

Commemorating Fallen Slovenian Soldiers in Austro-Hungarian Uniforms and the Yugoslav Idea

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Archduke Franz Ferdinand personally commanded the military manoeuvres, and after their conclusion on June 28, 1914, a grand military parade was held in Sarajevo. This day was also a “holiday that served to call and remind each and every Serb to take revenge on all tyrants who wanted to keep the Serbian people divided and disunited in bondage and darkness” (Obradović 1928: 6). Accordingly, many people saw the parade as a “deliberate insult to Serbian sentiment” (Bartulović 1925: 45; Obradović 1928: 6; Ćorović 1936: 594). In such a context, the shooting of Gavrilo Princip did not come as a surprise to many people. Princip was hailed as “the embodiment of Miloš who killed Sultan Murad on Vidovdan” (Obradović 1928: 7; see also West 1942: I, 339–43).

In the first days following the assassination in Sarajevo, the mood of the population was determined by a sense of curiosity, a morbid fascination with the death of a celebrity, rather than belligerence

(Watson 2014: 54). The press satisfied this curiosity with extensive reports on the transfer of the remains of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and Duchess Sophie von Hohenberg to Vienna. They emphasised the great sadness of citizens over the murder of the crown prince and his wife. These reports had a strong effect on the mood of the population, making their attitude towards Serbia increasingly hostile. Public outrage was further fuelled by reports in the Serbian press blaming Austria-Hungary for Gavrilo Princip's crime due to its misguided policies in the Balkan Peninsula, as well as the findings of the police investigation implicating Serbian authorities in the Sarajevo assassination (Watson 2014: 55–6). This set the stone rolling and triggered an avalanche that buried millions beneath it.

Instead of reporting the events, the contemporary press stirred up popular sentiment in Austria-Hungary. In this spirit, for example, Alexander Roda Roda wrote in the *Vossische Zeitung* in Berlin in 1914 that the Dual Monarchy had stood idly by in 1909 and 1912 when it could and should have reacted. However, when Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife were assassinated, all Austro-Hungarian peoples demanded revenge for the heir to the Habsburg throne. Dozens of military bands played the Radetzky March. The battle of the black double-headed eagle against the white double-headed eagle reportedly enjoyed greater popularity in the monarchy than ever before. Allegedly, the Germans, Slavs, Hungarians, and Romanians unanimously and loudly demanded that the emperor take revenge for Franz Ferdinand (Anon. 1914c: 18–9).

The Slovenian press, leading political parties, opinion leaders, and journalists joined in the bellicose rhetoric. The day before the Dual Monarchy declared war on Serbia, the daily *Slovenec* published an editorial on Slovenes' enthusiasm for war under the ominous headline "Long Live Austria! Down with Serbia!" (Anon. 1914a: 1). When the Dual Monarchy officially declared war on Serbia, the press was full of reports of people's spontaneous enthusiasm for war against Russia and Serbia, as if all the citizens of the vast empire were zealous worshipers of the god Mars (Herceg 1919: 13; Blašković 1939: 79; Cornwall 2000: 16).

As the priest and writer Janez Kalan noted after the war, the Catholic clergy may also have offered a helping hand. Kalan agreed that it was wrong for them to speak and write as they did, but he believed it was possible to explain, at least in part, why they did. They deeply regretted his death because they supposedly did not know at the time that Vienna had sent Franz Ferdinand to his death, and because they expected him to be a wiser and more just ruler for the Slovenes than Franz Josef. When his remains were transferred via Ljubljana, they felt

as if all of their hopes had been buried with him. Franz Ferdinand's death was thus only the pretext for the war, not its cause,¹ "the spark that flew into two loaded cannons that could explode at any moment" (Nemanič 1920: 12–3).

Nico Wouters and Laurence van Ypersele rightly argue that "it is wrong to equate state propaganda completely with a devious manipulation of the hearts and minds of the passive population." According to them, the First World War propaganda "explicitly aimed to enhance internal national cohesion by exploiting pre-existing prejudices and stereotypes about other national groups." As such, it was a mirror reflecting the deeper needs of Austro-Hungarian society: the perceived values, beliefs, fears, and hopes of the population (Wouters and van Ypersele 2018: 3). This also explains why, on the part of the Austro-Hungarian Yugoslavs in 1914, there were "no rebellions, no acts of sabotage, no demonstrations, no desertions, and no failures to respond to the calls of arms" (Dragnich 1983: 7).

