Beyond Post-Socialist Memory. Politics of the Past in Slovenia from the Cold War to the Present

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Introduction

In World War II, Yugoslavia was not less bloody than other 'bloodlands' of Europe (Snyder 2010). Between April 1941, when it was attacked by the Axis forces, and summer 1945, it suffered approximately 1.1 million losses.[1] In 1945, several parts of the country were in ruins, while its population underwent large-scale massacres by foreign invaders and as a result of extreme internal violence. Even if with their own specifics, post-war Yugoslavia and Slovenia shared common traits with other European countries and experienced the dynamics of the global Cold War politics of memory (Judt 2000).

As in the rest of Europe, in Slovenia too the idea of a civil war was mostly denied, while the 'Germans' were considered the (only) responsible ones for the war, its sufferings and crimes (Judt 2002: 160). This was driven by the need to insist on the brotherhood of the Yugoslav peoples united in the building of socialism. Whilst on the one hand, the new ruling elites constructed the myth of the epic antifascist partisan struggle, on the other, the unpopular issues, such as post-war executions and collaboration with the occupiers, were often marginalised. Furthermore, celebrating the myth of the communist self-made liberation served to maintain the role of Yugoslavia in the Cold War geopolitical order. The myth confirmed the role of Yugoslavia as a winner in World War II and, after 1948, reinforced it with the image of the rebel against Stalin and the founder of a unique road to socialism. In internal politics this vision served to consolidate the political monopoly of the Communist Party. Resistance, heroism, fight, suffering, loss, victims, struggle, justice, victory were

1 This represented approximately 5.8% of the inhabitants. In comparison France suffered approximately 358,000 (0.85%), the Netherlands 248,000 (2.8%), Greece 620,000 (6%), Poland 6,000,000 (20%) and Soviet Union 20,300,000 (13%) of losses. Within Yugoslavia the highest numbers of victims were in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 328,000 (more than 10% of the population), Montenegro 37,000 (around 8%), Croatia 295,000 (more than 7%), Vojvodina 73,000 (more than 5%), Serbia 303,000 (more than 4%), Kosovo 24,000 (more than 3%) and Macedonia 24,000 (around 2%). In Slovenia, with 1,492,000 inhabitants in the war period, 94,000 losses represent 6.3% of the population (Borak & Fischer 2005: 790-791).

the keywords that characterised the Yugoslav rhetoric of memory throughout the Cold War. Not less than in other Yugoslav republics, in socialist Slovenia too the ritualisation of partisan discourses produced a self-perception that Miranda Jakiša (2015: 17) termed *active victimhood*.

The aim of this paper is not to provide a detailed description of the politics of memory in Slovenia from the demise of Yugoslavia to the present but to explore certain aspects of memory cultures that go beyond the Slovenian case and challenge explanations of neatly defined cultures of remembrance. In recent times many scholars have used comparative approaches and transnational examinations to show how national frameworks of memory are not self-sufficient and impermeable (Bauerkämper 2012; Pakier & Stråth 2010; Focardi 2013). It often happens that analyses of politics of memory are confined to predestined geopolitical boxes that perpetuate Cold War visions or focus exclusively on post-socialist countries. However, these methodological perspectives and structural attitudes suggest that states and their institutions are the only creators of memory politics in a top-down direction. Such a vision does not leave room for different forms of memory cultures. If we adopt a different approach focusing on vernacular rather than official memories produced by state institutions, we can ask whether memory cultures were diametrically opposed. Even if forms of suppressing divergent memories were often violent in Eastern European countries, it would be misleading to think that in Western societies different memories peacefully coexisted in a mutual dialogue. As recent studies have shown, even if sometimes different historical events might be in the focus, the past is not less problematic in Portugal, Spain, France or in Italy than it is in post-socialist Yugoslavia (Loff, Soutelo & Piedade: 2014; Wieviorka 2012; Aguilar Fernández 2002).[2] Even if a more in-depth comparative examination of memory cultures across Europe should be done, research on commemorations of massacres in Rome (Fosse Ardeatine), Marzabotto and Sant'Anna di Stazzema in Italy or in Oradour-sur-Glane in France reveal not only differences but also commonalities with similar commemorations in Yugoslavia (Farmer 1999; Portelli 1999; Di Pasquale 2010; Pezzino 2012; Karge 2014). A closer look at local commemorative practices throughout Europe shows that those in socialist countries are probably less different from Western Europe than we might think.

By presenting the case of Slovenia, I will argue that the politics of memory in post-socialist societies are not *per se* unique or different from those in (some) other parts of Western Europe. Moreover, if post-Cold War politics of memory in Slovenia are as they are, it is not only because of the country's socialist past. They are framed in close interaction with politics of memory on different levels and directions, *in*

2 Cf. also the forum on violence and historiography in Spain in the Journal of Contemporary History 2016, vol. 51 (2).

primis with those of its neighbouring countries with whom Slovenes share a troubled past (especially Austria and Italy), and narrated "within the context of a European discursive universe" (Sierp 2014a: 2).

In the first part of my paper, I will describe monumental representations of World War II in Slovenia, then I will provide a rough outline of the development of monumental debates and transformations in Slovenia after the fall of Yugoslavia, and finally I will focus on the border area between Slovenia and Italy in order to demonstrate that the borders of memory cultures are blurred and the perceptions of World War II in the East and in the West of Europe share differences as well as commonalities.

Building Partisan Victory

The figures that more than others embodied the feelings of victory were the partisan fighters, which could be found all over Slovenia and Yugoslavia. Not only collaborationists but also refugees, prisoners, concentration camp survivors, and most of those who did not fit in the picture of a heroic partisan epic were mostly neglected by the official post-war rhetoric. On the contrary, partisan fight was glorified and gained mythical traits. From school textbooks to monuments, from poetry and literature to films and music, the partisan narrative homogenised the discourse of public memory and canalised the representations of the past. The construction of this collective remembrance was functional to the new authorities both in strengthening the unity of the country and in legitimating the leadership of Josip Broz Tito. As stated by Kirn, "partisan struggle became a starting event of socialist Yugoslavia, but at the same time it was the official ideology that sustained communist power" (Kirn 2012: 270). However, its message was more nuanced and could not be reduced only to the function of state service. A closer look at memory engagement shows multiple practices in the commemoration of the war.

