

Women, Violence and Trauma in Wartime and Postwar Northeastern Adriatic



Edited by
Marta Verginella

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Introduction: From Violence to Trauma

Marta Verginella

The essays in this collection deal with postwar trauma and the violence it generates by looking into social and political backgrounds, as well as the ways in which trauma was understood, healed and stored in both cultural and political memory. They do so from a gendered perspective, with a particular focus on women following both world wars, and partly also after the wars that erupted in the 1990s after the break-up of Yugoslavia. If the claims of Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur about “gendering the front mean[ing] deconstructing the notion that wartime heroism is exclusively masculine” hold true, then gendering the postwar periods means transcending the “cult of the fallen soldier”¹ and delving deep into the inheritance of psychology and trauma that remained with women after wartime conflicts.²

In recent decades, historiography has increased its focus on studying the topic of understanding war, both expanding and redefining its meaning. Similarly, it has also taken a broader look at women’s war experience and the role of women not only as passive bystanders, but also as active members of the auxiliary armed forces, resistance movements, as spies, prison guards, etc.³ Historiography has also focused on women’s roles and experiences in the postwar periods in both Western and Eastern Europe, albeit to a lesser extent. The ERC project *Eirene Post-War Transitions in the Gendered Perspective: The Case of the North-Eastern Adriatic Region* (2017–2022), along

1 Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur, “Introduction,” in *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*, ed. Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1.

2 Claire A. Culleton, *Working-Class Culture, Women, and Britain, 1914–1921* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 169–176.

3 See Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel, and Margaret Collins Weitz, *Behind the Lines: Gender and Two World Wars* (Westford: Yale University Press, 1987).

with the interdisciplinary and inter-institutional collaborations (Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions) that emerged within its framework, aim to address this deficit.

The focus of the project is on women's agency and experiences in the postwar period during the history of the twentieth century in the northeastern Adriatic, the area where Central, South, West and Eastern Europe meet,⁴ an area often excluded from referential syntheses of twentieth-century European history or glossed over in a highly synthetic manner. The titles of these volumes, containing words such as "dark continent," "savage continent," and "blood land,"⁵ already vividly illustrate the brutality of the world wars and their violent prolongation after their end, all the while making it clear how they view the destructive nature of war more so than the ubiquity of psychological harm left amongst not only the combatants, but also the civilian population. Their inquiries merely hint at gender analysis; quantitatively processed data regarding the victims of postwar violence, forcibly displaced persons and those prosecuted based on gender is also absent.

One of the aims of this book, which brings together the results of pioneering studies in many respects, is to address this deficit and, above all, to contribute to the analysis of the violence and trauma experienced by women in the postwar period in this part of Europe. As Rachel Kimerling, Paige Ouimette, and Jessica Wolfe argue, "gender is also a major factor in the type of trauma exposure experienced by the individual, the social relationships that mediate the impact of exposure, and the systems of meaning into which the trauma event is encoded."⁶

In conflicts where the lines between the front and the home front are blurred, and where civilians often suffered more than soldiers due to genocidal practices, the precise demarcation of the boundary between the "sick" and the "rest of the population"—the traumatized and the non-traumatized—is very difficult, if not impossible to detect.⁷ Rachel Kimerling is surely correct, however, in asserting that "the numbers of people, both

4 Among the most important results of the project is the upcoming book: Marta Verginella and Urška Strle, eds., *Women and Work in Postwar Transition* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2025).

5 Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin Lane, 1999); Keith Lowe, *Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II* (London: Viking, 2012); Timothy Singer, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

6 Rachel Kimerling, Paige Ouimette, and Jessica Wolfe, *Gender and PTSD* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2002).

7 Marc Edele, "Towards a History of Trauma in Central and Eastern Europe After World War II: A Coda," in *Trauma, Experience and Narrative in Europe After World War II*, ed. Ville Kivimäki and Peter Leese (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 321–331.

on the battlefields and the home fronts, who suffered from psychological trauma have been substantially underestimated, and medical diagnoses only scratch the surface of the mental toll inflicted by modern war.”⁸

In the twentieth century, the female population in the area was also exposed to postwar violence due to wars and the geopolitical changes that followed, especially in border areas where the declaration of peace did not necessarily mesh with the nationality of the territory’s inhabitants. Following November 1918, this was the case in the former Austrian Littoral, in Carinthia, and after 1945, in the areas of the Julian March (Trieste, Gorizia) and Austria that remained under Allied and Yugoslav rule (Istria) until 1954 and 1955 respectively.

The Toll of Violence

More than eight million lives were lost in WWI, mostly young men conscripted into the army. Add to this the victims of epidemics, revolutions and other conflicts, and the total number of casualties is much higher—up to 13 million, according to some estimates.⁹ How many of these were women? Exact numbers remain unknown, but there were certainly many.¹⁰ WWII saw 40 to 60 million deaths based on various calculations of Soviet victims;¹¹ 40 million people were displaced either voluntarily or against their will. According to other calculations, the number between 1939 and 1948 comes to 45 million. How many of these people were women? According to various statistics, approximately 60 percent of the European victims during WWII were civilians, with women accounting for over half of those killed, victimized by Nazi and fascist occupational/genocidal politics, deported into death and concentration camps, interned, forced into slave labor, bombed

8 Rachel Kimerling, preface to *Gender and PTSD*, XI.

9 Dennis E. Showalter and John Graham Royde-Smith, “World War I,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed December 8, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-I>.

10 Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 79–80. On the numbers of widows, wounded, and maimed, see Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 80; Reinhard Sieder, “Behind the Lines: Working-Class Family in Wartime Vienna,” in *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work, and Welfare in Europe, 1914–1918*, ed. Richard Wall and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 109–138. On the civilian population mortality in time of war, see Ernst Bruckmüller, *Sozialgeschichte Österreichs* (Vienna, Munich: Herold, 1985), 404.

11 On how the different calculations of the dead in World War II are primarily influenced by the different calculations of Soviet casualties, see Richard Bessel, “Death and Survival in the Second World War,” in *The Cambridge History of the Second World War, Volume III*, ed. by Michael Geyer and Adam Tooze (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 258.

or, alternatively, suffered during their participation as army combatants or liberation movement freedom fighters.

If WWI was indeed similar to WWII in its imperialist aspirations, it differed in the rather static battlefields and in the profile of violence. The latter did reach beyond the front lines, but not as comprehensively and destructively as WWII.¹² This undoubtedly contributed to fewer civilian casualties, and therefore fewer female casualties. Aerial bombing in the Great War was also sporadic and limited to close distances when targeting the hinterland. This means that air strikes did cause civilian casualties, but in incomparably smaller numbers than in WWII. In the latter, air strikes on cities, infrastructure and industrial facilities were amongst the most common methods of warfare, contributing to the mass deaths of civilians, many of whom were women in the area covered by this book (especially cities such as Maribor, Celje, Trieste, Klagenfurt, and Zadar).¹³

WWII took place in Europe on a very wide scale, with theaters ranging from Brittany to Greece and Stalingrad. Like WWI, it was a total war and included several conflicts that completely blurred the boundary between the battlefield and the hinterland in the northeastern part of the Adriatic. Its destruction was massive and systematic due to violence based on racist, ethnic, religious and ideological motives. It affected all segments of the civilian population because the notion of the enemy also applied to women and children.¹⁴ The extension of the combat beyond the front was responsible for the increase in civilian casualties and material damage, which worsened living conditions especially among the poor and, after the end of the war, of widows and war orphans in particular.¹⁵

12 Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 217–217; Mark Cutts, *The State of the World's Refugees, 2000: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action* (Geneva: UNHCR, Oxford University Press, 2000), 13.

13 In the case of Maribor, an aircraft parts factory operated in the town. Above the town, allied planes dropped three-quarters of all the payloads deployed on Slovenia. The death toll—military and civilian—was officially declared at around 700, but more realistic estimates put it at around 1,000. It is estimated that 2,000 civilians lost their lives during the bombing of Slovene towns; Sašo Radovanovič and Lara Iva Dreu, *Bombardiranje Slovenije 1944–1945* (Maribor: Bio Energija, 2023), 156. Zadar was bombed particularly brutally between November 1943 and October 1944, when 24,000 inhabitants were displaced from the town.

14 On how the first war expanded the concept of the enemy to include women and children, see Bruna Bianchi, “I civili: vittime innocenti o bersagli legittimi?”, in *La violenza contro la popolazione civile nella grande guerra: deportati, profughi, internati*, ed. Bruna Bianchi (Milan: Unicopli, 2006), 80.

15 On erasing the distinction between soldiers and civilians in the wartime language of atrocity in John Horne, “Atrocities and War Crimes,” in *The Cambridge History of First World War, Volume I*, ed. Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 561–584.

Enzo Traverso considers WWI and WWII to be part of the “long European civil war,” a protracted period of violent practices and brutalities that continued in peacetime and were rooted in the struggle between revolution and counter-revolution, between the Enlightenment and the Counter-Enlightenment.¹⁶ His concept of the “long European civil war” is also very useful in order to understand the history of violence in the northeastern Adriatic, seeing how violent practices did not cease during peacetime after either war, and a continuum was established between them. A similar situation occurred in the wake of the Yugoslav wars.

After the end of WWI, the violence persisted either because of the revolutionary undercurrent emerging under the influence of the ideas of the Ottoman Revolution, or because of the violent clashes between politically antagonistic forces that crippled the restoration of civil order and political life in both Italy and Hungary. Scores with wartime and ideological enemies were settled violently in both West and Eastern Europe after the end of WWII. Revenge became one of the cornerstones of postwar Europe, as Lowe argues.¹⁷ Its enactment was certainly more radical and widespread in Eastern Europe than in the West. This is also evident when comparing the conduct of the postwar authorities. The Italian authorities, for example, sought to pardon war criminals and carried out an amnesty in 1947. After the end of the war, the Yugoslavs extended the postwar struggle against former war enemies to include the repression and persecution of class enemies.

In areas where Nazi and fascist occupation regimes were particularly brutal, as was the case in the northeastern Adriatic, a “parallel” war took place,¹⁸ sometimes extending into the postwar period, further leveraged by unsolved border issues. This supports Tony Judt’s thesis that violence remained at the root of the “long postwar period” that is said to have persisted in this part of Europe until the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1991.¹⁹ Upon taking into account the Yugoslav wars, it holds true up until the new millennium.

“‘War’ and ‘peace’ are not mutually exclusive phenomena in history, but are intimately related,” stresses Selma Leydesdorff in “Narratives of Survivors

16 Enzo Traverso, *Fire and Blood. The European Civil War, 1914–1945* (London and New York: Verso, 2016); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London: Abacus, 1994).

