




FORUM

Slovenian Historiography in the Post-1989 Period

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In 1999, a roundtable entitled ‘The Problems of Slovenian Historiography in the Twentieth Century’ took place at the Institute for Contemporary History (*Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino*) in Ljubljana. The event was envisioned as a moment where Slovenian historians could collectively confront the state of Slovenian historiography. The organisers asked the invited participants to reflect on the main shortcomings of Slovenian historiography produced in and about the twentieth century. In particular, the following themes and issues were placed at the centre of reflection: research pitfalls in Slovenian historiography; historical processes and problems that should urgently be put on the research agenda; methodological and epistemological quandaries; and, last but not least, external pressures on historiography and the interference of civil society and political actors in the work of professional historiography. As a starting point for the discussion, participants presented written position papers that were later published as a thin booklet.¹

In 2023, more than two decades after the roundtable, the published reflections make an illuminating historical source, offering an interesting window into the mental world and conditions in which Slovenian historians worked ten years after the beginning of the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Of course, not all views and perspectives can be summarised in this short contribution. Yet it is worth pointing out that participants shared common views on many issues. The discussants agreed that in the future all areas and spheres of human and social life – such as everyday life, economic history, the history of cultural practices and arts, etc. – should be included in the research agenda. Further, far more attention should be paid to historical problems that had been sidelined or deliberately marginalised in the past. In addition, the study of political history, which had been the focus of most professional historians since the late nineteenth century, should be placed on new methodological and interpretative foundations.

Several historians made critical remarks on the limited methodological competence of Slovene historians, arguing that this insufficiency could be improved by adopting more interdisciplinary approaches and by bringing in the conceptual apparatus of related social science disciplines (anthropology in particular). Many discussants agreed with the statement that methodological training had been neglected in the past. As an equally important and salient shortcoming, the tendency for researchers to take on an almost exclusive geographic focus on ‘Slovene territory’ and its past was highlighted. Up until 1999, research into Slovenian history or the history of Slovenian space was rarely presented in its broader Central European or Yugoslav context. What is more, even comparative research was the exception rather than the rule. As a discussant, historian Božo Repe tellingly revealed the consequences of a nation-centric analysis of the Yugoslav past: ‘While historians from the former Yugoslav republics each write their own national history and evaluate the common past from a purely national point of view, Western historians (often also on the basis of our own findings published abroad as well as at home) write books on Yugoslav history.’²

¹ Ervin Dolenc, ed., *Teze za razpravo na okrogli mizi Problemi slovenskega zgodovinopisja o 20. stoletju*, Ljubljana, 26 oktober 1999: ob 40-letnici Inštituta za novejšo zgodovino v Ljubljani [Theses for Discussion at the Roundtable ‘The Problems of Slovenian Historiography in the Twentieth Century’, Ljubljana, 26 Oct. 1999: On the Occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the Institute of Contemporary History in Ljubljana] (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 1999).

² *Ibid.*, 39.

Throughout the 1990s, the research approach of professional Slovenian historians was normatively shaped to focus on the national community, the national cultural space and the almost metaphysical idea of ‘Sloveneness’. Yugoslavia almost completely disappeared from historical accounts – even though so-called Slovenian history in the twentieth century took place almost entirely within the Yugoslav political, social and cultural context. At the same time, in the first ‘post-Yugoslav’ decade, there was already a clear trend towards a broadening of the historiographic horizon and a shift towards research into hitherto ignored or marginalised historical problems and processes, in parallel with the adoption of methodological approaches and historiographical trends from German-, French- and English-speaking academic communities.³ All of this was accompanied by heated discussions – both in the professional community and among politicians – that called for a more or less radical re-evaluation of the Yugoslav historical experience or even demanded a thorough revision of twentieth-century Slovenian history.⁴ The situation was paradoxical. On the one hand, since the beginning of the 1990s, many processes of professional transformation had been driven by more or less clearly articulated expectations that, unlike the supposedly ‘autocratic socialist period’, historians should be given the freedom to choose their research topics and methods of research. On the other hand, however, experiencing the ‘brave new world of democracy’ post-1989, professional historiography was simultaneously confronted with explicit expectations and demands from a part of the cultural and political elite for a ‘proper’ and ‘correct’ interpretation of the past.