PROPAGANDA VS REALITY

Successful mobilisation in a multiethnic empire was far more complicated than in a nation-state. Unity is essential in mobilising for war, but that was difficult to achieve among Habsburg subjects in 1914. Not only did the posters announcing mobilisation have to be printed in fifteen languages, but an even greater problem was the lack of a common identity. In the Empire and Kingdom, where national ideology divided rather than united people, the bond between citizens belonging to different peoples, many of whom were in conflictual relationships, was weak (Watson 2014: 90). For example, Slovenes conscripted to the war against Serbia were no closer to Serbs from Bosnia-Herzegovina than they were to Serbs from Serbia. Austro-Hungarian wartime propaganda attempted to paint a picture of a cohesive multiethnic community that in reality almost never existed. Despite all efforts to paint the

1 "Austria could not remain calm towards Serbia," Vladimir Ćorović opined. "It believed that after such great successes the young kingdom would not only become more conscious and resistant than before in its old garb, but that it would become, if not more active, at least more attractive. Notwithstanding Austrian interests, a nation-state of unquestioned hardness and value had emerged on its frontier, with which it would soon have difficulties similar to those with Italian Piedmont. This had to be prevented at all costs. Vienna, therefore, intended to militarily crush Serbia before it became dangerous. All that was sought was a favourable pretext for the attack" (Ćorović 1924: 77–8; see also Bataković 2015: 15).

picture of interconnected and cooperating peoples, however, concern came from all corners as to whether the members of the subordinate peoples, especially the Slavs, would support the war effort of the black and yellow eagle with two heads? Would the increasingly important national question interfere with the war effort? Because of the general enthusiasm for punishing the Sarajevo assassins and censorship, this question was not often raised in public (Orzoff 2004: 162).

When war was finally declared on Serbia, large public rallies were held in various cities of the Dual Monarchy, organised by civil and military authorities. Austro-Hungarian newspapers welcomed the war in unison with bombastic editorials (Romsics 2006; 27; Bobič 2012; 29). Externally, representatives of all political parties joined forces and took a unified stance. Before the war, the mayor of Ljubljana and leader of the so-called Liberal Party, Ivan Tavčar, and the prince-bishop of Ljubljana, Anton Jeglič, could not agree on practically any issue, but now both used bellicose, anti-Serb language. On July 28, 1914, Mayor Tavčar delivered a public speech from the town hall at a patriotic gathering. The cannon's thunder, Tavčar said, signalled to the whole world that Slovenes intended to remain loyal to the Austrian Empire until "the end of their days," adding that the Slovenian fist would not cease "until the enemy is trampled to dust and the black and yellow flag flies proudly over the defeated troops of the eliminated enemy!" (Anon. 1914b: 2). A few days later, Bishop Jeglič addressed the soldiers during Sunday Mass before they took their oath. In his address, the bishop declared the upcoming war a "just cause" and told the soldiers that it was their duty to exact just retribution for the "grossly unjust, underhanded, ongoing efforts to dismember and destroy our wonderful Austria, blessed by the rule of the old Habsburg dynasty." The soldiers were advised by Bishop Jeglič not to fear for their families or their heroic death, their martyrdom (Jeglič 1914: 1).

Of course, the widespread anger against Serbia was a public impression based on official propaganda as well as deliberately misleading public statements (see, e.g., Hribar 1928: II, 110). What people really felt remained unknown. Four years after the end of the war, Ivan Matičič recalled the day of mobilisation from a different perspective. He claimed that people "restless, pale, crying, frightened, desperate" stormed through the streets expressing their view that the devil should "take Austria" and all those who turned against the Serbian "brothers" (Matičič 1922: 3).

What is certain, though, is that many people were court-martialed and sentenced to heavy penalties for insulting His Majesty, disturbing public order, and similar "crimes." For example, on August



Fig. 1: Austrian soldiers posing over the body of a slain Serb soldier. Photo taken on the southern battlefield in 1915, from the private collection of B. Jezernik

24, 1915, Ivan Brence, an innkeeper from the village of Dovje, was executed by firing squad in Suhi Bajer near Ljubljana for claiming the previous month that the “foolish emperor” had started the war and that it would have been better if he had established relations with Russia instead of Germany. On October 15, 1915, Janez Komar, a blacksmith from the village of Radoha in southeastern Slovenia, was sentenced to death and shot in Suhi Bajer because an informant claimed to have heard him say, “Serbia is right (to defend itself)” (Pleterski 1971: 23).