17 Lowe, *Savage Continent*, 202.

18 About multiple wars and the intertwining of parallel and civil wars, see Stanley G. Payne, *Civil War in Europe 1905–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 193–207.

19 Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005).

of Srebrenica.”²⁰ Despite the introduction of peace, the dead defined the living, or, as the Bosnian women survivors of war crimes and conflict tend to say, “the war never ends.”²¹ This is not only because of the mass deaths and hidden bodies which make mourning difficult, but above all because of the brutalization of attitudes and conditions that perpetuate hatred and violence even in peacetime. This book sheds light on the ways in which the psychological effects of war violence manifested after the cessation of hostilities and were prolonged after they ended.

Postwar Violence and Women

Upon focusing on the northeastern Adriatic region on the map of European war violence and its postwar consequences, one finds that it was one of the areas of Europe where both total wars intensely devastated the landscape and settlements, causing mass casualties among soldiers and civilians, forced migration, refugees, deportations and internment. The establishment of peace in November 1918 did not stop the violence in the Kingdom of Italy nor in the Republic of Austria, where it continued and escalated in the 1920s and 1930s, especially in border areas such as Carinthia and the Julian March. Brutalization was, in other words, the product of defeat in Austria. Italy exhibited little difference in this regard, even though it emerged from the war as the victor. Yet despite gaining the territories of South Tyrol and the Austrian Littoral, Italy was dominated by a perception of defeat summed up in the syntax of the mutilated victory, “vittoria mutilata.”

Luisa Morettin claims in her book *A Blood Border: Trieste Between Mussolini and Tito* that WWI birthed the trauma of war in Italy, and “facilitated violence and genocidal logistics; the conflict stoked grievances and an abiding desire for revenge against those responsible for damaged national prestige, whilst nationalism was being defined by ethnicity rather than

20 The case of Bosnia shows that although genocide occurred “twenty years ago [...], hatred and pain are still present for the survivors of Srebrenica. While many are still displaced in refugee camps, and others return to a place that is drenched in blood, the war goes on in the minds, imaginations, and nightmares of the survivors.” Selma Leydesdorff, “Narratives of Survivors of Srebrenica: How Do They Reconnect to the World?” in *Women and Genocide: Survivors, Victims, Perpetrators*, ed. Elissa Bemporad and Joyce W. Warren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018); Linda Martin Alcoff, *Rape and Resistance, Understanding the Complexities of Sexual Violation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 253.

21 Danica Anderson, *South Slavic Women's Transgenerational Trauma Healing Through Oral Memories Practices: Women War Crimes and War Survivors* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2024),

territory.”²² It is possible to agree with this, but only upon adding that the capillary spread of violence was fueled by the fascist movement and its rise to power in 1922, which also legalized violent practices in peacetime and, in the northeastern border area of Italy, the persecution of the national enemy, the so-called “Yugoslav minority.”

The disagreements of large segments of the Slovene and Croatian population, first with the Italian authorities, and after 1920, their resistance to fascism and its assimilationist and repressive policies, led to an intensification of the repressive and violent practices of Italian authorities in the Slovene Littoral and Istria, which were directed against all segments of the anti-Italian population, and especially against the “Slavs.”

The transnational conflict, rooted in the nationalist antagonism between Italian and Slovenian and Croatian patriots from the time of the Habsburg monarchy, intensified in its extremity after the fascist period and WWII, and kept renewing itself until the 1950s. The uncertainty of the border area’s status until the London Memorandum in 1954 undoubtedly contributed to this. Against the background of the uncertain affiliation of the Julian March, which after June 1945 was partly under Anglo-American administration and partly under Yugoslav military administration, the conflict between the pro-Italian and the pro-Yugoslav camps took on increasingly obvious manifestations of a politically ideological clash between capitalism and communism, one that was only settled in 1954 with the London Agreement.²³

In the case of Carinthia, the insecurity of belonging to a border territory also played an important role in prolonging postwar violence. After the end of WWI, the struggle to establish the belonging of the multiethnic territory beyond the Karawanks was a lever for the violence carried out by both the pro-Austrian camp and the Yugoslav occupation army until the plebiscite of 1920. The outcome ended up favorably for Austria; it did reduce the violence, but did not completely stop the hatred and pressure directed at members of the Slovenian minority, which escalated in the 1930s after the rise of Nazism and especially during WWII when it culminated in the Nazi policy of the forced emigration of many Carinthian Slovenian families and the deportation of all those suspected of supporting the partisan movement.²⁴

22 Luisa Morettin, *A Blood Border: Trieste Between Mussolini and Tito* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2019), 253.

23 Federico Tenca Montini, *La Jugoslavia e la questione di Trieste. 1945–1954* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2020); Jože Pirjevec, “*Trst je naš!*: boj Slovencev za morje (1848–1945)” (Ljubljana: Nova revija, 2007).

24 For more on forced evictions and deportation, see Helga Embacher and Maria Ecker, “A Nation of Victims: How Austria Dealt with the Victims of the Authoritarian Ständestaat and National Socialism,” in *The Politics of War Trauma: The Aftermath of World War II in Eleven European*

The high level of violence in central Slovenia and the coastal part of Croatia during WWII can be attributed to the occupying regimes (Italy from April 1941 and Germany after September 1943) and their suppression of partisan liberation activity. The latter enjoyed the support of a significant part of the population, including women. Women were victims of mass executions and repression as well as of military conflicts. In fact, around 7 percent of women in the Slovenian partisan units, most of whom were unmarried, were largely demobilized at the end of the war. From 1941 to 1943, 31.58 percent of the female partisans died either in combat or as a result of wounds, torture or disease. Their mortality rate was higher than that of men (16.00 percent).²⁵

Women also represented a significant portion of the Slovenian population interned in the Italian camps, i.e., 7 percent and 9 percent of the total population of the Ljubljana region (between 25,000 and 30,000 people). Unfortunately, no data is available on how many of these were women and what their mortality rate was.²⁶ However, it is known that they constituted the majority, or at least half, of the internment population in some camps where living conditions were unbearable, such as Freschette d'Alatri and the camps run by the Italian army in Rab, Gonars and Visco. They were also interned in small camps organized solely for women by the Ministry of the Interior in the Marche, Abruzzo and Molise regions of central Italy.²⁷ With regard to gender, the statistics on persons transported to Nazi death and concentration camps, and German labor camps, are also incomplete,

Countries, ed. Jolande Withuis and Annet Mooij (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2010), 22; Valentin Sima, "Die Deportation slowenischer Familien aus Kärnten. Rahmenbedingungen, Präludium und Vorbereitung," in *Die Deportation slowenischer Familien aus Kärnten 1942* (Österreichische Liga für Menschenrechte: Vienna, 2003), 63–68. Avguštin Malle, Alfred Elste, and Brigitte Entner, *Vermögensentzug, Rückstellung und Entschädigung am Beispiel von Angehörigen der slowenischen Minderheit, ihrer Verbände und Organisationen* (Vienna: Oldenbourg, 2004). Helga Embacher and Margit Reiter, "Partisanin aus christlicher Nächstenliebe?—Österreichische Sloweninnen in den Konzentrationslagern," in *Arbeitserschaft und Nationalsozialismus in Österreich*, ed. Rudolf G. Ardel, and Hans Hautmann (Wien, Zürich: Europaverlag, 1990), 553–579. For information on the victims of postwar violence, including the most publicly active members of the Slovenian minority, especially former partisans and supporters of the pro-Yugoslav camp, see Andrej Leben, *V borbi smo bile enakopravne. Uporniške ženske na Koroškem v letih 1939–1955* (Klagenfurt: Drava, 2003).

²⁵ Valerija Bernik Burja, "Vloga žensk v osvobodilnem gibanju na Slovenskem" (master's thesis, University of Ljubljana, 2001), 241.

²⁶ Marta Verginella, Oto Luthar, and Urška Strle, *La memoria dimezzata: i campi fascisti nelle testimonianze Slovene* (Rome: Donzelli, 2025).

²⁷ Both the regional state archives and the Central State Archives in Rome contain lists of the interned population in individual camps, which means that it is possible to calculate the number of internees, but not the number of deaths by gender.

especially those from Lower Styria, where the Nazi government set out to radically transform ethnic relations and, to this end, also carried out forced emigrations of the Slovenian population to Serbia.

In some areas such as the Adriatic coast and especially Trieste, Udine and Gorizia, it is known that 9,880 people were deported to Nazi camps. They represented one-fifth of all those deported from the whole of Italy. A further fifth of these were women. Marco Coslovich gives the information that of the 1,235 Jews deported, 648 were women in the convoys that left Trieste for Germany—more than half.²⁸

Compared to other parts of Eastern Europe, the death toll in the north-eastern Adriatic region during WWII was lower, yet still higher than in Western Europe. In Slovenian territories, the proportion of casualties of war ranged between 5 and 7 percent of the total population. In Poland, for example, it reached 20 percent of the population, while in Western Europe it was 0.85 percent of the total population.

In the Ljubljana region, where violence intensified as a result of the conflict between partisan units and the occupying and collaborationist contingents, the death toll was 9 percent (30,299) of the total population. According to the calculations done by the Institute for Contemporary History in Ljubljana, the total number of victims was between 97,000 and 100,000 out of a total population of 1,492,000. This figure includes those killed at the end of the war—one-third of the total. According to calculations by Mitja Ferenc, a leading Slovenian researcher of postwar killings, 100,015 people were killed in Slovenia during World War II until April 1946, of whom 11,155 were women (11.2 percent).

The Italian capitulation was also an important turning point in the history of violence in the area. Istria, in particular, saw a wave of extrajudicial violence on September 8, 1943, resulting in some 400 deaths. The first episode of the so-called *foibe*, a term that has become established in historiography to describe the killings in Istria and the Julian March, was the overture to a long chain of Nazi reprisals in which many villages in Istria and the Ilirska Bistrica region were burnt. According to the findings so far, the number of women killed was low in the first case, but without a doubt higher in the

28 *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana*, no. 130, 22. 5. 1968. (<https://daveronaailager.files.wordpress.com/2019/12/gazzetta-ufficiale.pdf>). Marco Coslovich, *I percorsi della sopravvivenza. Storia e memoria della deportazione dall'Adriatisches Küstenland* (Milan: Mursia, 2011), 299; Luciano Patat, *I treni per i Lager. La deportazione dal carcere di Gorizia (1943–1945)* (Udine: Istituto friulano per la storia del movimento di liberazione, 2021); Luciano Patat, *I treni per i Lager. La deportazione dalle carceri di Udine e di Pordenone (settembre 1943–aprile 1945)* (Udine: Istituto friulano per la storia del movimento di liberazione, 2024).

second.²⁹ The arson and devastation were followed by the execution and deportation of civilians accused of supporting the partisan movement; both women and teenagers were among those deported to Germany from Istria.