More than two decades later, where does Slovenian professional historiography stand? And, above all, which characteristics, identified as particularly problematic in 1999, still linger in Slovenian historiography? I argue that Slovenian historiography has made significant structural and organisational changes in the past two decades, despite the stubborn persistence of some atavistic methodological and epistemological tendencies. Particularly with the involvement of younger generations of professional historians, who are deeply integrated into international research and academic networks, the last two decades seem to offer a good basis for the successful cultivation of professional historiography in the Slovene language.

Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom

Professional historiography in Slovenia enjoys constant and stable support from the state and the academic administrative apparatus, despite Slovenian historians’ tendency to complain about the conditions in which we work. It is indeed true that processes of ‘adjunctification’ and ‘precarisation’ have not bypassed the historical profession in Slovenia over the past two decades. Particularly in the years following the 2008 financial crisis, a temporary albeit sharp reduction in public funding for research diminished the number of stable research jobs, forcing several cohorts of younger historians with PhDs to adopt project-based, competitive strategies for academic survival. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that, in general, the institutional conditions for professional research have been quite solid over the past two decades. It could even be said that at no time in the past have the material conditions been as good as they are today, especially since public funding for research has started to grow again following the fiscal consolidation of the Slovenian state in 2014. Many professional historians are employed as university professors, and history can be studied at four public universities and one private – a decent number for a country of only two million. Alongside professors and researchers at universities, historians also work in public research institutes and in the vast network of public

³ This was a logical progression from the development that began in the mid-1980s. See Oto Luthar, *Med kronologijo in fikcijo: strategije historičnega mišljenja* (Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče, 1993), 183–5.

⁴ In the academic community, a debate involving two historians in the early 1990s, Vasko Simoniti (b. 1951), a future politician and Minister of Culture, and Bogo Grafenauer (1916–95), the most influential Slovenian historian after 1945, stood out in this respect. See Vasko Simoniti, ‘O slovenskem zgodovinopisju 1945–1990 ali kako je na zgodovinopisje vplivalo staranje oblasti’, *Zgodovinski časopis* 46, no. 3 (1992): 387–94; Bogo Grafenauer, ‘Ob pisanju o slovenskem zgodovinopisju’, *Zgodovinski časopis* 47, no. 1 (1993): 117–29.

archives and museums. Research work is publicly funded, either directly or through public tenders and calls for proposals. Moreover, the state supports the publication of several dozen scientific journals through subsidies, while public and private publishers can get a competition-based subsidy from the national research agency for the editing and printing of scientific monographs. As a result, research and publishing has grown dramatically in quantitative terms. The Slovene reading public has been virtually flooded with historical works – and it has become very difficult to keep track of every text produced.

In terms of themes, subjects and content, the focus of Slovenian researchers has significantly broadened. The trend towards thematic diversity has nevertheless not been limited to the last two decades, but has rather been the continuation of a process that began in the late 1980s. Whereas research on twentieth-century history had been mainly limited to the history of the labour movement, the Communist Party and the development of the partisan movement during the Second World War, the field has undergone a significant thematic broadening since the break-up of Yugoslavia. Today, research interests and research questions are no longer defined by any preconceived political expectations or unwritten restrictions, but by the curiosity and creativity of the researchers themselves. Yet, openness in the historical profession is not only the sign of a much more pluralist political culture, but to a certain degree also a result of internationalisation. With generational changes and the departure of the ‘old guard’, institutional research cultures and normative research frameworks have also changed. The national academic field has increasingly come into dialogue with the findings of international historiography, and there is an ever-growing number of direct institutional and individual links that transcend national barriers, mostly in the form of MA, PhD and postdoctoral fellowships, international and bilateral projects, participation in EU-funded research networks and so on.