Commemorations began as soon as the war was over and the construction of monuments and memorials was often a grassroots initiative of local communities rather than being only a party imposition (Klabjan 2017). Soon after the war, former partisans and their families organised mass services and constructed memorials for fallen comrades and local victims of Nazi and Fascist violence. The projects were mainly self-directed and were carried out on voluntary basis. Funds for the monuments were raised by collecting money door to door; the collected sum then being usually employed for the purchase of building materials. Other works (carving, etc.) were carried out by volunteers and artisans, who were often themselves former partisans or their sympathisers. Due to the limited financial resources, these memorials usually

consist of large slabs of stone (even if sometimes local marble could be found), on which, in most cases, stands a red star, the symbol worn by the partisan army, and an inscription commemorating the fallen combatants (e.g. "Honour to the fallen partisans," etc.). In many cases, the names of the fallen partisans and murdered hostages were engraved in the monuments. They were placed in local cemeteries and in the middle of villages, but also at locations where victims and combatants died: battle sites of the Resistance, the places of atrocities against civilians, and at the spots where people were shot down. Not different from the French *monuments aux morts* of the Great War, memorials of World War II in Slovenia have become as a common feature in the typical landscape as the village church (Farmer 1999: 6).

After this initial unregulated wave of statue mania, the Federation of Associations of Combatants of Slovenian National Liberation Army (*Zveza združenj borcev narodnoosvobodilne vojske Slovenije*, hereinafter: ZZB NOV) took over the construction of monuments (Silič-Nemec 1982: 21-25). It was the ZZB NOV, after its foundation in July 1948, which was in charge of commemorative initiatives in Slovenia (and elsewhere in Yugoslavia). Even if the inclusion of former combatants in the Federation proceeded slowly and it was less numerous than the central committee expected, the Slovenian leadership reported to Belgrade that Slovenes showed "huge interest" in the construction, restoration and maintenance of monuments and memorial plaques.[3] Thus, in 1961, Slovenia had the highest number of memorials in Yugoslavia: 4035 (Bergholz 2006: 79-80). Even if the Federation's mission was supported by other offices, such as the Institution for Protection of Cultural Monuments, the construction of new memorials was largely a former combatants' enterprise.

Yet it would be misleading to think that this "partisan landscape" developed in a linear and uniform manner from the end of the war until the collapse of Yugoslavia. Their construction could go through several phases. As was often the case, the former battlefield was turned into a site of memory where a modest memorial with little or no aesthetic value was placed and in years to come it was replaced by a larger monument. This was the case of the memorial to the Pohorje Battalion: in 1949 a small memorial was placed in the centre of the former encampment near a place called "Trije žeblji"; in 1958, it was replaced by a larger one for whose design and construction the local Association of Combatants commissioned the architect Branko Kocmut and the sculptor Slavko Tihec (Filipčič 1978: 1-2).

In general, the construction of monuments commemorating the national liberation struggle (NOB) involved the most eminent architects. The most famous

3 Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), Fond 297 Savez Udruženja Boraca NOR-a – Savezni odbor (SUB NOR-SO), Box 27, document n. 23-5/49, 7 October 1949.

was Jože Plečnik. He drew his first sketches as early as the end of the war and was commissioned to design several monuments in the following years. He is the designer (or co-designer) of memorials constructed in the 1950s in many Slovenian towns, such as Dolenja vas (1950), Laško (1951), Litija (1951), Novo mesto (1951), Ljubljana (1951), Vipava (1952), Mežica (1952), and others, and his disciples (e.g. Anton Bitenc) continued to design partisan memorials after his death (Krečič 1975; Prelovšek 2013).

However, a deeper analysis of the archival materials of the ZZB NOV's central committee shows that even if in the late 1940s and early 1950s the Federation strove to curb unregulated partisan memorials, the majority of proposals originated in the local environment. Thus on 4 January 1951, Antonija, a woman from central Slovenia wrote a letter to the committee: "A few days ago, I paid a visit to the ZZB NOV's local committee in Laško where I learned that two engineers were coming to town in order to discuss the memorials. Could you please send them to Kostanjevica as well, because we would like to set up a memorial, too? As many as seven years passed since our hostages and combatants had died…"[4] Kostanjevica soon established a committee that represented all "mass organisations" and turned to the ZZB NOV's historical commission which was in charge of monitoring and controlling the construction of memorials. The commission usually advised local committees that they should avoid designing memorials by themselves, a common practice in the first post-war years. "If possible, the draft of the memorial should be designed by a trained architect." If such an expert was not available, it was appointed by the commission; usually, it selected Comrade Jože Plečnik, Professor of Architecture, who seemed to have almost a monopoly on memorial design until the early 1950s. Drafts were then examined by the commission, and if approved, they could be realised. Very often, in order to symbolically unite the anniversary of an important event and the unveiling of a memorial, local committees tried to quicken procedures and overcome central authorities. When the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Liberation Front (*Osvobodilna fronta*) was approaching in 1951, proposals were put forth only a few months before the celebration, which resulted in the lack of time for proper preparation and, consequently, the commission rejected many proposals. Former combatants from Slovenska Bistrica, for example, were informed that their draft had not been approved as "it is inappropriate and alien to our national sentiment." In order to obtain an appropriate one, the local Association of Combatants was put in touch with the sculptor Lojze Lavrič.[5]

4 Arhiv Slovenijie (AS), Fond 1238 Republiški odbor Zveze združenj borcev NOV Slovenije 1947–1990 (1238 RO ZZB NOV), Box 9, document n. 54-1/51, 6 January 1951.

