Slovenian Remembrance Landscape in a Centenial Perspective

Petra Svoljšak

"The war of 1914–1918 belongs to no one, not even to historians," read the introduction of Jay Winter's and Antoine Prost's English edition of *The Great War in History. Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Winter, Prost 2005: 1). The Great War gained its "grand" title already in 1915, while the German *Weltkrieg* is of even older origin, as it was used before 1914 to designate great wars between European superpowers; however, the Eurocentric aspect prevailed after 1914. Before 1914, the expression *great war* was used to describe wars between European superpowers or wars of global historical meaning, but not in the sense of world wars (Janz 2014). During the war, the expression *European war* was also used, while the designation *great* implied the massive scale of the conflict – the first such conflict since the Napoleonic Wars and only comparable to the current designation of a *100-year flood*. However, the denomination had also moral

implications, especially for the Triple Entente that was fighting against the evil German militarism, analogous to the Biblical battle between good and evil at Armageddon. Sometimes, it was also called the *great war for civilisation* (Lang 2014). The centenary of the First World War, however, brought an addition to the terminology, with *the Great War* becoming *the greater war*. This was due to the "realisation," particularly by Western European First World War historiography that recognised it as the most relevant of its kind, that the military conflict in some parts of Europe began as early as 1912 and did not end until 1923, with larger chronological and geographical dimensions (see e. g. Fogarty 2015: 97-112).

The sheer volume of works produced on this topic is impressive. If Jay Winter and Antoine Prost noted 50,000 titles in the catalogue of the *Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine* in Paris in 2005, highlighting the impressive number of monographs published from the mid-1980s to the end of the 1990s (e.g. 1100 books in French, including more than 100 in 1998), the centenary has certainly multiplied these figures many times over. For comparison, let us examine the situation in Slovenia. Based on the entries in COBISS (Co-operative Online Bibliographic System and Services) encompassing the works of all Slovenian libraries, there were 2952 bibliographic units published on the topic of the Second World War from 1918 to 2014, of which 1120 were published in the last ten years, and 1757 from 1994 to 2014, among them 447 monographs (scientific, popular, guides, catalogues, theses, etc.) and 1052 units dedicated to the Isonzo Front. According to COBISS, 1456 (537 dedicated to the Isonzo Front) bibliographic units have been published in Slovenian during the last eight years.

The history of works about the First World War is primarily a history of the various topics that have been at the forefront of research at a particular time and place, but it is certainly telling that the further we move away from the event, the greater the interest it attracts, not least, but certainly also, because of the centenary of its beginning, its continuation, and its end. In the development of any form of historiography and public memory, there are undeniable fluctuations, ebbs, and flows; in the Slovenian case, however, we cannot use such literal terms, because it presupposes a continuous development over several decades, which has only been present here for the last forty years.

On the other hand, we can observe that Slovenian remembrance of the First World War oscillated between triumph and oblivion during the first half of the century. Oblivion also accompanied Slovenian historical remembrance of the Austro-Hungarian war experience at

a time when the First World War was a part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia's shared Yugoslav history, which was marked by military and political efforts for the unification of South Slavs. Nevertheless, the period between the two wars was considerably more productive in the field of First World War journalism, with many recollections of the military years, captivity, and wartime uprisings, and surprisingly few of the Isonzo Front.

With the creation of Kingdom SHS, an ethnocentric model was introduced into historical remembrance, and the struggle for control over memory of the past also became a struggle for political dominance in the newly emerged South Slavic state. The fact that Serbs (the former Kingdom of Serbia) possessed a great amount of political capital after the war as victors, helping to dissolve the Habsburg Monarchy and liberating South Slavs in order to unite with them in a common state, was also vital in the formation of state-building memory.

Particularly in the first post-war years, Slovenian collective memory of the First World War was shaped by the memory of the year 1914, when so-called military absolutism was introduced in the Austrian part of the monarchy and political persecution was widespread. The year 1914 also gave rise to various reactions and interpretations in the Slovenian public and partly also in historiography, making Slovenian historian Janko Pleterski's introductory thought in his 1971 reference work, *Prva odločitev Slovencev za Jugoslavijo* (Slovenians' First Decision for Yugoslavia), still crucially relevant:

> Even more than after its outbreak, the genuine attitude of Slovenians towards the war was revealed during the days of the acute crisis triggered by the assassination in Sarajevo. The danger of war was looming at that time, and the Austrian authorities had not yet set in motion the preparatory mechanism of military absolutism. (Pleterski 1971: 9)

Turbulent times and processes leading up to the First World War undoubtedly profoundly shaped the historical memory of the Habsburg/Austrian period in Slovenian history, but the memory was tainted by events of the First World War during the war and also in the following decades. The perception of Austria as the prison of the peoples, albeit this term has never been used in historiography to describe it, was the result of strongly biased commemorative literature about the formation of the Yugoslav state between 1918 and 1941. Ivan Lah, a member of the rebirth movement ("Preporod") consisting of revolutionary youth aiming to dissolve Austria-Hungary and unify with other South Slavs, wrote: "This evening, as I boarded our train in Zemun, I heard someone speak Hungarian and felt as if I were in prison" (Lah 1925: 45).

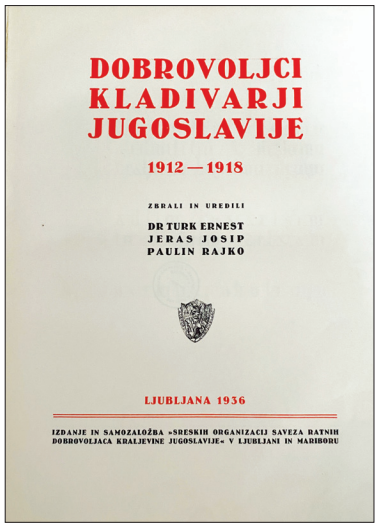
On the other hand, the relationship of Slovenians with their former homelands (the Habsburg Monarchy, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes/Yugoslavia, socialist Yugoslavia) has ebbed and flowed, which had an impact on the collective memory of past events. As Slovenian historian Peter Vodopivec has noted, the image of Slovenia's three former homelands in school textbooks, historiography, and even more so, public memory has been decidedly grim (Vodopivec 2014). In recent decades, the image of the Dual Monarchy has improved, and school textbooks have also highlighted the fact that, despite the pressure of Germanisation, Slovenians developed into a modern nation in the second half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, it has been acknowledged that the majority of Slovenian-speaking inhabitants in Slovenian lands were sincerely loyal to the Habsburg crown and saw the monarchy as their homeland. Aspirations for an independent state thus prevailed only during times of extreme internal crisis, when accepting compromises was no longer an option (Pleterski 1971: 9).

