusen Licht wirkte das von dichtem schwarzem Haar und einem makellos schwarzen Vollbart umrahmte Gesicht noch dunkler als sonst. Der Kollege aus dem Balkanland machte einen fast finsternen Eindruck auf uns.«

»V difuzni svetlobi [kantine deželnega parlamenta v Mainzu] je obraz, obdan z gostimi črnimi lasmi in brezhibno črno brado, deloval še temneje kot običajno. Kolega iz balkanske dežele je na nas napravil skoraj zlovešč vtis.«

Jure Gašparič, Ljubljana

Es war im Spätsommer 1988, als ich Jurij Perovšek das erste Mal begegnete. Die Stipendiaten des Mainzer Instituts für Europäische Geschichte gingen wie meistens so auch diesmal gemeinsam zum Mittagessen in die Kantine des Landtags von Rheinland-Pfalz. Das 1950 gegründete Institut war ein französisch-deutsches Projekt der Nachkriegszeit im Geiste europäischer Verständigung. Wissenschaftler und Wissenschaftlerinnen aus Europa, aus Nordamerika und Fernostasien wohnten und forschten gemeinsam unter dem Dach der Alten Universität mitten im Stadtzentrum. Das Jahr 1988, in dem Jurij Perovšek Stipendiat war, wurde tief geprägt von den Auswirkungen der Reformpolitik in der Sowjetunion unter Gorbatschow. Die ideologische Front zwischen West und Ost begann aufzuweichen, und das spürten auch die Stipendiaten des Instituts. Die Begegnungen westlicher Historiker mit Wissenschaftlern aus den sozialistischen Ländern Europas bekamen eine neue Bedeutung. Die Gespräche wurden politischer.

Jedem Mainzer Stipendiaten war damals bewusst, dass die Kollegen und Kolleginnen aus dem »Ostblock« nur unter bestimmten Voraussetzungen in den »Westen« hatten reisen können. Unter den ins nichtsozialistische Ausland entsandten Reisekadern waren keineswegs nur hyperloyale Parteigenossen, aber bestimmt auch keine Regimegegner zu finden. Eine Ausnahme bildeten die Wissenschaftler aus der Volksrepublik China. Sie wurden ersichtlich geheimdienstlich überwacht, immer wieder kamen »Gäste« aus Chinas diplomatischen Vertretungen zu Besuch. Chinesischen Stipendiaten blieb nur die Wahl regelmäßiger Berichterstattung oder der Entschluss, den Aufenthalt im Westen zur Flucht ins Exil zu nutzen – eine Gelegenheit, die während meiner Anwesenheit 1987/1988 ein prominentes Wissenschaftlerehepaar aus China ergriff.

Unter den Kollegiaten des Mainzer Instituts gab es stets auch einige »neutrale« oder »blockfreie« Wissenschaftler, zum Beispiel aus der Schweiz und aus Jugoslawien.

Jurij Perovšek war einer von ihnen. An jenem sonnigen Septembertag saß er mit seinem Mentor Janko Prunk an einem Tisch in der Kantine in der Nähe von uns. Wir musterten ihn mit jener gelassenen Aufmerksamkeit, die jedem Neuankömmling zuteilwurde. Uns erschien Jurij zuerst als ein eher verschlossener, ja unzugänglicher Zeitgenosse. Lag es am schräg einfallenden Sonnenlicht, das Teile der Kantine bereits im Halbschatten liegen ließ? Im diffusen Licht wirkte das von dichtem schwarzem Haar und einem makellos schwarzen Vollbart umrahmte Gesicht noch dunkler als sonst. Der Kollege aus dem Balkanland machte einen fast finsternen Eindruck auf uns.

Einige Tage später traf ich den Neu-Stipendiaten Perovšek in der Institutsbibliothek wieder. Ich arbeitete damals an meiner Dissertation über die napoleonischen Reformen in Süddeutschland. Neugierig fragte ich den Kollegen aus Jugoslawien nach seinem Forschungsthema. In gut verständlichem Deutsch, dem nur hier und da der korrekte Artikel fehlte, antwortete er mir bereitwillig. Sein Spezialgebiet sei die Ideengeschichte des jugoslawischen Liberalismus im europäischen Vergleich – von den Anfängen im 19. Jahrhundert unter der osmanisch-habsburgischen Herrschaft auf dem Balkan bis in die Zwischenkriegszeit des Vereinigten Königreichs Jugoslawien. Bei der Inspektion der Bibliothek habe er festgestellt, dass er während seines dreimonatigen Aufenthaltes noch mindestens 20 Spezialmonografien mit geschätzt 8.000 Druckseiten durcharbeiten müsse. Eingeschüchtert von diesem Arbeitspensum hielt ich es für besser, mich zurückzuziehen. Auch viel später noch, als wir längst befreundet waren, beeindruckten mich die wissenschaftliche Produktivität und der nicht nachlassende Arbeitseifer des Kollegen – dessen pflichtbewusste Selbstdisziplin fast soldatische Züge hatte.

Im Gegensatz zu seinen Mitstipendiaten, die während ihres Forschungsaufenthalts auch die kulturelle und gastronomische Seite der lebensfrohen Landeshauptstadt am Rhein nicht entbehren wollten, schien der Kollege aus Ljubljana für Freizeitvergnügungen keine Zeit zu haben. Es war deshalb kein Wunder, dass er uns anfangs wie das Modell eines dienstefrigen Apparatschiks vorkam. Alles schien exakt vorbereitet zu sein. Jurij Perovšeks wissenschaftliche Dienstreise folgte einem präzisen Plan mit straffem Zeitmanagement. Auch das Institut kannte feste Regeln und Gewohnheiten. Dazu zählte die frühmorgendliche Aktivität einer Reinigungskolonie, die den ansonsten eher später einsetzenden akademischen Arbeitstag pünktlich um 6.30 Uhr einläutete. Beim Aufkreuzen des Reinigungspersonals hörte ich den bis dahin so wortkargen Kollegen laut und vernehmlich, aber keineswegs abfällig über die tägliche Invasion der Armee von »Putzpanzern« fluchen. Wie selbstverständlich der Gebrauch von Schimpfwörtern bei Eröffnung einer akademischen Konversation im Slawischen ist, habe ich erst später erfahren – im Vergleich zum Deutschen kennt die slawische Sprache einen großen Reichtum an Invektiven, die Jurij virtuos zu handhaben wusste.

Wie sehr sich Geisteswissenschaftler über den richtigen Gebrauch von Sprache definieren, ist eine Erfahrung, die besonders akademische Anfänger machen. Eine institutionalisierte Form des wissenschaftlichen Dialogs war der Jour fixe des Mainzer Instituts, das wöchentliche Mittwochskolloquium, das den Stipendiaten Gelegenheit bot, ihre

Promotionsprojekte vorzustellen. Die Diskussion war formalisiert und verlief im dialektischen Frage-Antwort-Format. Staatsgrenzen und politische Sprachpräferenzen in den Herkunftsländern sorgten für unterschiedliche Voraussetzungen. Neben Deutsch war Englisch im Institut Verkehrssprache, doch galt die Regel, nur hilfsweise englisch zu reden. Die allgemein geübte Toleranz im Fremdsprachengebrauch erwies sich als eminent wichtiger Faktor sozialer Vergemeinschaftung. Dabei stellte sich heraus, dass der Stipendiat Perovšek, statt von dieser Freiheit Gebrauch zu machen, sich selbst einen unerbittlichen Zwang zum korrekten Sprachgebrauch auferlegt hatte. Bereits vor seiner Abreise nach Deutschland stand das Erlernen der deutschen Grammatik im täglichen Selbststudium auf dem Plan, ein Pflichtprogramm, das selbst bei besonders Sprachbegabten Frustrationen hervorrufen musste. Es hat viel Überredung gekostet, ihn davon abzubringen, sich regelmäßig Grammatiklektionen zu verordnen.

Je mehr es Jurij gelang, sich den Institutskonventionen eines unbefangenen Sprachgebrauches anzupassen, desto gelöster wurden die Gespräche mit ihm. Man konnte bei ihm besonders gut hören und sehen, welche innige Verbindung zwischen Sprache und Physiognomie besteht. Seine anfangs so düstere Aura und die angestrenzte Körperhaltung wichen heiterer Fröhlichkeit und temperamentvollem Gestikulieren, je besser Jurij sich verständlich machen konnte. Er selbst habe sich anfangs wie ein »hinkender Frankenstein« gefühlt, so erklärte er es mir später, der sich erst im Verlaufe seines Mainzer Deutschpraktikums sprachlich allmählich in einen leichtfüßigen Seiltänzer verwandelte.

Wenn es irgendjemandem möglich ist, Geist und Phantasie in einer fremden Sprache poetisch Ausdruck zu verleihen, dann Jurij Perovšek. Ohne Zweifel spielte dabei der maßvolle Gebrauch von Alkohol eine förderliche Rolle. Ich erinnere mich eines späten Abends, den wir im Anschluss an eine Institutsveranstaltung in einem Nachtlokal wenige Straßen hinter dem Universitätsgebäude verbrachten. Es war überhaupt das erste Mal, dass sich Gelegenheit zu einem längeren Gespräch ergab. Mich interessierten die damaligen Verhältnisse in dem bis zu dessen Tode 1980 von Tito eisern zusammengehaltenen Jugoslawien. Es war ein Land, das ich nicht kannte und das sich nach meiner Wahrnehmung in einer rasant sich verändernden Umgebung als stabiler Anker des Sozialismus erwies. Mein Gegenüber erklärte mir jedoch geduldig und ohne zu dozieren die tatsächliche politische Lage. Ihm lag daran, das westliche Missverständnis von der sozialistischen Mangelwirtschaft aufzuklären, die es in weiten Teilen seines Heimatlandes nicht gebe. Wie gut es sich zumindest im slowenischen Teilstaat zwischen Alpen und Adria leben ließ, davon konnte ich mich bei einem ersten gemeinsamen Besuch Ljubljanas Anfang 1989 selbst überzeugen. Und dennoch schilderte mir Jurij eindringlich die Unmöglichkeit, den Traum einer sozialistischen jugoslawischen Staatsnation zu verwirklichen. Zu groß seien die Unterschiede zwischen den südslawischen Nationalitäten – kulturell, politisch, ökonomisch, und vor allem hinsichtlich der Arbeitsproduktivität der Bevölkerung. Diese sei in Slowenien viel höher als etwa in Serbien – zumindest die letzte Behauptung schien mir plausibel angesichts der Erfahrungen, die ich mit Jurij's Arbeitsethos gemacht hatte.

Bis zu jener Nacht hatte ich Jurij Perovšek als politischen Menschen eingeschätzt. Mit gewissem Stolz erzählte er mir, Sohn eines prominenten Partisanen zu sein. Der Vater hatte seit 1941 in einem Abschnitt der adriatischen Küstenzone gegen die italienisch-deutsche Besatzungsarmee gekämpft, er war ein enger Weggefährte Titos. Nach der Befreiung war er an führender Stelle am Aufbau der slowenischen Teilrepublik Jugoslawiens beteiligt. Jurij bewunderte den Vater, der auch nach dem Zerfall des Staates aufrecht an seinen politischen Überzeugungen festhielt. Hier endete aber die Loyalität des Sohnes, der sich seine eigenen Gedanken über die Zukunft Jugoslawiens machte und im Unterschied zum Vater die Unabhängigkeit Sloweniens begeistert begrüßte. Das starre Festhalten an alten kommunistischen Dogmen, deren Geltung durch das politische Votum der Menschen längst widerlegt war, war ihm fremd. Den politischen Monologen des vom Zerfall Jugoslawiens enttäuschten Vaters täglich ausgesetzt zu sein, war nicht einfach. Der Respekt vor der Lebensleistung des Vaters verbot es ihm jedoch, die Wohngemeinschaft zu verlassen.