5 AS, Fond 1238 RO ZZB NOV, Box 9, document n. 42-1/51, 2 February 1951.

Not only in the first post-war years but also later many works were performed voluntarily. Yet there still remained construction material costs to cover. What happened to the local committee in Laze, a small village in central Slovenia, is representative of the whole republic: as they did not have enough cement, they had to borrow it from small businesses. They intended to repay them with money raised at the inauguration ceremony. However, the sum collected was not enough and the organisers had to solicit financial support from the Government of the People's Republic of Slovenia.[6] The archival material reveals many similar requests. It also shows that the construction of memorials involved the cooperation of many individuals (architects, engineers, as well as intellectuals who wrote tombstone inscriptions) and companies (particularly construction companies) in an intermingling of private initiatives and public support, memory activism and socialist narratives, official remembrance, and private mourning.[7]

Voluntary work was typical for small village communities but not only. When the Association of Combatants in Maribor, the second largest Slovenian city, intended to commemorate the formation of the Liberation Front by erecting a war memorial at the local cemetery, it largely counted on its own workforce.[8] Yet its idea did not convince the historical commission according to which "a more appropriate and larger monument should be built."[9] However, it would be misleading to think that the relationship between local committees on the one side and the historical commission of the central committee of the national Federation of Associations of Combatants on the other was unilateral. The periphery was not a passive subject forced and keen to accept orders from the centre, as other examples show: after the commission

6 AS, Fond 1238 RO ZZB NOV, Box 9, document n. 12-2251, 17 September 1951.

7 In order to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Liberation Front in April 1951, the local committee from Gradec near Črnomelj intended to build a monument to local war victims, yet realised that the total costs would amount to 460,000 dinars. Before the works were completed, the number of hours of voluntary work reached almost 4,000; funds raised at various events 75,000 dinars, another fund-raising campaign yielded 50,000 dinars, and the local committee planned to organise bingo in order to raise another 100,000 dinars. The historical commission allocated them 50,000 dinars, yet it did not give its approval to the proposed inscriptions on the plaque. Instead, the local committee made the following proposals: "You sacrificed your lives for our freedom, you served us until your very death"; or "Wide fields you ploughed, soaked them with your blood, good seeds you sowed, fought with bravery"; or "Glory to you who gave your lives for freedom, may you live in eternal memory." The commission decided that the inscription should read: "May you live bravely as we did! May we finish what you did not!" (AS 1238 RO ZZB NOV, Box 9, document n. 105-1-2/51, 15 March 1951).

8 AS, Fond 1238 RO ZZB NOV, Box 9, document n. 6/51, 11 January 1951.

9 AS, Fond 1238 RO ZZB NOV, Box 9, document n. 75-1/51, 3 February 1951.

rejected the draft proposed by the local committee in Logatec, a town in central Slovenia, and entrusted the architect Jože Plečnik with the task, local committee members turned down Plečnik's draft.

Logatec was not an isolated case: "With our technical commission having thoroughly examined and evaluated the draft, and our membership having assessed it, too," the Association of Combatants from Šentpeter na Krasu (Pivka after 1952) concluded that the draft memorial designed by "Comrade Plečnik from Ljubljana" would not suit "our town as it would be convenient only for a larger town […]."[10] As a result, they commissioned the project to the painter and director of the Regional Museum in Postojna – Leo Vilhar, "who will draw up the plans in accordance with the idea and form that suits Kras, local terrain, and the location on which the memorial will be erected. We could not acquiesce to the drafts by Comrade Plečnik as they are too monumental and impressive and therefore cannot be realised in our humble countryside."[11]

The disagreement can be understood at several levels. For the purpose of this paper, it is important to underline that the statement about the incompatibility with local terrain hides multifaceted forms of dissent. Their rejection involved mechanisms with which the local community opposed the decisions adopted by the top of their own organisation and spatial interventions envisaged by an "external" ("from Ljubljana") professional. He was perceived as incapable of understanding the local situation, and his aesthetic sense was believed to be in disharmony with the Kras environment. These tensions invert the perspective of the periphery as a passive subject of decision making, dependent on and subjugated to the centre, and show that local communities sought to define themselves in ways that might be at variance with the desires of the central offices.

Šentpeter again was not an isolated case. The historical commission also rejected the plans for a memorial in Cerkno, in north-western Slovenia, replacing them with Plečnik's proposal. Yet the locals did not accept it, arguing that the solution proposed "is not compatible with the terrain where the memorial is supposed to stand." Again, doubts could be raised whether incompatibility with the local terrain was the only reason for rejection. The correspondence reveals that "no organisation agreed with the plan […]" and that "[…] in order to embark on works which are being constantly postponed, we beg you to take into consideration the wish of our people and organisations and to approve and financially support the erection of a

10 AS, Fond 1238 RO ZZB NOV, Box 9, document n. 3-I-51, 9 January 1951.
11 AS, Fond 1238 RO ZZB NOV, Box 9, document n. 14/51, 21 February 1951.

monument as envisaged by the locals."[12] If that did not happen in the shortest time possible, "the local membership of the Association of Combatants could become passive."[13]

Disagreements related to the monuments' aesthetics were usually solved and the commission approved the plans even when "they are not the best,"[14] while financial support was not always available. In the village of Planina pri Sevnici, a memorial was unveiled on 16 August 1953 in order to celebrate the municipality day and 100,000 dinars were granted to complete the works on time.[15] The monument in Šoštanj also got financial support from the central base, but this was not always the case and several other committees struggled for money or got rejected. The ZZB NOV replied to the local committee in Dobernič in such a way: "We cannot help you, so you will have to provide the means on your own."[16]

Further research into the local forms of commemoration in other European countries would be needed, but a partial analysis already shows connections with different national cases. It also reveals concrete international, transnational and interethnic cooperation between the people involved in the commemorations. Mutual visits between Italian and Yugoslav veteran organisations, mayors, town councils, city delegations, and politicians of different political orientations were organised to pay tribute to the victims of the war. On the initiative of the Slovenian Veterans organisation, an agreement on the arrangement of war graves and cemeteries was signed on 15 April 1964 between the governments of Yugoslavia and Italy. In the following years several mutual initiatives to detect dead soldiers, find anonymous graves, transfer remains and construct ossuaries took place in both countries. In 1970 a cemetery and a monument to the "Yugoslavs" who perished all over Southern Italy were dedicated in Barletta. At its opening on July 4 (Combatant Day in Yugoslavia) the highest authorities from Yugoslavia attended the celebration and in the following years Italian local politicians were often hosted in Yugoslav cities (Martocchia 2011: 228-229).[17] Very similar cases speak for Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Piedmont, Liguria,

12 AS, Fond 1238 RO ZZB NOV, Box 9, document n. 16/51, 10 February 1951.

13 AS, Fond 1238 RO ZZB NOV, Box 9, document n. 121/51, 12 March 1951.

14 AS, Fond 1238 RO ZZB NOV, Box 21, document n. 463/1, 5 October 1953.

15 The request sent to the central committee shows the division of costs and the contributors: local combatants gathered and sold wood, earning 250,000 dinars; Kozjansko combatants, who later became functionaries in Maribor, collected 100,000 dinars; the district of Celje contributed 50,000 dinars; Sergej Kraigher 10,000 dinars; DES Krško 5,000, Brežice Forest Administration 10,000 dinars; altogether, they raised 425,000 dinars. The costs of the memorial, inscriptions and erection amounted to 597,586 dinars, the designer Zoran Didek charged 10,000 dinars, so that the costs excluding transport amounted to 607,000 dinars. They asked the central committee for 100,000 dinars (AS, Fond 1238 RO ZZB NOV, Box 21, document n. 604 – I – 293, 25 August 1953).