On the other hand, it is also true that a considerable number of the letters sent to the press by Slovenian soldiers from the Serbian battlefields did not conceal the pride of the senders in their exploits on the battlefields. For example, Lieutenant Pavel Cvenkel, who was seriously wounded during the storming of the Drina, wrote in *Ilustrirani Glasnik* that the feeling the Austro-Hungarian soldiers had when they first stepped on Serbian soil was indescribable: “We officers were strangely moved and exclaimed ‘*Alea iacta!*’ *Alea iacta!* (the die is cast),’ and the troops shouted joyfully towards the other side, where the Serbs were hiding, ‘We are together now, “*braćo*” (Serbian for “brothers”)!’ At that moment we almost swore that we would rather go to our deaths than cross the Drina back” (Cvenkel 1914: 2).

COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

At the height of public enthusiasm, most people expected the Dual Monarchy's war with "Little Serbia" to end within a few months. "We will be home, before the leaves fall," sang the Slovenian soldiers (Simčič 2014: 40). But the months turned into four terrible years, during which the illusions of heroic deeds, as depicted by military painters since the time of "Father" Radetzky, perished and the nation's hero was finally buried in "anachronistic school readings" (F. G. 1924: 1; Jezernik 2014: 42–5). Indeed, technological progress prided death with a huge scythe that it could wield ever faster and more viciously—the death toll went into the millions.

Before the First World War, the heroes whose deeds were cast in bronze or carved in stone for posterity were always military commanders and leaders; the common soldiers were forgotten (Mosse 1975: 37, 47; 1990: 99; Winter 2006: 281). The harrowing turmoil of the war, however, led to a change in the perception of the collective memory of the war's essential protagonists. The victor was replaced by the "unknown soldier," the regular infantryman who bore the brunt of suffering and was subjected to the full onslaught of "the most terrible war the world has ever seen" (Strobl 1915: 1). The enormity of the war's casualties, which could be found neither in the experience of contemporaries, nor in the chronicles of history, triggered a paradigm shift and, not least, paved the way for democratic thinking:

The fate of the nation, its fortune or misfortune, should not be decided by a handful of men who came to power by birth, luck, or favouritism. The nation itself should forge its own path, determine its own destiny, good or bad, and bear its own burden! Those who have the right to suffer and sacrifice undoubtedly have also the right to decide on the cause of their own sacrifice and suffering. (Neznan 1919: 91)

The First World War lasted a long time and did not end with a triumphal procession, as many people imagined at the beginning. Rather, as Count Max Montgelas put it, it ended with "no one knowing why they had fought" (Montgelas 1925: 11). Nevertheless, after the war there was a fundamental break in the collective memory of the Slovenes. When the war ended, both victors and losers came together to mourn, honour the dead, and pay respect to the fallen soldiers of all nationalities. As stipulated in international agreements, the countries involved in the war, pledged to care for the graves of fallen soldiers, regardless of nationality or citizenship, as they saw fit for their own dead,

for they had all sacrificed what mattered most to them—their lives—in the service of their homeland. A special international fund was established for this purpose, to which all participants in the war contributed “considerable sums of money” (F. B. 1923: 3; J. H. 1923: 2). In the years following the war, countless cemeteries for fallen soldiers of all nationalities were established in cities and villages across the Old Continent. Their message was to honour the self-sacrifice, suffering, and memory of all war victims. A notable exception was the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. It was established as a Yugoslav nation-state on December 1, 1918, less than a month after the protracted and bloody war in which its citizens had been mobilised against each other. It thus united all Yugoslavs, the “winners” (the former citizens of the Kingdom of Serbia) and the “losers” (the former Yugoslav citizens of the Dual Monarchy) of the war into one state.

The Austro-Hungarian campaign against Serbia, in which a large part of the mobilised Yugoslavs were on the side of the aggressor, claimed an enormous number of victims and caused severe economic damage. When the Serbian government returned home at the end of the war, it found, “nothing but a heap of ruins and a vast, burning earth; a starved country, barbarously devastated and bereft of everything. Roads and railroads were destroyed, and there was still no post office, telegraph, or telephone” (Nedeljković 1919: 3). Serbian losses in blood were even higher, with the blood toll of the “Mother of Heroes, the Kingdom of Serbia,” amounted to one million lives out of the four million lives who had inhabited it before the war² (Šišić 1937: 267). In comparison, about 35,000 Slovenian soldiers in Austro-Hungarian uniforms died, and 11,000 invalids (Dobida 1929: 430).