Concerning national or patriotic feelings and the formation of collective memory, it should also be noted that loyalties, allegiances, and identities were intertwined at three levels: ethnically Slovenian, crownland loyalty (Carniola, Carinthia, Styria, Austrian Littoral), and dynastic Habsburg, meaning above all loyalty to the dynasty and the emperor, who as a political icon united the nations and was therefore worthy of the complete trust of his citizens.

At a conceptual level, processes and events in the new state were interpreted as the history of the united Yugoslav nation and were in harmony with the politically declared trinity of the peoples of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Many of the "unification" myths were based on experiences of the First World War, which, however, were very heterogeneous and created an almost schizophrenic situation between the winners (Serbia) and the losers (ex-Austro-Hungarian Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs), which naturally put the commemoration processes in a difficult position, as commemorating victory and defeat at the same time was, of course, impossible.

One of the main sources of state-building mythology was the volunteer movement, which represented only a small number of Slovenians, as only around 4,000 Slovenians joined the movement. For instance, only in the first battles on the Serbian front in 1914, around 12,000 volunteers joined the Serbian army, but only 24 were Slovenians, thus making the volunteers' contribution to the liberation of South Slaves in Austria-Hungary symbolic at best (Svoljšak and Antoličič 2018: 126). This was also reflected in the new Yugoslav reality, where

the understanding of the role of Slovenian volunteers was also purely symbolic and relegated to the periphery of commemoration processes, and where all initiatives came from the representatives of the volunteers themselves. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the majority of texts on the First World War written in the interwar period were dedicated to the volunteer movement (Svoljšak 1993: 272-75). This was also reflected in school textbooks, as the volunteer movement compared its multinational character with the Yugoslav and non-Serbian character of the new Yugoslav state.


DOBROVOLJCI
KLADIVARJI
JUGOSLAVIJE

1912 — 1918

ZBRALI IN UREDILI

DR TURK ERNEST
JERAS JOSIP
PAULIN RAJKO

LJUBLJANA 1936

IZDANJE IN SAMOZALOŽBA »SREŠKIH ORGANIZACIJ SAVEZA RATNIH DOBROVOLJACA KRALJEVINE JUGOSLAVIJE« V LJUBLJANI IN MARIBORU

Fig. 1: The frontpage of the memorial book "Dobrovoljci kladivarji Jugoslavije 1912 – 1918" (Ljubljana 1936).

However, there were double standards even within the volunteer movement, and state-building public memory was certainly discriminatory towards a certain part of volunteers, namely Yugoslav volunteers within the Italian army. On the other hand, the memories of this movement, organised by First Lieutenant Ljudevit Pivko, constitute a specific and important part of Slovenian remembrance of the First World War (Pivko 1923[1], 1991[2]). In September 1917, Lieutenant-Commander Pivko and the majority of his regiment defected to the Italian side. Convinced that this was the only way to fight against Austria-Hungary, they opened a front to the Italians against the enemy at Carzano. However, the Italian army captured them as prisoners of war. Imprisoned, Pivko organised a volunteer detachment among the captured Slavic and South Slavic officers and fought with them on various parts of the Italian front. Pivko's position after the

war was a reflection of the political situation at the time and the situation of an ex-Slovenian officer of the former Austro-Hungarian army. During political struggles in Yugoslav Slovenia in the 1920s, there were accusations, on the one hand, that Pivko was a traitor, and on the other, that he had deliberately ignored the Yugoslav Committee, which was in charge of Yugoslav unification. Pivko strongly refuted the accusations, noting, in particular, the inhibiting/negative role of the Yugoslav Committee in organising Yugoslav volunteers in Italy, since they only accepted volunteering in the Serbian army and under oath to King Petar. It is also worth mentioning Lovro Kuhar, also known as Prežihov Voranc, the writer of the first Slovenian war novel, who aspired to join the ranks of the Yugoslav volunteer division throughout his captivity in Italy, but his wish remained unfulfilled. The establishment of the Yugoslav division was hindered by the Italian government because of its territorial gains in the London Memorandum of 1915, and it did not allow Slovenian and Croatian prisoners of war to join the division. The Italians, however, reportedly sent some eager "volunteers" to the front in Tyrol, where they dug trenches, including Kuhar. In September 1918, he was finally "enlisted" by the Yugoslav division, but he could not live out his wish for active participation in the struggle against Austria-Hungary due to the war coming to an end.

An important Yugoslav myth, which has also been comprehensively internalised by Slovenian (volunteer) authors, was the ordeal of the Serbian Great Retreat through Albania to the coast. This became a constitutive myth in Yugoslav nation-building and led to narrative hyper-production, which also incorporated biblical symbolism and was used by Slovenian writers of memoirs remembering the Albanian Golgotha. In their narratives, Slovenian writers sometimes glorified the heroism and sacrifice of the Serbian people, while also assessing the Slovenian people during the war as unprepared for freedom, because slavery was so profoundly rooted in their hearts and minds (Jeras 1938: 22).

The post-war position of Slovenian war veterans and former members of the disbanded Austro-Hungarian army also have had a considerable impact on Slovenian public memory of the First World War (Svoljšak 2006: 277-88; Newman 2018). The war veterans were tasked with preserving the memory of their fallen comrades, but they also encountered a difficult social situation, partly stemming from the existing legislation that privileged the volunteers and, of course, Serbian and Montenegrin war veterans. The Veterans' Association *Bojevniki* (Warriors) was only founded in 1931. It was a non-partisan and non-political organisation with a fundamental guiding

Leto I., štev. 1. V Ljubljani, dne 15. avgusta 1931. Cena Din 1·50.