Während er mir das alles erzählte, wurde mir klar, dass Jurij Politik weniger von einem Parteistandpunkt als von der menschlichen Erfahrungsseite her betrachtete. Als Historiker fiel es ihm leicht, Positionen und Handlungsoptionen analytisch einzuordnen. Der Unterschied zwischen Theorie und Praxis, zwischen Ideologie und Leben war ihm stets bewusst. Zu seinen persönlichen Erfahrungen gehörte das innere Ungleichgewicht zwischen den Teilrepubliken Jugoslawiens. Slowenien war eine der Minderheiten, die sich dem Führungsanspruch der serbischen Nation unterzuordnen hatte. Die Menschen aber wollten hier wie dort nach ihrer eigenen Façon leben und nicht nach den Vorgaben einer selbstgewissen Nomenklatura. Dieser Einsicht verschlossen sich die Parteigenossen in Belgrad, und deshalb hätten sie das Scheitern des sozialistischen Experimentes selbst zu verantworten. Nichts war Jurij daher mehr zuwider als Dogmatismus und Intoleranz, Autoritarismus und Uniformität. Die intellektuelle Vielfalt der internationalen Community des Mainzer Instituts dagegen entsprach seinem Lebensgefühl. Im Zusammensein mit Menschen unterschiedlichster Herkunft und Mentalität blühte Jurij geradezu auf. Seine geistreichen Wortspiele und gewagten Metaphern sorgten für Heiterkeit unter den Stipendiaten und Institutsangestellten.

Jurijs Umgang mit den Kollegen, deren Status im Institut sich 1988 und erst recht im Schicksalsjahr 1989 immer mehr nach der individuellen politischen Haltung bestimmte, war unbefangen. Er suchte den »Wesenskern«, das »Eigentliche« im Menschen, um es in seinen Worten auszudrücken. So zählen zu seinem Freundeskreis bis heute Künstler und Kommunisten, »Businessmen« und Philosophen. Ein besonders enger Freund, Trauzeuge bei Jurijs Hochzeit, ist ein Franziskanerpater. Beide werden sich gemeinsam köstlich amüsiert haben über das väterliche Gewitter gegen »die Klerikalen«, denen der alte Partisan die Hauptschuld am politischen Niedergang Jugoslawiens gab. Der Historiker Perovšek ist bestimmt nicht religiös, eher spirituell und esoterisch orientiert. So zeigt er sich hypnotischen Experimenten aufgeschlossen, in der Absicht, geistige Explorationen in vergangene Zeiten und entfernte Welten zu unternehmen. Seine wissenschaftlichen Interessen gehen weit über sein

Hauptgebiet, die politische und intellektuelle Geschichte des Liberalismus, hinaus. Vor wenigen Wochen hat er einen neuen Artikel in der geschichtswissenschaftlichen Institutszeitschrift *Prispevki* publiziert, in dem es um die »Slowenische Perspektive auf den Spiritualismus im Zeitalter des Bürgertums« geht – eine äußerst interessante Frage, über die sich der Verfasser dieser Zeilen gerne mit dem Autor Perovšek in dessen 70. Lebensjahr bei einigen Gläsern Sliwowitz einmal unterhalten möchte!

Andreas Schulz, Berlin



Dejan Pacek

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Ocene in poročila – Reviews and Reports

Andrej Rahten, *V prah strti prestol. Slovensko dojetanje habsburške dinastije v postimperialni dobi.*

Celje: Društvo Mohorjeva družba in Celjska Mohorjeva družba,
2023, 386 str., ilustr.



Ena od stalnic slovenskega zgodovinskega spomina je gotovo t. i. stara Avstrija oziroma v njem izstopajoči habsburški vladarji – v splošni zavesti Franc Jožef in Marija Terezija – ter njihova monarhija. V zadnjem dobrem stoletju jo, potem ko je živela že pred njim, zaznamuje še habsburški državni konec. In prav odnosu do njegovega označevalca – Habsburžanov –, ki se je po letu 1918 razvil v slovenskem, jugoslovanškem in širšem mednarodnem okolju, se je v pričujočem delu posvetil prof. dr. Andrej Rahten.

V svojem delu o Slovencih in zadnjih 105 letih Habsburžanov ter v njihovem okviru življenju in delovanju prvorojenca zadnjega habsburškega vladarja Karla I. – Otta von Habsburga – nas avtor uvodoma spomni na proces razkrajanja njihove monarhije oktobra 1918 in znane besede dr. Antona Korošca:

»Veličanstvo, prepozno je. Usoda je že odločila!« Nato opozori na izvirne slovenske znanstvene monografije o treh politično najbolj izpostavljenih Habsburžanih v 20. stoletju – Francu Jožefu, Francu Ferdinandu in Karlu (Franc Jožef, ur. Gregor Antoličič. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2016; Andrej Rahten, *Prestolonaslednikova smrt: po sledih slovenskih interpretacij sarajevskega atentata*. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2013; Karel I.: *zadnji slovenski cesar*, ur. Gregor Antoličič. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2022) – in pojasni, da je njihovo slovensko dojetanje tematizirano tudi v njegovem delu, največ pozornosti pa je posvečeno zadnjemu cesarjeviču Ottu von Habsburgu. Umestil jo je v poglede slovenske politike in publicistike na dinastijo, ki je tako dolgo vladala na Slovenskem – v času, ki je sledil njihovem padcu s prestola.

Avtor nas v svojo obravnavo vpelje prek slovenskega avstrodinastičnega patriotizma, povezanega s Francem Jožefom, in označbe njegove politične podobe. Pokaže tudi na njegovo osebno življenje in različne kritične ocene cesarja v kasnejših zapisih slovenskih politikov in publicistov. A »vse do svoje smrti [je] ,zadnji monarh stare šole' v očeh Slovencev ohranil vtis discipliniranega, delovnega in narodom pravičnega vladarja«. Z letom 1918 se je to spremenilo. V dobi jugoslovanske države so ga risali v peklu. (38) Uveljavila se je tudi zmerljivka avstrijakant. Avtor pojasni, da izzvir iz italijanščine, pojavil pa se je v času habsburške uprave v predmarčni dobi, ko je Apeninski polotok zajel risorgimento. Šlo je za pejorativno oznako italijanskih uradnikov in predstavnikov družbenega življenja, ki so sodelovali z avstrijsko upravo. Zmerljivko, ki je bila do prve svetovne vojne večinoma omejena na primorski prostor, so prevzeli tudi v slovenščini. V širšem obsegu so jo začeli uporabljati neposredno pred koncem vojne. Vrhunec v političnih spopadih med slovenskimi strankami pa je dosegla v prvi polovici dvajsetih let 20. stoletja. Proti katoliški Slovenski ljudski stranki (SLS) so jo radi uporabljali liberalci, da bi na ta način odvzeli legitimnost njenim avtonomističnim zahtevam do Beograda. (53) Bila je tudi sestavni del liberalnega kulturnega boja proti katoliški strani.

Čeprav se je do poletja 1918 avstrodinastični patriotizem ohranil pri večini slovenskih politikov, je s prevratom 29. oktobra 1918 skoraj čez noč izpuhtel. »Demonizacija dinastije se je takoj po prevratu v slovenski javnosti močno razširila, pri čemer so vplivna glasila različnih političnih orientacij med sabo kar tekmovala, katero bo v svojih kritikah šlo dlje.« (57) V brošuri Habsburgovci: žalostne slike iz naše preteklosti, ki jo je leta 1919 izdala mladoliberalna Domovina, so se v zadnji kitici v njej objavljene pesmi zapisale tudi besede: »Sedaj je konec! V prah je prestol strtl, / kjer se šopiril je habsburški rod, / in kjer prej vladala je muka, smrt, / življenje novo zdaj – slavi svoj god.« (58) Navdihnile so tudi glavni naslov avtorjevega dela. Po omenjeni brošuri naj bi bila habsburška dinastija v bistvu drugo ime za vse zlo na svetu. (60) Avtor nam nato približa prizadevanja slovenske politične elite po nastanku Kraljevine SHS glede vprašanja, kako naj bo slovenstvo zastopano v simbolih nove države. To so postale celjske zvezde v jugoslovanskem grbu. Spomni tudi na vprašanje jugoslovanstva grofov Celjskih, tezo, ki so jo v zgodovinisju ovrgli. Nato predstavi medsebojno obtoževanje z avstrijakantstvom med liberalci in katoliškimi narodnjaki ter prilagoditev nekdanjih vidnih slavilcev Habsburžanov (Jakoba Dimnika, Antona Funtka) novim razmeram ob zamenjavi njihove dinastije s karađorđevićevo. Po prevratu so na Slovenskem Habsburžane zavrgli, v politiki ni bilo o tem nobenega dvoma. »Drugo vprašanje pa je, kakšna so bila intimna razmišljanja v slovenskih meščanskih krogih, ali pa, kako je sprememba dinastije sprejelo konservativno misleče prebivalstvo na podeželju.« (74)

Zdaj nas avtor seznanja z življenjem zadnjega habsburškega cesarja Karla in njegove družine v izgnanstvu na Madeiri, ki je sledilo njegovemu drugemu ponesrečenemu poizkusu vrnitve na ogrski prestol. S soprogo Zito je na otok prispel novembra 1921, na svečnico 1922 pa so se jima pridružili tudi otroci, med njimi Otto. Po Karlovi smrti

1. aprila 1922 je družina pod zaščito španskega kralja dobila zatočišče v Baskiji, kjer je Otto opravil avstrijski in madžarski gimnazijski program. Družina se v zavetju španske kraljevine ni umaknila z zgodovinskega odra. Kdor je to mislil, se je motil. »Četudi brez prestola, je še vedno predstavljala faktor, ki ga niso mogli zanemariti v nobeni od držav naslednic razpadle monarhije. In ne Ziti ne Ottu ambicij ni manjkalo.« (89) Sovpadale so z avstrijskim legitimističnim gibanjem in madžarskimi monarhisti. Od leta 1930 jih je poosebljal Otto von Habsburg, ki je s polnoletnostjo postal poglavar habsburške družine. Habsburška restavracijska težnja je v določeni meri vznemirjala politiko v državah naslednicah monarhije. Najbolj goreča nasprotnica habsburške restavracije je bila Jugoslavija, čeprav ni bila nikoli pomembna tarča habsburških legitimistov. Njihove restavracijske ambicije je nedvoumno zavračal načelnik SLS in vodilni slovenski politik v prvi Jugoslaviji dr. Anton Korošec, v slovenski publicistiki pa so Habsburžani ostali »neke vrste dežurni krivci, odgovorni tako za vse težave Slovencev v preteklosti kot tudi za prvo svetovno vojno«. (104)

Po gornjem prikazu avtor preide k rojstvu ideje, ki je kasneje globoko zaznamovala Ottovo življenjsko delo. Dobra pol leta po Karlovi smrti se je Richard Nikolaus grof Coudenhove-Kalergi na Dunaju zavzel za ustanovitev skupnosti evropskih držav – Panevropske. Evropske kontinentalne države (brez Velike Britanije in sovjetske Rusije) naj bi druga drugi jamčile nedotakljivost meja in sklenile defenzivno zvezo za varovanje skupne vzhodne meje in carinsko unijo. Združena Evropa bi tako stopila ob bok Veliki Britaniji, Rusiji, Ameriki in Aziji. Avtor predstavi delovanje panevropskega gibanja in opozori na sodelovanje slovenskih politikov (Antona Korošca, dr. Josipa Vilfana, dr. Engelberta Besednjaka) na njegovih kongresnih srečanjih. Predstavi tudi posamezne poglede na panevropsko gibanje na Slovenskem. Omenimo naj, da se je za Panevropo pred drugo svetovno vojno ogreval tudi zgodovinar Bogo Grafenauer. (116) Gibanje je imelo svoje predstavništvo tudi v Jugoslaviji. Predsednik častnega odbora Panevropske unije v kraljevini je bil več let Korošec. Avtor opozarja, da je bil Coudenhove-Kalergi odločen nasprotnik nacionalsocializma in vseh drugih oblik totalitarizmov (komunizma). Hitler ga je odkrito sovražil, enako tudi Otta von Habsburga. Oba je nacistična nevarnost povezala.