Although the death toll on the Serbian side was much higher than that of the Austro-Hungarian war veterans, the Serbian veterans at least had the satisfaction of knowing that their sufferings and sacrifices were not in vain, as they had achieved the liberation and unification of the Slavic South. Commemorations of the anniversaries of important battles served to alleviate the traumas of war. The invasion of the Austro-Hungarian army, Serbian victories in the early months of the war, and the eventual defeat, retreat, occupation, and victory against an overwhelming superior forces became elements of

2 The exact number of Serbian casualties has never been determined, but according to historian Branko Petranović, Serbia lost around 370,000 soldiers during the war. Another 630,000 died from cholera, hunger, and the harsh living conditions in the camps of POW. Roughly 114,000 war invalids survived the war and 500,000 children were left without parents (Petranović 1980: 35).



Fig. 2: “Serbian war memorial, which was not erected due to the quick intervention of our troops.” Postcard from the private collection of B. Jezernik.

the Serbian postwar narrative that gave meaning to the war experience. Leading Serbian politicians, who held the lion’s share of power in the common state, rarely failed to mention the great Serbian sacrifices for liberation and unification. For instance, in a book edited by Lazare Marcovitch, *Serbia and Europe 1914–1920*, we read:

In history there are already examples of peoples who pay for their national unity with their blood. But the efforts of the Serbian people, the sacrifices they have made and continue to make to secure their independence and free their Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian brothers from a foreign yoke, have surpassed anything seen before. And in the face of this spectacle, so tragic from the human point of view, so noble and significant from the point of view of the destiny of peoples, both friends and enemies of our nation will understand why Serbia continues this struggle to the death. The communiqués speak of liberated square kilometres, but the Serbian blood shed in torrents shows that the goal, the only possible and conceivable one, is the complete and total liberation of our nation. (Marcovitch 1920: 81–2)

POILU IN AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN UNIFORM

The great change in the collective memory of Europe is best illustrated by the fate of the monument in Metz, France, originally dedicated to Kaiser Wilhelm II, which was demolished after the war and replaced

by the monument to the *poilu* (French infantryman). The monuments erected in the affected countries often depict soldiers in uniform, as was the case in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. However, this custom posed a particularly difficult problem when it came to commemorating the fallen soldiers who had died in Austro-Hungarian uniforms. Accordingly, “uniformed” monuments were rare in the Drava Banate, but some were erected nonetheless. The first was the so-called Kranjski Janez statue in the Holy Cross Cemetery in Ljubljana, although it was not officially dedicated to any fallen soldier, but to the Slovenes of the 17th Imperial and Royal Regiment who were executed for their rebellion against the Austro-Hungarian Empire during the Judenburg Mutiny on May 12, 1918. It was originally planned and created as a monument to the bravery and loyalty of Slovenian soldiers in Austrian uniforms during the war (Anon. 1916: 4), but was then discarded after the end of the war and finally erected with a different connotation.

After the war, there was hardly a Slovenian family that had not suffered a loss, and their immense pressure for a worthy place of remembrance made the previous neglect impossible. The memory of Slovenian soldiers who had died fighting for the Austrian army was kept alive in an organised way by the “non-partisan and non-political” Association of Slovenian Soldiers, which held its first general assembly in 1924 “around the throne of the Queen of Heaven” in Brezje. As Ivan Rozina, the chairman of a group of war veterans from Ljubljana, once said, in the period between 1918 and 1924 Slovenian war veterans “fell into a kind of indifference” and thought that “with the end of the war and the liberation of their homeland they had completely fulfilled their duty” (Anon. 1934: 2). Subsequently, however, on the initiative of the Association, monuments were unveiled almost every Sunday in parishes throughout the Drava Banate (Stelè 1931: 412); by 1926, almost 150 monuments, mainly plaques, had been erected to fallen “Slovenian heroes” (Anon. 1926: 6; Dobida 1929: 430; Bonač 1931: 1–2). These monuments were intended to give descendants a lasting testimony to the reverence for fallen comrades and the culture of the Slovenian nation, which acted according to the motto: “A people that honours and respects its dead forges its future in gold” (Anon. 1934: 2).