BOJEVNIK

GLASILO ZVEZE BOJEVNIKOV

Deset let naš kralj.

V nedeljo, 16. avgusta, bodo hitele naše misli prav posebno v naš Beograd, kjer bo praznoval naš kralj desetletnico, odkar stoji na čelu države in vodi nje usodo.

Naš kralj — junak!
Naš kralj — državnik!
Naš kralj — tolažnik!
Naš kralj — osvajalec src!

In ko se zbirajo trpini iz svetovne vojne dan pred velikim dogodkom na Brezjah, pošiljajo prvi z vsem srcem in svetim navdušenjem svojemu kralju častitke ter zagotovilo vdanosti in zvestobe, iz vse duše pa prosijo Vsemogočnega, da naš kralj še dolgo varno, modro in pravično vlada domovini, ki se je rodila iz tisočerih žrtev vojnih grozot.

Naše poslanstvo.

Pravijo, da smo organizacija umirajočih. Res je: vedno nas je manj, saj se z vsakim dnem krčijo naše vrste. Res je pa tudi, da svet vedno bolj pozablja na one strašne dni, katerih si ne želi nihče več. Zato je prav, da živeči opozarjamo na težke čase, ki jih že zagrinja megla pozabe. Povejmo vse tisto, s čimer je izpričana burna naša zgodovina.

Svetovna vojna je vrgla svet s tečajev. Tako ga je preobrnila, da se še vedno ne more uravnovesiti in dobiti trdnih temeljev za stalno življenje. Zdi se, da se v vsem življenju nadaljuje nekrvavi boj za obstanek. Države hite in se trudijo, da bi zacelile rane, ki jih je zadal krvavi metež. Toda komaj popravijo samo eno zevajočo rano, se že odpre nešteto drugih, ki neprestano in vedno bolj krvave. Nehote se človek izprašuje: Ali res ni izhoda iz tega kaosa, ali res ni leka za ozdravljenje duš? Tu si je zastavila tudi naša organizacija nalogo, da blaži rane, prizadete po svetovni vojni, in da krepi ter pospešuje pravo prijateljstvo, kakršnega smo bili vajeni na bojiščih.

Svet ječi pod težo gospodarskih nadlog. Vsepovsod kriza. Brezposelnost zavzema vedno večji razmah. Nezadovoljnost se z vsakim dnem veča. Treba je hiteti, pomagati, da tovariš ne propade v tem brezmočnem stanju. Pa je zopet naša zveza, ki naj opozarja, svetuje in pomaga!

Spominjajmo se tudi onih, ki so žrtvovali najdražje — svoje življenje! Treba je, da se jim oddolžimo, da pospešujemo napravo primernih spomenikov, da delamo za ureditev vojaških pokopališč in da skrbimo ob vsaki priliki za počastitev spomina padlih vojakov.

V listu je potrebno, da slišimo mnenja tovarišev, ki naj nam opišejo svoje doživljaje iz vojnih let, orišejo zanimivosti težkih dni in predočijo svoje trpljenje z bojnih poljan. Saj bodo to zanimive priče iz dobe našega trpljenja in največjega ponižanja.

Glavno pozornost bomo posvečali ideji, ki je začrtana v pravilih in v naših srcih. Kakor nismo poznali razlik v strelskih jarkih, tako ne bomo poznali razlik pri našem delu. Vsak in vsi na plan, da bo naš list tem zanimivejši.

Našo organizacijo hočemo razširiti po vsej naši domovini. Zato bomo v listu priobčevali vse, kar zanima predvsem naše člane. Zato naj posebno naše podružnice, naše

Mi hočemo med narodi mir, da bi se med sabo laže kulturno, gospodarsko in socijalno izpopolnjevali.

Mi hočemo omogočenje složnega mednarodnega in meddržavnega življenja.

Kadar pa bi vendarle kdorsibodi ogrožal naše narodne ali državne meje — takrat pojdemo vsi mi bojevniki naše zveze, stari in mladi, ki so stali ob Soči ali ob Dravi, prostovoljno in radi tudi v najtrši boj za obrambo svetih pravic našega naroda, naše države in našega kralja.

General Maister.

1

Fig. 2: The first issue of the newspaper "Bojevnik", August 15, 1931.

principle of fostering friendship among its members and providing moral, legal, and material assistance to its members, the disabled, and war orphans. In addition, they were extremely active in erecting monuments to fallen comrades, with some 160 monuments being built in civilian cemeteries, towns and villages. The main promotional tool of the Veterans' Association was the newsletter *Bojevnik*, which was published between 1931 and 1936, bringing back memories of the fighting years, but above all informing and raising awareness among its members and readers about the mission of the Veterans' Association and its work.The *Association* promoted both Slovenian national consciousness and loyalty to the Yugoslav state, and throughout its existence, it consciously and persistently emphasised efforts for the welfare of the nation and the state, as well as worked for reciprocity and friendship between the Slavic peoples. It established charitable foundations and funds, economic enterprises, and collected material for a war museum, mainly paintings, diaries, and books. For the implementation of its projects, it relied on charitable support rather than state funding, which was particularly evident in three cases: namely, when it unsuccessfully attempted to erect a tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Brezje and a monumental cemetery for fallen soldiers at the Holy Cross Cemetery (present-day Žale) in Ljubljana, and strived to regulate the social status of veterans, war widows, and orphans.

On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the coronation of the image of Mary, Help of Christians (1907) in Brezje, in preparation for the ceremony on August 28 and 29, 1937, the idea was conceived of redeveloping the area in front of the church to create a large park, where monuments to deserving men and women and Mary's worshippers would be erected. The tomb of an unknown Slovenian soldier was to be erected in memory of all Slovenian soldiers buried in all of the places where the war raged, while a fountain with a statue of Mary Help of Christians was to stand in the monastery garden as a symbol of her love and mercy. The monument was hailed as a symbol of peace, reconciliation, and comradeship, and the idea of the unknown Slovenian soldier's tomb, into which the remains of the soldier would be transported, was unique and highly symbolic, with each Slovenian parish contributing soil from its own cemetery in special urns as a symbol of community and the shared sacrifices of all Slovenians.