Unfortunately, it is impossible in the scope of this text to present detailed insights into all of the research achievements of the past two decades. Yet even a cursory survey of Slovenian scientific journals and monographs reveals the thematic diversity of research. In the past two decades, Slovenian historians have conducted research on topics as diverse as migration, the politics of memory and the formation of historical memory, the influence of the era of fascism on Slovenian territory, political culture, housing construction in the socialist era, diplomatic history, political and social boundaries, the history of food, the history of political parties, biographies of leading Slovenian politicians in the twentieth century (*inter alia* the interwar leader of the Slovene People’s Party, Anton Korošec, the communists Edvard Kardelj and Boris Kidrič, or the first president of independent Slovenia, Milan Kučan), sports, women and gender, diseases, medicine and epidemics, the state security service, education, the Isonzo Front and the First World War, extrajudicial mass killings and the communist takeover of the state, cultural politics, religious life and the development of church institutions, eugenics, everyday life during socialism, architecture, biographies of lawyers, local history and last – but certainly not least – the armed conflict between partisans and local Quisling troops during the Second World War. The list goes on.

Interestingly enough, there has been no specific institutional history behind the thematic broadening of historical research. No particular areas have been intentionally targeted for funding and no particular topics have tended to land the best jobs. The whole process dwelled in a combination of improvisation and the genuine, if somewhat naïve, wish to ‘modernise’ historical research that was, especially in the 1990s, abundantly funded by different non-state sources. The variety of new studies that have emerged in the last thirty years was thus an indirect result of a sincere desire by the professional community to thematically broaden the study of the Slovenian past. With the privilege of hindsight, one could conclude that the main catalyst of changes can be found in the deliberate decision of the academic community ‘to do things differently’ in a new political setting dominated by the ideological tropes of liberal democracy and the post-Yugoslav transitional journey of the Slovenian nation away from the Balkans and back to Central Europe. A mixture of the notions of liberalisation, Europeanisation and democratisation, on the one hand, and grants, research funds and financial support provided by NGOs and EU funds on the other, implicated much more diverse and relaxed, if still nation-centred and occasionally nationalistic, understandings of twentieth-century Slovenian history.

The Historiographical Tradition: Or, Narrowing Your Horizons

In terms of research subjects and questions posed, there is no doubt that Slovenian historiography is much more heterogeneous today than it was twenty years ago. Even more, it seems that in the last two decades the only limiting factor regarding research preferences has been the imaginations of scholars themselves. Alongside this undoubtedly positive aspect, it is nonetheless important to note two slightly more worrying trends: the spatial reduction of the research focus and the stubborn persistence of traditional methods and approaches. In the last two decades, Slovenian historians have only rarely indicated an ambition to look beyond the notion of historiography as an evidence-based chronological reconstruction of events from the past. Similarly, only a few historians have embarked on the path of more spatially and geographically ambitious research that is not limited exclusively to so-called Slovene ethnic territory.

This lack of interest in historical processes outside of Slovenian territory is a distinctive feature of Slovenian professional historiography. Few scholarly works rise above narrowly national contexts. This is unusual, to say the least, given that, for most of the twentieth century, ‘Slovenian history’ was inseparable from the history of Yugoslavia – of a state whose very heterogeneity calls for comparative research into common historical processes across different territorial areas. Nevertheless, in reality, there has been very little use of the comparative method in Slovenian historiography in the last twenty years. In those few cases where a comparative approach was applied, authors did not focus on Yugoslav space, but instead compared the ‘Slovene case’ with a similar one elsewhere. As an example of the latter, it is worth highlighting Miha Kosmač’s research on the displacement of the populations of Istria and of the Sudetenland after the Second World War.⁵ Similarly, Tone Kregar’s monograph compares the national development of Slovenes and Slovaks from the middle of the nineteenth century until the beginning of the German occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1938.⁶ Such approaches are, of course, crucial for a more complex understanding of historical processes; comparison allows the Slovenian historian to step back from the dominant (or master) narrative of Slovenian national historiography, but also enables a better understanding of the contemporary Slovenian experience in the European context. By limiting one’s research focus to ‘the national’, the notion of a Slovenian *Sonderweg* is reinforced, inadvertently arguing for the claim that Slovenian territory and its population – or the Slovenian nation in the twentieth century – followed a different and unique course, incomparable to other neighbouring territories and, above all, independent of broader political, social and cultural contexts.