16 AS, Fond 1238 RO ZZB NOV, Box 21, document n. 143-1/52, 12 April 1952.

17 AJ, Fond 297 SUB NOR 1947-1973 (I), Box 81, Material Odbora i komisije za obeležavanje istorijskih mesta iz NOB-e.

Rome and others on the one side, and Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia on the other. These practices are the result of common commemorations but also of a network that went beyond the limited sphere of veterans' organisations, which included schools, sporting associations, brass bands and cultural organisations.[18] In many cases commemorations produced long-term personal friendships and institutional cooperation – twinning of cities between distant localities often based on events of antifascist solidarity during the war and on anti-Fascist memory afterwards.[19] With the end of the war, the partisan commander Anton Ukmar-Miro, originally from Prosecco/Prosek near Trieste/Trst, became an honorary inhabitant of both Koper/Capodistria and Genoa, where he fought during the war. Close contacts between combatants from Slovenia and the National Association of Italian Partisans (*Associazione nazionale partigiani d'Italia*, ANPI) from Vicenza resulted from the engagement of Anton Vratuša. During World War II he was the connection between the Slovene Resistance and the Italian Communist Party and this war experience produced long-lasting links. The cooperation culminated in visits at the highest state level: the ANPI President Arrigo Boldrini visited Slovenia and Yugoslavia, and also the Italian President Sandro Pertini, a former partisan, during his visit to Yugoslavia in 1983, attended the inauguration of the memorial to the Italian partisan division "Garibaldi" in Pljevlja, Montenegro.[20]

Especially along the Italo-Yugoslav border, delegations of the Slovenian minority in Italy and Italian left-wing politicians attended commemorations in Yugoslavia. Local sections of partisan veterans' organizations were the carriers of mutual visits, exchange of ideas and practices, and networking among former combatants included in different national organisations. Even if political prejudices were still present, in the post-war decades growing attention was given to common commemorations. The tensions were not derived only from ethno-national contrasts, as the nationalist master narrative of the last decades aims to explain, but from the political antagonism of the Cold War. In 1948, the Tito-Stalin split produced a clash in the post-war anti-fascist coalition that lasted for decades. In fact, bilingual, Italian and Slovenian, commemorations were frequent in this borderland, and close to Kučibreg, a small locality where the border between Slovenia and Croatia runs today and where Croatian, Italian and Slovenian-speaking partisans suffered heavy losses against

18 Only Slovenia and Yugoslavia are in the focus of this paper. However, practices of transnational participation in commemorative rituals went beyond bilateral dimensions and included other socialist countries, like Czechoslovakia. Every year a delegation from Czechoslovakia was invited to take part in the sport events of the Trofeo della Resistenza in Sesto San Giovanni near Milan (Del Grosso 2012: 9).

19 The twinning of Italian and Yugoslav cities produced several agreements: Kruševac and Pistoia in 1967, Reggio Emilia and Zadar in 1972, Quiliano and Ajdovščina in 1972, Gonars and Vrhnika in 1975, Cassino and Užice in 1981, Cetinje and Spoleto in 1974, Castel San Pietro Terme and Opatija in 1983, Maribor and Udine in 1985, etc.

20 *Novi list*, 22 September 1983, 1, 3.

Nazi forces in October 1944, a trilingual memorial was constructed in 1959 (Abram 1984). Delegations from all the three countries still meet every year to commemorate "the symbol of joint struggle."[21]

Where Have All the Partisans Gone?

In the 1980, the monolithic image of World War II started to crumble and from 1990 onwards it became a battlefield for individual and collective memories. On 8 July 1990, in a critical period for Yugoslavia, the President of the Presidency of the Republic of Slovenia Milan Kučan, who later became the President of State, shook hands with the Ljubljana Archbishop Alojzij Šuštar. Their meeting in the Kočevski Rog forest, which was a site of mass murder of Nazi collaborationist units (the Home Guards) in June 1945, was attended by 30,000 people. It was organised to end the fierce polemics on World War II and to strengthen feelings of national reconciliation, yet it was followed by contested war memories and commemorative practices which shape the political confrontation until today (Vodopivec 2006: 502).

The rhetoric of ethnic exclusivism and national exceptionalism replaced the narratives of brotherhood and unity. Even if Slovenia was only marginally involved in the armed conflict of the 1990s, anti-Yugoslav feelings did not disappear overnight. The concretisation of these feelings included the removal of monuments and other symbols, the introduction of new state holidays and work-off days, the renaming of streets, places and schools after persons connected to the partisan heritage and socialist Yugoslavia in general. Along with the pluralisation of political life, new political elites called for a democratisation of memory and for a revision of the politics of the past. If the partisan veterans' organisation and the left parties struggled for a linear continuation of the anti-fascist myth, especially the Right and the Catholic Church voiced a radical change of the historical narratives (Luthar 2014).

The adoption of the Public Holiday and Work-off Days in the Republic of Slovenia Act in 1991 annulled the former legislation, abolishing the state holidays related to the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, while name changes of places, streets and educational institutions were introduced in 1991 at local level through municipal ordinances.[22] Ljubljana changed the names of the squares named after Lenin, Marx and the revolution, and renamed the central Tito Road to Slovenian Road. Some Slovenian towns, such as Koper, kept the place names referring to Tito,

21 Kućibreg je simbol skupnega boja. *Primorske novice*, 11 August 2015.

22 Uradni list RS, št. 112/05 – UPB, 52/10 in 40/12 – ZUJF.

while others changed them: after nine years of being called Titovo Velenje (Tito's Velenje), the town was renamed Velenje in 1990. Since 1990, the University of Ljubljana has no longer been named after Edvard Kardelj. Maribor renamed Boris Kraigher Square and several other squares and streets, with new names of people and events related to independent Slovenia or the local environment.