The Veterans' Association strove to ensure that Slovenian war victims were also commemorated in a fitting and lasting way at the Holy Cross Cemetery in Ljubljana. During the war, soldiers of various nationalities and religions were buried at this cemetery, including prisoners of war who died in the military hospital in Ljubljana, mostly Italians. Evangelical, Jewish, and Muslim soldiers were buried in a separate Evangelical Saint Christopher cemetery, which was closed in the 1950s. For a long time, the Association unsuccessfully addressed requests and applications to competent institutions to build the cemetery, and in 1932, the Ljubljana municipality finally accepted the initiative of the Veterans' Association to open a military cemetery at the Holy Cross Cemetery. The task was entrusted to architect Jože Plečnik, who drew up a plan for the cemetery. As early as 1923, the remains of the Judenburg rebellions were transported to the Holy Cross Cemetery and ceremoniously buried under the watchful eye of the *Kranjski Janez* statue, the work of Slovenian sculptors Svitoslav Peruzzi and Lojze Dolinar (1916). Architect Plečnik envisioned erecting a mighty monument in the shape of three pyramids on the same site, to serve as a central landmark for the entire cemetery. However, the plan was never carried out; instead, in 1939, in accordance with the plans of architect Edo Ravnikar, Plečnik's pupil, a military charnel house surrounded by a burial ground park was built and consecrated in December of the same year. There, a total of 5,238 victims of the First World War were buried, including the Judenburg victims, Slovenian fighters who had fallen in Carinthia, a member of the Preporod Ivan Endlicher, prisoners of war, and soldiers who had been buried in the Evangelical cemetery.

Fig. 3: A drawing of the Plečnik's idea of the monument on the Holy Cross cemetery, published in *Bojevnik*, II (3), June 25, 1932.

In addition, the veterans devoted themselves to finding solutions to the everyday struggles of their members, above all their difficult economic situation, as the majority of them were peasantry and working-class, and disability benefits were one of the most pressing among the surviving veterans of the First World War.

According to the 1922 census, there were around 85,290 disabled veterans of the First World War in the Kingdom of SCS. The national structure indicated that there were 33,666 Serbian, Macedonian, and Montenegrin disabled veterans, of which 13,500 were Serbs from the former Austro-Hungarian empire, 20,166 soldiers were from the former kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro, 21,308 were Croats, 11,467 were Slovenian, while the rest were members of other nations, mostly Germans (2,657) and Hungarians (2,527) (Kresal 1998: 229).

In any case, the Slovenian share was very large, representing as much as 15.4 per cent of all disabled veterans, even though the Slovenian regions constituted only 8.5 per cent of the Yugoslav population. According to the census, the most impacted was the age group between 30 and 40, while 28 per cent were older and 10 per cent were younger, indicating that those most affected were soldiers between the ages of 23 and 37. Providing for the material needs of such a large share of the population was thus extremely difficult and required a systemic approach (Kresal 1999: 307). In the Slovenian regions of the Kingdom of SCS, a fifth of Slovenian families was lastingly affected by the war, according to some data. There were supposedly 31,039 widows supporting 49,182 dependent family members, while other data indicates a lower number of war widows, namely, 27,000 (Kresal 1999: 307).

However, a definite and uniform solution for disabled veterans on a state level was not established until 1925, when the Disabilities Act of 17 November 1925 went into effect. Until then, disabled veterans and families of fallen or missing soldiers exercised their right to disability benefits in accordance with the old legislation of the states they were a part of before the First World War, i.e. Serbian, Hungarian, and Austrian legislation (December 27, 1875). From 1918 to 1925, the regulation of the National Government of the Kingdom of SHS

of 20 November 1918 also applied, but only to Yugoslav Slovenia. The Regulation on Temporary Emergency Relief Assistance to People with Disabilities and Families of Fallen Soldiers of 14 May 1920, amended on March 15, 1921, and published as the Temporary Emergency Relief Assistance to People with Disabilities and Families of Fallen and Missing Soldiers as well as Other Civil Victims of the War Act of 28 December 1921, applied to the whole Kingdom.

Nevertheless, the differences regarding the value of temporary disability pensions and other rights derived from the abovementioned legislation endured. The 1920 and 1921 regulations defined as disabled veterans those soldiers who, according to the laws of the former kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro and Austria-Hungary respectively, had performed military duty or service as conscripts, volunteers for the reunification of Yugoslavia, and who, through no fault of their own, were wounded or had their health impaired to such an extent that they were declared unfit for military service by the competent military authorities and their capacity to engage in gainful activity was reduced by 20 per cent. Prisoners of war who "met" the conditions for disabled veterans were also included.

Fig. 4: The statue of Kranjski Janez at the Žale cemetery (photo P. Svoljšak).

The regulation also defined the status of civilians disabled in the war, stipulating that persons who, due to military operations and through no fault of their own, sustained the same injuries as disabled veterans were eligible to acquire this status. Similarly, the eligibility conditions for disability benefits for war widows, internees, families of

dead or killed internees and detainees, and dependent family members were meticulously set out. According to F. Kresal, the economic situation of Slovenian disabled veterans was dire, as almost 67 per cent were not homeowners, while 23 per cent lived below the subsistence level. Disabled veterans were eligible for numerous privileges and disability benefits, which were also available to family members of fallen, dead, or missing soldiers; however, that represented only 5 per cent of the assets required for a family of four to support itself. That only goes to show that "disability benefits were only a state recognition and not a meaningful assistance for the support of families of fallen soldiers or provision of a decent life for disabled veterans, which they, of course, should have" (Kresal 1998: 311).