Preden se avtor posveti pogledom na vprašanje habsburške restavracije v mednarodnem okviru, svoje delo popestri z zgodbo pustolovca Alojza Novaka s Sv. Lenarta (danes Vrha) nad Laškim. Ta je leta 1934 z igranjem na habsburško karto v Avstriji in Nemčiji od več lahkovernežev pridobil finančna sredstva. Dokumente o Novakovih prevarah in burnem življenju je avtor pridobil v gradivu, ki ga je nedavno odkril v Avstrijskem državnem arhivu. Nato prikaže odzive na vprašanje restavracije. Poudari Hitlerjevo globoko zakoreninjeno sovraštvo do habsburške dinastije, ki je temeljilo v očitku, da ni bila sposobna zadržati propada svoje monarhije, Ottovo odklonilno stališče do Hitlerja ter stališči češkoslovaškega predsednika dr. Edvarda Beneša in predsednika jugoslovanske vlade dr. Milana Stojadinovića, da je bolje, če Avstrija izgine z zemljevida, kot da bi bila poligon za habsburška restavracijska prizadevanja. Strah pred obnovo habsburške monarhije je tudi po Hitlerjevemu prevzemu oblasti ostal

eden od glavnih veziv male antante. Misel o obnovi monarhije je bila tedaj še zelo živa. Po eni strani je o tem vse do leta 1935 razmišljal Mussolini, po drugi strani pa se je v povezavi z Ottom zanjo ogreval avstrijski kancler dr. Karl Schuschnigg. Bal pa se je, da bi taka politika lahko vodila k nacistični intervenciji. Anton Korošec je bil tedaj v protinacističnem krogu zagovornikov avstrijske državne samostojnosti. Ko je leta 1938 prišlo do anšlusa, je sprejel novo politično dejstvo. Je pa večina tedanje slovenske politike menila, da bo po anšlusu za Koroške Slovence bolj poskrbljeno, kot je bilo v avstrijski republiki. Očitno pa je »anšlus pomenil za nemške nacionaliste na Koroškem dobro priložnost, da nadaljujejo sistematično raznarodovalno delo, začeto po plebiscitu«. (167) Ob tem na Slovenskem niso pozabili ugotoviti, da je z anšlusom nastopil konec Habsburžanov. Otto je tedaj težišče svojega delovanja iz Belgije, kjer je družina bivala v tridesetih letih, prenesel v Pariz, ki je postal eno od glavnih središč avstrijske emigracije po anšlusu.

Otto von Habsburg je v Parizu navezal stike s številnimi francoskimi politikami in obnem v zahodnih medijih neumorno opozarjal na nevarnost, ki jo je Hitler predstavljal za Evropo in svet. Medtem so v nekdanji Avstriji razpustili vse monarhistične organizacije in pozapri njihove voditelje, enako pa tudi sinova v Sarajevu umorjenega Franca Ferdinanda – Ernsta in Maxa Hohenberga ter nekdanjega avstro-ogrskega poveljnika na ruski fronti nadvojvodo Josepha Ferdinanda. Otto je v Parizu srečal vidnega monarhista in protinacista pisatelja Josepha Rotha, v njegovem glasilu *Österreichische Post* pa je poleg britanskih politikov (in zgodovinarjev) Winstona Churchilla in Harolda Nicolsona sodeloval tudi Coudenhove-Kalergi. Panevropsko gibanje je s Hitlerjevimi pohodoma po evropskih državah ugašalo. Avtor opozori, da se je na Slovenskem ob začetku druge svetovne vojne povečalo zanimanje za Habsburžane. Med drugim je leta 1939 v mariborski *Edinosti* izšel članek, ki je bil redkost v slovenski publicistiki med vojnama. Članek *Mednarodna dinastija* je izstopal iz tedanje protihabsburške usmeritve. Njegov avtor je naklonjeno pisal o Ottu. Poudaril je, da velja za zelo skromnega človeka, čeprav pripada rodbini s sedemstoletno tradicijo. (189) Otto je ostal v Parizu do njegovega padca v nemške roke junija 1940, ko se je umaknil na Portugalsko. Pred tem je spomladi obiskal ZDA in se srečal s predsednikom Franklinom Delano Rooseveltom. Izselsko glasilo slovenskih delavcev v New Yorku *Glas naroda* je ob njegovem obisku poudarilo, da ne predstavlja nobene rešitve problemov v srednji Evropi, in mu odreklo vsako simpatijo. Julija 1940 se je Otto iz Lizbone umaknil v Ameriko. Sprejel je Rooseveltovo pobudo in se naselil v Washingtonu. Odpravil se je na turnejo po ZDA, kjer je opozoril nase s serijo odmevnih predavanj, na katerih je krepil mrežo poznanstev.

Otto von Habsburg je v Združenih državah ostal do konca oktobra 1944, ko je v Lizboni ponovno stopil na evropska tla. Med bivanjem v Ameriki je sprva verjel, da je pred njim neponovljiva zgodovinska priložnost – obnova podonavske monarhije. Zavzemal se je za federativno preureditev Podonavja, pri čemer naj bi združili dobre zglede nekdanjega mnogonarodnega imperija z načeli protihitlerjeve koalicije. Pri tem je bila implicite v igri možnost habsburške restavracije. Njegova prizadevanja za

ustanovitev podonavske federacije niso dobila zavezniške podpore. Pomembno pa je vplival na odločitev zaveznikov, da Avstriji vrnejo državnost v mejah pred anšlusom leta 1938. Avtor predstavi različne zamisli, ki so jih med vojno o prihodnji ureditvi v srednji in jugovzhodni Evropi preigrali v mednarodni politiki, in slovenska stališča o tem vprašanju. Slovenski politični prvaki v emigraciji so vztrajali pri jugoslovanski državni kontinuiteti – obnova habsburške monarhije ni predstavljala resne alternative. Enako so tudi slovenske izseljenske organizacije odklanjale Ottova restavracijska prizadevanja, proti zagovornikom obnove habsburške monarhije pa je uspešno lobil tudi izseljenski pisatelj Louis Adamič. Prav tako je bila vrnitev v habsburške čase nesprejemljiva za politike in intelektualce v okupirani Sloveniji. Doma in v tujini je v celotnem slovenskem političnem loku prevladoval jugoslovanski državni koncept.

Po vrnitvi v Evropo in koncu vojne se Ottu von Habsburgu ni posrečilo naseliti v Avstriji. Po nekajmesečnem bivanju na Tirolskem jo je januarja 1946 moral zapustiti. Spet je bil v izgnanstvu. Ponovno se je posvetil potovanjem in predavanjem. Poleg ZDA in Kanade je opravil številna potovanja po Afriki in Aziji. Povsod so ga sprejemali ugledni sogovorniki, večinoma iz državnega vrha, običajno suvereni. Misli o vrnitvi v srednjo Evropo ni opustil. Leta 1957 je dobil avstrijsko državljanstvo in potni list, a – ker se ni hotel odreči dednim vladarskim pravicam – brez pravice vstopa ali prehoda skozi Avstrijo. »Vsekakor je bil to eden od najvidnejših paradoksov v odnosih med republikanskimi oblastmi na Dunaju in nekdanjo dinastijo.« (229) Omejitev je temeljila na t. i. habsburškem zakonu iz leta 1919, ki ga je ohranila tudi Avstrijska državna pogodba iz leta 1955. Po tem zakonu je bila dinastija izgnana iz države in njeno imetje zaplenjeno. Zakon je članom dinastije prepovedoval vstop v Avstrijo, razen če bi se bili pripravljene odpovedati vladarskim zahtevam in se izjavili za lojalne republiški državni ureditvi. Avtor pristavlja, da bi takrat težko našli politika, »ki bi imel odprtih toliko vrat v številne kraljeve in predsedniške palače. Pravzaprav so mu bila zaprta zgolj ena – tista v Hofburg.« (Ibid.)

Otto von Habsburg je po lastnem pričevanju šele med bivanjem v ZDA »zares ugotovil«, da je njegova glavna identiteta evropska. (230) V obdobju po vojni je okrepil svoja prizadevanja za tesnejše povezovanje med evropskimi državami. S Coudenhove-Kalergijem je sooblikoval panevropsko gibanje, leta 1957 pa so ga izvolili za enega od podpredsednikov Panevropske unije. Vrednostni temelj evropskega povezovanja je videl v krščanstvu, saj se v družbi, ki zanika vero, lahko pojavijo ljudje, ki želijo sami postati bogovi, in tam je dovoljeno vse. Avtor opozarja, da so krščanski humanizem kot temelj evropskega združevanja poudarjali tudi v slovenski politični emigraciji, kjer so dosti razmišljali o evropski ideji (Ruda Jurčec). Čeprav se je Otto tedaj zavezal, da bo aktivno prispeval k širitvi panevropske ideje, je njegova prioriteta ostala Avstrija. Želel se je vrniti domov.

21. februarja 1958 je Otto dunajsko vlado seznanil, da priznava veljavne zakone avstrijske republike in se izreka za njenega zvestega državljana. Avtor prikaže, kako sta tedaj na njegova prizadevanja v zvezi z vrnitvijo domov opozorila dunajska dopisnika Slovenskega poročevalca in Ljudske pravice Jaka Štular in Drago Fras. Zadnji je v svoji

poglobljeni analizi ugotavljal, da realistično razmišljujoči v avstrijski politiki v Ottovi vrnitvi niso videli obnovitve časov stare Avstrije, ampak so menili, da bi s svojo prisotnostjo zgolj oživiljal zamisel o velikem geografskem prostoru, v katerem naj bi imela Avstrija koordinacijsko vlogo. (240) Otto se v domovino ni mogel vrniti tudi po tem, ko se je po rojstvu moškega potomca 11. januarja 1961, ki ga je po očetu poimenoval Karel in s polnim naslovom »nadvojvoda avstrijski«, 31. maja odrekel pripadnosti habsburško-lotarinski dinastiji, vsem zahtevam za vladanje in se izrekel za lojalnega državljana republike. Izjava je bila zanj ponižujoča – odreči se je moral članstvu v lastni družini. Vrnitev domov so mu preprečili socialisti in svobodnjaki, ki so v parlamentu preglasovali Avstrijsko ljudsko stranko (ALS) in dosegli, da so Otta von Habsburga razglasili za nezaželeno osebo. Socialisti so bili tedaj v vladni koaliciji z ALS, njihovo glasovanje pa je, kot je opozoril Fras, predstavljalo pomemben parlamentarni precedens v zgodovini druge republike. Prvič se je zgodilo, da je ena vladna stranka preglasovala drugo s pomočjo glasov opozicije. Avtor opozarja, da je svobodnjake tedaj vodil Friedrich Peter, nekdanji član SS – »vsaj (nekdanji) nacisti očitno niso pozabili Ottovega boja proti anšlusu«. (247) Poudari tudi, da je znotraj socialističnega tabora ravnanju svoje stranke nasprotoval zunanji minister Bruno Kreisky. »Zvest tradiciji svoje družine, je ohranil do dinastije, ki je veljala za zaščitnico judovskega prebivalstva, spoštljiv odnos. Podobno je veljalo tudi za Simona Wiesenthala, znamenitega lovca na nacistične zločince, ki se je prav tako zavzemal, naj se Habsburgu dovoli vrnitev.« (248)

Otto je pravico, da obišče domovino, prvič izkoristil leta 1966, ko se je večkrat napotil v Avstrijo, šele tri leta kasneje pa je obiskal Dunaj. Sicer je živel tradicionalno družinsko življenje in se posvečal predvsem politiki in publicistiki. Rad je poslušal Gershwinov jazz, njegov priljubljeni literarni junak je bil agent FBI Lemmy Caution izpod peresa britanskega pisca Petra Cheyneyja, filmski pa James Bond. Všeč so mu bili tudi vesterni. »Čeprav je po prestižu veljal za številko ena evropskega plemstva, ni bil njegov tipičen predstavnik, saj mu je bil uživaški način življenja tuj. Ko so ga vprašali, zakaj ne nastopa na aristokratski sceni, je odvrnil: ‚Predvsem imam pomembnejše delo, pa tudi nobene zveze nimam s to družbo, nikoli je nisem imel. [...] Tako izgubljena je. To ni nič globokega, je izguba časa. Čas pa je vendar najpomembnejše, kar imamo v življenju.‘« (250)

Kot eden od ključnih zagovornikov evropske integracije je Otto von Habsburg leta 1973 prevzel vodenje panevropskega gibanja. »Restavracijskih načrtov v javnosti ni več omenjal.« (275) Preden nas avtor seznanj z njegovim prevzemom vodenja gibanja, svoj pogled upre še na odklonilna stališča prvakov koroških Slovencev do habsburške restavracije med vojnama in slovenske politične emigracije po drugi vojni ter na znano zamisel »vmesne« Evrope (Intermarija) dr. Lamberta Ehrlicha iz leta 1941. Dragoceno je njegovo opozorilo na stik mladega koroškega razumnika, kasnejšega zgodovinarja, Feliksa J. Bistra s Habsburgom v petdesetih letih 20. stoletja. Ustavi se tudi pri odstranjevanju habsburških simbolov na Slovenskem po prvi vojni, od »habsburških ostankov« pa posebej opozori na Karlov prestol iz leta 1564, stol, ki

so ga kranjski deželni stanovi tega leta izdelali za poklonitveno ceremonijo nadvojvode Karla II. Notranjeavstrijskega. Danes ga hrani Narodni muzej Slovenije. Ob desetletja trajajočem brisanju habsburških simbolov iz slovenske zgodovinske zavesti je bila njegova ohranitev »nedvomno pravi mali čudež«. (274) Prestol lahko vidimo na naslovnici monografije.