In 1991, partisan names were replaced with place names for the schools at Ptuj (Ivan Spolenjak Elementary School was renamed Breg Elementary School, Tone Žnidarič Elementary School became Mladika Elementary School, and Franc Osojnik Elementary School is now People's Garden Elementary School). A school in Nova Gorica, a town built on the border with Italy when Gorizia was returned to Italy at the Paris Peace Conference in 1947, was named after the partisan division IX Corps but replaced in 1992 with the name of Fran Erjavec, a writer. A primary school in Ljubljana constructed in 1959 and named after Boris Kidrič, a partisan leader and an important politician in socialist Yugoslavia, was renamed after its place name (Savsko naselje – "Sava Quarter") in 1997. Yet such changes were not limited to the 1990s only, to a "hot" post-socialist instinct. In 2014, Komen, a small town not far from the Italo-Slovene border, witnessed a harsh polemic when the elementary school was proposed to be named after Max Fabiani, a famous architect but also an important party member in Fascist Italy, instead of a national partisan hero. The mayor avoided overt conflict by not placing the proposal on the agenda of the municipal council, yet the polemic between its supporters and opponents caused rumours in the local community.[23] Moreover, such discord should not be regarded as only local in nature, since in 2009 the City Council in Ljubljana wanted to rename a street after Tito. Yet the Constitutional Court considered the act unconstitutional since "it was 'contrary to the core values' on which the Constitution was based and the fact that all modern European constitutional democracies were based on the promotion of respect for human dignity, human rights, and fundamental freedoms, whereas 'totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century led in Europe to millions of victims and even systematic violations of human rights.'"[24]

In the aftermath of Yugoslavia's disintegration, partisan memorials became disturbing. Some of them were vandalised and many red starts, usually standing on the top of the monuments, disappeared overnight, while others were simply neglected. Slovenia saw no mass demolition of memorials, as it happened in Croatia. In Dalmatia only more than 3,000 monuments were destructed or removed (Robionek, Müller &

23 Na čelu šole ostaja narodni heroj Stjenka. *Primorske novice*, 26 November 2014.

24 Tito street case, Lidija Drobnič and ors v Ljubljana Municipality, Review of the constitutionality and legality of regulations and general acts, U-I-109/10-11, OG RS 78/11, ILDC 2025 (SI 2011), 26th September 2011, Slovenia. Oxford Public International Law, 26 September 2011, H6.

Vulesica, 2010). But it would be misleading to think that Slovenia experienced no interventions in the "partisan space". Almost overnight, many busts and portraits of Tito were removed from public institutions, as it was the case with the bust in the entrance hall of the Slovenian Parliament which was moved to the City Museum of Ljubljana in 1990 (Ciglenečki 2012: 207-210).

Old memorials became disturbing in the new imagination of the public space and provoked long-lasting resentments in local communities: in the village of Rodik, not far from the Italo-Slovene border, a plaque commemorating local victims of World War I was added to the memorial to the victims of World War II. Originally constructed in 1945, the memorial bears the names of seven young villagers killed in the summer of 1944 by Wehrmacht soldiers. In the following decades the remembrance of the massacre was preserved and ritualised by the local community rather than by official memorialisation and the monument in the main square embodied its cultural memory. In the changed atmosphere of the 1990s a group of people promoted the idea that all villagers who lost their lives in war should be remembered. After decades of forced oblivion and supposed unilateral mourning a general sense of piety was encouraged. However, after a fieldwork conducted in the area in summer 2015, the conversations revealed that many locals believed that the memorial had been altered because of other reasons. Politically motivated, the opponents of the original memorial wanted to delegitimise the memory of World War II in the present. What Tatiana Zhurzhenko (2007) calls the geopolitics of memory, on a local level resulted in a balance of sensibilities. By mounting a plaque commemorating the local victims of World War I on the original memorial, they minimised the political message of the victims of World War II. Because some villagers labelled it as a heritage of the communist regime and associated it with the left political option in the present, the monument was transformed in a more general showcase of the local community's collective memory. Yet the form, time and space of these operations indicate that what happened in Rodik was not only an expression of piety but primarily a form of contemporary political confrontation.

In those parts of Slovenia where the collaboration with Nazi and Fascist units was more common and several people died fighting in collaborationist units (like MVAC – *Milizia volontaria anti-comunista* or Home Guards, *domobranci*), the re-appropriation of the past is especially harsh. As stated by Luthar (2013: 887), "there is at present almost no place without a memorial or a 'parish plaque' dedicated to the Domobranci". The constant re-emerging of these 'memory knots' shows that memories not only melted after being frozen, but the new geopolitical setting enabled the rise of many competitive claims to emphasise *their* past.[25] From an initial

25 The term 'memory knots' is borrowed from Michael Rothberg (2009). The concept of 'frozen memories' refers to the well-known work of Tony Judt (2002).

request of recognising the suffering of "all sides" in a general effort to attain the 'democratisation of memorialisation' supported by the claim that respect must be shown to all victims, Slovenia's public space now witnesses a shift between the roles of victims and perpetrators. Since the 1990s, the call for 'national reconciliation' has been the buzzword of many political parties, the Catholic Church, civil society organisations and individuals (mostly centre-right wing but not only). Following the general and transnational downplay of socialism/communism and its equation with Nazism, Slovenia witnessed increased rhetorics publicly promoting the paradigm of collaborationists' patriotism. As in other European countries, in Slovenia, too, they gradually gained the role of legitimate defenders of the nation against communist revolution, while their memorials in many cases replaced partisan monuments as central sites of memory on the local level.