The fact that disability pensions were set based on the political decision that only certain categories of disabled veterans and families of fallen soldiers were eligible for it also contributed to this situation. The main condition was participation in the struggle for the Yugoslav state, as the sacrifice for liberation and Yugoslav unification was rewarded by doubling the disabled benefits. The privileged group was comprised of disabled veterans, families of fallen, dead or missing soldiers, and war orphans from the former Kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro, whereas only disabled volunteers and families of fallen, dead, or missing volunteers from the newly-annexed regions, as the Temporary Emergency Relief Assistance to People with Disabilities and Families of Fallen and Missing Soldiers as well as Other Civil Victims of the War Act of 1921 defined the former Austro-Hungarian regions, were eligible for support in accordance with the Serbian legislation of 1914. Former internees and detainees from around the country, victims who became disabled due to the cruelty of the enemy, and families of persons who were killed by the enemy or died in internment were also eligible for these benefits. All other disabled veterans, i.e. mostly former Austro-Hungarian soldiers, received disability pensions in accordance with the legislation of the dissolved Habsburg Monarchy.

Therefore, disability benefits for disabled veterans from former Austro-Hungarian regions were between 55 per cent and 71 per cent lower than those guaranteed for soldiers from Serbian and Montenegrin regions, while the situation regarding disability benefits for families was even worse as they were between 55 per cent and 85 per cent lower. This persisted for seven years, even though the level of benefits fluctuated due to inflation and high prices; however, the inequalities remained. In 1925, the Assembly of the Kingdom of SCS finally adopted a new disabled persons act that harmonised the rights of disabled veterans as well as those of the families of fallen, dead, or missing

soldiers across the country. This eliminated the disparity in the value of disability pensions and modified the definition of disabled veterans to include any Yugoslav citizen who became disabled during military service from the date of mobilisation until six weeks after demobilisation; the status was thus linked to military operations as well as peacetime if the injury or illness occurred through no fault of their own while on military duty.

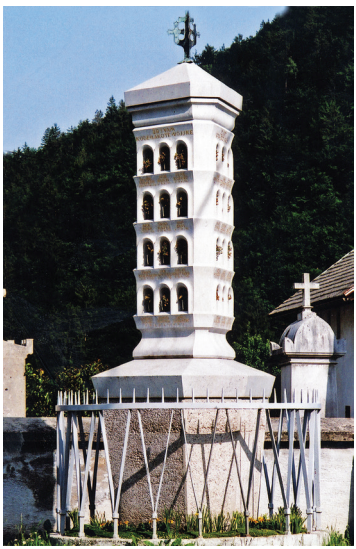


Fig. 5: The monument to the falls soldiers, Bohinjska Bela (photo D. Svoljšak).

The main eligibility condition became military service and official duty (non-military persons who became sick due to exile, combat, or defending the border as part of official duties were also given the status of disabled persons), whereas the legislation did not include civilian disabled persons and civilian victims of war as was the case before. Civilian disabled persons and disabled veterans were eligible only for activities or injuries that happened during military- or war-related activities. Despite the additional forms of state protection and assistance, such as disability allowances and disability benefits, which accounted for about 90 per cent of the rights guaranteed by law, the situation of World War veterans, disabled veterans, and families of fallen soldiers was very unfavourable, as they did not receive social insurance or any other protection for other threats to their existence. The soldiers warned that, above all, a lot of work and inventiveness was required "for a person to be able to enjoy their legal rights. Before this happens, many of those poor souls could wither away" (*Bojevnik*, 15.11.1931: 3).

Furthermore, the inequalities and discrimination against veterans of the former Austro-Hungarian army compared to volunteers and other soldiers for Yugoslav unification did not end with the establishment of the SFR Yugoslavia. In 1970, the Association of Slovenian Military Volunteers from the Wars of 1912 to 1918 was founded, and in 1971 the Slovenian Assembly passed the Act on the Fighters for the Northern Border and on Slovenian Military Volunteers from the Wars of 1912 to 1918, when Slovenian volunteers were given a special place in the Slovenian Constitution. In 1980, a monument to them, the work of renowned Slovenian sculptor Janez Boljka, was erected on the Dvorni Square in Ljubljana.

The new Yugoslav authorities' discriminatory attitude was also reflected in the treatment of active officers of Slovenian and Croatian nationalities, whose loyalty was always questioned by Yugoslav military authorities. Since loyalty and patriotism meant above all devotion to Serbian state traditions and symbols, there were many reasons to doubt the loyalty of non-Serbian officers. As I. Banac points out, even in such simple and mundane cases as the use of the Cyrillic or Latin alphabet, the use of the Latin alphabet was often taken to represent an anti-state sentiment. This resulted in frequent resignations from the army, which were often refused by military authorities, who imprisoned advocates who drew attention to national inequality. Thus, on the eve of the Second World War, only 31 Croats and 22 Slovenians remained out of 191 staff officers. The direct and immediate link between the army and the Crown, and their rootedness in Serbian political tradition, Serbian national ideology, and Serbian First World War mythology, consequently constituted a major obstacle to the establishment of equal relations within the new Yugoslav state community (Banac 1984: 151–52). Even in commemoration of the fallen, it was impossible to establish equal relations between those who sacrificed their lives for their homelands.

In the fields of journalism and historiography, an important subject was that of military mutinies in the Austro-Hungarian army, which was present in the public both during the two world wars and after 1945, and which waned from public memory after the 1990s, when it became a mere footnote in historiographical overviews (Svoljšak 1993: 263-87, 547-67; Svoljšak 2014: 143-71).

The Austrian authorities linked the mutinies to Bolshevik propaganda, which was supposedly spread by returnees from Russian captivity, some of whom were indeed leaders of individual rebellions. The mass movement in support of the May Declaration, which swept across Slovenian lands and was reflected in the slogans used by rebel

Fig. 6: The monument to the volunteers in Ljubljana, Dvorni trg, 1980 (photo M. Zaplatil).

soldiers, also had a significant influence on the revolts. In terms of public commemoration, it is worth noting that in the period between the two world wars, military mutinies were interpreted mainly as processes that contributed to the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy, although the rebels were not attributed any particular heroic qualities in the public discourse. Most of the records were written on the anniversaries of the mutinies or their epilogues, i.e. the summary trials and executions of the leaders of the mutinies. A special occasion was certainly the transfer of Judenburg victims to the Holy Cross Cemetery in Ljubljana in 1923.