In addition to smaller monuments in parishes and villages, the secretary of the association, Franc Bonač, announced as early as 1926 the intention to erect a dignified, extensive, neutral large monument in Tivoli Park in Ljubljana, dedicated to all victims of the war (Anon. 1926: 6). This monument was never erected, though. As a rule, memorials to fallen soldiers in Austrian uniforms were erected

almost exclusively in parishes and villages. An outstanding exception represents a memorial plaque on the façade of the Metlika town hall, inaugurated in 1928 on Unification Day (December 1). The plaque contains only a selected list of names of the fallen citizens of Metlika: the names of those who had fought on the Italian or Russian fronts are listed, while the names of those who had fallen on the Serbian front are omitted (Rus 2021: 161).



Fig. 3: The original monument to the Unknown Serbian Soldier, Avala. Postcard from the private collection of B. Jezernik

At a time when Serbian parts of the country were taking out state loans to erect monuments to soldiers who had fought in Serbian uniforms, the state made no effort to honour soldiers who had fallen in other uniforms, leaving it to the villagers, relatives, and veterans to bear the cost themselves. As a result, people considered these monuments, i.e. markers commemorating the First World War, as part of their property and their intimate, family commemoration of fallen and missing soldiers as well as the suffering of civilians. They became part of the local community's embodied memory of the war, which often diverged from official interpretations. Again, this was not a helpful means of healing the wounds of war, instead it ensured that the bitter and intense enmity of the prewar period deepened rather than bridged the gaps between the peoples of the new nation-state. The confrontation with the divisions of the past also led to a change in interpretation of the present and the future, which played an identity-defining role for many individuals.

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was established in 1918 as a nation-state of one nation. However, disagreements over

who won and who lost the war heightened awareness of different identities, and awareness of different identities exacerbated the division between its citizens, which eventually developed into a division between Us and Them. An increasing number of Slovenes, welcomed initiative to commemorate the fallen soldiers, even though they were repeatedly accused of “Austrianism.” Many were silenced by these accusations, but Secretary Bonač rejected the accusations, saying that they were merely an expression of “Byzantinism” (cf. Anon. 1925: 377). In 1924, Fran Bonač defiantly declared that the sea of blood between the Austrian Empire and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was radically reshaping the hearts and minds of all European nations:

That is exactly why we shall erect monuments and honour the blessed memory of those who swam in that gruesome lake and, in their effort to keep the waves from swallowing us all, were themselves drowned and lost. Their pitiful, scattered burial grounds serve as landmarks of our lives. Every soldier of the Great War was a martyr, regardless of nationality. (Bonač 1924: 2)

His attitude eventually hardened, and he did not shy away from taking steps towards historical revisionism, as shown by his prayer for the “fallen heroes” at the open-air meeting dedicated to the victims of the First World War in Brezje in 1925 (see Anon. 1925: 377).

Since the past and its interpretation are the key to nation-building—because the common perception of a common past is the strongest justification for the existence of a particular nation—this triggered a series of changes. When a group of Catholic Slovenian war veterans offered a reinterpretation of the existing public narrative and chose Brezje as the setting for its public expression, they also emphasised the Catholic faith as the most distinguished characteristic of the Slovenian people. In a multi-confessional kingdom, this could not be accomplished without a fundamental change in what should be remembered and what should be forgotten.

After 1918, in order to strengthen the common identity, efforts were made to suppress the collective memory of the Yugoslav peoples, who had previously been part of the Dual Monarchy, and promote the Serbian collective memory of the Great War as a war of liberation and unification. By portraying Slovenian war victims and their sufferings as sacrifices for their homeland, those who did not want to accept Yugoslav identity obviously contradicted this concept.