If ignorance of the comparative method is rather hard to justify, then it is all the more difficult to understand why so few Slovenian historians have been interested in Yugoslavia as a state or a political formation with its own historical dynamics.⁷ This is rather unusual for at least two reasons: first of all, a wealth of sources are readily available – indeed, Slovenian historians would need to make little effort to learn the ‘Serbo-Croatian’ of non-Slovenian sources – but also, and second, it is simply impossible to consider Slovenian history during the twentieth century without taking into account the fact that between 1918 and 1991 it took place within a South Slav state formation. In recent years, however, there have been some positive developments. Particularly among the younger generation of historians, one can trace an increased interest in exploring the Yugoslav era from a Yugoslav point of view that is not confined or exclusively limited to the Slovene perspective.⁸

⁵ Miha Kosmač, *‘Etnično homogena Evropa’: preselitve prebivalstva v Istri in Sudetih 1945–1948* (Koper: Znanstveno-raziskovalno središče–Založba Annales, 2017).

⁶ Tone Kregar, *Med Tatrami in Triglavom: primerjave narodnega razvoja Slovencev in Slovakov in njihovi kulturno-politični stiki 1848–1938* (Celje: Zgodovinsko društvo, 2007).

⁷ An impressive and important exception is Jože Pirjevec’s work on Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav wars. See Jože Pirjevec, *Jugoslavija: [1918–1992]: Nastanek, razvoj ter razpad Karadjordjevičeve in Titove Jugoslavije* (Koper: Lipa, 1995); idem., *Jugoslovanske vojne: 1991–2001* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2003).

⁸ Maja Lukanc, ‘Jugoslovansko-poljski odnosi med letoma 1945 in 1956’ (Doctoral dissertation, Department of History, University of Ljubljana, 2020); Jurij Hadalin, *Boj za Albanijo: propad jugoslovanske širitve na Balkan* (Ljubljana:

In fact, research over the past twenty years has only in exceptional cases reached beyond the deliberate spatial delimitation of Slovenian territory. The somewhat intangible notion of ‘Sloveneness’ is in most cases the central building block and binding element of the historiographical imagination, guiding the structure and narrative strategies that Slovenian historians employ in analysing historical sources and shaping a coherent narrative. As a result, an almost exclusive focus on the Slovenian population, institutions and/or historical actors often leads to rather curious paradoxes in which an historical phenomenon from the period when current Slovenian territory was part of the Yugoslav state is treated as almost entirely detached from the broader Yugoslav context. Often, therefore, the history of the two Yugoslav states is understood, at least implicitly, only as a kind of ‘Yugoslav intermezzo’ in the course of Slovenian history – that is, some sort of aberration in national history – implying that Yugoslavia as a political and institutional structure did not influence (and even less so *determine*) the historical dynamics in ‘Slovenia’ or in ‘Slovene ethnic territory’.⁹

While methodological nationalism has been the dominant orientation in terms of spatial and contextual boundaries, Slovenian historiography has also remained largely committed to traditional analytical strategies and narrative approaches. In practice, Slovenian historians very rarely ask themselves a research question and most often endeavour simply to chronicle in sequence the past of Slovenians, of the Slovenian nation, of Slovenian historical actors, or events and processes that have occurred on Slovenian territory. In general, the majority of historians adhere to a ‘positivist’ or a basic empirical scientific method. Drawing on the analysis of collected sources and secondary literature, many of them, but not all, produce solid historical reconstructions with little ambition for synthesis or interpretation beyond mere description. At the same time, however, they create the impression of historical exceptionalism by focusing narrowly on an historical phenomenon without any particular desire to contextualise it. Moreover, the empirical and descriptive approach often fosters the notion of a self-contained coherent diachronic causality, linking the ‘Slovenian before’ with the ‘Slovenian after’ within the boundaries of ‘Slovenian ethnic territory’. One of the more prominent spatio-temporal contexts for such narrative practices and historicising strategies has been the Second World War. In the last two decades, the Second World War has usually been presented as a backdrop against which a ‘Slovene national tragedy’ – a civil war between members of two political blocs – took place on Slovenian ethnic territory. And if uninformed readers were to judge the Second World War solely by some recent studies by Slovenian historians, they could easily come to the conclusion that the Second World War broke out not because of the invasion of Poland but to allow Slovenians to settle scores by force and resolve internal political contradictions that had brewed during the interwar period.¹⁰