After 1945, the issue of military uprisings remained prominent in public remembrance, and the debate was certainly influenced from 1968 onwards by the publication of a translation of a study by the Czech military historian, Karel Pichlík, *Z ruského zajetí do boje proti válce* (From Russian Captivity to the Fight Against War) (Ljubljana), which, as the title suggests, expresses the fundamental tenet of the Slavic freedom fighters in 1918, namely, the struggle against the war. Lojze Ude (Ude 1967: 965-67; Ude 1968: 185-205; Ude 1968a) and Vlado Vodopivec (Vodopivec 1967: 121-27; 1967a, 1115-121; 1968, 11.5.1968) placed the mutinies in the broader context of the events in the Monarchy, namely returnees from Russian captivity and their longing for revolution, which would bring the war to an end, thereby refuting the biased and simplified interpretation that these mutiny instigators aimed to spread Bolshevism. As Vodopivec argued, a socialist revolution was a means of fulfilling their dreams of peace. Only in 1976, the first mutiny in the Austro-Hungarian army, that of Cattaro (January 1918), received a monographic treatment, which is the only original Slovenian monograph on military mutinies (Perhauc, 1976).

Given the significance and contemporary state of Slovenian public discourse on the First World War, the Isonzo Front represents a central building block of public commemoration of the Great War in Slovenia. However, political circumstances over the past hundred (and more) years have profoundly influenced the extent to which the memory of the Isonzo Front, with all its dimensions and influences, has been present in the Slovenian public.

In the period between the two world wars, it was certainly influenced, first of all, by the national/political context. The territory of the former battlefield that stretched between the Kingdom of Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, under the terms of the London Memorandum, the Armistice of Villa Giusti, and, of course, the Treaty of Rapallo, with a large chunk of former Carniola, came under the Italian rule, which based its post-war ideology and state-forming mythology precisely on the events of the First World War and the Isonzo Front (as the 4th Italian War of Independence), excluding any form of public remembrance and commemoration of the processes and events linked with the Austrian past of the so-called new provinces.

Even the great military defeat of the Italian army in the 12th Battle of the Isonzo, known as Caporetto, which is still used as a metaphor in Italy, was turned into a great moral victory for the Italian army and the country and marked the beginning of a new (victorious) Italian military era in the interwar period, after the issue of guilt was "resolved," as discussed by the special parliamentary commission *La commissione d'inchiesta su Caporetto (*The Commission of Inquiry on Kobarid). It was the area of the former battlefield, the so-called redeemed territory, that was marked by the Italian state in the 1920s with open-air museums, named as *zona sacra* (holy site), while, in the late 1930s, the Italian state built monumental charnel houses all along the former front, the largest of which was in Redipuglia in the Karst region of Trieste, and, in the Slovenian ethnic territory, in Oslavia (now in Italy) and Kobarid, where most of the remains of Italian soldiers were re-buried from military cemeteries. The myth of the unknown soldier was also born on the redeemed territories as the remains of the unknown Italian soldier made their last journey by train from the Basilica of Aquileia to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at *Piazza Venezia* in Rome in 1921.

The memory of the people inhabiting the most affected regions during the war and who had lived through the atrocities of war on multiple levels, from refugeedom to life in the hinterland or under foreign military occupation, was publicly suppressed. Overwhelmed by the current events of increasing fascist violence, the memory was not given

the chance to live, since the historical, material, and moral circumstances of everyday life had hardly changed in comparison to wartime, and the memory was, in a sense, also a reflection of the real-life situation. The arrival of fascism in Slovenian and Croatian regions marked the suppression of all national life, which retreated into intimacy, with memory eventually sinking into oblivion.

On the other hand, the Isonzo Front did not fit into the Yugoslav memorial landscape at all, because it did not contain the elements of the (military, political) struggle for a future unified Yugoslav state. It was thus almost overlooked by authors and, of course, completely neglected by the ruling politicians. Therefore, few memorial records of the Isonzo Front were published in the inter-war period (Svoljšak 1993: 276–78) and it was not until 1936 that Amandus Pepernik's important memoir *Doberdob, slovenskih fantov grob* (Doberdò, the Grave of Slovenian Lads) was published, a title that became synonymous with Slovenian presence and sacrifice on the Isonzo battlefield, also depicted in the popular song *Oj Doberdob, slovenskih fantov grob* (lyrics by Fran Bonač, scored by Zorko Prelovec). (Stanonik 2020: 136) The first Slovenian war novel was only published in 1940, again under the title *Doberdob, vojni roman slovenskega naroda* (*Doberdò*, a War Novel of the Slovenian Nation), written by Lovro Kuhar - Prežihov Voranc.

Fig. 7: Doberdo plateau during the Isonzo front (Archive Ciril Prestor, ZRC SAZU, Milko Kos Historical Institute).

The memory of the war starting in the Slovenian front yard was preserved owing to the creativity of famous Slovenian artists (Maksim Gaspari, Hinko Smrekar, Ivan Vavpotič). During the war, they created unforgettable and ever-present postcards with wartime motifs, with art accompanied by poetry, which focused mainly on refugees. However, long years of relative lull after 1945 pushed the Isonzo Front on the brink of total oblivion. The Isonzo Front has indeed become a hot topic today, endlessly discussed from a military point of view; however, some of the processes triggered by the Isonzo battlefield were historiographically completely forgotten until the 1980s, but luckily not erased from memory.

Slovenian historiography in the interwar period was mainly concerned with medieval history and the rise of the Slovenian national movement in the 19th century, and after 1945, focused explicitly on the Second World War, with the First World War remaining in the shadows of historiographical interest, with the exception of topics related to the formation of the Yugoslav state. The interwar ethnocentric concept of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was replaced by the concept of supranational sacrifice of the partisan liberation movement during the Second World War, and later by the assertion of the concept of brotherhood and unity of Yugoslav nations and nationalities. The reasons for this attitude are certainly linked to the victory of the liberation movement in the Second World War and the social revolution, as well as the construction of a new Yugoslav political and social system. But it can be noted that the Yugoslav communist regime tolerated the thematisation of certain topics of the First World War, only now that perspective partly changed. The best example of this perspective change is the view of military mutinies, now seen as a subversive element of the dual monarchy after 1918, with their heroic socialist charge particularly emphasised in 1945.