Those who spearheaded the search for alternative commemorations were well aware that their actions would raise many question marks, so they attempted to disguise them as mere acts of reverence

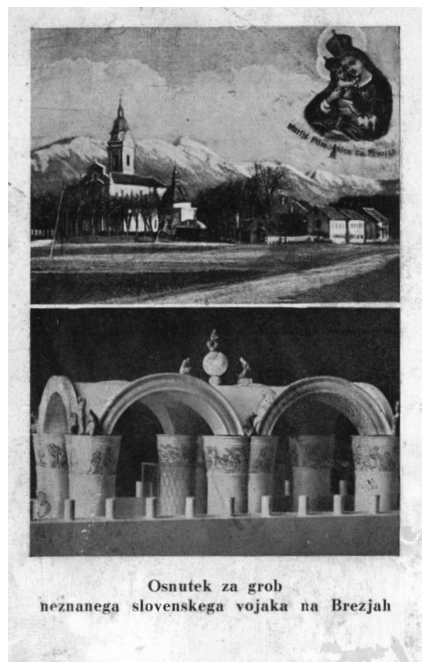


Fig. 4: Design for the grave of an unknown Slovene soldier in Brezje. Published by the Association of Slovenian Fighters. Postcard from the private collection of B. Jezernik.

that a civilised nation cultivates toward its sons (Bonač 1931: 1–2; K. M. H. 1935: 1). In particular, former Austrian war priest France Bonač vehemently advocated the right of the fallen Slovenian soldiers who had given everything on the altar of the homeland to “a dignified grave and a dignified memory.” As an honorary speaker at numerous commemorative and remembrance ceremonies in the Drava Banate, Bonač repeatedly referred to biblical examples, such as the story of Saul’s concubine Respha, and asserted

Just as Respha watched over the wretched corpses of her crucified children, so shall we in this association protect the graves of our fallen comrades and remind our people not to forget their sons, but for each hamlet to put up at least one modest plaque in their honour, to pray for them, and to pay tribute to their sacrifice, their love, and their loyalty—to us. (Bonač 1929: 407)

Bonač repeatedly emphasised the non-political character of the Association of Slovenian War Veterans, but he also never missed an opportunity to address burning political issues in his speeches. He repeatedly said that Slovenes love “their country,” so he demanded that the leaders of the nation-state also show love for it by “lightening

their heavy tax burdens and returning them to the entire population of the country without distinction”; and that they do “not neglect their disabled, who have contributed everything on the altar of the fatherland.” These were, of course, obvious political demands. Bonač also dismissed those who expressed doubts about the patriotism of former Austrian soldiers. In the course of time Bonač’s attitude hardened, and finally he did not shy away from steps towards historical revisionism, as his prayer for the “fallen heroes” at the open-air event in honour of the victims of the First World War in Brezje in 1925 shows (see Anon. 1925: 377).

The political motivation for commemorating fallen Slovenian soldiers in Austro-Hungarian uniforms became clear in the mid-1930s, when the association began to organise so-called tabors (gatherings) of the Slovenian people. The first of these gatherings took place on Sunday, August 11, 1935, in Komenda. The tabor was attended by several thousand people, including schoolchildren, firemen, folklore groups in traditional costumes, and the brass band of the Domžale district. The honorary speaker on this occasion was Ban Marko Natlačen. He did not dwell on the past, but focused on the present, in particular on the relationship between the Slovenian and Yugoslav national consciousness, or as he said, on how “we perceive the Yugoslav nation and Yugoslav national unity.” He explained that it is important to distinguish between the idea of the Yugoslav nation in the state-political sense and the Yugoslav nation in the ethnic-cultural sense. According to Ban Natlačen, all citizens of Yugoslavia, including Germans and Hungarians, constituted the Yugoslav nation as a single entity in the political sense. In the ethno-cultural sense, however, Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes were three distinct national entities. Therefore, he said, any kind of hegemony of one nation over another should be considered intolerable. He concluded by stating that the Slovenes formed a nation-state with the Croats and Serbs in 1918 in order to become stronger together and not to lose their national individuality (Anon. 1935: 1–2).

MONUMENTAL SOLDIERS IN AUSTRIAN UNIFORMS

In the Slovenian part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, Slovenian soldiers fallen in Austrian uniforms were not publicly commemorated in the first post-war years. However, when monuments and memorials to fallen Slovenian soldiers began to be erected, their number

increased rapidly. In the Drava Banate with its 1,144,298 inhabitants on 15,746 km² (Zupan 1937: I, 4) Vito Hazler documented more than 525 of them (Hazler 2021). These are mainly name plaques on church walls or cemeteries, but also figurative representations of soldiers in Austrian uniforms. The depiction of soldiers in Austrian uniforms on monuments in the Yugoslav nation-state was burdened with a special mortgage, as it was the Austro-Hungarian army that invaded the Kingdom of Serbia, leaving behind great human losses and terrible devastation.