Po prevzemu panevropskega gibanja je Otto von Habsburg leta 1979 na listi bavarske Krščansko socialne unije – v svoji vili »Austria« je od leta 1954 živel v Pöckingu na Bavarskem in leta 1979 pridobil nemško državljanstvo – kandidiral za Evropski parlament in postal evropski poslanec. Deloval je v tem okviru, verjetno pa bo držalo, »da Otta hrepenenje po habsburškem prestolu ni nikoli povsem zapustilo«. (278) V času po odpovedi prestolu pa je doživel marsikatero zadošččenje. Gotovo je to bila demokratizacija komunistične Evrope sredi osemdesetih let, ki jo je spremljala oživitev srednjeevropske ideje.

Kot odličnega poznavalca habsburške skupnosti je avtorja srednjeevropska ideja seveda vseskozi zanimala. To vidimo v posebnem poglavju, v katerem opozori na slovensko gledanje nanjo konec osemdesetih (Drago Jančar) in v začetku devetdesetih let 20. stoletja (dr. Peter Vodopivec, Viktor Blažič), na pisce, ki so se v postimperalni dobi vračali v habsburški čas (Joseph Roth, Franz Werfel, Stefan Zweig, Franz Theodor Csokor, Friedrich Schreyvogel, Robert Musil), njihove slovenske prevajalce (Angela Vode, Maila Golob), slovenske prevode literature o Habsburžanih in njihove zgodovinske obravnave (dr. France Martin Dolinar, dr. Vasilij Melik, ddr. Jože Maček, dr. Vekoslav Grmič) ter spreminjanje okostenelih vrednostnih pogledov na monarhijo v zgodovino (Melik).

Avtor se nato prestavi v politično Slovenijo konec osemdesetih in v začetku devetdesetih let. Spomni na prelomni nastop dr. Franceta Bučarja v Evropskem parlamentu 20. januarja 1988, ki je bil za »evropske parlamentarce opozorilo, da se želi slovenski narod po štirih desetletjih bivanja na vzhodni strani železne zavesne vrniti v demokratično Evropo skupaj z ostalimi jugoslovanskimi narodi ali tudi brez njih, če slednji tja ne bi hoteli«. (306) Tedaj se je izoblikovalo trajno zavezništvo med Ottom von Habsburgom in Bučarjem. Bučar je v naslednjih treh letih skupaj z drugimi razumniki iz Slovenske demokratične zveze pomembno prispeval k slovenski osamosvojitvi iz jugoslovanskega okvira. Poleg tega je s svojimi evropskimi povezavami, ki jih je vzpostavil ob obisku Strasbourga, deloval v smeri čimprejšnjega mednarodnega priznanja slovenske države. Pri tem je imelo pomembo vlogo zlasti lobistično omrežje panevropskega gibanja. S Habsburgom je stike vzdrževal tudi jugoslovanski generalni konzul v Strasbourgu, nekdanji dopisnik Dela iz Pariza in Rima, Andrej Novak. Novak je bil verjetno tudi prvi slovenski novinar, ki je opravil intervju z nekdanjim cesarjevičem. Ta mu je predstavil svoj politični profil, pri čemer je poudaril, da se ne želi opredeljevati po klasičnih strankarskih kategorijah: »Rekel bi, da ima liberalizem veliko odlik, imam pa se za precej konservativnega. Konservativizem ima veliko dobrih plati, vendar mislim, da človek predvsem ne sme biti preveč doktrinaren. Imeti pa mora določena načela, to pa so predvsem načela osebne svobode, svobode naravnih

skupin znotraj širše skupnosti. Rekel bi torej, da spoštujem konservativno liberalno dediščino.« (304–305)

V tem času se je dojemanje Otta von Habsburga v slovenski javnosti začelo spreminjati. Nenaklonjene članke so zamenjala nevtralna poročila (mag. Bojan Grobovšek). In medtem ko je nesojeni jugoslovanski kralj Aleksander Karađorđević v Londonu še vedno sanjal o prestolu, je Otto po demokratični spremembi aprila 1990 januarja 1991 obiskal Ljubljano. Kot predsednik prve demokratično izvoljene skupščine ga je sprejel Bučar. V svojem skupščinskem nastopu je Otto von Habsburg poudaril pravico Slovenije do neodvisnosti. Slovenijo je nato obiskal še aprila in julija 1991, januarja 1992, marca in septembra 1993, februarja 2000 ter maja 2002, 2004 in 2006. Slovenija, s katero ga je povezovala osebna vez – bil je imejitelj in častni polkovnik znamenitega ljubljanskega 17. pehotnega polka, ki so mu ga dodelili kot prestolonasledniku –, je bila v njegovem političnem pogledu. Medtem je v devetdesetih letih v Evropskem parlamentu predložil tudi resolucijo o zaščiti lipicancev. Na skrb za lipicance ga je ob njegovem obisku Nove revije 18. februarja 2000 spomnil tudi pesnik, dramatik, esejist, prevajalec in mladinski pisatelj prof. dr. Boris A. Novak.

Otto von Habsburg se je v obdobju razpadanja Jugoslavije močno zavzel za slovensko in hrvaško osamosvojitve, v okviru panevropskega gibanja pa si je neumorno prizadeval, da bi Slovenija in Hrvaška vstopili v Evropsko unijo. Tu avtor pristavlja, da je Otto srednjeevropske monarhistične ambicije »že dolgo nazaj zamenjal za evropsko idejo, vendar to ne pomeni, da ni občasno zavestno igral tudi na karto zgodovinske povezanosti narodov v Podonavju«. (311) Kot predsednik Mednarodne panevropske unije se je udeležil ustanovnega zбора Slovenskega panevropskega gibanja 27. januarja 1992 na Bledu, kjer so za njegovega predsednika izvolili Franceta Bučarja.

Avtor nato spremlja nadaljnjo pot Otta von Habsburga in članov njegove hiše. Opozori na beatifikacijo njegovega očeta Karla leta 2004, »zadoščenje, ki je na neki način kompenziralo tudi vse poraze in razočaranja na njegovi dolgi politični poti«. (318) Poudari tudi Habsburgovo vizionarsko oceno Vladimirja Putina, ki jo je podal kmalu po njegovem prevzemu oblasti. »Kdor pozna preteklost tega človeka,« je dejal, »mora biti zaskrbljen. Ljudem je morda všeč, da se lepo oblači, je vljuden in govori tuje jezike. Pozabljajo pa, da ga je KGB za delo, ki ga opravlja zdaj, pripravljalo zelo dolgo. Devet let je bil na čelu KGB v Nemčiji. To ni ravno pomirjujoč podatek.« (320–321) Avtor opozori še na enega Habsburga iz začetka 21. stoletja – Ulricha Habsburg-Lothringena iz toskanske veje dinastije. Še danes živi v neposrednem sosedstvu Slovenije na avstrijskem Koroškem. Ulrich si je v Avstriji želel po sodni poti izboriti pravico do predsedniške kandidature. Po neuspehu pred avstrijskim sodiščem in potjo v Strasbourg je avstrijska narodna skupščina leta 2011 zadostila njegovi zahtevi. Vendar je zamudil kandidaturo na predsedniških volitvah leto poprej. »Prepozno je bilo tudi za nekdanjega cesarjeviča, ki je umrl prav v letu, ko so avstrijske parlamentarne stranke izpolnile njemu sicer nikoli izpolnjeno željo, da bi lahko podpora ljudstva preizkusil na demokratičnih volitvah v svoji domovini.« (327) Naj opozorimo še na očitek Ulricha Habsburg-Lothringena, ki ga je zaradi prepovedi pasivne volilne pravice

članom dinastije leta 2002 izrekel v pismu Alexandru Van der Bellenu, zveznemu govorniku avstrijskih Zelenih, stranke, ki ji je pripadal. »Zdelo se mu je nesprejemljivo, da naj bi se [Van der Bellen – op. J. P.] kot politik Zelenih zavzemal za človekove pravice imigrantov, preganjanih, beguncev in tujcev, medtem ko je njegova lastna družina v domovini tarča diskriminacije.« (326)

Politično slovo nesojenega habsburškega monarha je potekalo postopoma. Leta 1999 je odložil mandat evropskega poslanca, pet let kasneje pa je odstopil s položaja predsednika Mednarodne panevropske unije. Odstopil je v letu velike širitve EU z desetimi članicami iz srednje Evrope, baltske regije in Sredozemlja. Na zgodovinski dan, 1. maja 2004, je bil glavni gost na slavnostni akademiji Slovenskega panevropskega gibanja v Gornji Radgoni. Dogajanja, povezana s Slovenijo, je še vedno poznal. O tem – vprašanju slovensko-hrvaške razmejitve – ga je seznanil France Bučar, s katerim si je dopisoval v letih 2007 in 2008. Njemu je med Slovenci vse do smrti tudi najbolj zaupal.

Habsburgova smrt 4. julija 2011 je odmevala po vsem svetu. Avtor prikaže odzive nanjo v tujini in doma. Zlasti v ZDA so poudarjali njegovo protinacistično dejavnost in opozorila na stalinistično nevarnost. Doma pa si ga je kljub demoniziranju in norčevanju, ki mu je bila desetletja izpostavljena njegova družina v slovenski politiki in publicistiki v postimperialni dobi, večina na koncu zapomnila predvsem kot – »prijaznega gospoda«. (342)

Ob Ottovi smrti avtor potegne črto pod njegovo politično udejstvovanje. Šlo je za kariero vzponov in padcev, pri čemer so prevladovali slednji. »Tisto, za kar so ga kot cesarjeviča vzgajali že od malih nog, je namreč ostalo nedosegljivo.« (332) Ironija zgodovine pa je bila, da je edino resno priložnost za uresničitev njegovih monarhističnih sanj ustvaril prav njegov največji idejnopolitični nasprotnik – Hitler. »Ta je sicer leta 1938 z zemljevida brezobzirno zbrisal njuno skupno domovino, a nato v naslednjih letih povsem razmontiral versajsko ureditev. Na njenih ruševinah je za trenutek zasejal žarek upanja tudi za habsburško vrnitev, kar je Otto začutil in se spretno zavihtel v bližino Roosevelta, enega od treh ključnih mož kasneje zmagovite protihitlerjanske koalicije. Toda izkazalo se je, da simpatije ameriškega predsednika niso mogle odtehtati brutalne moči Stalinovega imperija, ki je po drugi svetovni vojni pogoltnil tudi velik del nekdanje habsburške monarhije.« (333) Kar zadeva Habsburgov projekt vračanja v Avstrijo po vojni, ki naj bi »navadnemu državljanu« Ottu omogočilo, da si po demokratičnih pravilih izbori vodilno vlogo v državi, pa z današnje perspektive deluje bolj kot poskus iz obupa. »Pri Ottu je poleg pregovornega optimizma namreč mogoče zaznati tudi precejšnje precenjevanje njegovega dejanskega političnega vpliva, kar je bila gotovo posledica dolgoletnega življenja v emigraciji, ko je vzdrževal večinoma stike zgolj z enako mislečimi lojalisti.« Habsburška karta po letu 1945 ni bila več v nobeni od takratnih notranjepolitičnih kombinacij del resne politične igre. (Ibid.) Tu naj navedemo še zanimiv Habsburgov odgovor na vprašanje Andreja Novaka v njegovem že omenjenem intervjuju. Na vprašanje, ali je osebno monarhist, je dejal: »Nisem ne monarhist ne republikanec, ker mislim, da je to vprašanje državne ureditve.