The inertia of Slovenian historiography in dealing with the First World War was overcome by activities of amateur historians, who dealt particularly with the military events on the Isonzo Front, while official historiography, most notably in the first decades after 1945, dealt only with more politically convenient topics. Nevertheless, this period also saw the publication of the first and still reference monograph on the political circumstances of the incorporation of Slovenian lands into the new unified Yugoslav kingdom. In his book *Prva odločitev Slovencev za Jugoslavijo* (*Slovenians' First Decision for Yugoslavia*), Janko Pleterski focused on the so-called military absolutism and political persecution in Slovenian crownlands of the former monarchy, as well as the political circumstances that led to the dissolution of the monarchy and entry into the new state, which was systematically addressed years later, most notably by Walter Lukan (Lukan 2008: 91-149; 2007: 217-83); 2014; 2017).

Thus, it was only the democratisation of political life in Slovenia, and thereby of (historical) science, that brought about changes in the treatment of the First World War towards the end of the 1980s. As in other successor states of the Habsburg monarchy, the fall of communism opened up the possibility for historiographical optimism and pluralism as old prejudices were fading, although they had not yet completely dissipated. Schindler also attributes this shift to the dictatorial and undemocratic regimes that ruled these countries, arguing

Fig. 8: Austro-Hungarian military cemetery at Gorjansko (Archive Ciril Prestor, ZRC SAZU, Milko Kos Historical Institute).

that after living in/experiencing them, the Habsburg Monarchy could hardly be called oppressive in comparison (Schindler 2003: 130).

Slovenian historiography of the First World War may not have followed the development path outlined in Western European historiography, but if the year 1992 is considered a turning point for Western European historiography – as the year of the opening of the *Historial de la Grande Guerre* museum and research centre in Perrone, near the former Somme battlefields, which was supposed to bring us closer to a transnational or at least comparative way of researching and presenting the history of the First World War – Slovenia must look to the year 2004, when the Slovenian Society (*Slovenska matica*), under the expert leadership of Peter Vodopivec, organised the first multi-disciplinary Slovenian symposium, *The Great War and the Slovenians*. At the time, Slovenian First World War history was placed within the European context of the Great War, using a name that best defined the multidimensionality of the wartime and the wartime experience. The ground-breaking nature of the symposium was not only the result of a multi-disciplinary approach, but also a variety of topics (literature, art, censorship, heritage, historiography, hinterland, religion, stereotypes) placed in a cultural-historical perspective, as well as the fact that this was the first such joint effort of Slovenian science to shed light on what happened in Slovenian regions during the First World War from various

perspectives, to confront different methodological approaches, and to show the possibilities of using various sources to gain an insight into the past. It is also worth mentioning that as early as 1995, the publishing house *Nova revija* published the chronicle *Slovenska kronika XX. stoletja* (the Slovenian Chronicle of the 20th Century), in which various First World War themes, including political, cultural, economic, and military, were presented to the Slovenian public as chronicle entries, with the First World War being named one of the turning points of Slovenian history in the twentieth century (Drnovšek and Bajt: 1995).

The awakening of Slovenian collective memory of the First World War and especially the Isonzo Front began in the 1980s, even though the first efforts to showcase the events of the Isonzo Front and the First World War can be traced back to the late 1960s when the regional Goriški Museum laid out plans for a First World War Museum at Mount Sveta Gora near Nova Gorica, a popular pilgrimage spot with a basilica dedicated to St Mary, destroyed during the war and famous for its miraculous image of Mother of God, and which shared its destiny with that of the people as it was moved to Carniola. The plan was rejected by local cultural and political authorities, claiming that the time was not yet right and that addressing the Second World War was still a priority. This could be also attributed to the fact that the territories lost during the First World War were annexed to the Republic of Slovenia after the Second World War.

In terms of subject matter, the Isonzo Front has predictably become or remained the primary subject of history writers, and it may even be argued that the memory of the Isonzo Front has colonised Slovenian memory of the First World War in general. This can be attributed to both the indecisiveness of Slovenian historiography and the exceptional interest of the population of the Isonzo region, which has "fuelled" the interest by collecting material from the battlefield over several decades, some of which serve as exhibits in museums along the former front. Historians must take responsibility for the transfer of this historical topic to the field of amateur writing on the history of the First World War.

With its establishment, the Isonzo Front represented a remarkable space of interaction between the front and the hinterland, between the civilian and the military population, between the Austrian and the Italian, between the redeemed, the occupied, and the liberated. The terminological arc reflects the diverse topics, which have been partly explored and presented in Slovenian historiography (see e. g. Klavora 1993; 1994; 1997; 2007; 2014; Šimac and Keber 2011;

Fig. 9: The monument to the Slovenian soldiers on the Eastern front, author Janez Suhadolc, 2018, (photo P. Svoljšak).

Podbersič, 2009: 517-42; Svoljšak, 2009: 343-56; Sedmak 2003; Sedmak 2001; Himmelreich 2001; Svoljšak, Pirih, Fortunat-Černilogar, and Galić 2005; Milčinski 2000).

Although with reservations, we can speak of systematic research over the last three decades, which has been affected by inadequate research policies and insufficient financial stability of the research environment, making systematic and continuous research very difficult. Nevertheless, studies have been carried out by skilled research teams and persevering individuals. If we exclude 2014 and 2015, which mark the centenary of the First World War's beginning and the Isonzo Front, and if any representation and articulation of this subject is primarily a response to the timeliness of the moment, we can nevertheless conclude that the First World War has become a field of research for almost all Slovenian research institutions and a subject of education in Slovenian history and defence studies (Svoljšak 2014: 153). The last 20 years have been a time of awakening the memory of the all-encompassing experience of Slovenian soldiers in the First World War, the so-called Slovenian regiments, and their participation in the bloody battlefields. This is also reflected in scholarly fields, but we have not yet gone beyond schematic, and certainly telling, studies of individual regiments or descriptions of the roles of individual soldiers (Lužar 2010; Podpečnik 2014).