Calls to narrow the historiographic scope and focus exclusively on Slovenian topics were particularly strong in the first decade after the collapse of Yugoslavia and the establishment of an independent Slovenia. Yet, in fact, the spatial and thematic reduction of Slovenian historiography has a much longer tradition. Both the insistence that historians focus on the ‘national substance’ and on empirical description is a result of a decades-long institutional legacy and, at the same time, of the self-understanding of Slovenian professional historians as providers of supposed historical truth about the Slovenian past. Prevailing methodological traditionalism is a mixture of the legacy of the

Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2011); Gašper Mithans, *Jugoslovanski konkordat: pacem in discordia ali jugoslovanski 'kulturrkampf'* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2017).

⁹ A good example is a recent book written by a retired professional Slovenian historian. There, the author attempts to present the history of Slovenians from the perspective of the independent state of Slovenia, recounting the ‘historical facts’, offered without context, that led to Slovenia’s independence in 1991, spanning a broad period of time from the Middle Ages to 1991. See Stane Granda, *Pot v samoslovenstvo: prva osamosvojitvena zgodovina Slovencev* (Ljubljana: Družina, 2022).

¹⁰ See two typical examples by two prominent right-wing historians/public intellectuals: Jože Možina, *Slovenski razkol: okupacija, revolucija in začetki protirevolucionarnega upora* (Ljubljana–Celje–Celovec–Gorica: Medijske in raziskovalne storitve J. Možina–Društvo Mohorjeva družba–Celjska Mohorjeva družba–Mohorjeva družba–Goriška Mohorjeva družba, 2019); Tamara Griesser Pečar, *Razdvojeni narod: Slovenija 1941–1945: okupacija, kolaboracija, državljanska vojna, revolucija* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 2004).

socialist era and of the long continuity of the dominant nation-building mode of historicising, which can be traced back to the late nineteenth century.¹¹ At the end of the nineteenth century, professional historiography in the Slovenian language devoted itself to the representation of national history.¹² This trend continued practically without interruption in socialist Yugoslavia; as Božo Repe, among others, has convincingly shown, a common Yugoslav historiography never really existed. In the socialist era, national historiographies with fragile links to each other thrived in the individual republics, collaborating in research on individual projects that were in reality only half-written or soon to be abandoned.¹³ While new national heroes came to the forefront of Slovenian historical narratives as major historical actors – for example, Slovenian peasants who resisted the German nobility in the early modern period, or Slovenian partisans who, under the leadership of the Slovenian communists, resisted the German invaders in the Second World War – the representation of the past remained unchanged and traditional. The socialist era also saw the establishment and consolidation of ‘the dominance of positivism and the practice of recording historical events without historical context’, which, as Mateja Režek has noted, was a way for historians to ‘retreat into the safe waters of “factography” and to avoid the dangerous waters of interpretation’ due to implicit or explicit political pressure from the postwar League of Communists.¹⁴ In other words, professional historians resorted to an empirical and source-based approach as a way to depoliticise their research, focusing predominantly on the chronological description of political dynamics.

While debates on methodological issues have continued over the last three decades, predominant research practices have changed very slowly, but in a positive direction. Younger generations of Slovenian historians have been declaratively in favour of approaches that go beyond methodological nationalism, and have been especially receptive to methodological trends and epistemic turns outside Slovenia. A decade ago, historians would articulate their familiarity with international developments exclusively in the methodology sections of project applications, mainly out of a desire to satisfy the expectations of ‘non-Slovenian’ reviewers. Nowadays, however, Slovenian historians try to participate intensively and be part of international historiographical debates and research endeavours. This, of course, implies a fundamental change in the ways of historicising and the replacement of traditional methodological approaches. However, there is still a considerable number of researchers who stick to tradition, limit themselves to descriptive accounts and focus exclusively on ‘Slovenian ethnic territory’. The persistence of traditionalist historical practices and accounts is somewhat related to the ‘academic inbreeding’ that is omnipresent in Slovenian research institutions. It is also a result of the lack of in-depth methodological and epistemological training that future professional historians fail to acquire as students in the course of their studies at Slovenian universities. It should also be mentioned that more thorough and rapid methodological transformations have been somewhat constrained by institutional barriers. The aforementioned financial crisis and the reorganisation of the state budget has reduced research funding for the humanities. As a result, for almost a decade, younger professional historians have been severely hampered from personally engaging in substantive methodological and thematic debates in contemporary international historiography, and have had few opportunities to study abroad or take part in international research endeavours. It is also worth noting that, until recently, the country’s central public institution which allocates public funds for research – the Slovenian Research Agency (*Javna agencija za raziskovalno dejavnost Republike Slovenije*, ARRS) – explicitly supported research that had a patriotic impact,