Encouraged by the *Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism* adopted by the European Parliament in 2009, the Slovene political elite, after long-lasting debates in the parliament and outside it, supported the decision to build a central monument to all victims of wars in Slovenia. It was constructed on the Congress Square, one of the central squares in Ljubljana, and inaugurated in July 2017. From the very beginning the architects tried to avoid political aspects and emphasised that "the proposed erection of the memorial and its symbolic form are pronouncedly neutral in nature, expressing no unnecessary pathos and no monumentality unsuitable for space and time."[26] Its neutral, unbiased and conflict-free message was in line with the expectations of the Slovene President Borut Pahor, one of the main supporters of the memorial. At the inauguration he stated that "not for a single moment did we think that the erection of such a memorial would do away with our aspiration to national reconciliation; on the contrary, it wants to encourage and preserve it."[27] The overcoming of past national traumas was emphasized by several speakers at the official inauguration on 13 July 2017.[28] However, these memorial activities were not aimed at stimulating a national reconciliation through critical debate on the complexities of the national past. Rather it seems that, similarly to what is happening at the European level, the aim is to avoid active confrontation and to create a new form of amnesia through conscious homogenization of conflictual memories (Sierp 2014: 107).

26 Spomenik žrtvam vseh vojn previsok. *Delo*, 19 January 2015; Spomenik žrtvam vseh vojn na preizkušnji. *Dnevnik*, 19 November 2011. Available at: https://www.dnevnik.si/1042488898 [Accessed 1 June 2018].

27 Foto: Neznanci oskrunili mesto spomenika žrtvam vseh vojn, 18 July 2015. Available at: https://www.rtvslo.si/slovenija/foto-neznanci-oskrunili-mesto-spomenika-zrtvam-vseh-vojn/369943 [Accessed 3 March 2017].

28 Borut Pahor: to je spomenik ljubezni. *Dnevnik*, 13 July 2017. Available at: https://www.dnevnik.si/1042778056 [Accessed 28 September 2017].

We Shall Overcome

It is particularly fruitful to examine the impact of different politics of memory in a larger and transnational context of border areas. Borders not only divide and delimit but are often places of junction and mutual influences. Borderlands are crucial sites for the recovery of memories, their contestation and re-negotiation (Zhurzhenko 2011: 74). In the last part of this paper, I will use the case of Italy, firstly, to challenge the vision of a hermetic and exclusive post-socialist memory, and secondly, to show how politics of memory intertwine across national borders. Managing the past and redefining collective identities after 1989 and 1991 is not specific to post-communist societies (Kattago 2012: 89). The obsession with memory and the reinterpretation of history are European, even global phenomena, rather than an Eastern European peculiarity (Collotti 2000).

The Primorska region, the westernmost part of Slovenia today, at the border with Italy, where the Iron Curtain ran in the first post-war years, seems appropriate to test the (im)permeability of national memory cultures. After the demise of the Habsburg Empire in 1918, the region underwent several territorial changes: from annexation to Italy and the theatre of harsh policy of anti-Slovene ethnic suppression, to incorporation into the Third Reich between 1943 and 1945 with an extremely high rate of victims and general war violence. If in other regions of nowadays Slovenia the struggle between the communist-led Liberation Front and the collaborationist units was harsh, in this region, because of its territorial liminality and unclear belonging, the partisan leaders were able to organise an efficient and widespread underground movement supported by the majority of the local population. After the war the region was occupied by Yugoslav, British and American troops. At the Paris Peace Conference, the western part was returned to Italy, the eastern part was given to Yugoslavia, while part of it, including the port city of Trieste, was granted the status of Free Territory administered by both armies until 1954. Even if tensions smoothly decreased both at the state and at the local level, as a result of which the demarcation was increasingly a line of conjunction rather than rupture, after the end of the Cold War new contrasts emerged.

In post-war Slovenia, the key emphasis in commemorative practices became the incorporation of the Primorska region into Yugoslavia in 1945. After gaining independence in 1991, Slovenia did see new interpretations of history and calls for its revision, yet its visions of the past did not entirely change. Why? Mainly because the end of World War II and the partisan struggle resulted in the 'national liberation' of the Slovenes and the annexation of most of Primorska (Littoral, previously named Venezia Giulia) to Yugoslavia. This had an important impact not only on the region

itself, but also on the national collective memory in general, since it enabled putting the Slovene national program in practice. Even if the contested cities of Klagenfurt/Celovec, Gorizia/Gorica and especially Trieste/Trst remained outside its borders, after World War II socialist Slovenia, as part of Yugoslavia, gained a large part of what Slovenes considered their ethnic territory. Similar understanding of the past can be observed in some parts of Croatia, especially in Istria and in Rijeka/Fiume, where the post-war order brought not only socialism but also 'national liberation' for the Croatian-speaking population (Dota 2010: 29).

In the mutating geopolitical situation from the end of the 1980s onwards, *new* histories came to the fore. If in Slovenia this provoked harsh discussions on 'victims of post-war killings,' in Italy the *foibe* (pits supposedly used as mass graves) and the 'exodus of Italians' became central elements in the post-Cold War national narrative. In the Slovene public sphere demographic changes (related not only to the Italian-speaking population but also to the whole country) have rarely been addressed, and post-war violence has been silenced for decades. Accusations of a Yugoslav ethnic cleansing against local Italian-speaking population were mounting. However, the construction of the image of 'Italians' as victims of World War II and its aftermath was not something new. It started already during the war, together with the fall of Mussolini in the summer of 1943, at a time when the collapse of Italy opened, again, the question of the geopolitical reconsideration of the Northern Adriatic area. This image has been supported with the ambiguous role of Italy as 'co-belligerent' of the Allies and it continued in the Cold War when Italy played an important role in the geopolitical strategies of the West. Right-wing parties and organisations, in particular, cultivated and propagated memories of 'Yugoslav crimes' against Italians. Memories of 'foibe' and 'exodus' were not frozen or submerged. In the Cold War, such memories had no major impact at national level, but were the dominant theme in the local memory discourse. Especially the local right and major exile organisations were confined to their exclusive realm of remembering. They built their identity on their own perception of history according to which national identity was the main trigger for the post-war "exodus" (Ballinger 2003). They were organising commemorations in Trieste, Gorizia and other Italian towns, which at that time were relegated mostly to post-fascist circles. Yet in 1980, they succeeded in entering the national discourse: in Basovizza/Bazovica – a village 15 km east of Trieste, at the border with Yugoslavia, the pit where corpses were found after the war, the 'foiba,' was recognised as "a monument of national interest." Thus, its perception of a post-fascist *lieu de memoire* slowly dissolved and was reimagined as a site of national tragedy.