After the end of the war in May 1945, there came a wave of violence in the Julian March, when, according to the most likely numbers, between 2,000 and 3,000 people were killed. Most of them were of Italian nationality and belonged to a variety of official bodies, be they military, police, war oppositionists, as well as opponents of the new Yugoslav authorities. Among them were also women, whom Gorazd Bajc mentions and attempts to quantify in this book. This was a wave of violence that was part of the mass extrajudicial killings directed mainly against members of collaborationist units, but also against their relatives, who retreated westward, mostly towards Austria. During wartime and the postwar period, a number of the people from the area of present-day Slovenia were branded ideological and class enemies. They were later killed after the war ended.

For the sake of a comparative understanding of the twentieth century in the Yugoslavian region, the bloody consequences of the war that followed the breakup of Yugoslavia that proved the most fatal for the male population should also be noted alongside these grim statistics recounting the casualties of war. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, 93,837 people died, 63,687 of whom were Bosniaks (66.2 percent), 24,726 Serbs (25.8 percent), 7,602 Croats (7.8 percent) and 547 from other nationalities (0.5 percent). While the Serb and Croat sides were dominated by military casualties, half of the Bosniaks were civilians. Among the civilian population, between 20,000 and 25,000 women were victims of sexual violence (most of them Bosniak), most being muslim Bosniaks. Few of them were recognized as victims of war. As many humanitarian reports show, they were marginalized as victims of sexual violence in the postwar period and also deprived of state assistance and adequate medical treatment.³⁰

29 Fascist and collaborationist units collaborated with the German army in "clearing the terrain." From April 25 to May 13, German troops organized operation *Braunschweig*, also known as the "spring" or "May" offensive, which took place in the Karst surrounding Buzet and Opatija and also affected the Brkini region. In Lipa, 269 civilians were killed, most of them burned alive. The burnings were accompanied by various forms of violence: arrests, shootings, deportations, and indiscriminate terror against the civilian population, with frequent forced migrations.

30 Sara Valentina Di Palma, "Corpi di donne in guerra. La violenza sessuale in Bosnia e Ruanda e i problemi del dopoguerra," *Storicamente* 10/1 (2014): 1–35; Dubravka Žarkov, *The Body of War: Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-up of Yugoslavia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

War and Postwar Displacement

As was the case in other areas of Europe, violence in the North-Eastern Adriatic region during and after the war was an important means of demographic and national transformation of both occupied and liberated territories, as is particularly evident from the mass migrations, both voluntary and forced, that had already begun during the war and continued throughout the conflict. After the opening of the front in the spring of 1915, the civilian population (women, children and the elderly) were forced to move to the interior of the monarchy before the fighting started. Mass relocation also took place in Pula and parts of Istria, which may have been targeted by the Entente forces because of their military-strategic importance.

Members of the upper classes who had sufficient material resources moved abroad, for example to Switzerland, or to larger cities in the interior of the monarchy. Similarly, some members of the middle classes sought accommodation in backwater towns or in the countryside in order to avoid being housed in refugee centers, the so-called “wooden towns,” where 190,000 refugees weathered the war. According to some estimates, 114,383 Italians, 64,259 Slovenes and 11,224 Croats came from the Austrian Littoral or Istria.³¹ Wagna was one such refugee camp. It was known for its highly fluid line between refugee and internment camp, contributing to the trauma of the refugee experience,³² deepened even further by the return to homes that had often been razed in the meantime.

After the breakthrough at Kobarid (Caporetto), 250,000 civilians left Friuli and much of Veneto, taking refuge across the Piave. Those who remained were subjected to violence by German and Austrian troops, and the women were also subjected to rape, as Teresa Bertilotti writes in her chapter.

WWI caused material devastation of the front and the hinterland in Gorizia, the Isonzo Basin, Friuli and also in Trieste, i.e., in the territory occupied by the Italian army after the end of the war. This was reflected in the high death rate due to poor food availability and various epidemics, especially the Spanish flu, which continued to spread in the postwar period:

31 Marija Jurić Pahor, *Memorija vojne: soška fronta v spominski literaturi vojakov in civilistov* (Klagenfurt: Mohorjeva družba, 2019), 181; Franco Cecotti, ed. “Un esilio che non ha pari”, 1914–1918: *profughi, internati ed emigrati di Trieste, dell'Isontino e dell'Istria* (Gorizia: LEG, 2001).

32 On the catastrophic conditions in Wagna, see Jurić Pahor, *Memorija vojne*, 182; Paolo Malni, *Fuggiaschi: il campo profughi di Wagna 1915–1918* (San Canzian d'Isonzo: Eizioni del Consorzio culturale del Monfalconese, 1998). In this book, Verginella mentions in her chapter refugee women who were brought to the Trieste psychiatric hospital from the Wagna camp.

“the anxiety and uncertainty prevalent during the transitional phase after the dissolution of the Empire [...] marked the end of a centuries-old reality and imposed a significant psychological and emotional toll,” one that manifested itself in Trieste in the extremely high rate of female suicides, as Matteo Perissinotto brings to the fore in this book.

The dissolution of Austria-Hungary motivated many to leave for the interior of the former country. Those who left were public administration employees and those who worked for state-run companies, as well as those who could not fathom living in a new country and under Italian rule. This was regardless of the precarious living conditions that ruled in Austria³³ and the new Central European countries that sprang up from the ashes of the Empire.³⁴

The exodus of the Slovene population from Carinthia from October 1920 onwards ranged between 2,000 and 3,000 persons, according to some estimates even as high as 6,000 to 15,000. It was not so much the result of the poor economic situation but rather the methodical escalation that accompanied the Carinthian plebiscite, and the resentment that was directed against all those who had voted for Yugoslavia and Austria ended up being the winning option. These postwar migrations are confirmed by the results of the 1931 census in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which at that time held 29,521 people born in the territory of the Republic of Austria. Of these, 16,736 and 6,350 were settled in the Drava and Sava provinces respectively.³⁵

Slovenian Carinthians migrating in the postwar period created tension with the locals, as was the case of littoral Slovenes and Croats who had moved into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.³⁶ This was both due to the housing crisis as well as competition in the labor market, described in the

33 1,737 people emigrated from Trieste to Austria, where the new republic was struggling with food and coal shortages. In Vienna, hunger and street fighting made life more like war than pre-war life. About how the first two years after the war were “years of high unemployment, inflation, food and housing shortage and rising crime, including violent crime committed with weapons brought back from the front,” see Maureen Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 311.

34 1,210 people emigrated to Czechoslovakia and Hungary. More in Piero Purini, *Metamorfosi etniche: i cambiamenti di popolazione a Trieste, Gorizia, Fiume e in Istria: 1914–1975* (Udine: Kappa Vu, 2010), 43.

35 Jurić Pahor, *Memorija vojne*, 343.

36 After the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy, 30,000 to 40,000 Slovenes and Croats moved from the former Austrian Littoral to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes due to pressure from the Italian authorities, loss of citizenship or employment, and some also due to unwillingness to live under the Kingdom of Italy.

writings of Urška Strle and documented in psychiatric files in Ljubljana's mental hospital analyzed by Marta Verginella and Ana Cergol Paradiž. Between September and October 1919, the Office for the Occupied Territories was in charge of 15,071 persons who had immigrated to Yugoslavia from the Julian March. About one quarter of these were settled in Strnišče near Ptuj.³⁷ Most of the others settled in various Styrian towns where the German population had left.³⁸ A similar switch took place in Prekmurje, where, after the departure of the upper strata of the Hungarian population, Slovenes, mainly from the Littoral, took up jobs in civil service and education, and to a lesser extent in agriculture. The departure of a significant part of the pre-war Habsburg population from the Julian March, along with the Slovene and Croatian population—even those who saw themselves as German³⁹—coincided with the arrival of some 40,000 people from the Kingdom of Italy to all the major cities of the former Austrian Littoral, from Gorizia to Trieste and Pula.

Due to the devastation of the war, the Italian military occupation authorities in Friuli, especially in Gorizia and the Isonzo Basin, attempted to create the minimum requirements for the return of war refugees to their homes. The first to return to the Gorizia and Isonzo Basin regions were refugees from the interior of Italy, and later (and to a lesser extent), those who had been resettled in the interior of Austria—in Bohemia, Moravia, Styria and Carniola, especially if they were members of the Slovenian middle class (especially government officials and teachers). After returning to the Gorizia and the Isonzo Basin regions, many decided to emigrate to the Americas, especially to Argentina. This was either because they were faced with the difficulties of reconstruction or due to an objection to being governed by

37 Purini, *Metamorfosi etniche*, 54.

38 Between 20,000 and 40,000 Germans left Lower Styria after 1918. More in: Johann Böhm, *Die deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien, 1918-1941: Innen- und Aussenpolitik als Symptome des Verhältnisses zwischen deutscher Minderheit und jugoslawischer Regierung* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009). Between 1918 and 1921, approximately 42,500 Russian emigrants immigrated to Yugoslavia. It was a predominantly male migration (31.55 percent women, 68.44 percent men), which decreased to 25,000 persons before World War II; Miroslav Jovanović, "'Instability and infertility'—Family and Marital Relations of the Russian Refugees in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia," in *Between the Archives and the Field: A Dialogue on Historical Anthropology of the Balkans*, ed. Miroslav Jovanović, Karl Kaser, and Slobodan Naumović (Münster: Lit; Belgrade: International Colloquium on Historical Anthropology, 2004), 107.

39 In the area occupied by the Italian army, there were between 60,000 and 105,000 soldiers between November 15 and 17, 1918 (Purini, *Metamorfosi etniche*, 35), and in the following months the militarization of the entire occupied area of the Julian Alps was reflected in the presence of 47,000 soldiers and representatives of the repressive authorities. In the same months, 50,000 inhabitants left the entire Istria (Purini, *Metamorfosi etniche*, 43).

Italian authorities. This holds especially true for members of the younger generations; many girls numbered among them.

Precise statistical data that would provide a gender breakdown of migration is not available, as is also evident from Urška Strle's chapter on forced migration in the postwar period in the northern Adriatic region. Thus, we can only make educated guesses about the gender distribution of those displaced during and after both world wars.