The first of these monuments was Kranjski Janez, designed in 1916 by Slovenian painter Ivan Vavpotič and Slovenian sculptor Svitoslav Peruzzi, a one-year volunteer, but never completed because Peruzzi was discharged from military service. It was carved in marble by Slovenian sculptor Lojze Dolinar, also a one-year volunteer (Anon. 1916: 4). According to a contemporary account, Kranjski Janez was most likely contemplating about the past and future days of glory and victory, remembering the heroes who had achieved this and would achieve it again, sacrificing everything they held dear on the altar of the homeland—their lives. Every vein of the created hero was said to breathe life, pride, and self-confidence. “This is the Kranjski, the Slovenian soldier—a hero!” (Orešan 1917: 115–16).

In the spring of 1917, the High Command of the Imperial and Royal 17th Infantry Battalion “Crown Prince” requested the Ljubljana City Council to determine a location for the monument. As *Slovenec* reported on April 4, 1917, Mayor Tavčar welcomed the proposal and mentioned two possible locations for the monument in the city centre (Anon. 1917: 1–2). Kranjski Janez, however, was not erected until 1923, when the remains of the victims of the Judenburg Mutiny were brought to Ljubljana (Čopič 1987: 168–69). It was then erected at the Holy Cross Cemetery in Ljubljana, not to honour the fallen soldiers on the battlefield, but to commemorate the victims of Judenburg who should have gone to the front on May 12, 1918, but refused (Anon. 1923: 277).

A few years after Ljubljana, the village of Dovje erected its own statue of Kranjski Janez. It was erected on the initiative of a preparatory committee, which organised a fundraising campaign that brought in about 25,000 dinars. When thinking about the representation of the statue, it was decided that it should represent a regular soldier of the 17th Slovenian Infantry Division in a typical Austrian uniform. The committee’s position was that “history simply cannot be rewritten” and therefore the statue should be considered “a contemporary document, a sad reminder of an even sadder past, when Slovene boys and men were forced against their will to participate in a worldwide massacre” (Anon. 1938b: 3).

However, not everyone shared their opinion. The monument in Dovje was eventually wantonly destroyed because it allegedly depicted “a soldier in too Austrian a uniform,” as some repeatedly pointed out in protest (Anon. 1938a: 8). The statue and its pedestal were torn down and the head removed from the site. However, the marble plaque with the engraved names of some 60 fallen and missing soldiers was spared the fury of the perpetrators. “The sight of the destroyed statue is pitiful—a mute testimony to the suffering of our Slovenian boys and men who were forced to fight for predatory foreigners and the oppressors of our country,” *Slovenec* reported (Anon. 1938b: 3).

On November 26, 1933, an interesting figurative monument depicting a soldier in Austrian uniform was erected in the town of Trebnje. It was dedicated to the parishioners of Trebnje and the surrounding villages who died in the First World War. On the day of the solemn unveiling of the monument, France Bonač, who “moved the people of Trebnje to tears” with his performances, gave a speech during the mass in the packed parish church. The monument in Trebnje is more than six metres high and depicts a soldier in full military gear standing bruised and battered on the rubble of a battlefield. Behind him is Christ on the cross—the Comforter and Helper who delivers him from his despair. On the sides, large shells are carved from black granite, and a marble plaque in the centre of the pedestal bears the enigmatic inscription “To the heroes—compatriots of our homeland.” At the unveiling ceremony, Bonač refrained from explaining how to understand the inscription, which says that the hero in the (Austrian) uniform embodies the homeland. For which homeland, then, did the heroes fall: Austrian or Yugoslav? Whatever the answer, the message of the stone soldiers in Serbian uniforms in one part of the Yugoslav nation-state and in Austrian uniforms in another part was that the First World War was not really over in the 1930s, but continued at least symbolically (see Jezernik 2017). The Serbian and Slovenian political leaderships developed a consistent narrative of the righteous victimhood of their respective people, which was eloquently and convincingly espoused by their respective parties of resentful partisans. In short, in the Yugoslav nation-states, the cult of fallen Serb, Croat, and Slovene soldiers became a central component of Serb, Croat, and Slovene nationalism and thus an important emotional component that blocked the development of a common Yugoslav identity.