What was new in the 1990s? After the collapse of the socialist world and the demise of the anti-fascist myth in Italy, these narratives became central to the re-creation of

a (supposedly) lost Italian identity. Yet now they were no longer marginalised, neither politically nor geographically. After 1989, in Italy, the so-called "First Republic" had become mired in political collapse. The transformation of the Italian Communist Party, the biggest "Western" communist party, the rise of new political forces such as *Lega nord* and *Forza Italia* and the presence of post-Fascists in the government led to a weakening of the anti-Fascist myth and to a revision of the Resistance paradigm (Mammone 2006: 217). Not only in Yugoslavia and in Eastern Europe but also in Italian society, a widespread debate about "reconciliation" and "pacification" took place. As elsewhere, its aim was to rebuild the country around a revised version of the national past and the "eastern border" helped to set a narrative of victimhood against one of guilt and responsibility (Clifford 2013: 243; Perra 2008).

In the new international atmosphere, previously marginal commemorative practices turned into events attended by state representatives. In 1991, the Italian President Francesco Cossiga introduced the ritual of attending the commemoration at the Basovizza foiba, thus elevating it to a ceremony of national importance. His successor Oscar Luigi Scalfaro declared the site a national monument in September 1992, and since then it has been propagated as a site of 'Italian martyrdom' equivalent to the genocide committed by the Yugoslav communists, which was for long decades silenced due to political reasons and the international balance of the Cold War (Pirjevec 2009: 199-208; Verginella 2010: 49).

These mnemonic processes and upheavals had their political backgrounds. If Italian politicians on the regional level mostly supported Slovene (and Croat) independence, the official statement of the national foreign policy was rather ambiguous. From an initial denial followed by scepticism of the foreign minister Gianni De Michelis, Italy recognised Slovene independency in January 1992 but later blocked its accession negotiations with the European Union. The attitude of the first Berlusconi government in charge between 1994 and 1996 proved to be especially harsh (Tesser 2013: 145-149). Only after a long dispute over compensation issues and property restitution to the exiles, Italy lifted the veto to Slovenian accession agreement. If European diplomacy solved the controversy on the political level, the controversies left negative feelings in the population. Together with the escalation of narratives of the past based on the re-evaluation of the Fascist period and the criminalisation of Yugoslav partisans, this policy provoked different reactions and entered a harsh debate in Slovene society. Yet such politics of memory did not end in 2004 when Slovenia joined the European Union. In March 2004 the Italian Parliament passed a law establishing 10 February as Italy's national Day of Remembrance and the case of "foibe and exodus" became the *topoi* of Italian national remembrance accepted

by the great majority of the political parties (Mattioli 2011: 157-193). Even if some scholars saw the new law "in clear apposition, (…) to the Holocaust memorial day" (Gordon 2006: 183), its significance is more nuanced and complex. In fact, these new narratives enabled not only to perpetuate the image of the Italians as *brava gente* and as victims of World War II in the general posthumous amnesty, but also to criminalise "Yugoslavs," along with "Germans," for the "tragedies of the Italian nation" (Del Boca 2005; Pirjevec 2009: 201-230; Osti Guerrazzi 2010, 240-241; Focardi 2013).

However, all these memory operations have shaped not only memory cultures and perceptions of the past in Italy. Even if in Slovenia official politics dominated by the centre-left liberal-democratic party (LDS) for most of the 1990's, mostly overlooked historical controversies, and postponed memory aspects, the waves of commemorative discourses did not stop at the Italo-Slovene border. What was central in the Slovene internal and foreign policy at the moment was the entrance in key Western institutions, EU and NATO *in primis*, but the new wave of Italian memory had a direct impact on the perceptions of the past in Slovenia too. If official politics remained mostly passive, it was the so-called civil society that entered the memory discourse. Different organisations protested. The end of the unilateral vision from the socialist past brought to the fore new events related to the plurality of political groups that opposed Fascism in the border area, part of Italy between 1920 and 1947. Disputes about who was the first to oppose Fascism challenged the Manichean narrative of Socialist Slovenia in which the Communist party held the monopoly over anti-Fascism. One of the major changes regarded the rediscovering and the gradual rehabilitation of the pre-war anti-fascist organisation TIGR (an acronym for Trieste, Istria, Gorizia, Rijeka – the major towns of the region annexed by Italy and that had to be freed). This irredentist organisation was founded in 1927 by Slovenes and Croats in Italy who violently opposed the Fascist practices in the region. They were not the only group operating in the region in the interwar period. Others were not less active (Borba, Orjuna etc.), but TIGR was the most durable and overshadowed the myriad of national oppositions in the region. In order to preserve the memory of TIGR, a new organisation was established in 1994. By organising commemorations, publishing memoirs and bulletins, and building memorials, the *Društvo za negovanje rodoljubnih tradicij organizacije TIGR Primorske* (Association for the Cultivation of Patriotic Traditions of the Organisation TIGR in Primorska) was aiming to preserve the good name of anti-fascism, to provide bottom-up protection of what it considered the national interest of Slovenia, as well as to place emphasis on the national rather than ideological nature of the resistance (Rožac Darovec 2016: 897–898).

Similarly to the previous decades memory activism was often the result of vernacular initiatives. It was the pressure of the so-called civil society that forced the Slovene political establishment to react to memory initiatives coming from its Western neighbour. If on the Italian side of the border the foiba of Basovizza was proposed as a national monument and the "eastern border" became the buzzword for a new, national mnemonic strategy, on the Slovene side of the border, south of Nova Gorica, a tower to "the defenders of the Slovene soil" has been realised. The works started in 2002 and were completed in 2011. After severe polemics between the TIGR organisation on the one side and the museum in charge for the content on the other, the initial idea of a barrier against the Western memory menace turned gradually into a more moderate survey of the development of Slovene national history.[29] Nowadays it hosts a historical exhibition on five floors, divided in five main periods.[30] The permanent exhibition places an emphasis on the Isonzo/Soča front and World War I in particular to underline the general loss suffered by the population of the region in general, beyond ethnic and political divisions. Its ground plan coincides with the four cardinal points, and presents Slovenia as a European crossroads of four groups of "nations": Romance, Germanic, Hungarian and Slavic. Thus, the initial messages of nationalistic defense clashes with the contemporary displays of a standardised "European" narrative of a shared memory (Rožac Darovec 2016: 901).