During and after WWI, war-related migration in the northeastern Adriatic was concentrated in the conflict zones, particularly those in the Austrian Littoral and, after 1918, in the Julian March, as well as in the border regions of Carinthia and Prekmurje. They also affected the areas of Lower Styria and Carniola, in the case of the German or Austrian-leaning population. The internment and deportation of civilians on suspicion of anti-state activity in both Austria and Italy during the Great War was limited in scope and did not reach the numbers of WWII, which saw tens of thousands of civilians being deported to Italy and Germany both by Italian and Nazi authorities.

The return of the survivors from the Italian and German camps after the end of WWII coincided with the mass departure of the occupying forces' collaborators, their family members, other deportees (for example, the German minority) and all those who refused to live in Tito's Yugoslavia. Many of those who did not manage to escape to Austria and Italy fell victim to the aforementioned mass killings.⁴⁰

The coming to power of the revolutionary Yugoslav authorities caused a collective social and political upheaval in Istria and Dalmatia, triggering a mass exodus of between 200,000 and 250,000, according to some estimates even up to 300,000 people of predominantly Italian origin.⁴¹ This led to a radical change in the Istrian landscape, draining the populations of both coastal cities and towns in the interior. The Istrian refugee wave, which lasted until the mid-1950s and beyond, should be seen as part of a multi-million-person migratory flow from Eastern Europe to the West.⁴²

40 Lowe, *Savage Continent*, 97. The executions of 50,000–60,000 Croatian and Muslim troops, mainly collaborators, with a handful of women among the victims (Lowe, *Savage Continent*, 276); in Yugoslavia, revenge was more severe than elsewhere, the difference being that the violence was to a large extent “politically motivated” (Lowe, *Savage Continent*, 279), carried out by the state.

41 Pamela Ballinger, *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003). Cristiana Colummi, Liliana Ferrari, Gianna Nassisi, and Germano Trani, *Storia di un esodo: Istria 1945–1956* (Trieste: IRSML-FVG, 1980). Raoul Pupo, *Il lungo esodo: Istria: le persecuzioni, le foibe, l'esilio* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2017).

42 According to Mazower, 11 million displaced (Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 218).

An integral part of this was also the German population forcibly expelled from Yugoslavia, the *Volksdeutsche*. The latter mainly moved to Austria, where 1.6 million displaced persons were settled after the end of the war.⁴³

The review of wartime and postwar migration in the researched area should also include the population movements triggered by the break-up of Yugoslavia and, in particular, the war in Croatia and Bosnia, from where Croatian, Serb, Bosniak and ethnically mixed populations migrated in large numbers as a result of wartime conflicts, ethnic cleansing, mass rapes and genocidal acts.⁴⁴ The refugee waves, which numbered more than 500,000 displaced Croats and Serbs from Croatia and 2,200,000 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, were directed away from the most violent flashpoints—either towards the interior of Croatia or to Serbia and abroad. Those heading for Slovenia were mainly refugees coming from Bosnia, most of them women and children. After the Dayton Agreement in 1995 that regulated the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the situation in Kosovo deteriorated, contributing to the departure of some 300,000 people, mostly Albanians.⁴⁵ In June 1999, after the war, some 200,000 Serbs, Roma and other non-Albanians left Kosovo, fearing reprisals. Unlike the Bosnian refugees, only a minority of Albanian refugees headed for the northeastern area; from the 1990s onwards, the proportion of the male migrant labor force—also those coming from Serbia—increased in the Italian east both in Friuli and Veneto, often followed by women and children after a certain time delay.

Individual and Community Trauma

The individual studies presented in the book aim to identify the psychological consequences of women's constant proximity to death, or high levels of exposure to various violent practices ranging from death threats to rape, bombing and material devastation in general. The aim was also to ascertain how, when and why trauma emerged in individual women, victims and actors, initiators of mass violence, those persecuted, displaced, and raped

43 Bruckmüller, *Sozialgeschichte Österreichs*, 480, 498.

44 Marie-Janine Calic, "Ethnic Cleansing and War Crimes," in *Confronting the Yugoslav Controversies: A Scholars' Initiative*, ed. Charles Ingrao and Thomas A. Emmert (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2013), 114–151.

45 Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, "A Short History of the Kosovo Albanians' Struggle for Independence 1878–1998," in *Civic and Uncivic Values in Kosovo: History, Politics, and Value Transformation*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet, Albert Simkus, and Ola Listhaug (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015), 29–52.

in the wars of the twentieth century, a feat that ended up proving difficult. If every instance of violence and every loss does indeed trigger a ripple effect, this does not mean the lasting trauma or traumatic trace caused is easily traceable in all the individuals who experience it.⁴⁶ This similarly holds true for the consequences of the various instances of war devastation experienced by the female population in the northeastern Adriatic region in the twentieth century.

The complexity of historicizing and explaining trauma in a gender-sensitive manner does not depend only on its definition and consequent problematization, as is particularly evident in the chapters written by Marta Verginella, Ana Cergol Paradiž, Francesco Toncich and Manca G. Renko. It is also conditioned by the availability of sources and their use of language. This fact is rather tellingly illustrated by the cases of women raped during WWI and WWII, as attested to in their writings by Teresa Bertilotti and Dagmar Wernitznig. Studies elucidating on the extent of women raped in the Yugoslav wars during the 1990s also highlight the difficulty of verbal articulation.⁴⁷

Many of the women damaged emotionally and psychologically in the wartime and postwar reality did not give testimony regarding the traumatic experiences they had undergone. They preferred to keep silent rather than confide in those closest to them. Often, they could not do so because they found it impossible to verbalize, and many did not want to burden their loved ones. Some were willing to talk about them in private, occasionally with their fellow victims, but rarely in public.⁴⁸

Immediately after their return from the Italian internment sites at Rab and Gonars, writers Milena Mohorič and Branka Jurca described their camp experiences and partly transformed them into literature.⁴⁹ However, the postwar willingness to talk about the suffering endured often calcified in the aftermath, mainly because of the postwar social framework of

46 On the boundary between normal reactions and illness: Stephen O'Brien, *Traumatic Events and Mental Health* (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 35–52.

47 Nena Močnik, *Sexuality After War Rape: From Narrative to Embodied Research* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018); Nena Močnik, *Trauma Narrative to Embodied Research* (London: Routledge, 2017); Nena Močnik, *Transmission and Sexual Violence: Reconciliation and Peacebuilding in Post Conflict Settings* (London: Routledge, 2020); Anna Di Lellio and Garentina Kraja, *The Strongest Link: An Oral History of Wartime Rape Survivors in Kosovo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025).

48 Silva Bon, Anna Di Giannantonio, Chiara Fragiaco, and Marina Rossi, *Sarà ancora bello, Saj bo še lepo* (Gorizia: Centro Isontino di ricerca e documentazione storica e sociale Leopoldo Gasparini, 2004).

49 Milena Mohorič, *Motivi z Raba* (Ljubljana: Slovenski knjižni zavod, 1946); Branka Jurca, *Pod bičem. Podobe iz taborišč* (Ljubljana: Naša žena, 1945).

collective memory, which was not favorable to camp narratives. As a rule, the narratives of war and postwar victims found their way to the public only upon the establishment of a temporal distance from the events, which is typical of all the environments taken into account here, from the Slovenian to the Italian, Croatian and Austrian.⁵⁰ This was facilitated by the wider public's appreciation of such witnesses following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communist regimes, and by a greater sensitivity to the consequences of human rights violations in general.

As the focus shifted from the community to the individual, from the winners to the losers, the memories of the victims of postwar violence also came to life. The need for a new understanding of WWII, especially in the countries of the former communist bloc, a world Slovenia and Croatia were part of, increased public sympathy for the war and the postwar testimonies of the defeated side, many of whom were women.

As Andrea Pető notes, the fall of communism broke a period of collective silence about the rapes committed by Soviet soldiers in Budapest and Vienna. Silence was also broken in Austria, where the massive number of rapes by Soviet soldiers was subjected to a "conspiracy of silence"⁵¹ in line with the post-1945 prevailing belief that Austrians were victims of Nazism. Numerous studies have shown the difficulty of remembering and recollecting sexual violence by its survivors, particularly in the case of the mass rapes of women in Bosnia and Kosovo.⁵²

Women's recollections also sometimes took a more idiosyncratic path compared to those of men, for example, when responding to the needs of the women's liberation movement. In the 1970s, upon the start of the second wave of the women's liberation movement, oral testimonies of women who had fought and been persecuted started to gather, being collected both in Italy and in Yugoslavia. Important memoirs were published which today provide insights into women's experiences of the partisan struggle, deportation and internment, as well as the postwar period, and in general

50 Péter Apor and Henry Rousso note that, unlike the memory of WWI after 1918, the memory of WWII and the Holocaust in particular is expanding despite the temporal distance from the event itself; Martin Conway, Pieter Lagrou, and Henry Rousso, eds. *Europe's Postwar Periods—1989, 1945, 1918: Writing History Backwards* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 189.

51 Andrea Pető, "Memory and the Narrative of Rape in 1945," in *Life After Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s*, ed. Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 131.

52 Močnik, *Sexuality After War Rape*; Nena Močnik, *Trauma Transmission and Sexual Violence: Reconciliation and Peacebuilding in Post Conflict Settings* (London: Routledge, 2020); Di Lellio and Kraja, *The Strongest Link*.

raise awareness of the difficult and often traumatic nature of women's integration into postwar society.⁵³

In the 1990s, the narrative of the Holocaust and the central place that the memories of Jewish survivors and Jewish women assumed in the framework of Western collective memory contributed to the increased demand and interest in the testimonies of victims and their trauma. The "Holocaustization of memory" was a late development in Slovenia and Croatia, but it nevertheless had an impact on the testimonies of the victims of war and postwar violence on the victorious communist partisan side, as well as on the partial valorization of the testimonies given by victims of Nazism and fascism.

It is precisely this increased interest in the personal testimonies of victims from the 1990s onward that acquainted public discourse with the concept of trauma, a result of the Yugoslav wars with their practices of ethnic cleansing and mass rape.⁵⁴ Said concept of trauma is now practically automatically associated with the psychological consequences of the violence endured, the persecution and the wrongs suffered. "The language of trauma had become part of the vernacular—it is accessible and familiar in contemporary Western culture."⁵⁵ The concept of trauma, which was completely unusual during WWII⁵⁶ and even more so following WWI, has become a highly utilized piece of historical syntax, used to understand and explain the experiences of those subjected to wartime and postwar violence, a synonym for the suffering and psychological wounds endured during the war and after.

The contemporary, generalized use of trauma has almost deleted the traces of the psychoanalytic origins of the concept and understanding of trauma from memory, as posited by Freud in the 1920s, when he considered trauma to be a consequence of "a unique event characterized by the excessive intensity of the stimulus in relation to what ego can sustain, breaking

53 See for example Stana Gerk, Ivka Križnar, and Štefanija Ravnikar-Podbevšek, eds., *Slovenke v narodnoosvobodilnem boju. Zbornik dokumentov, člankov in spominov* (Ljubljana: Borec, 1970).