¹¹ Jernej Kosi, ‘Nacionalno zgodovinske kot orožje ljudstva: Grafenauerjeva koncepcija slovenske zgodovine’, in *O mojstrih in muzi: zgodovinske Boga Grafenauerja in Ferda*, eds. Peter Štih and Žiga Zwitter (Ljubljana: Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, 2018), 60–84.

¹² Rok Stergar and Jernej Kosi, ‘Kdaj so nastali “lubi Slovenci”? O identitetah v prednacionalni dobi in njihovi domnevni vlogi pri nastanku slovenskega naroda’, *Zgodovinski časopis* 70, no. 3–4 (2016): 458–88.

¹³ Božo Repe, ‘Razpad historiografije, ki nikoli ni obstajala: institucionalne povezave jugoslovanskih zgodovinarjev in skupni projekti’, *Zgodovina za vse* 3, no. 1 (1996): 69–78.

¹⁴ Mateja Režek, ‘Usmerjena preteklost: mehanizmi ideološke in politične “kontaminacije” zgodovinskega v socialistični Sloveniji in Jugoslaviji (1945–1966)’, *Acta Histriae* 22, no. 4 (2014): 971–92.

although it is also true that the criteria for funding have changed radically in the past few years.¹⁵ In addition, comparative, entangled, global and similar approaches demand considerable budgets, whereas Slovenian grants are simply too modest to allow for more ambitious methodological endeavours.

Still, substantial progress has been made in the last two decades in the so-called digital humanities. Slovenian historiography has begun to reap the benefits of Slovenian libraries' decades-long efforts to establish digital book repositories.¹⁶ Moreover, over a decade ago, the Institute of Contemporary History launched an infrastructure project dedicated to the digitisation of secondary literature and historical sources.¹⁷ These efforts have recently been expanded with a new research programme which will focus on the creation, analysis and interpretation of digital sources. The publicly funded interdisciplinary research group will develop methods by which professional historians could pursue their research in innovative ways through the analysis of digital corpora of historical sources.¹⁸ Last but not least, the Centre for Public History was established at the University of Ljubljana's Department of History in 2021.¹⁹

Shopping in a Department Store Called 'The Slovenian Past'

The narrowness of the Slovenian methodological imagination is undoubtedly a troubling tradition that has only gradually given way to new approaches, conceptualisations and research strategies. However, a much greater, almost existential threat to Slovenian professional historiography exists: the political revisionism and culture wars promoted by right-wing political parties and the civil society they foster. Whereas the traditional research goal of Slovenian historians has always been a chronological reconstruction of the past based on sources, this is certainly not the case for the adherents of alternative narratives, who often freely pick up facts from the Slovenian past and create causal narrative chains that fit their specific agendas and expectations.

In terms of content, the key conflicts between the different regimes of historicity that have predominated over the past two decades have concerned two historical periods: the Second World War and the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The Second World War is a particularly salient field of political and commemorative struggles. It is here that, over the past two decades, veterans' organisations and political actors have crossed swords to mobilise supporters or the voting electorate by deploying the notion of the Second World War as a Slovenian civil war, or by vindicating the collaboration of part of the Slovenian political elite with the Italian and Nazi occupation regimes, or condemning post-war mass killings and partisan crimes.²⁰ The battle for interpretation is accompanied by the so-called discourse of reconciliation, promoted by some influential Slovene intellectuals as a quasi-therapeutic way of confronting the past, which the Slovenian community involved in the civil war supposedly needs to undergo in order to be able to act politically in a more united and cohesive way in the future. In so doing, the discourse of reconciliation implicitly replaces critical analysis with a controversial remembrance discourse according to which the Second World War inflicted a great deal of (equal) misery on all participants – collaborators and partisans alike, victims as well as perpetrators.²¹