Bistvena funkcija države je zagotoviti varnost državljanov, pravni red, osebne svobode. To najdemo tako v nekaterih monarhijah kot v nekaterih republikah. « – »Gre za to, ali ljudstvo sprejema politični sistem, in ni govora, da bi se bilo treba spraševati, ali bo ta sistem trajal ali ne.« (330)

Svojo pretehtano in hevristično odlično izpeljano obravnavo, utemeljeno v širokem poznavanju relevantne literature, publicistike in zgodovinskih virov, avtor zaključuje z razmislekom o slovenskem odnosu do preteklosti. Opozarja na nesprejemljivo izključevanje preteklosti iz zgodovinskega spomina v različnih obdobjih, ko ta ni sovpadala z novim časom. Takemu nasilju nad zgodovino se upira, pri vprašanju Habsburgov pa ga hrabri dejstvo, da smo danes, po prvem valu povečanega zanimanja za habsburško dobo v osemdesetih letih 20. stoletja, priča novemu. V zgodovinopisju to kažejo nova znanstvena dela, ki so rezultat večletnega sistematičnega raziskovanja. Avtor si želi, da se bo spodbuda za bolj poglobljeno vrednotenje slovenskega sobivanja in soočanja s habsburško dinastijo v prihodnosti vendarle krepila. Njegov bistveni poudarek je, »da je bila habsburška monarhija tudi država Slovencev«. (364) Napačno bi bilo »zreducirati obstoj habsburške monarhije kot zgolj na vladarsko posest neke dinastije, kakor tudi ta ni bila samo avstrijska, ampak je imela že od časov Svetega rimskega cesarstva dalje tudi širše (srednje)evropsko poslanstvo. Habsburžani so bili v monarhični Avstriji legalna in legitimna dinastija, Slovenci pa so historično in državnopravno spadali pod njeno oblast, čeprav so jo v postimperialni dobi politiki in publicisti razglasili za ‚tujoj‘. Slovenci so bili avstrijski državljani in aktiven del avstrijskega političnega življenja, kar bodo težko zanikali še tako goreči zagovorniki teze o ‚ječi narodov‘.« Slovenska politična nacija je nastala kot plod prizadevanj slovenskih narodnih voditeljev in razumnikov iz časa habsburške monarhije. (365) »Habsburški prestol je res ostal strt v prahu«, na koncu svojega dela zapiše avtor. »A to ne bi smela biti ovira za vsestransko vrednotenje slovenskega doživetja nekdanje dinastije v postimperialni dobi, ki sega tudi preko starih floskul o ‚ječi narodov‘ in ‚gnili monarhiji‘. Tajiti ali prikrajati zgodovinsko vlogo vladarjev je seveda možno nekaj časa, nikakor pa ne večno. Pa naj bodo z Dunaja, iz Beograda ali Kumrovcov.« (366–367)

Prof. dr. Andrej Rahten je slovensko zgodovinopisje obogatil še z enim odličnim delom. V prah strti prestol zaključuje njegovo trilogijo o Slovencih in Habsburžanih ob koncu monarhije (Od Majniške deklaracije do habsburške detronizacije: slovenska politika v času zadnjega habsburškega vladarja Karla. Celje: Celjska Mohorjeva družba, 2016) in o slovensko-avstrijskih razhajanjih po njej (Po razpadu skupne države: slovensko-avstrijska razhajanja od mariborskega prevrata do koroškega plebiscita. Celjska Mohorjeva družba – Mohorjeva družba Celovec – Goriška Mohorjeva družba: Celje – Celovec – Gorica, 2020) še s slovenskimi in mednarodnimi vrednostnimi pogledi na Habsburžane po njihovi ugasli môči. Delo je napisal v opazno spretne slogu s pritegujočo zgradbo besedila, iz katere se vidi njegova splošna kulturna razgledanost. V knjigi prikaže tudi vrsto podrobnosti v mednarodnem, avstrijskem in slovenskem dogajanju zadnjih dobrih sto let, zgodovino ene najstarejših evropskih rodbin pa tehtno prenese še v dočerajšnji čas. Delo ponuja v precejšnji meri še ne

videno slikovno gradivo, med drugim fotografije avtorja z Ottom von Habsburgom in njune korespondence, saj ga je kot član panevropskega gibanja osebno poznal. Slovenci imamo sedaj svoj in v srednjeevropskem prostoru redke izvirne monografski prispevek o za marsikoga zanimivi usodi, življenju in delu prvorojenca zadnjega habsburškega vladarja.

Jurij Perovšek

Barbara Damjan, Filip Dougan, Primož Premzl, Herman Pušnik in Alenka Šelih (ur.), Nepozabljena Klasična gimnazija Maribor.
Maribor: Umetniški kabinet Primož Premzl, 2023, 560 str.



Spominski zborniki, s katerimi ustanova, bodisi izobraževalna ali raziskovalna bodisi podjetniška ali uradniška, obeleži takšen ali drugačen jubilej svojega delovanja, so na Slovenskem že uveljavljena tradicija. Te zbornike, v katerih je običajno popisana zgodovina posamezne ustanove in kjer so zbrane fotografije in pričevanja, v resnici kasneje prebira le malokdo, razen oseb, povezanih z dotično ustanovo, in kakšnega zgodovinarja. Marsikateremu izdajatelju je pomembnejše, da ima zbornik reprezentativen videz, tako da lahko služi kot protokolarno darilo, in bralec pogosto dobi občutek, da so zborniki nastali bolj iz občutka dolžnosti, da ob obletnici nekaj nastane, kot pa zaradi iskrenega

veselja do raziskovanja preteklosti lastne ustanove. Zaradi tega je prijetno v roke dobiti zbornik, kjer je že od prve strani jasno, da je nastal z ljubečo zagretostjo cele skupine ljudi.

Zajeten zbornik *Nepozabljena Klasična gimnazija Maribor* na 560 straneh je takšen projekt. Vpogled v kolofon pokaže, da so vanj vključena besedila 151 avtorjev, tako pokojnih kot še živčih. Avtorji besedil so skušali na karseda privlačen način prikazati zgodovino mariborske klasične gimnazije od njenih začetkov leta 1758 do ukinitve leta 1959, ki je od leta 1892 domovala na današnji Mladinski ulici 9. Uvodni zapisi pojasnjujejo, da se je ideja za monografijo rodila leta 2020 v pogovoru med pravico dr. Alenko Šelih in ravnateljem Prve gimnazije Maribor – svojevrstne duhovne naslednice klasične gimnazije – Hermanom Pušnikom. Kljub omejitvam koronskega časa se je projekt razširil na obilico sodelavcev, ki so radi pristopili na pomoč s podatki, prispevki, spomini in fotografijami. Priprava zbornika je obsegala veliko raziskovalnega

dela v štajerskih arhivih in knjižnicah, ki je razkrilo marsikateri podatek, še neobjavljen v dosedanjih raziskavah.

Uvodnim mislim sledi zgodovinski pregled delovanja klasične gimnazije. Odpira ga članek o njenem delovanju do konca prve svetovne vojne, ki ga je v šestdesetih letih spisal Jan Šedivý. V prispevku v ospredje postavlja slovenske narodnozavedne tendence med gimnazijskimi dijaki in profesorji, prisotne v času po pomladi narodov, in poudarja, da so se tudi nemški dijaki za časa Avstro-Ogrske množično udeleževali neobveznega tečaja slovenščine. Zaradi številnih slovensko obarvanih projektov je bila gimnazija po Šedivýjevi oceni slovensko kulturno žarišče za Spodnjo Štajersko, tudi če jo je nemška skupnost skušala omejevati in ovirati. Gimnazijci so se izkazali tudi na nekaterih nepričakovanih področjih, med drugim kot abstinenti, saj so se pridno pridruževali protialkoholnemu gibanju, ter kot ustanovitelji mariborske mestne knjižnice. Pregled nadaljuje Drago Potočnik s statistično obravnavo medvojnega obdobja, ko je število nemških dijakov upadlo in je narasel delež primorskih emigrantov, čas druge svetovne vojne, ki jo je zaznamovala ponovna germanizacija šole, pa predstavljata poročilo Ivana Mravljaka in seznam gimnazijskih knjig, uničenih med vojno. Težišče poglavja je povojna doba, ki jo kritično pretresa več prispevkov. Prispevek Jureta Mačka tematizira obdobje do reforme v šolskem letu 1957/58, ko je v novem političnem sistemu klasična gimnazija postala preveč meščansko elitistična, zato jo je skušala oblast širše odpreti tudi delavskim in kmečkim množicam. Med mariborsko gimnazijo, ki v to ni hotela privoliti, in oblastjo so nastale tudi politične napetosti, ker je eden od profesorjev na Prešernovi proslavi leta 1946 izražal kritiko sistema ter govoril o nekdanjih dijakih, ki so padli v nemški uniformi. Potekal je postopek defašizacije v obliki odstranjevanja vseh, ki so kakorkoli sodelovali z okupatorjem, prav tako pa so nadzorovali tiste, ki so izkazali naklonjenost do katoliške cerkve. Po raznih tehtanjih, polemikah in sporih je bila gimnazija avgusta 1959 ukinjena. Težavne odnose med gimnazijo in socialistično oblastjo dodatno osvetljuje šolnik Janez Pastar skozi problematiko kaznovanja ideološko deviantnih dijakov leta 1952. Med desetertico teh dijakov so bili tudi Jože Pučnik, Polde Bibič in Peter Božič. Njihov »zločin« je bilo oblikovanje skrivnega literarnega krožka, ki je prav tako ilegalno izdajal glasilo *Iskanja*, kritično do oblasti. Kratkemu intermezzu Braneta Senegačnika o pesmih v ilegalni reviji sledi še en Pastarjev prispevek o ideji samostojne Slovenije, kot se je med gimnazijskimi dijaki Prve gimnazije Maribor, potem ko so bili premeščeni z ukinjene klasične gimnazije, pojavljala že na začetku šestdesetih let, kar je povzročilo nov alarm pri oblastnih strukturah. Sledita še faksimile arhivskega dokumenta, v katerem zgodovinar Metod Mikuž ob rob maturi leta 1954 razmišlja o funkciji klasičnih gimnazij v družbi in o tem, kdo bi se moral na njih šolati, ter ponatis prispevka iz leta 1959, ki ga je napisal Bogo Teplý in predstavlja še en oris zgodovine gimnazije s poudarkom na znanih dijakih. Poglavje zaključuje statistični prispevek Romana Mirnika z analizo tedenskega števila učnih ur latinščine po drugi svetovni vojni.

Tretje poglavje je pravzaprav leksikon štirih ravnateljev in 28 profesorjev ter profesorice Klasične gimnazije Maribor, ki so se s svojimi dosežki in zaslugami zapisali v

slovensko zgodovino. Vsak dvostranski prispevek je opremljen s portretom osebnosti, besedilo pa ponudi biografski očrt s poudarjenimi najpomembnejšimi področji delovanja – in seveda časom, ko so osebe ravnateljemale ali poučevale na mariborski gimnaziji. Med njimi so tudi posamezniki, ki jih poznamo iz štajerske kulture in politike, med njimi Božidar Raič, dr. Janko Pajk, dr. Karel Verstovšek, Janko Glazer, dr. Franc Sušnik, dr. Milan Grošelj, dr. Helena Gizela Stupan in Anton Ingolič. Četrto poglavje se po istem vzorcu nadaljuje s pregledom znamenitih dijakov Klasične gimnazije Maribor; dokumentiranih jih je 116. Pred bralcem se razkriva galerija znanih in manj znanih imen oseb, ki so v Mariboru, na Štajerskem, na Slovenskem in v tujini zaznamovale številna področja: književnost (Stanko Vraz, dr. Jakob Sket, dr. Makso Šnuderl, dr. Bratko Kreft, Edvard Kocbek, Kajetan Kovič), jezikoslovje in literarno zgodovino (dr. Franc Miklošič, dr. Karol Glaser, dr. Matija Murko, dr. Fran Ilešič, dr. France Kidrič, dr. Joža Glonar, dr. Anton Slodnjak, dr. Jože Toporišič), filozofijo (dr. France Veber, dr. Anton Trstenjak), politiko (Andreas Tappeiner, dr. Ivan Žolger, dr. Anton Korošec, Ciril Žebot), vojsko (Wilhelm von Tegetthoff), pedagogiko (Henrik Schreiner), glasbo (Hugo Wolf) in druga. Po statistiki, predstavljeni v uvodu zbornika, je bilo med profesorji in dijaki gimnazije 29 akademikov, osem univerzitetnih rektorjev ter deset pokrajinskih, ministrskih ali vladnih predsednikov.

V petem poglavju je zbranih 54 pričevanj nekdanjih profesorjev, profesorice, dijakov in dijakin klasične gimnazije, od katerih so jih večino (za obdobje po drugi svetovni vojni) zbrali uredniki zbornika, nekaj pa je poobjavljenih pričevanj iz spominov že preminulih oseb. Raznolika pričevanja večkrat tematizirajo napete nemško-slovenske odnose v Mariboru, politične razkole znotraj slovenskega tabora, profesorje, ki so pustili globok vtis, težave in ovire v izobraževalnem procesu, opise izvenšolskih dejavnosti, kot je udarniško delo, ter začetke ukvarjanja s področjem, ki jih je kasneje proslavilo. Kakopak pričevanja vsebujejo tudi kopico anekdot iz šolskih klopi. Na koncu je vključenih tudi nekaj pričevanj nekdanjih dijakin in dijaka Prve gimnazije Maribor.