54 In the case of the war in Bosnia, women experienced multiple traumas—Annemiek Richters, "Sexual Violence in Wartime: Psycho-Sociocultural Wounds and Healing Processes: The Example of the Former Yugoslavia," in *Rethinking the Trauma of War*, ed. Patrick J. Bracken and Cecilia Petty (London: Free Association Books, 1998), 112.

55 Patrick J. Bracken and Celia Petty, eds., introduction to *Rethinking the Trauma of War* (New York: Free Association Books, 1998).

56 Jolande Withuis, "Introduction: The Politics of Trauma," in *Politics of War Trauma: The Aftermath of World War II in Eleven European Countries*, ed. Jolande Withuis and Annet Mooij (Amsterdam: Aksant 2010), 1; Lisa Vaughn, Dovile Budryte, Natalya Tovmasyan Riegg, Lisa M. Vaughn, and Natalya T. Riegg, eds., *Feminist Conversations: Women, Trauma, and Empowerment in Post-Transitional Societies* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2009), 4–5.

through the shield of the mind of the subject.”⁵⁷ It bears additional mention as the Freudian understanding of trauma expanded to today’s understanding of traumatism as a consequence of traumatic emotional events, or as “permanent mental and physical health damage”;⁵⁸ this was accompanied by a manifold expansion of the collective dimensions of trauma.⁵⁹ Trauma is increasingly understood through the dimensions of community, of belonging to an ethnic or religious entity, of collectives that found themselves in “a traumatic climate or situation enduring in a time in which psychological, physical, sexual abuse might be perpetrated even without overt dramatic features being immediately noticeable, but whose potentially pathological effects can be nonetheless very serious.”⁶⁰

As trauma studies confirm, it is difficult to separate the individual from the collective level of trauma, because trauma can be identified “as socially constructed through a constant interplay on the individual and communal levels.”⁶¹ It is precisely because of this that the literary works at hand testify as to the usefulness of intersectionality between trauma studies and memory studies when attempting to elucidate on trauma. Similarly, the analysis of various sources is necessary, including those ranging from autobiographical, written and oral to newspapers and psychiatric sources, all with the intent of capturing the complexity of wartime and postwar traumatism. The longitudinal, comparative and transnational approaches are all useful much in the same way, with the intent of capturing the ubiquity of psychological harm on one hand and the incorrectness and manipulative nature of declaring the exclusivity of nationally or ideologically conditioned suffering on the other. Comparing psychiatric and other sources shows that there is no community in the northern Adriatic region that can claim the primacy of their victims over others. A considerable purpose of this book and its corresponding scholarly endeavor is to point out the need for a comprehensive treatment of war and postwar violence and trauma, and also to draw attention to the

57 Clara Mucci, *Beyond Individual and Collective Trauma: Intergenerational Transmission, Psychoanalytic Treatment, and the Dynamics of Forgiveness* (London: Karnac, 2013), 1.

58 Withuis, “Introduction: The Politics of Trauma,” 1.

59 Nancy Body Webb, “The Impact of Traumatic Stress and Loss on Children and Families,” in *Mass Trauma and Violence Helping Families and Children Cope*, ed. Nancy Body Webb (New York: The Guilford Press, 2004), 4.

60 Body Webb, “The Impact of Traumatic Stress,” 4.

61 Austin Sarat, Nadav Davidovitch, and Michal Alberstein, “Trauma and Memory. Between Individual and Collective Experiences,” in *Trauma and Memory: Reading, Healing, and Making Law*, ed. Austin Sarat, Nadav Davidovitch, and Michal Alberstein (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 5.

political manipulation and historiographical incoherence of their political appropriation for the benefit of one community or the other.

Contents

Marta Verginella notes how, after WWI, psychiatrists in Trieste and Ljubljana denied that the war or postwar events were the main cause of mental illness and mental disorders. Like their colleagues throughout Central Europe, they insisted on explaining war neuroses as the consequences of physical damage to the nerve centers rather than war traumatism. The stress, fear, anxiety and psychophysical problems caused by war and postwar conditions due to persecution, exposure to death and loss of others, maltreatment, refugeeism, etc. were often seen as secondary factors acting against a background of pre-existing neurological disease. In this belief, the author notes many similarities in opinion between Austrian and Italian psychiatrists.

The traumatic nature of women's war and postwar experiences mentioned in the study is linked to the prohibition of languages, persecution, loss of country and status, forced relocation, etc. The psychiatric sources in particular show the destabilizing power of the two wars, which, especially in border and multi-ethnic areas, extended into the postwar period and dramatically affected many women's experiences. The author points out that this is a topic that has not yet been the subject of systematic, comparative and transnational study in the region, although individual studies have partly drawn attention to it, although only addressing it in part.

The chapter by Ana Cergol Paradiž is based on 2,223 medical records of individuals hospitalized in Ljubljana's psychiatric ward during the period of 1910–1945. In her chapter, she analyzes how feelings of fear and anxiety were reflected and developed during both wars and their corresponding postwar periods, and how they were treated in the preliminary diagnoses of the Ljubljana psychiatrists. Studying the manifestations of fear in psychiatric records enables her to shed light on the sexual dimensions of psychological suffering in the (post)war period and to establish to what extent fear was inseparable from the experience of war. In both postwar periods, the insecurity related to changing gender roles was evident, and sexuality-related anxiety was mainly recorded in psychiatric records. Ana Cergol Paradiž notes that these anxieties often intersected with feelings of Christian guilt, which persisted in Slovenian records until WWII, when this guilt took on more secular dimensions. The tendency to retraditionalize family life after the ends of both wars was also reflected in the psychiatric treatment of female patients. Psychiatric records

show that the neglect of traditional female duties, such as housework and motherhood, was understood and treated as a symptom of mental illness. Meanwhile, psychiatric sources largely remained silent regarding the sexual violence experienced by women during and after wartime, which was also typical of the time period when Slovenian society was transitioning to socialism.

Francesco Toncich highlights the case of female patients hospitalized at the Franz Joseph I Regional Psychiatric Hospital in Gorizia that was leveled during the bombardment of the town between 1915 and 1916. The Gorizia patients, who were evacuated and transferred to other psychiatric hospitals and asylums, experienced chain trauma. Based on the medical records of the psychiatric hospital in Udine (1920–1933), Toncich finds that the hospitalized patients had to cope with the psychological consequences of wartime conflict and refugee status, as well as with the trauma resulting from the new state frameworks and their loss of previous rights, in particular that of citizenship. As former Habsburg citizens and displaced patients, they were faced with lawlessness in the new political and psychiatric systems. The uncertainty of their political status and cultural/linguistic disorientation in the face of political violence exposed the patients to additional traumatic experiences, especially when they were transferred to Italian psychiatric structures. This meant they found themselves in a psychiatric environment not equipped to treat people from a multilingual and multiethnic background.

Manca G. Renko deals with multi-traumas, focusing her attention on the analysis of the diary of Italian freedom fighter partisan Maria Antonietta Mori (1919–2009). Further areas of focus include the autobiographical writings of Slovenian author Kristina Brenk (1911–2009), the autofictional book Nedeljka Pirjevec (1932–2003) and the autofictional novel of Slovene-Austrian author Maja Haderlap (1961–) *Angel of Oblivion*. In her analysis, she shows how important it is to subject every autobiographical as well as literary narrative of traumatic experiences and events to an in-depth discursive analysis. This is because trauma can be perceived not only in the content, but above all in the style; the latter differs from the usual autobiographical or historical testimonies. The authors she studied wrote “to make sense of their experience or even to understand it,” and in doing so, used diverse registers and narratives. From the analysis of their works, it is also clear that “trauma is a never-ending transition, it places its survivors in an in-between state, caught between a world they knew before and the future full of uncertainty.”

Urška Strle examines the different forms of forced migration as a traumatic and violent legacy of wartime, ranging from forced refugees to deportations and expulsions. She identifies practices of ethno-national and/or ideological unification of multiethnic spaces attempted by all political

actors. Employing a transnational approach, she shows the complexity of migration processes as a result of wartime and postwar violence that left strong transgenerational trauma in those displaced. Such trauma affected all national communities in the area, albeit in different time frames. Some of them already during WWI, others during and after WWII, and others again in the 1990s in former Yugoslavia, especially in Bosnia and Kosovo. As is evident from her treatise, the war and postwar migrations in the northeastern Adriatic need to be treated in a unified manner, as they are intertwined. They reflect the high level of violence against civilians who were forcibly expelled or chose to flee or emigrate because of unbearable conditions. Gender is only one of the relevant aspects in their treatment, but social and family status, ethnicity, age, education, etc. are of no lesser import.

Teresa Bertilotti focuses on Italian government reports on violence by Austrian and German soldiers in Veneto and Friuli from October 1917 onwards, and on the documentation on sexual violence collected during that time. This documentation contains ample prejudice against women stemming from patriarchal culture, but also from the evaluation itself of sexual violence against women. Bertilotti stresses that in order to understand sexual violence against women in WWI and also later in the twentieth century, it is particularly important to take into account the “new tools of inquiry” that have emerged from understanding sexual violence in contemporary conflicts, and which are also useful “in investigating and rereading past conflicts, particularly during World War I in the area of the North Adriatic.”

As was the case in the more recent Yugoslav wars, the silence of the victims also prevented reports of rape during and following WWI. This prevalence of shame was due to a lack of collective support and solidarity with raped women. The code of honor of the patriarchal society and the very concept of masculinity contributed to the exclusion of the raped woman as a subject from the community or to her marginalization.

Dagmar Wernitznig delves into the traumatic consequences of sexual violence. First, she analyzes the valuable war diary of an East Styrian woman and mother on the run from Soviet soldiers or rapists, testifying to physical and psychological enslavement. The woman does not speak directly about the rape she endured, but does bear witness to murders, suicides, desperation with no chance of self-defense or escape. Wernitznig then takes the shocking case of a Viennese woman, a teacher with a university education, who, after being attacked by Russian soldiers, found herself in a psychiatric ward, where she was subjected to a cruel clinical protocol after the trauma she had experienced. The subject itself had been repressed for long periods of time. Even the few testimonies that were printed after the war devolved

into their authors being stigmatized. It was only from the 1990s onwards that historiography began to shed light on the extent of the rapes committed, but the focus was mainly on capital cities such as Berlin and Vienna, while more rural areas such as Styria, where 30,000 rapes took place, remained neglected.