On many occasions over the last two decades, the mobilisation of the past for political ends has been an ideological weapon of right-wing political parties and civil society movements. Despite the

¹⁵ Back in 2003, for instance, the ARRS annual report specifically highlighted financial support for research projects that 'strengthen national identity' (see <https://www.arrs.si/sl/finan/letpor/inc/mszs-finpor-2003.pdf> (last visited 26 Nov. 2023)).

¹⁶ See <https://www.dlib.si/?&language=eng> and <https://ukm.um.si/domoznanske-digitalne-zbirke> (last visited 26 Nov. 2023).

¹⁷ See https://www.inz.si/en/Research-Infrastructure-of-Institute-of-Contemporary-History_1/ (last visited 26 Nov. 2023).

¹⁸ See <https://www.inz.si/en/Digital-humanities-resources-tools-and-methods/> (last visited 26 Nov. 2023).

¹⁹ See <https://sredisce-za-javno-zgodovino.ff.uni-lj.si/en/> (last visited 26 Nov. 2023).

²⁰ See Oto Luthar and Heidemarie Uhl, eds., *The Memory of Guilt Revisited: The Slovenian Post-Socialist Remembrance Landscape in Transition* (Göttingen: V & R unipress, 2019).

²¹ Marko Zajc, 'Spomenik Pr' Skelet in Zvezdi: k politiki spomina v Sloveniji v drugem desetletju tretjega tisočletja [The Monument Near Bar Pr'Skelet and Café Zvezda: On the Politics of Memory in Slovenia in the Second Decade of the Third Millennium]', *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 60, no. 1 (2020): 152–71.

impressive achievements of Slovenian professional historiography in terms of scope and the heterogeneity of its content, right-wing activists insist that, thirty years after the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia, the study of the past – like many other spheres of society – is still under the influence of ‘uncles from the background’ or the ‘deep state’. Against this background, amateur historians and hobby researchers – Roman Leljak perhaps the most notorious of them all – have published voluminous bodies of amateurish and post-truth history that purport to reveal the ‘real truth’ about the nature of the communist regime, that is, about its violence, crimes and lies. This kind of crusade against professional historians and their supposed sponsors has found some resonance in the public, most dramatically expressed in December 2015, when the professionally-written biography of Milan Kučan – the first President of the Republic of Slovenia and the penultimate Chairman of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Slovenia – was demonstratively burned in front of his house.²²

The quite explicit political tendency to revise history has been particularly strong in periods when the right-wing populist Janez Janša has led a coalition government. During his premierships, the state has financially supported the authors of alternative and revisionist historical narratives. In many cases, Janša’s government, or ministers from his party, have deliberately set up parallel institutions or diverted public funds to trusted individuals with the correct political pedigree. For example, during the first Janša government (2004–8), the Study Centre for National Reconciliation was established, whose almost explicit agenda was to relativise the collaboration of part of the Slovenian political, cultural and religious elite during the Second World War by using the retro-causal chronological principle: the allegedly totalitarian communist regime that emerged after the Second World War and persisted throughout the entire socialist period was supposed to be the justification for a part of the Slovenian political elite to take up arms on behalf of the occupier, or to place themselves in the political and administrative service of the Nazi and Italian administrative occupation apparatuses. The Centre soon obtained public funds for research, and, as the title of its research programme – ‘The Violence of Communist Totalitarianism in Slovenia 1941–1990’ – shows, already manifested its ideological and political vision.²³ The efforts of right-wing politicians and associations to rewrite and reinterpret the past according to their particular views and expectations could occasionally take on increasingly comic proportions. Despite being personally involved as an important historical actor – as the Minister of Defence in 1991 – Janez Janša, for instance, became a member of the editorial board of the *Encyclopedia of Slovenian Independence*, a state-funded online compendium devoted to the representation of crucial processes and events that led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia and proclamation of an independent and sovereign Slovenian nation-state.²⁴