Zbornik se zaključuje s šestim poglavjem, ki obsega pravzaprav samo kratek zapis Roberta Čepona o pomenu poznavanja grško-rimske antike za razumevanje časa, v katerem živimo, ki kot nekakšen *credo* zaključuje zbornik s sporočilom, da poznavanje antike pomaga pri razumevanju, da obstajajo alternative našim lastnim potem tukaj in zdaj.

Še posebej pri celotni knjigi razveseljuje kakovost njenega tiska in oblikovanja. Založnik, mariborski domoznanski zbiratelj in galerist Primož Premzl, je, tako kot že pri svojih prejšnjih monografijah, skupaj z oblikovalcem Matjažem Wenzlom poskrbel za doseganje najvišjih standardov. Reprodukcije fotografij, razglednic, umetniških slik in dokumentov ter člankov so kakovostne, razporeditev slik in besedila na posameznih straneh je igrivo inovativna, pa tudi raznolike tipografske rešitve za naslove, mednaslove, vmesne citate in glavno besedilo so atraktivne. Bralec dobi občutek, da brska po živopisni starodavni kroniki, ki jo je kronist začinil z izrezki, fotografijami in pripisi na robu.

Nepozabljena Klasična gimnazija Maribor je zbornik, ki bo pač najzanimivejši nekdanjim dijakom klasične gimnazije ter Mariborčanom nasploh, vendar tudi nedomačini iz dela izvemo marsikaj novega, ker lahko služi kot nekakšen mariborski »kdo je

kdo« – galerija tako rekoč vseh pomembnih Mariborčanov 19. in 20. stoletja, saj se je le redkokdo izognil šolanju na gimnaziji. Zaradi zajetnega obsega in množice sodelavcev je mogoče oprostiti peščico tipkarskih napak. Zbornik je zato mogoče razglasiti za ponosen pomnik zgodovinskega pomena klasične gimnazije v mestu ob Dravi.

Ivan Smiljanić

Mateja Čoh Kladnik in Jelka Piškurić, Kazen naj obsojenca prevzgoji. Kazenske ustanove v Ljubljani in okolici, 1945–1954.

Ljubljana: Študijski center za narodno spravo, 2024, 326 str.



Znanstvena monografija avtoric Mateje Čoh Kladnik in Jelke Piškurić je izvirni prikaz izgrajevanja kazenskih ustanov v Ljubljani in okolici po koncu druge svetovne vojne, ko je okupatorsko nasilje nadomestilo komunistično nasilje proti vsem nasprotnikom.

Že platnica knjige nam vzbudi občutek tesnobe nad dejstvom, da konec vojne ni pomenil tudi konec zaporov, mučenj, zasliševanj v podzemnih zaporih in drugih temnih prostorih, pozabljenih od sveta, vse z namenom prevzgoje v »človeka novega kova«, kot lahko preberemo že na samem začetku monografije. Glavni namen kazni je bila torej prevzgoja obsojenca v duhu predanosti domovini in v pravem odnosu do družbe, države in dela.

Notranjost platnice nas sooči z dejstvom, da so se po, danes prijetnih lokacijah za sprehode po Ljubljani, nahajale v obravnavanem obdobju tajne lokacije, Centralni zapor Ozne/Udbe, Kazensko poboljševalni zavod/Kazensko poboljševalni dom, taborišča in delovišča. Spomin nanje je s časom zbledel, ali pa sploh ni bil v zavesti ljudi. Pričujoča monografija nas vedno znova spominja, naj se ta del slovenske zgodovine s spoštovanjem zasidra v zavest ljudi.

Monografija temelji na arhivskem gradivu, pri čemer avtorici izpostavljata poročila kazenskega zavoda v Ljubljani v gradivu organov za izvrševanje kazenskih sankcij, poročila državne varnosti in gradivo uprave za organizacijo in kadre, dokumente o zgodovini organov za notranje zadeve, ki se nanašajo na delovanje državne varnosti ter gradivo Republiškega sekretariata za notranje zadeve (RSNZ), ki se hrani v mikrofilmih (serija III). Na podlagi spominske literature in pričevanj avtorici prikazeta bivanjske razmere v kazenskih ustanovah, na deloviščih in ravnanje z obsojenci. Avtorji

spominskih zapisov so predvsem izobraženci (npr. Angela Vode, Ljubo Sirc), ostali so zapustili le nekaj spominskih zapisov in pričevanj.

Pred podrobnim prikazom kazenskih ustanov v Sloveniji, monografija prikaže nastanek in organizacijo organov za notranje zadeve na slovenskem ozemlju, katerega začetek sega v čas druge svetovne vojne. Zvezno ministrstvo za notranje zadeve si je po koncu vojne prizadevalo, da bi od vojaških oblasti in Ozne prevzelo v upravljanje vsa taborišča in zapore. Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve LRS je upravo nad posameznimi kazenskimi zavodi in taborišči prevzelo v začetku septembra 1945. To so bili: jetnišnici v Ljubljani in Novem mestu, kaznilnica v Mariboru, taborišča v Bresternici, na Studencih, Teharjah in v Kočevju ter sodni zapori v Mariboru. V tistem obdobju je bilo v omenjenih zavodih priprtih 2918 oseb. Bivanjske razmere so bile izredno slabe. Vzdrževanje kazenskih zavodov v prvih letih po vojni je bil velik problem, zaradi splošnega pomanjkanja. V ta namen je bil sicer oblikovan poseben sklad, ki ga je upravljalo ministrstvo za notranje zadeve.

V poročilu o delu ministrstva za notranje zadeve za obdobja od 12. maja do 15. oktobra 1945 je bilo med drugim poudarjeno, da se nad obsojencem pri »prevzgoji« ne sme izvajati fizičnega nasilja niti poniževati njegovo dostojanstvo. Že v nadaljevanju monografija prikaže, da se to določilo v praksi ni izvajalo. Poleg slabe oskrbe je za prvo povojno desetletje značilno samovoljno ravnanje pazniškega osebja z obsojenci. Član politbiroja CKKPJ in načelnik zvezne Uprave državne varnosti (Udba) Aleksandar Ranković je sicer v svojem referatu z naslovom Za nadaljnjo krepitev pravosodja in zakonitosti označil razmere v zaporih in ravnanje z zaprtimi kot »humane«.

V kazenskih ustanovah, to je kazensko poboljševalnih zavodih/domovih in na njihovih posestvih, v taboriščih in na deloviščih, v okrožnih in okrajnih zaporih, so obsojeni prestajali kazni prisilnega, poboljševalnega in družbeno koristnega dela. Omenjene kazni so do začetka 50. let izrekli vojaška in civilna sodišča ter upravni organi. V začetku 50. let je pričel veljati Kazenski zakonik. Kazenske predpise monografija predstavi v poglavju Predpisi o izrekanju in izvrševanju kazni.

Poglavje Zapori državne varnosti v Ljubljani je po moji oceni najbolj pretresljiv del monografije, ki posega v podzemlje Centralnih zaporov Ozne. Centralni zapori so bili preiskovalni zapori za tiste, ki so bili osumljeni političnih kaznivih dejanj. Ena od poglavitnih nalog državne varnosti je bila spremljanje političnih nasprotnikov, njeno delo pa je potekalo v tajnosti. Skupna točka med javno varnostjo, ki jo je predstavljala milica, in državno varnostjo oz. Ozno/Udbo pa je bilo vodstvo kriminalistično-obveščevalne službe. V centralnih zaporih naj bi poleg preiskovalnih obstajali tudi tajni zapori. V njih naj bi bili do usmrtnitve zaprti tudi nekateri na smrt obsojeni na dachauskih procesih.

Vodstvo Ozne za Slovenijo se je po prihodu v Ljubljano 10. maja 1945 naselilo v stavbo, v kateri je imela pred vojno svoje prostore banka Slavija, med vojno pa je bil v njej sedež Gestapa. Z Ozno se je v Slavijo vselila tudi sovjetska misija, ki naj bi svetovala takratnemu načelniku Ozne za Slovenijo Ivanu Mačku. Zapori Ozne v Ljubljani so bili konspirativni, dostop do njih je bil omejen.

Eden takšnih zaporov je bil v stavbi na Poljanskem nasipu v Ljubljani, ki je doživela več transformacij, in sicer od psihiatrične bolnišnice do okupatorskih zaporov in končno zapora Ozne.

V poglavju so pretresljive izpovedi preživelih, opisi mučenj, zaslišanj, ki se niso v ničemer razlikovala od nacističnih in stalinističnih metod izvabljanja »priznanj«.

Ob sprehodu po današnji Miklošičevi si težko predstavljamo, da je nekoč za sodno palačo stal zapor, ki so ga porušili v začetku 60. let. Rušenje nazorno prikazuje fotografija v monografiji, ki je tudi sicer bogata s fotografskim materialom. Stavba sodnega zapora je služila svojemu namenu že pred in med vojno. S sodno palačo je bil povezan z notranjim prehodom. V tlorisu je imel obliko križa, kar ponazarja tudi skica, ki je priložena v monografiji.

Razmere v zaporu na Miklošičevi v obdobju neposredno po koncu vojne so slabše dokumentirane. Avtoricama so kot vir služila letna poročila zavoda, predvsem pa ohranjeni zapisi obsojencev, spominska literatura, pričevanja in deloma gradivo RSNZ. Iz vsega omenjenega je moč razbrati, da so bile razmere težke. O zgodnjih razmerah v zavodu pričajo spomini Jelke in Kriste Mrak, ki so ju zajeli na vlaku z ranjenimi domobranci.

Razmere v sodnem zaporu podrobno opisujejo tudi drugi. Nekatere so pripeljali pred sodnim procesom iz centralnih zaporov na Poljanskem nasipu. Ko je bil preiskovalni postopek zaključen, so namreč preiskovance praviloma premestili. Obtožnice so prejeli tik pred sojenjem. Tako se je zgodilo tudi z obsojenimi na Nagodetovem procesu.

Fizično delo obsojencev ni bilo namenjeno le prevzgoji, ampak je bil pomemben dejavnik tudi gospodarski učinek. Tako so obsojenci iz KPD Ljubljana sprva delali v obrtnih delavnicah znotraj zavoda, ki so jih leta 1947 preoblikovali v posebno državno podjetje, in na kmetijskem posestvu, ki ga je prav tako upravljal zavod. Kmalu so pričeli obsojence razporejati tudi po zunanjih deloviščih. Podrobnejši vpogled v to problematiko nudi monografija v poglavju Delovišča in taborišča. Današnje Savsko naselje je npr. rezultat dela obsojencev, ki so delali v taborišču Žale. Povečini so bili duhovniki. Kot je zapisal v spominih duhovnik Jožko Kragelj: »Pionirji tega naselja smo bili duhovniki.«

Dunja Dobaja

Dejan Pacek, *Od konflikta h kompromisu. Oris odnosa med državo in Katoliško cerkvijo v Sloveniji 1966–1991.*

Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2023, 560 str.



Socializem in vera: pojma, ki namigujeta na antitezo, sta v monografiji Dejana Packa obravnavana z ramo ob rami, s čimer avtor odpira prostor za nova historična spoznanja o temi, ki pomembno sooblikuje sodobno dojetje slovenske nacionalne zgodovine. Knjiga številka 52 v zbirki Razpoznavanja, ki jo izdaja Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, obravnava odnos med državo in Katoliško cerkvijo¹ med letoma 1966 in 1991 na podlagi arhivskega gradiva slovenske verske komisije. Ta je pod različnimi imeni obstajala od druge svetovne vojne, njeno delovanje pa se je v desetletjih njenega obstoja prilagajalo dinamiki političnih razmer. Tako arhivsko gradivo kakor temeljna literatura sta v svojih osnovnih potezah opisana v predgovoru h knjigi. To bralcu omogoči vpogled v raziskovalni proces, hkrati pa ga usmeri k

morebitnemu nadaljnjemu branju. Monografija je časovno in vsebinsko logično zamejena. Leto 1966 je z vidika odnosa med državo in Cerkvijo prineslo dve pomembni novosti. Prvič, Jugoslavija je takrat sprejela Beograjski protokol, ki je vsaj delno normaliziral odnose med federacijo in Svetim sedežem. Drugič, istega leta je po brionskem plenumu (četrtm plenarnem zasedanju Centralnega komiteja Zveze komunistov Jugoslavije) nadzorovanje verskih skupnosti prešlo z represivnih organov na upravne. To se je neposredno odražalo pri delu verske komisije, ki je osrednja tvorka gradiva, na katerem temelji monografija. Leto 1991, s katerim se monografija zaključuje, je prav tako povezano z delom komisije. Ta je takrat prenehala delovati.