A rather telling barometer of the general emotional state of the postwar period is the number of suicides. In regard to this, Matteo Perissinotto puts Trieste under the microscope. While the number of suicides decreased during WWI, it increased markedly after the end of the war, especially in the years 1919–1922. The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian state and the incorporation of the territory of the Austrian Littoral into the new Italian national and institutional state coincided with the expulsion of Austro-Hungarian civil servants, including teachers, and with a profound economic depression, high unemployment, rising living costs, inflation and the exclusion of women from the labor market. All factors that served to exacerbate the existential uncertainty and anxiety accompanying the loss of social status and means of income, a factor that drove several women to suicide. Women found themselves in a more difficult situation than men in terms of acquiring citizenship, especially if they were single and in need of care. Compared to wartime, suicide rates also increased following WWII, but not to the same extent as after WWI, as the population in the postwar period looked to the future with greater hope and confidence, despite the precarious geopolitical context in which the Julian March was situated.

Gorazd Bajc discusses women who were victims of arrests, imprisonment, extrajudicial executions or mass killings after WWII in Slovenia and neighboring territories, especially in the Julian March and Austrian Carinthia. He notes that historiography has so far neglected violence specifically targeted at women, even though individual sources, from memoirs to newspapers, do make mention of it. He focuses on the extrajudicial executions of opponents by the new Communist authorities, on members of the German, Italian and Hungarian minorities, but also on the Slovene diaspora, which preserved the memory of the trauma it had experienced abroad. He obtains important data in particular for Lower Styria (German: Untersteiermark; at the time comprising the Slovenian part of Styria and part of Carniola), where at least 2,400 people were executed between May 1945 and the end of January 1946, of whom around 700 (29 percent) were women of both Slovenian and German nationalities. Bajc further notes that in the early postwar period, women in Slovenia and the neighboring territories were victims of various forms of violence, either mass executions or arrests. In carrying out violence against the vanquished, the victors did not, for the most part, make a notable distinction between male and female victims.

The study by Ana Ljubojević and Jelena Seferović deals with war widows in Croatia and more broadly also in the areas affected by the war conflicts after the break-up of Yugoslavia. Taking this as their exposition, they begin with the observation that war is a public matter, while war trauma is not. Through oral sources, they try to identify how individual state postwar policies contributed to the empowerment of widows, to contextualizing their mourning, and also to their social integration. Or, to put it differently, they try to ascertain the consequences of political actors and the state's expectation in maintaining a behavior useful for preserving the war recollections of the 1991–1995 conflict in Croatia. Through a comparative examination of personal public and official memories, the authors show how, as “memory dealers,” war widows contribute to, but also weaken, official memory narratives about the war. This is when their personal feelings do not coincide with public expectations. It is precisely the mismatch between individual memories and collective expectations that is the reason for the widows banding together and also for the maintenance of their public visibility.

Dunja Jelenković draws on four films—*Na svoji zemlji/On One's Own Land* (France Štiglic, YU, 1948), *La città dolente/The Suffering City* (Mario Bonnard, ITA, 1949), *Trst je naš/Trieste Belongs to Us* (Žiga Virč, SLO, 2009) and *Rosso Istria/Red Land* (Maximiliano Hernando Bruno, ITA, 2018)—to draw attention to the political use of cinema in the context of post-1945 and post-1991 trauma. The chapter focuses on film depictions of women's traumatic experiences during and after WWII, both in relation to migration, armed conflict and various forms of violence (e.g., rape), and death. The chapter shows how cinematic images of women's suffering were utilized to create privileged cultural memories and to disseminate traumatic images. If the figure of the revolutionary woman is also present in the depiction of trauma in postwar Slovenian or Yugoslav film, the figure of the mother and wife predominates in Italian film production after WWII. From the 1990s onwards, it is mainly the sexually defiled female body that is at the forefront. From a victim of political pressure to a victim of physical violence, the role of the woman in Italian cinema is thus reshaped.

About the Author

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PART I

Wartime and Postwar Trauma in Psychiatric Sources

1. Postwar Trauma and Recollections in Psychiatric Records and Autobiographical Sources of Women from the North Adriatic Region

Marta Verginella

Abstract: The study examines war and postwar trauma among women in the North Adriatic region through psychiatric records from the State Archives in Trieste and the Psychiatric Hospital in Ljubljana, alongside autobiographical sources. It focuses on clinical cases in which women linked psychological distress to wartime violence, atrocities, and postwar hardships, particularly those affecting national minorities in border areas. The author critically questions medical interpretations of war-related trauma, noting that doctors often avoided directly addressing its causes. Special attention is given to linguistic conflicts between patients and physicians, which at times influenced diagnosis and treatment. To broaden the analysis, the study integrates published and unpublished memoirs, offering a fuller understanding of women's traumatic experiences, including those who never entered psychiatric institutions.

Keywords: psychiatry, war trauma, borders, autobiographical sources, violence, Northern Adriatic

The present study of war and postwar trauma of women in the North Adriatic region is based on an analysis of psychiatric records held by the State Archives in Trieste and the Psychiatric Hospital in Ljubljana. The main focus is on clinical material in which patients mention specific wartime events and atrocities, as well as the (background) events from the postwar period, all in relation to their psychological problems. Despite the fact that

medical insight into the hidden layers of individual trauma associated with war and the postwar period “often elude state and medical attempts to define and control psychological wounds,”¹ clinical material is, as many studies confirm, an excellent source for the cultural, anthropological and social history of war and the postwar period.² In order to include or at least mention the traumas documented in psychiatric sources alongside the war and postwar traumas that were not treated psychiatrically, the study also refers to individual autobiographical sources and memoirs, both published and unpublished. Their use holds the potential for adding to the wealth of knowledge related to the trauma visited on the lives of women in the twentieth century by the wars and the postwar period, even those who did not cross the institutional psychiatric threshold.

Total war and the prolonged violence of the postwar period generated a wide range of psychological, traumatic reactions. It was hardly a certainty that these would find a place in medical records and medically diagnosed illnesses. Instead, they can also be traced to oral testimonies, court records, autobiographical accounts, literary narratives and memoirs. As Leese points out, “trauma is always mediated as memory, and [...] the forms by which it is transmitted also influence what stays in the mind, what is forgotten, and the degrees of recollection, amnesia or erasure.”³

As is evident from the recent groundbreaking epistemological trauma studies of P. Leese, J. Crouthamel, H. Karge and others, the study of war and postwar trauma opens up a number of conceptual issues related to the normalization and understanding of trauma in the medical, mainly psychiatric and psychoanalytic context. This began in the second half

1 Jason Crouthamel and Peter Leese, “Introduction,” in *Psychological Trauma and the Legacies of the First World War*, ed. Jason Crouthamel and Peter Leese (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 2.

2 On its exceptional and complex nature, because “it’s complex, mediated nature and often convoluted and inconsistent structure could raise doubts regarding its validity and functionality as a source for historical research”; Ana Antić, *Therapeutic Fascism, Experiencing the Violence of the Nazi New Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 27. See also Antonio Gibelli, *L'officina della guerra. La Grande guerra e le trasformazioni del mondo mentale* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2007); Annacarla Valeriano, *Malacarne. Donne e manicomio nell'Italia fascista* (Rome: Donzelli, 2017), 140–146; Gloria Nemec, *Dopo venuti a Trieste. Storie di esuli giuliano-dalmati attraverso un manicomio di confine 1945–1970* (Meran-Merano: Edizioni Alpha Beta Verlag, 2015).

3 Peter Leese, “The Limits of Trauma: Experience and Narrative in Europe c. 1945,” in *Trauma, Experience and Narrative in Europe After World War II*, ed. Ville Kivimäki and Peter Leese (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 15. On the nature of traumatic memory as a social act and recurrent images and feelings that can last a lifetime and be transmitted across generations, see also Graham Dawson, *Making Peace with the Past: Memory, Trauma and the Irish Troubles* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 128.

of the nineteenth century and continues to this day.⁴ A more detailed historiography of the recognition of psychic pain stemming from war is omitted here. This is both because of the limited scope of this chapter and due to the primarily historiographical intention of this study. Differences in conceptualizing and defining trauma⁵ are referenced only when they offer interdisciplinary and comparative insight into the war and postwar trauma experienced by women in the north Adriatic region in the twentieth century. Moreover, difficulties in recognizing the personal and collective trauma of war and postwar events affect women most, especially civilian women. In most cases, war and postwar trauma—such as shock, injury, mutilation, and disability—is associated primarily with adult men, particularly soldiers and veterans. A gendered perspective on wartime and postwar trauma, therefore, sheds light on the civilian population, which was often drawn into the “total wars” of the twentieth century but has rarely been recognized as “war victims” in past historiography. Here, in the very beginning, it is worth stressing that the public recognition of war and postwar trauma has become topical, especially in recent decades; on the one hand, this is due to increased sensitivity towards human rights violations, and on the other, it is due to the dominance of the victimological paradigm.⁶ As J. Withuis notes, trauma is currently—especially in the West—automatically associated with a psychological injury, whereas even after the end of World War II, “trauma referred simply to a physical injury. This shift in meaning represents something larger: it illustrates the radical changes in how we feel severe adversity affects our lives and health, and in how people assess others and themselves as being victims.”⁷

4 Brigitta Busch and Tim McNamara, “Language and Trauma: An Introduction,” *Applied Linguistics* 41, no. 3 (2020), 323–333.

5 On conceptualizing trauma, see Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore–London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 115, note 5.

6 For more on this see Annette Wieworka, *L'Ère du témoin* (Paris: Hachette 2002); Valentina Pisanty, *The Guardians of Memory and the Return of the Xenophobic Right* (New York: CPL Editions, 2021).

7 Jolande Withuis, “Introduction: The Politics of Trauma,” in *Politics of War Trauma: The Aftermath of World War II in Eleven European Countries*, ed. Jolande Withuis and Annet Mooij (Amsterdam: Aksant 2010), 1.