Along with new monuments several other memory initiatives in Italy were mirrored in Slovenia. The temporal contiguity of national memorial days is not a coincidence: if in March 2004 the Italian parliament introduced the Day of Remembrance (*Giorno del ricordo*), as a response, in September 2005, the Slovene parliament introduced the Day of Restoration of Primorska to the Motherland as a state holiday.[31] Several initiatives sustained these mnemonic strategies and tried to popularise a new vision of the past. Public television and media in general played a central role in these activities, as it is showed by the success of the movie *Il cuore nel pozzo (The Heart in the Pit)* and, more recently, by the theatre play *Magazzino 18* by Simone Cristicchi (Verginella, 2010). If in 2005 the Italian national broadcaster RAI screened the movie, showing a black and white image of violent Yugoslav partisans against innocent Italians, the Slovenes responded in 2010 with Črni *bratj*e (Black brothers), the story of a group of young antifascist from Gorizia/Gorica. However, the attempt to respond to the initiatives coming from Italy gained far less importance in Slovenia. The movie went almost unnoticed and a theatre play was in preparation but never performed.

29 *Delo*, 6 May 2011, Spomenik na Cerju po desetletju zapletov urejen [Accessed 7 February 2017].

30 http://www.tigr-drustvo.si/cerje [Accessed 7 February 2017].

31 *Delo*, 24 May 2005 [Accessed 18 February 2017].

Not only did the waves of memory transcend borders but also a physical appropriation of sites took place. In February 2009, a group of members of the Italian exile organisation, together with institutional representatives and the Italian general counsellor in Slovenia tried to pay tribute to an alleged mass grave site in the Slovene village of Lokev, not far from the Italo-Slovene border. The initiative was not opposed by the Slovene authorities. They allowed it but the commemoration was opposed by the local population. Locals saw it as a provocation and organised a counter-manifestation. The police separated the two groups, national media followed the event, and, again, polemics and accusations lasted for weeks.[32] The exile leaders claimed that Slovenia did not manage to clarify its own past and "that part of the Slovene political establishment has fake aspirations for reconciliation," while the right wing local leader Roberto Menia and at that time under-secretary at the Ministry of the Environment who took part in the pilgrimage, invited Slovenia "to officially apologise to Italy as it ought to be ashamed of its past in front of Europe." On the other side local protesters accused not only the exiles of provocation but also the Slovene authorities for allowing the manifestation.[33]

The chronology and the improvised nature of these practices show that, rather than being a premeditated memory strategy arising from its socialist past, Slovene politics of memory seem to be a response to nationalistic memory initiatives in Italy. This assumption is supported also by the short-term enthusiasm for these commemorations. Because of the political divisions in 2007 two different commemorations for the "Restoration of Primorska to the Motherland" were organised and if initially the government was in charge of the celebration, already in 2010 it withdrew its support. Its organisation (and its costs) had to be taken by organisations and local municipalities.[34] The Cerje Tower faced similar dynamics: if the works started with great pomp, the complex is still unfinished, and both central government and local administrations refuse to manage it because of the financial consequences this entails.[35]

A minor engagement of the central government in these memory activities is probably the consequence of a mitigation of the war of memories on the state level. If in 2007 the Italian president Giorgio Napolitano was speaking of "Slavic anexionism" and provoked harsh resentment in Slovenia (and especially in Croatia), in 2010 he met in Trieste the Slovene president Danilo Türk and the Croatian president Ivo Josipović. All three laid flowers on the former *Narodni dom*, a site commemorating local Slovenes burnt by Italian nationalists in 1920, and on the monument to the "exodus of Italians" from Istria after the war. Afterwards, they attended a concert for

32 *Il Giornale*, 1 March 2009 [Accessed 23 February 2017].
33 *Mladina*, 28. February 2009 [Accessed 23 February 2017].
34 *Primorske novice*, 13 & 14 July 2010.
35 *Primorski dnevnik*, 2 February 2017, 16.

peace organised by maestro Riccardo Muti.[36] Since then, a memory armistice, the "spirit of Trieste," has prevailed in official narratives, but at the local level different interpretations of World War II continue to evoke harsh diatribes.

Conclusion

Were and are memory cultures in the western and eastern part of Europe really so different? Bruno Groppo (2013: 239) synthesised the memory division of Europe between the dominance of the communist past in countries of the former Soviet Bloc and the primacy of the Shoah in Western Europe. However, it is impossible to draw a clear and linear boundary that would not change in time and space. The case of Slovenia has shown that memories are not divided (only) between the West and the East, but they also diverge on political and cultural lines within specific national, regional and local societies.

As claimed by Uilleam Blacker and Alexander Etkind (2013) in the Introduction to the volume *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, memories that inhabit the phantom space of Eastern Europe may clash and divide, but their contact creates a form of entanglement. They are in constant and interchangeable flux which provides the basis for common characteristics in East European memory cultures. Yet if this could be true for a vision incorporating "Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany all the way to Siberia," mutual memory influences, mnemonic exchanges, overlappings and entanglements exist between Western and Eastern Europe not less than within Western (and Eastern) Europe. National memory cultures are often transnational in their consequences. They overcome geopolitical boundaries and influence other national politics of memory. Therefore, if we consider only countries considered socialist in their political and economic system until the beginning of the 1990s, we see that they are defined in advance as specific and different. Too often analyses of politics of memory are conceptually predetermined and continue the Cold War dichotomy between the two Europes. In scholarly research, the West and the East often seem to be divided not by an Iron Curtain and by different political, military and economic systems, but by studies on memory cultures. If Lagrou has convincingly shown us how a comparative approach allows us to better understand memory processes in different national post-war societies on the example of France, Belgium and the Netherlands, this paper shows how fruitful it is to compare cases across former geopolitical (and mental) borders (Lagrou 1997: 186; Haslinger 1999). Furthermore, it reveals that shifting the focus away from official politics in post-socialist countries provides scholars with a different narrative of memory cultures in post-Cold War Europe.

36 *Il Piccolo*, 14 July 2010.

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