Odnosi med državo, tako Slovenijo kot eno izmed federalnih enot kakor jugoslovansko federacijo samo, in Katoliško cerkvijo so bili zapleteni in večplastni, hkrati pa so se z leti znatno spreminjali. Upoštevanje časovne dinamike je eno izmed osrednjih vodil monografije, zaradi česar avtor tematiko ločeno obravnava v posameznih časovnih obdobjih. Monografija sicer skoraj popolnoma pušča ob strani politično in vojaško dogajanje med drugo svetovno vojno, ki je neposredno vplivalo na dinamiko odnosa med državo in Cerkvijo po letu 1945, medtem ko povzetek historičnega razvoja med letoma 1945 in 1966 bralcu nudi oprijemljiv kontekst za razumevanje osrednjega dela monografije. Avtor v tem delu obravnava nastanek in razvoj delovanja komisije ter osnovne poteze diplomatskih stikov med Jugoslavijo in Svetim sedežem,

¹ V oceni ohranjam poimenovanja, ki jih je v monografiji z ustreznimi razlagami uporabljal avtor.

vključno s popolno prekinitvijo medsebojnih diplomatskih stikov leta 1952. Avtor s primerjavo z drugimi socialističnimi državami položaj Cerkve v Sloveniji oziroma Jugoslaviji dragoceno umesti v širši kontekst srednje in vzhodne Evrope. Jugoslavija je bila edina izmed socialističnih držav, ki je po prekinitvi diplomatskih stikov s Svetim sedežem te ponovno vzpostavila. Prav tako ni posegala v imenovanja znotraj cerkvene hierarhije. Avtor prvo poglavje zaključi s podrobnim pregledom delokroga slovenske republiške verske komisije ter komisij na ravni okrajev in občin, s čimer postavi njihovo delovanje na trden formalni temelj.

Drugi, osrednji del monografije se od uvodoma obravnavanega konflikta med slovensko republiko in Cerkvijo vsebinsko usmeri h korakom, ki so vodili do kompromisa med stranema. Jugoslovanska ustava in zakonodaja sta ustrezali minimalnim kriterijem, ki so omogočali ureditev razmer, zato sta postali osnovni temelj za obsežna pogajanja o normalizaciji odnosov med jugoslovansko federacijo in Svetim sedežem. Ta so dozorela v razmeroma kratkem dokumentu – beograjskem protokolu, podpisanim 25. junija 1966, še štiri leta pa je trajalo, da so se diplomatski odnosi v celoti obnovili. Dokument, ki so mu zgodovinarji do sedaj pripisovali razmeroma omejen pomen, avtor v monografiji na podlagi arhivskega gradiva ponovno ovrednoti: protokol je kot pomemben temelj sodelovanja med Jugoslavijo in Svetim sedežem na mednarodni ravni omogočil dialog med Svetim sedežem kot vplivnim igralcem na področju diplomacije ter Jugoslavijo kot nosilko gibanja neuvrščениh.

Avtor v naslednjem poglavju podrobno obravnava ustavni razvoj in razvoj zakonodaje, ki je neposredno (z Zakonom o pravnem položaju verskih skupnosti skupaj s slovensko republiško uredbo za izvrševanje in njegovimi kasnejšimi dopolnitvami) ali posredno (z Zakonom o agrarni reformi in kolonizaciji, Zakonom o zakonski zvezi, Zakonom o državnih matičnih knjigah) vplivala na položaj Cerkve. Dejavnost Cerkve je bila v Jugoslaviji oziroma Sloveniji z vsakokratno ustavo (1946, 1963 in 1974) ter z Zakonom o pravnem položaju verskih skupnosti (1953) omejena na bogoslužno dejavnost, verski tisk in verske šole. Zakulisje nastajanja zakonodaje in njenega učinka je v knjigi podprto z arhivskim gradivom verske komisije, s čimer so v knjigo vključeni številni komentarji, pomisleki in osnutki oseb ter institucij, vpletenih v ustvarjanje zakonodaje. Ob izteku osemdesetih let je proces spreminjanja ustavne ureditve pridobil demokratičen značaj. Te spremembe so zajele tudi področje vere. Cerkev v Sloveniji je dobila možnost razširiti svoje delovanje, ko so amandmaji k republiški ustavi leta 1989 v veliki meri prevzeli dikcijo mednarodnopravne ureditve osebne in politične svobode.

A pot do korenitih sprememb je bila še dolga. Ob koncu šestdesetih in v začetku sedemdesetih letih je republiška verska komisija pozvala občinske komisije, naj na podlagi priloženega vprašalnika ocenijo stanje razmerja med državo in Cerkvijo. Odgovore občinskih komisij avtor podrobneje analizira, s čimer pokaže na razliko med zgodovinskim dogajanjem na federalni in republiški ravni na eni strani ter lokalni ravni na drugi. Poročila občinskih komisij nudijo vpogled v vsakodnevno življenje (vernih) državljanov v odnosu do konfliktov, ki so se vršili na višjih ravneh politike. Ti

so včasih globoko zarezali v vsakdanje življenje, medtem ko so spet drugič komaj kaj vplivali nanj. Pod drobnogledom komisij so še posebej bila področja, kot so karitativna dejavnost, verouk in gradnja ter obnavljanje verskih objektov, kjer delovanja Cerkve v odnosu do države vsebinsko ni bilo mogoče enostavno razmejiti.

Preostanek poglavja avtor nameni dvema pomembnima institucijama, Slovenskemu duhovniškemu društvu in Teološki fakulteti v Ljubljani, ter katoliškemu tisku. Slovensko duhovniško društvo obravnava v njegovi vlogi – kot mu jo je (med drugim) dodelila država – dejavnika diferenciacije znotraj Cerkve, vendar pa je zaradi normalizacije odnosa med državo in Cerkvijo le delno izpolnjevalo to poslanstvo. Cerkev sama je bila do obstoja in delovanja društva ambivalentna, medtem ko je država kljub njegovemu omejenemu vplivu vztrajala pri njegovem obstoju vse obdobje socializma. V času demokratičnih sprememb je društvo sodelovalo pri oblikovanju amandmajev k slovenski republiški ustavi. Pri obravnavi Teološke fakultete se avtor spričo bogate zgodovine te institucije posveti njenemu pravnemu položaju, položaju njenih predavateljev in študentov, državnih subvenciji, ki ji je bila namenjena v obdobju socializma, ter oddelku, ki ga je fakulteta leta 1968 ustanovila v Mariboru. Podobno obravnava slovenski verski tisk – najprej z vidika njegovega pravnega položaja, nato pa z vidika njegove strukture in načina obravnave političnih vsebin. Poglavje se zaključí z obravnavo redovnih in laičnih organizacij po drugi svetovni vojni. Uvodne vrstice tega podpoglavja nakazujejo izredno raznolik položaj, ki so ga te imele in ki je bil odvisen predvsem od njihovega delovanja med drugo svetovno vojno. V nadaljevanju se avtor osredotoča večinoma na negativne posledice, ki so jih organizacije in njeni posamezni člani občutili v obdobju socializma.

Zadnje poglavje monografije je namenjeno primerjavi položaja Cerkve na Hrvaškem in v Sloveniji med letom 1971, ko je urejanje položaja Cerkve prešlo s federacije na njene republike, in razglasitvijo neodvisnosti obeh držav. Primerjava, ki omogoča ugotavljanje specifičnosti in podobnosti pri obeh primerih, se osredotoča na pravni položaj Cerkve ter na odnos hrvaških in slovenskih škofov do političnih vodstev obeh socialističnih republik. Poglavje, ki sicer vnaša dragoceno primerjalno perspektivo, bi svojo tehtnost lahko povečalo z uporabo dodatnih virov (hrvaške provenience), ki bi omogočili bolj poglobljeno analizo in podprli nekatere splošne ugotovitve.

Odnos med socializmom in vero se je v desetletjih, ki jih obravnava monografija, spletal v gosto mrežo poizkusov, kritik, mnenj, diplomatskih odmikov in političnih premikov.

Monografija, ki gosto zajame mnoge izmed njih, dopušča še dodaten prostor za nadaljnjo raziskavo, ki bi z vzpostavljanjem vzročno-posledičnih razmerij med posameznimi dogodki še obogatila obstoječe znanje in dodala vrednost gradivu verske komisije, ki se izkaže za bogat historični vir.

Mateja Ratej (ur.), *Osebnosti slovenske humanistike in družboslovja.*

Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2024, 276 str.



Monografijo *Osebnosti slovenske humanistike in družboslovja v 20. in 21. stoletju*, že deveto knjigo v dosednji seriji podobnih monografij, je tudi tokrat uredila zgodovinarica Mateja Ratej, izdal pa Inštitut za kulturno zgodovino ZRC SAZU. Biografije šestnajstih znanstvenic in znanstvenikov je napisalo sedemnajst avtoric in avtorjev. Kot je zapisala urednica v uvodni besedi, gre za izbrane osebnosti, ki so v okviru akademskih sredin bolj ali manj vidno, bolj ali manj odmevno in bolj ali manj pomembno pojasnjevale ter s tem sooblikovale družbeno stvarnost slovenskega prostora. V monografiji se spoznamo z življenjem in delom filozofa in urednika ter železničarskega uradnika Leopolda Benka (Jurij Perovšek), z v Piranu rojenim pesnikom Marcom

Petronijem, grofom Caldanom (Gregor Pobežin in Karin Bernardi), z matematično sociologinjo in statističarko Anuško Ferligoj (Ali Žerdin), s klasičnim filologom Kajetanom Gantarjem (Darka Zvonar Predan), s pravnikom in politikom Andrejem Gosarjem (Srečo Dragoš), s teologom Franzem Ignazem, grofom Inzaghiem (Marjeta Ciglencečki), s psihologinjo Ljubico Marjanovič Umek (Urška Fekonja), z zgodovinarjem Vasilijem Melikom (Jelka Melik), z zgodovinarico in bibliotekarko Melitto Pivec Stele (Mateja Ratej), z jezikoslovko Bredo Pogorelec (Mojca Smolej), s filozofinjo Almo Sodnik (Vesna Leskošek), s politologom, filozofom in psihologom Vladimirjem Sruko (Zoran Medved), s pravnikom in politikom Ivanom Vaneko Šifrarjem (Janja Hojnik), s pravnico in kriminologinjo Alenko Šelih (Matjaž Ambrož), z muzikologinjo Manico Špendal (Karmen Salmič Kovačič) in z geografom ter zgodovinarjem Mavricijem Zgonikom (Jure Maček). Razen v 17. stoletju rojenega pesnika Marca Petronija so drugi v monografiji predstavljeni ustvarjalci živeli in delovali v različnih krajih na Slovenskem v 20. in 21. stoletju. Družbeni prerez izbranih biografij pokaže raznolike pritiske političnih ideologij in družbenih neenakosti v različnih družbenopolitičnih sistemih ter vztrajne poskuse iskanja svobode znotraj njih. Biografije ne ostajajo na ravni suhoparnega podajanja podatkov, saj orisujejo intimna doživljanja in osebna prizadevanja znanstvenic in znanstvenikov, njihove družinske razmere ter tudi širši družbenopolitični in kulturni prostor, politične ideologije, odnose in razmerja. Prav poseben uvid v intimne svetove in čustvena doživljanja podajajo prispevki, ki so jih napisali vnuki in otroci ali študentje, kolegice oziroma kolegi izbranih akterk in

akterjev v monografiji. Biografije razkrivajo, kako pomembno je obravnavati življenjske in družbenopolitične okoliščine ljudi, subjektivna doživljanja ter hkrati strukturne razmere, v katerih so ustvarjali in živeli, da lahko razumemo razvoj humanistične in družboslovne misli na Slovenskem.