Psychiatric Treatment of War and Postwar Trauma

After World War I, psychiatrists in the psychiatric hospitals of Trieste and Ljubljana, the origins of the sources⁸ which serve as the subjects for this analysis, refused to accept that the war or postwar events were the main cause of mental illness and mental disorders. Like their colleagues throughout Central Europe, they insisted on explaining war neuroses as the result of physical damage to the nerve centers rather than war trauma.⁹ In the war and postwar events and experiences mentioned by patients and their relatives, they were prepared to identify individual influences on latent neuropsychiatric problems rather than their causes. Stress, fear, anxiety, and psychophysical problems caused by war and postwar conditions were often seen as secondary factors viewed against the background of a hereditary predisposition or pre-existing neurological disease.¹⁰

Individuals such as Edoardo Weiss, a student of Freud and a pioneer of psychoanalysis in Italy and one of the authors of the anamneses and diagnoses analyzed in the Trieste hospital,¹¹ were familiar with psychoanalytic findings on war neuroses. An example are the findings of S. Ferenczi, who identified the war as a source of psychological consequences and neuroses during the 5th International Congress of Psychoanalysis in Budapest on

8 For the purposes of this study, 1,402 files from 1910 to 1945 were examined in the archives of the University Psychiatric Hospital in Ljubljana. Special thanks are due to director Prof. Dr. Bojan Zalar and all the staff who made the material available. In the State Archives in Trieste, boxes Nos. 21 to 28 and 64 to 71 were examined, and Nos. 318 and 319 for male patients, for which thanks are due to director Dr. Antonietta Colombatti and the rest of the staff.

9 Rita Corsa, *Edoardo Weiss and Trieste con Freud. Alle origini della psicoanalisi italiana. Le vicende di Nathan, Bartol e Veneziani* (Rome: Alpes Italia, 2013), 114.

10 Military doctors, in particular, recognized the symptoms of false, "hysterical illnesses" in war neuroses, the purpose of which was supposedly to avoid military service in Gibelli, *L'officina della guerra*. See also Heike Karge, *Der Charme der Schizophrenie. Psychiatrie, Krieg und Gesellschaft im kroatisch-serbischen Raum* (Südosteuropäische Arbeiten, Bd. 164) (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), 169–183; Jelena Seferedić, "Reflection on the (Un)Power of Men in the Context of Postwar Everyday Life of Croatian War Veterans with Mental Disorders from World War I," *Synthesis Philosophica* 69 (2020): 32.

11 On Edoardo Weiss and the openness to psychoanalysis in Trieste in Giorgio Voghera, *Gli anni della psicoanalisi* (Pordenone: Edizione Studio Testi, 1980); Corsa, *Edoardo Weiss and Trieste con Freud*, 69–88. On the Trieste *Weltanschauung*, which only allowed the intersection of an organicist approach in psychiatric practice from the late 1960s onwards: Luisandro Canestrini, Silvio Cusin, and Paola Paulin, "Il background culturale medico triestino tra psichiatria, psicoanalisi e antipsichiatria," in *La cultura psicoanalitica, Trieste: Atti del Convegno, Trieste 5–8 dicembre 1985*, ed. Anna Maria Accerboni (Pordenone: Edizioni Studio Tesi, 1987), 316–317. See also: <https://www.spiweb.it/la-ricerca/ricerca/shrenger-weiss-vanda>.

September 28 and 29, 1918.¹² This, however, did not actually undermine the prevailing opinion based on the positivist and organicist psychiatric Viennese school, one that was still dominant after WWII.¹³

Psychiatrists who came into contact with “traumatized” soldiers and civilians in Trieste and Ljubljana in the 1950s largely avoided attributing psychological problems to war trauma. As is particularly evident from the way in which the partisan fighters and combatants were treated, they had all the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)¹⁴ and were referred to a psychiatric hospital in Ljubljana by the Yugoslav military authorities in the first weeks and months after the end of the war.¹⁵ Similar treatment also occurred in psychiatric institutions in Zagreb and Belgrade, where war neurotics were considered war hysterics or “nervous patients.”¹⁶ In many ways, their diagnoses resembled those given by Italian and Austrian psychiatrists after WWI.¹⁷

12 Caroline Eliacheff and Daniel Soulez Larivière, *Le temps des victimes* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2007), 28–31.

13 For more on the understanding of war trauma of soldiers and veterans in German and Austrian psychiatry, and in particular in the Tridentine hospital of Pergine, see Anna Grillini, *La guerra in testa* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2018), 67–68 and 122–123. On the treatment of the traumas of the Great War in France, see Gregory M. Thomas, *Treating the Trauma of the Great War: Soldiers, Civilians and Psychiatry in France, 1914–1940* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009). For more on trends in Yugoslav psychiatry after 1918 and 1945, see Antić, *Therapeutic Fascism*.

14 For a conceptualization of the use of PTSD there is Mark S. Micale's essay, “Towards a Global History of Trauma,” in *Psychological Trauma and the Legacies of the First World War*, ed. Jason Crouthamel and Peter Leese (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, Springer International Publishing AG Switzerland, 2017). The diagnosis of PTSD is used here with the understanding that it emerged from a specific period and context, such as the US during the Vietnam War era. In one of his essays, M. Micale contextualizes and examines the history of this diagnosis and its influence on historical trauma studies. He also expresses skepticism about the current uncritical and expansive use of the term. See: Micale, “Towards a Global History of Trauma,” 289–310.

15 Marija Jurić Pahor, *Memorija vojne: soška fronta v spominski literaturi vojakov in civilistov* (Klagenfurt: Mohorjeva družba, 2019), 11–15.

16 The soldiers themselves called these “confrontation seizures.” Heike Karge mentions the term “Kozara psychoses,” which was used by doctors to designate partisan war neuroses (Karge, *Der Charme der Schizophrenie*, 241). The latter and its specifics were dealt with by psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Hugo Klajn in his study *Ratna neuroza Jugoslovena* (Belgrade: Tersi, 1995) written immediately after the war, but which had already disappeared from the psychiatric reference literature by the 1950s. It was published in book form in 1995. On the discrepancies in the treatment of war neuroses in Yugoslavia from the 1950s onwards, Karge, *Charme der Schizophrenie*, 242.

17 Grillini, *La guerra in testa*, 64–69.

Alongside Hugo Klajn, Janko Kostnapfel¹⁸ was one of the few psychiatrists in Yugoslavia who delved into the psychological turmoil of the partisan fighters who were treated at the psychiatric ward in Ljubljana between 1954 and 1970.¹⁹ The average age of the group, which was dominated by patients diagnosed with neurosis, was 46.8 for women and 45.7 for men at the time of their first examination. Patients were mostly manual and semi-physical laborers and possessed lower levels of education. Married women predominated among those diagnosed with neurosis; alcoholism, which was prevalent among male patients, was not recorded among them.²⁰

According to Kostnapfel, many former partisans, as well as activists and internees who belonged to the victorious side, understood “their neurotic disorders as a direct consequence of the physical exertions and emotional stress of the war.”²¹ In the case of the defeated side, ex-soldiers, and collaborationist groups, there was much less association of neurotic problems with the war effort, not least because collaboration with the occupier was considered shameful. From the patients’ perspective, the losing side “were probably better off therapeutically than those in the victors’ circles, since they are not only fixated on the significance of the inter-war stresses, which are often only a trigger, but also on other postwar and postwar emotional impairments, which is closer to the scientific truth.”²² According to Kostnapfel, neurosis in ex-combatants was “the result of prolonged and/or recurrent micro-traumas, largely extra-conscious and most closely linked to complex emotional events. When the emotional tension, the interference, finally reaches its boiling point, it finds its valve in neurotic symptomatology, or alcoholism.”²³

He believed that the triggers of trauma are rooted in childhood, in the violence and stress of war, and in many cases, in postwar tensions.²⁴

18 Janko Kostnapfel, *Vojna kot sprožilni vzrok psihičnih motenj pri naših nekdanjih borceh* (Ljubljana: Zavod SRS za zdravstveno varstvo, 1972), 8–11. At the Third Congress of Yugoslav Physicians in 1971, Kostnapfel’s paper dealt with the psychological consequences of WWII and the impact of the horrors of war on patients of the younger and middle generations, but his treatise was marginalized by medical and political forums (Antić, *Therapeutic Fascism*, 181).

19 Most of the patients were ex-combatants from the wider Ljubljana area, with only a minority from other parts of Slovenia. Among them there were no NOB activists and collaborators, which contributed to the lower representation of women, who accounted for 15 percent of the total sample (Kostnapfel, *Vojna kot sprožilni vzrok*, 22–23).

20 Kostnapfel, *Vojna kot sprožilni vzrok*, 28 and 47.

21 Kostnapfel, *Vojna kot sprožilni vzrok*, 17.

22 Kostnapfel, *Vojna kot sprožilni vzrok*, 17–18.

23 Kostnapfel, *Vojna kot sprožilni vzrok*, 135.

24 Kostnapfel, *Vojna kot sprožilni vzrok*, 77.

Kostnapfel further noted that the neuropathic and pseudoneurotic states of combatants were more a consequence of demands for privileges, unrealized expectations and insufficient recognition than a consequence of the war effort.²⁵ Hence, there are many similarities with the views of Austrian and Italian psychiatrists who, after WWI, regarded the aggressiveness and mental illness of war veterans and civilians alike as a secondary consequence of the inability to adapt to postwar conditions, both in the work and family environment, but also as a strategy for obtaining pension bonuses.²⁶

Medical Histories and Language

The discursive fragmentation and synthetic nature of clinical records, functional hospitalizations and medicalizations determines the quality and quantity of patient biographical data that offers itself for analysis. The attention of the psychiatrist-record keeper was focused primarily on the negative moments of life and deviance, and in the case of women, also on biological conditions such as menstruation, childbirth and menopause. In short, all the factors that allowed for a diagnostic hypothesis and justified psychiatric treatment, hospitalization and internment.²⁷ The clinical record reconstructed the “a posteriori” illness, and with it, a patient’s personal narrative, which came out “as if it had been lived exclusively in function of the illness, and especially in function of the hospitalization.”²⁸

The synthetic way in which the biographical data and circumstances of the mental health problems and illnesses were presented was not only the result of psychiatric standards and established record keeping practices. In wartime and in the politically turbulent initial postwar years, this method was also modified in order to protect the patient. The deportations of patients of Jewish origin from the psychiatric hospitals of Trieste and Gorizia to Nazi extermination camps resulted in tragedy. Similarly, the implementation of the radical eugenics and euthanasia program also affected non-Jewish patients in the area administered by the Nazi German authorities, for

25 Kostnapfel, *Vojna kot sprožilni vzrok*, 77.

26 Grillini, *La guerra in testa*, 67.

27 Nemeč, *Dopo venuti a Trieste*, 51–54; Antić, *Therapeutic fascism*, 30–36; 68–71.

28 Nemeč, *Dopo venuti a Trieste*, 52. On the implications of the definitions of diagnoses and labeling, Franco Ongaro Basaglia, “Nota introduttiva,” in *L’istituzione negata. Rapporto da un ospedale psichiatrico*, ed. Franco Basaglia (Milan: Baldini + Castoldi, 2018), 9–17.

example in the Novo Celje mental hospital²⁹ and in the psychiatric ward in Klagenfurt.³⁰ Forced deportations of mental patients from the Pergine mental hospital in Tridentino to Germany had already taken place in 1939 as a result of the Italo-German agreements.³¹

Great care was taken in recording personal data as part of the psychiatric records in Ljubljana during the war, during both the Italian and German occupations. This was not only in the cases of partisans and illegal aliens, where any mention of their activities would have spelled a death sentence for both them and the medical staff but also in the case of the hospitalization of the *home guard* collaborationists (in Slovenian *domobranci*). Any specific reference to the ideological orientation and affiliation of patients could have made life difficult in the postwar context.³² This is also reflected in the Ljubljana case, as records of postwar hospitalizations of members of the Liberation Front or soldiers from the Yugoslav Army are very scant.