The period of distancing from Yugoslavia was marked by the systematic publication and reprinting of memoirs, diaries, and letters of Slovenian soldiers, which showcase the Slovenian war experience in all its geographical and experiential dimensions and provide an incomparable "reference" to the combat experience on the Western battlefield. Above all, at the time of the centenary, Slovenian museums

obtained additional private pieces of heritage, photo albums, diaries, and memoirs, which serve as invaluable testimonies to the momentous time 100 years ago and reveal everyday life in the army, the good and bad sides of soldiering, holidays, encounters with new places and people, temptations that we might never have considered at home (Svoljšak 2014, 163-64).

The war victims are also an important subject and the central axis for remembering and commemorating what happened on the front lines, even after a hundred years or more. This is demonstrated by the numerous initiatives undertaken by the successor states of the Dual Monarchy, members of which fought and died on the front. For several years, the so-called Isonzo Express, with more than 500 passengers and state representatives, arrived from Budapest to commemorate the fallen Hungarian soldiers at military cemeteries in the Posočje and Karst regions, and there is also a memorial to the fallen Hungarian soldiers on Prevala, a hill above the town of Nova Gorica. Polish soldiers are honoured by a pyramid monument on Mount Sabotin, Slovak soldiers by a distinctive bell tower at Vinišče near Renče, and Ukrainian soldiers by a renovated monument from 1917 in the Panovec forest near Nova Gorica. In 2018, the Slovenian state also paid tribute to the memory of Slovenian soldiers who fought on the faraway Eastern Front by unveiling memorials at the military cemetery in Gorlice (Poland) and the Lychakiv Cemetery in Lviv (Ukraine).

Determining how many Slovenian soldiers died in the Austro-Hungarian army continues to be a great wish of Slovenian First World War historiography, both for its direct demographic consequences and for its impact on commemoration, collective consciousness, and the manipulative potential of the issue. A partial picture is given by local studies, which, by examining various sources (civil registers, commemorative plaques, lists of casualties) in local contexts, have been able to provide a very credible assessment of the death toll for individual Slovenian towns with their immediate or broader surroundings (Svoljšak 2014: 167–68). In the context of the commemoration of fallen soldiers, it is worth noting that, to give the fallen soldiers a name and a place of burial even if only after more than a hundred years, data on fallen Slovenian soldiers on First World War fronts have been collected for several years now, from lists of the fallen, to parish plaques and inscriptions on monuments, to the most primary sources, namely, the registers of military units. The names and fates of fallen Slovenian soldiers are published on *Sistory*, a specialised portal of Slovenian history run and managed by the Institute

for Contemporary History and a nationwide project of Slovenian institutions and individuals who have contributed data.[1]

However, while it can be said that, despite the incomplete data, it is possible to provide a very generalised picture of military victims – partly based on the database of Slovenian soldiers fallen in the First World War – the same cannot be said for civilian victims, who, as was generally the case, have been addressed only in modest contributions (Koren 2010).

Fig. 10: The Walk of Peace from the Alps to the Adriatic, The Walk of Peace in the Soča Region Foundation (https://www.thewalkofpeace.com/sl/map/).

1 *Vojaške* žrtve *1. svetovne vojne na Slovenskem*, https://zv1.sistory.si/?lang=sl

Slovenian historiography has become increasingly aware of more marginalised war topics and is not lagging behind other Western European role models (Svoljšak 2014: 150). At the same time, it also addresses wider European topics and carries out more extensive research on the history of the Habsburg Monarchy's final war (Rahten 2013; Rahten 2014; Lipušček 2003; 2012; Grdina 2009; 2010).

From the viewpoint of public remembrance and awareness of the decisive character of the First World War for the Slovenian nation and regions and their future, the lion's share was also contributed by the national Radiotelevizija Slovenija broadcaster, which actively participated in the centenary events with two documentary series: the five-part *Slovenci in 1. svetovna vojna* (Slovenians and the First World War 1914-1918 from 2014: Silence Before the Storm, Bloody Fields of Galicia, Doberdó: The Grave of the Slovenian Lads, The Breakthrough at Kobarid, The Downfall) and *In Focus*, where it delves deeper into individual themes (The Background of Archduke Franz Ferdinand's Death, Women in the Great War 1914-1918, Sacro egoismo, Slovenians under the Habsburgs). Of course, other Slovenian institutions such as museums and the National and University Library were also notably active during the First World War centenary commemorations (Svoljšak 2018).

The Isonzo Front continues to resonate in various aspects of its historical role, with Kobarid and the 12th Battle of the Isonzo becoming synonymous with the Isonzo Front in Slovenia and the centre of First World War commemoration and remembrance, as well as promotion of its heritage. These tasks are taken over by Kobarid and Tolmin museums and The Walk of Peace in the Soča Region Foundation, and with the help of local communities.[2] It was actually museums and collectors that first brought the Isonzo Front and then the First World War in general back into Slovenian collective memory of twentieth-century condensed history. However, heritage and remembrance have long surpassed historians' research, as many other scientific disciplines have entered with new approaches (Jezernik and Fikfak 2018; Fikfak and Jezernik 2020), and new technologies have been implemented to study heritagisation (Pisk and Ledinek Lozej 2023: 136-47; Košir 2017; Mlekuž, Košir and Črešnar 2014).[3]

As a result, in recent decades, we have witnessed a quantitative increase in the number of texts, but also a qualitative increase in the range of topics; in this sense, we can rightly say that the pendulum

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2 The Walk of Peace in the Soča Region Foundation: https://www.thewalkofpeace.com/about-us/

3 E.g. Avgusta d.o.o: https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=ByZQtWnDKC4

has swung upwards, and that obscurity and mediocrity are terms that belong to the past as regards the treatment of the First World War in Slovenian historical remembrance. Just as the period of the formation of the first unified South Slav state between 1918 and 1941 "required" a state-led and state-supported memory of the First World War, pushing Slovenian-Austro-Hungarian experience into the background as the Second World War presented new requirements for historians and writers of history, and thus determining the topics addressed by Slovenian historiography, so has the period of political democratisation and state independence brought an air of self-reflection. At the same time, there is a shift towards the emancipation of Slovenian First World War historiography within the European transnational and comparative research, and the consolidation of Slovenian war experience on the European map of the First World War.

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