Pomen monografije je torej večplasten, po eni strani nas seznanja s konkretnimi zgodovinskimi, kulturnimi, družbenimi in političnimi razmerami, v katere so se rodili, kjer so se oblikovali, se izobraževali in razvijali posameznice in posamezniki. Opozarja, da smo (raziskovalke in raziskovalci) vpeti v družbenopolitične okoliščine, da smo njihov sestavni del, da je znanost situirana v strukturnih pogojih, historično oblikovanih družbenih razmerah in konkretnih življenjskih okoliščinah ter odvisna od njih. Biografije kažejo na postopno liberalizacijo in odpiranje akademskega prostora v drugi polovici 20. stoletja; postopoma (pa čeprav zelo počasi) so v znanstvene institucije in tudi na univerzo prihajale ženske, utirajoče pot nam, ki smo prišle za njimi. A hkrati biografije pokažejo, da so se kljub spremembam v akademskih institucijah ohranili diskriminatorni mehanizmi, hierarhije in strukturne ovire. Razmerja neenakosti in moči, politični pritiski in cenzure so predstavljali (ter predstavljajo) omejitve v različnih političnih ideoloških sistemih.

Po eni strani monografija razkriva izjemne dosežke, predanost, radovednost, trud in strast posameznic ter posameznikov, ki so kljub številnim strukturnim oviram, cenzuri in marsikdaj tudi brez družinske podpore vztrajali ter neutrudno iskali prostore, kjer so lahko ustvarjali in raziskovali; po drugi strani pa nas opozarja, da so dosežki posameznic in posameznikov sestavni del daljše zgodovine razvoja intelektualne misli. To je pomembno, saj opominja, da imajo naše misli in ideje prednike, da so ustvarjali tudi ljudje pred nami in da vsi mi gradimo na njihovih zamislih in dosežkih. Morda je to danes treba še posebej poudariti, ker neoliberalizacija znanstvenih institucij tudi na sistemski ravni krepi idejo neprestanega izumljanja novega. Ob poplavi dokazov o lastni inovativnosti in izjemnosti, ki jo moramo raziskovalke in raziskovalci dokazovati v člankih in projektnih prijavih, je še pomembneje, da ne pozabimo, da smo vsi sestavni del širše intelektualne misli, potomci tistih, ki so ustvarjali pred nami.

Biografije pomembno kažejo na medsebojne vplive znanstvenic in znanstvenikov, na njihovo vpetost v mrežo medsebojnih odnosov, na to, kako so se ideje rojevale in razvijale v skupnih razpravah v šoli, na fakulteti, preko pisem ali družabnih druženj. Monografija opozori tudi na pomen solidarnosti in kolegialnosti v akademskem svetu, a hkrati tudi na boleče napetosti, ki so obstajale med kolegicami in kolegi v različnih časovnih obdobjih. Biografije so napisane jasno in so zelo berljive ter tako dostopne znanstveni ter tudi širši javnosti.

Nina Vodopivec

Tadej Cankar, »Odločnejši protivniki semitstva«. O antisemitizmu in slovenskih liberalcih na Kranjskem.

Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino
in Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 2023, 205 str.



Kljub maloštevilni prisotnosti Judov na Kranjskem v 19. stoletju je bil duh antisemitizma precej prisoten. Mogoče ga je zaznati tako v političnih, kulturnih, gospodarskih kot znanstvenih sferah. Tadej Cankar v svojem delu *»Odločnejši protivniki semitstva«*. *O antisemitizmu in slovenskih liberalcih na Kranjskem* predstavlja fenomen kranjskih liberalcev, ki so, v primerjavi s sorodnimi nemškimi in avstrijskimi liberalci, nastopili z bistveno bolj protijudovskim razpoloženjem.

Avtor monografije, arhivist Tadej Cankar, zaposlen v Arhivu Republike Slovenije, v uvodu poudari, da so se protijudovska stališča na Slovenskem razlikovala; drugačna mnjenja so bila pogojena z geografskimi, političnimi, narodnostnimi, ekonomskimi in idejnimi dejavniki, tako se je pojavljala razlika že med liberalci na Kranjskem

in liberalci na Goriškem. Cankar, čigar fokus je odnos do antisemitizma kranjskih slovenskih liberalcev, področje, ki je bilo delno že raziskano, v svojem delu dosedanje ugotovitve ovrednoti in jih dopolni.

Monografija je razdeljena na dva širša sklopa, ki sta med seboj povezana. Prvi sklop obravnava pojav antisemitizma v Evropi v drugi polovici 19. stoletja in predstavlja odnos med liberalizmom, Judi in antisemitizmom, drugi sklop pa se osredotoči na glavno temo knjige, na antisemitizem, ki in kakršen se pojavlja pri liberalcih na Kranjskem. V tem delu prikaže odnos liberalcev do Judov, značilnosti slovenskega protijudovstva, stereotipne podobe Judov, kot so jih videli in vzdrževali slovenski liberalci, vzroke antisemitističnega prepričanja Slovencev in ne nazadnje slovenski odziv na afero Dreyfus.

Prvi del knjige obravnava širši evropski prostor, drugi del pa se usmerja zlasti na Kranjsko, saj je tam delovala prva in osrednja liberalna stranka. V prvem delu avtor upošteva predvsem objavljeno literaturo, povezano z zgodovino Judov, antisemitizma in evropskega antisemitizma. V drugem delu uporablja dve vrsti virov: časopise in spominsko literaturo.

V prvem sklopu obravnava splošen odnos do Judov v zgodovini Evrope. Najprej opisuje obdobje pred judovsko državljansko emancipacijo, nato pa proces integracije Judov, ki je potekal na prehodu iz 18. v 19. stoletje. Integracija ni bila povsod enako

uspešna. Judje so na emancipacijo gledali z optimizmom, v upanju, da bo antisemitizem izginil. Vendar se je ta v šestdesetih in sedemdesetih letih 19. stoletja začel vpletati v politiko in je postal del programov različnih političnih strank. Spremenil se je odnos do antisemitizma, ki je izhajal iz nezadovoljstva z judovsko emancipacijo.

Cankar nato podrobneje obravnava antisemitsko gibanje, ki je sovpadalo z zatonom liberalizma, vstopom množic v politiko in preoblikovanjem konservativnih političnih gibanj. Antisemitizem je postal sredstvo za diskreditacijo političnih nasprotnikov, uporabljali so ga v javnih nastopih političnega katolicizma in kasnejših desničarskih gibanj.

V nadaljevanju preučuje odnos med srednjeevropskimi Judi in liberalizmom, pri čemer ugotavlja, da je bila povezanost med Judi in liberalizmom v Nemčiji in Avstro-Ogrski precejšnja. Judje so podpirali liberalizem zaradi svojih zahtev po emancipaciji in vizije, v kateri bi verska pripadnost postala nepomembna. Večji del 19. stoletja so bili privrženi liberalni politični opciji. Liberalci so v splošnem rešitev judovskega vprašanja videli v popolni asimilaciji, so pa v času novih razmer, ki jih je prinesel zaton liberalizma, sprejeli kompromisni odnos do Judov, ki je bil odvisen od občinstva in lokalnih razmer.

Drugi sklop se začne z razlago osnovnih značilnosti antisemitizma na Kranjskem. Poudarja, da je bilo v drugi polovici 19. stoletja razpoloženje slovenske družbe do Judov negativno in da je bilo javno izražanje antisemitskih stališč družbeno sprejemljivo. Judje so predstavljali zanemarljiv delež prebivalstva na Kranjskem, prebivalstvo pa se je balo njihove naselitve. Niso jih več dojemali kot gospodarski problem, temveč so jih povezovali z avstrijsko-nemškim liberalizmom, dejavnikom, ki bi okrepil nemški tabor na škodo slovenskega.

Cankar ugotavlja, da je majhno število Judov vseeno sprožalo protijudovska občutja, ki pogosto niso imela prave zveze z Judi samimi. Zaradi nizkega števila Judov na Kranjskem je bilo ohranjanje protijudovskih predsodkov lažje, saj so jih črpali iz ljudskega izročila in stereotipnih podob. Prav tako je majhno število Judov prebivalcem dajalo občutek varnosti, a hkrati povzročalo strah, da bi se razmere lahko spremenile. Morebitni razlog pa sta bila tudi splošen strah in nezaupanje do tujcev na Kranjskem.

Cankar trdi, da je bil slovenski antisemitizem ujet v politični kontekst, tj. v politično-ideološki antisemitizem, ki ni bil toliko usmerjen proti samim Judom kot proti političnim nasprotnikom, ki so jih skušali z njim diskreditirati. Na Slovenskem se je že v šestdesetih in sedemdesetih letih začelo povezovanje judovstva z liberalizmom, kar se je navezovalo tudi na kranjske liberalce. Protijudovsko vzdušje proti liberalcem je v veliki meri spodbujal Janez Evangelist Krek, ki je svoja stališča izražal v časopisu *Slovenec*. Avtor to imenuje politično-ideološki antisemitizem kranjskega političnega katolicizma.

Medtem ko so klerikalci in liberalci imeli protijudovska stališča, je socialdemokratski tabor na Kranjskem ostajal edina politična skupina, ki se antisemitizma ni posluževala, temveč mu je odločno nasprotovala. Socialdemokrati in klerikalci na Kranjskem so v odnosu do Judov posnemali modele tujih, zlasti nemških in avstrijsko-nemških strank, medtem ko so kranjski liberalci imeli samosvojo protijudovsko

usmerjeno držo, ki se je od avstrijsko-nemških stališč razlikovala. Močna nastrojenost proti Judom je bila le eno od področij, na katerih so se kranjski in avstrijsko-nemški liberalci razlikovali. Do nastrojenosti je morda prišlo zato, ker slovenski liberalci niso imeli zelo dodelanega programa in so se prepuščali dnevni politiki, ki je tedaj obvladovala slovenski politični prostor. Cankar tako trdi, da so slovenski liberalci prevzeli protijudovsko naravnost zaradi splošne naravnosti slovenske družbe, ki je izhajala iz idejne prevlade katoliškega tabora in krščanskosocialnega diskurza ter tako idejno vplivala na liberalce.

V nadaljevanju Cankar obravnava še politični, gospodarski in narodnostni vidik antisemitizma slovenskega liberalizma. Pri političnem vidiku ugotavlja, da so tako klerikalci kot liberalci uporabljali antisemitizem kot sredstvo diskreditacije in blatenja političnih nasprotnikov, ter doda, da so ga liberalci tudi še za obrambo pred obtožbami klerikalnega tabora. Pri gospodarskem vidiku oceni, da so proti Judom nastopali v glavnem zaradi skrbi pred konkurenco, pri narodnostnem pa predstavi očitke, ki so jih prtili Judom, namreč da so glavni krivci za narodnostna nasprotja v monarhiji. Liberalni časopisi so jim očitali brezdomovinskost in internacionalnost, po drugi strani pa pragmatično narodno prilagodljivost.

Zanimiv preobrat protijudovskih stališč se je zgodil med Dreyfusovo afero, ko so liberalci omilili ali celo opustili svoja pričanja.

V zaključku Cankar sintetizira svoje ugotovitve. Oceni, da je bil odnos slovenskega liberalizma na Kranjskem do Judov kompleksen, protisloven in skoraj vedno odklonilen. Oblikovalo se je posebno stanje, v katerem je antisemitizem na Slovenskem postal skupna značilnost tako klerikalne kot liberalne politike. Poudarja, da antisemitizem ni bil neposredno usmerjen proti Judom, ampak je bil predvsem rezultat notranjepolitičnih bojev, ki s samimi Judi niso imeli veliko skupnega. Antisemitizem kranjskih liberalcev je črpal iz tradicije verskega antisemitizma, protijudovske naravnosti družbenega okolja, krščanskosocialnega gibanja ter odpora do sodobnih procesov ekonomske modernizacije in strahu pred judovsko ekonomsko prevlado.

Monografija osvetljuje podobo precej protijudovsko usmerjenega ozračja, ki je prevevalo Kranjsko v drugi polovici 19. stoletja. Antisemitizem, ki se je ukoreninil v javni diskurz, ni toliko temeljil na Judih samih kot na ideji in strahu pred njimi ter je postal močno orodje v rokah politike. Cankarjevo delo ponuja zanimiv zgodovinski pregled, ki poleg novih spoznanj omogoča predvsem svežo perspektivo na prisotnost antisemitizma v slovenskem prostoru in slovensko politično stanje v drugi polovici 19. stoletja. Delo je plod resnega raziskovalnega dela, ki ga dokazujeta bogata uporaba časopisnih virov in literature, na katere je oprto. Struktura monografije je smiselno sestavljena, oba sklopa pa se lepo dopolnjujeta, saj prvi nudi dobro osnovo za razumevanje drugega.

Cankar dobro predstavi kompleksno ozadje prisotnosti antisemitizma pri kranjskih liberalcih, ki je bilo, kot je zapisal sam, »inherentna značilnost slovenskega liberalnega tabora od njegovega vzpona do zatona v obdobju med vojnama«.



Tadej Cankar

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