Conclusion: Three Decades of Navigating between Academic Traditionalism, Political Expectations and Rigorous Historical Analysis

Since the late 1980s, many Slovenian politicians and prominent public figures have shared a belief that controlling interpretations of the past can shape citizens’ identities and either maintain or shatter ideological hegemony. How the past is researched, analysed and interpreted has thus been taken seriously in Slovenia – with many important positive effects for a professional community that studies and writes about history. Despite cyclical economic turmoil and governmental changes, every Slovenian minister in charge of science and research since 1991 has strived to maintain a stable institutional landscape and to ensure access to public funds for professional historians. Slovenian historians who were employed as civil servants in the state-funded institutional system did not lose their jobs during this period. Public institutes, museums, archives and university departments have not been abolished

²² Borut Mekina, ‘Sežig knjige o Kučanu’, *Mladina*, 24 Dec. 2015, available at: <https://www.mladina.si/171613/sezig-knjige-o-kucanu/> (last visited 26 Nov. 2023).

²³ Despite the clear political background of the Centre, some of its collaborators nevertheless produced empirically solid, if interpretatively modest and conceptually questionable, studies with clear ideological–political overtones.

²⁴ See <https://enciklopedija-osamosvojitve.si> (last visited 26 Nov. 2023).

in the last three decades. On the contrary, many new ones have been set up and the number of professional historians paid for their work from public funds has increased significantly.

However, since the establishment of Slovenia as an independent nation-state, many politicians and civil servants in charge of research administration share the conviction that the study of the past should serve as a means of political mobilisation and as a tool for ensuring national adulation. At times, such aspirations have been articulated as unscrupulous attempts to interfere with academic freedom. Professional historians have been confronted on several occasions over the past three decades with thinly veiled hints of what the proper attitude to the past should be in public institutions financed from the state budget. Sadly enough, some professional historians have embraced such suggestions and tailored their own professional work to satisfy explicit political expectations. Moreover, in extreme cases, the scholarly community has been delegitimised by politically funded alternative narratives that observe few, if any, of the scholarly orthodoxies that govern the historical profession. To make things potentially worse, examples from the regional neighbourhood (e.g. Hungary and Poland) suggest that membership of the European Union is no guarantee that, in the future, Slovenian scholars will not face deliberate restrictions on their freedom of research or become subject to initiatives that defund research institutes perceived as threats by the regime.

Political interference aside, professional historiography in Slovenia has undoubtedly broadened its research foci over the past three decades, even if many scholars have continued to stick to traditional methodological approaches and narrative strategies. The assumption that the history of so-called Slovenian territory unfolds in isolation from broader historical processes and transformations – that is, according to the simple principle of chronological causality – is still a highly preferred starting point for historiographic analyses. It is somewhat paradoxical that methodological nationalism persists so stubbornly in a professional community that focuses on a territory that, due to its history of involvement in imperial or multi-national polities, has in reality relatively little practical experience with the political principle of the sovereignty of the nation.

However, with the slow departure of older generations trained in a distinctly Slovenian context and the arrival of younger historians educated in a pluralistic political culture and embedded in European and global research and educational networks, Slovenian historiography now faces a gradual transformation in research practices. Rather than focusing solely on the Slovenian nation, the profession is now moving toward a paradigmatic openness and a more integrated understanding of historical processes. Aside from the constant fear that a change in government could potentially unleash nationalist and politically motivated pressures on professional historiography, it seems that the key challenge in the near future will be to face digitalisation as a groundbreaking problem for the whole field of humanities. In fact, when it comes to digital methods and the so-called digital humanities, the Institute of Contemporary History is already following international trends.²⁵ There is still no clear answer, however, to the question of which strategies of representing the past will be used by Slovenian professional historians in the digital future – an era when the printed book will neither remain as the gold standard of historical scholarship, nor as the crucial medium consumed by the reading public. In this case, as always, history will be the final judge.

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²⁵ See <https://www.inz.si/sl/Raziskovalna-infrastruktura/> (last visited 26 Nov. 2023).