Finally, the Association of Slovenian War Veterans began to organise large commemorative events, unveil memorial plaques and perform rituals, especially on the holiday of November 1. The outdoor gatherings of Slovenian war veterans in Brezje played an important

role. They were included in the commemorative calendar in the middle of August, on the feast of the Assumption of Mary, as they claimed, although they closely coincided with the old war pilgrimages in honour of the birthday of Emperor Franz Josef I (August 18). So closely, in fact, that this coincidence could not have escaped the notice of anyone familiar with the pilgrimages during the war. Perhaps the largest gathering took place on St. Mary's Day in 1925. It was estimated that about 12,000 participants came from all Slovenian regions, including those outside the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

Commemorations of fallen soldiers were declared apolitical every time, and Slovenian war veterans often paid lip service to the royal house to dispel suspicions of Austrianism. At almost every rally, general assembly, and similar event or meeting, a telegram of allegiance was sent to King Aleksandar to emphasise the non-partisan and non-political nature of the movement. Occasionally, the king's name was also associated with that of the fallen soldiers, creating a radically whitewashed interpretation of their historical role and significance. For example, the local veterans' organisation in Vodice restored a monument to the fallen soldiers of their community whose names had been obscured by the rain. In 1935, the names of the fallen were gilded, and the king's name was additionally engraved in a prominent place on the monument (Anon. 1935a: 3). Although great efforts were made to conceal the political component of the movement, this dimension was evident: it was intended to mobilise the masses for specific political goals and to support the notion that "something must be done" to correct the current situation.

At gatherings on the occasion of the unveiling of memorial plaques or at commemorative ceremonies, political views were regularly expressed, mostly formal ones, but always referring to the present and not to the past. In the nation-state whose current citizens had fought on the other side of the front line not so long ago, the memory of the war had become one of the central ideological battlefields. This struggle became more and more open and political over the years. As documented by the leadership of the Association of Slovenian Veterans, the gatherings "developed into genuine national manifestations in the first half of the 1930s (Osrednji odbor Zveze bojevnikov 1933: 3). Speakers at the war veterans' gatherings systematically emphasised their determination and the need to preserve the Slovene language,³

3 "Language is by no means merely an external means of communication, but an essential part of the individuality and culture of every nation," proclaimed *Slovenec* in 1924 (Anon. 1924: 1).

Slovene national characteristics, and the Catholic faith, that is to say, what they considered the most important signs of Slovene national individuality.

In the 1930s, numerous commemorative events were held in Slovenian parishes in honour of the fallen Slovenian soldiers. The number of monuments with lists of fallen soldiers grew rapidly, and soon there was hardly a parish without one (Anon. 1935c: 1). Although all this took place far from the kingdom's capital and was obscured by an incomprehensible Slovene language, the goings-on eventually drew the attention of Belgrade. In late 1925, the Belgrade newspaper *Politika* released a biting commentary condemning the events:

We have no objection to families tending their graves out of reverence for those who lost their heads in war through accident, bad luck, or lack of consciousness, but we have our legitimate doubts about ostentatious, formal ceremonies that praise and glorify those who fought in the name of Charles of Habsburg against the common cause of the Allies and Yugoslavs. For it is clear and indisputable that these fallen soldiers fought with all their might against the liberation of this country—even if unknowingly or against their will. (Z. 1925: 5)

Politika's concerns were dismissed in *Slovenec* by the leadership of the Association of Slovenian War Veterans as an “unfounded attack.” They pointed out that the graves of all soldiers who had fallen in various countries were all being cared for, even those belonging to the enemy's army, including Germans slain in the invasion of Belgrade. Because of this, Slovenes also could not stay silent and thus “spit on the bones of their brothers and sons” who had fallen in Gorizia and in the Primorska region, where they “defended their own soil” (Glavni odbor Z. S. V. 1925: 2).

At the events of the Association of Slovenian Soldiers, and later after its violent restructuring (having attracted the attention of Belgrade) into the Association of Yugoslav Fighters “Boj,” the language of the speakers became all the more political, with a direct and clear agenda of struggle against centralism and for the autonomy of the Slovenian nation. Not everyone could take the podium at these commemorations; all speakers had to be approved by the association. The language of the speakers became increasingly radicalised and eventually took on an openly Slovenian nationalist tone. Its use at ceremonial and ritualised occasions paved the way for it to become part of the worldview of the participants, confirming their sentiments as morally right. The places and occasions in which they were uttered gave them a strong emotional dimension, a prerequisite for the effective transformation of an idea into a material force.

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