The inaccurate reference to the political background of individual traumas in the psychiatric records of Trieste in June and May 1945, when Trieste and its surroundings, including Istria and Gorizia, were under Yugoslav military

29 From the Novo Celje Hospital, the Nazis took more than 400 patients to Austria and Germany where they were executed. Approximately half of them were women. More in Janko Kostnapfel, "Janez Kanoni (1904–1977)," in *Slovenski psihiatri*, ed. Janko Kostnapfel (Radovljica: Didaktika, 1996), 124–125.

30 Dagmar Wernitznig, "The Madwoman in the Cellar: Trauma and Gender After Both World Wars—A Field Study of Psychiatric Files," *On Culture: The Open Journal for the Study of Culture* 11 (2021): 1–23; Helge Stromberger, *Die Ärzte, die Schwestern, die SS und der Tod*, 2nd ed. (Klagenfurt: Drava Verlag, 1989) and "Ein Beispiel für 'Rationalisieren' und 'Sparen' im Nationalsozialismus—die Todestransporte von Klagenfurt nach Hartheim im Jahr 1940/41," in *Kärntner Jahrbuch für Politik* 2003, ed. Karl Anderwald, Peter Karpf, and Hellwig Valentin (Klagenfurt: Kärntner Druck- und Verlagsgesellschaft, 2003), 165–173.

31 The case of the patients from the Pergine psychiatric hospital who were forcibly deported to Germany. Among them were patients from Val Canale (Canal Valley), hospitalized in Udine. For more, see Paolo Ferrari and Kirsten Maria Düsberg, "Senza poter scegliere. Una ricerca su pazienti psichiatrici deportati in Germania," in *Dove ci portate? Wohin bringt ihr uns? Where are you taking us?*, ed. Paolo Ferrari and Kirsten Maria Düsberg (Udine: Storia Kappa Vu, 2019), 7–18.

32 In August 1942, the Italian occupation authorities arrested head physician Kanoni in the Ljubljana psychiatric hospital, who was interned in Rab and later imprisoned in the prison in Koper, from where he escaped to the partisans (Kostnapfel, "Janez Kanoni (1904–1977)," 121–133). In January 1944, the Gestapo arrested and executed head physician Mihael Kamin, and in February of the same year, the home guard arrested and executed Gerlovič, the director of the Ljubljana psychiatric hospital, who was associated with the Liberation Front medical committee (Kostnapfel, "Janez Kanoni (1904–1977)," 123–124). See also Janko Kostnapfel, "Franjo Gerlovič," in *Slovenski psihiatri*, ed. Janko Kostnapfel (Radovljica: Didaktika, 1996), 85–91. See also Črt Kanoni, *Tam dola, za zidom* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 2021), 149–151.

rule, is also attributable to the uncertainty of the political backdrop, or to the fear that individual patients might be subjected to external pressure and even arrest if their beliefs and actions were mentioned too explicitly.

It bears additional mention that the paucity of anamnesis data subjected to the historiographical analysis here, in many cases, also depends on the patients themselves, their eloquence, medical condition, personality traits, education, social status and gender. Often, it also hinged upon the linguistic competence of the doctors and medical staff with whom the patients came into contact. Among the psychiatric patients from the Canal Valley who were hospitalized in the psychiatric hospital Sant'Osvualdo in Udine in the 1930s, there was a predominance of German and Slovene-speaking patients who did not know the language of the institution—Italian. Some of them were silent in a foreign language environment and were therefore treated as deaf-mutes.³³

The issue of linguistic competence was also a burden for many Slovenian and Croatian patients in Trieste (and to a lesser extent in Gorizia)³⁴ because psychiatrists communicated in Italian and, following WWI, also in German. Communication in Slovenian or Croatian was the exception rather than the norm. Women from the Slovenian and Croatian countryside, who had no contact with the urban, Italian-speaking environment, were more often affected by this circumstance. Diana de Rosa, who has systematically reviewed the archives of the psychiatric hospital in Trieste, notes that among the women hospitalized in Trieste, the majority were from the Karst region and the poorest suburban districts of Trieste. Some also hailed from Gorizia, Carniola and Istria. They were mostly of humble origins, housewives, farmers, maids, and retail workers, and they endured poor living conditions. They were often unable to explain their depression or medical condition during observation at the city hospital even before they had been admitted for psychiatric treatment.³⁵

In this respect, it is worth mentioning the case of M. E., who was diagnosed with early dementia and catatonia in March 1923. The medical examiner admitted that he had difficulty carrying out the examination because “she

33 Mirsten Maria Düsberg, “Dove ci portate,” in *Dove ci portate? Wohin bringt ihr uns? Where are you taking us?* (Udine: Kappa Vu, 2019), 62–63. G. A., a maid from Samatorza (Samatorca), village on Karst near Trieste, who had not been brought to her senses by doctors and was diagnosed with early onset dementia (ASTs, 59/16, box 21), also shrouded herself in silence.

34 The issue of language in doctor-patient communication is also discussed by Francesco Toncich in this book.

35 Diana de Rosa, *La carrozza di Treves. Storie di donne e della loro follia* (Dogliani: Sensibili alle foglie, 2002), 9–20.

spoke only Croatian” or because she did not answer the questions posed to her. Other information indicates that the patient had attended a domestic services school in Tomaj, a village in the Karst region and that she had been briefly hospitalized in Ljubljana, meaning she was also a Slovene speaker. Another such case who gave the impression of verbal paucity was a native of Vrhpolje near Kamnik (Gorenjska), who taught in a Slovenian school in Sistiana (Sesljan) near Trieste after the end of WWII. She answered the psychiatrist in monosyllabic words or simply did not respond.³⁶

The problem of language and impeded communication with doctors is also evident in the cases where patients remained silent because they demanded the use of Slovene out of protest. After the end of WWII, a housewife from San Pelagio (Šempolaj) near Trieste, born in 1868 in Komen, demanded that the medical staff speak to her in Slovene. According to the medical staff, although she understood and spoke Italian well, “she wants to speak solely Slovene because she is Slovene.”³⁷ Her request was not an expression of any psychological disturbance as the note might imply, but was consistent with the political changes that took place after the end of WWII, when the arrival of the Yugoslav partisan army in Trieste put an end to the ban on the public use of Slovene, which had lasted for more than twenty years (the case with Croatian in Istria was similar), and the general period of fascist persecution of the Slavic population.

Although the Yugoslav administration of Trieste lasted only forty days, the victory of the partisan movement over Nazi-fascism produced a sense of triumph among the minority, something that was also reflected within the psychiatric institution. Slovene or Yugoslav identity became a strong identifying moment for the majority of the Slovene population and, therefore, also for the women who were hospitalized in the psychiatric institution after the end of the war. Female patients who were labeled illiterate had demanded that doctors speak to them in Slovene and that they wanted to be part of Yugoslavia. From a psychiatric point of view, they were regarded as generally confused or even fanatical. It is generally clear from the files that the psychiatrists did not pay much attention to the issue of language and, in general, to the linguistic formulation of psychiatric problems and the linguistic background of their presentation.³⁸ Therefore, an even more

36 ASTs, Archivio Ospedale Psichiatrico Provinciale, Cartelle cliniche (from now on CC), box 69, n. 191/1948.

37 ASTs, CC, box 69, n. 321/1947.

38 In this respect, the description by psychiatrist Antonio Slavich is most telling. When he arrived at the psychiatric hospital in Gorizia in 1962, only one of the three doctors, a dentist by training, was Slovene (from 1942 to 1947 he served as chief physician and “exchanged a word

comprehensive analysis of the trauma experienced by individuals as a result of the ban on the use of Slovene or Croatian between the two wars can only be made by taking into account other autobiographical testimonies, both oral and written.

One such testimony was left by Sava Rupel from Prosecco (Prosek) near Trieste, who was deported to Ravensbrück. She mentioned the fascist violence she experienced after publicly denouncing her sentence in the Slovene language as one of her most traumatic experiences. She had a stall in the St. James quarter of Trieste where she sold flowers. It was destroyed by fascists after she replied to one of her customers in Slovene.³⁹ In their memoirs of growing up under fascism, other witnesses also mention the violence they experienced for speaking Slovene at school or in the street, the exclusion or scorn they received because their parents did not enroll them in fascist organizations, and the trauma that followed after the italianization of their first and last names.⁴⁰

The forced Sloveneization and Croatianization of names were also traumatic for the Italian population who remained within the borders of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia after 1945 or in Zone B of the liberated territory of Trieste under Yugoslav military administration. Particularly traumatic for many Italians in Istria was the loss of linguistic primacy that occurred with the arrival of the Yugoslav authorities and the

or two in Slovene" with the patients). Almost 200 women were under the supervision of the Gorizian dermatologist Antonio Gobbo, who spoke only Italian. The only neuropsychiatrist on staff was Vittorio Ali. In 1962, new posts were advertised for hospital orderlies: "There was no trace of ethnic proportionality: the only difference between the Italians and the Slovenes was that the Slovenes knew Italian well, but not vice versa, which might have been useful to some in trying to dialogue with some of the more stubbornly silent Slovene patients. This opportunity was not explored particularly in depth, especially at the beginning." Antonio Slavich, *All'ombra dei ciliegi giapponesi* (Gorizia: Edizioni Alfabeta Verlag, 1961), 63–64.

39 Boris Kobal, *V ženskem peklu. Savina zgodba* (Trieste: Ztt-Est 2006), 20–22. Sava's testimony about her deportation to Ravensbrück was first transmitted in Italian to Marco Coslovich: *La storia di Savina* (Milan: Mursia editore, 2011), and later also in Slovenian (Mirjam Koren, dir., *Spomini*, Trieste: Rai Regional-Trieste, Slovenian program, 2004).

40 More testimonies about the trauma of the language in Servola (Škedenj), suburb of Trieste, can be found in Marija Makarovič and Marta Košuta, *Ena duša in ena pamet* (Škedenj: SKD Ivan Grbec, 2008). The trauma of women due to the persecution of the use of Slovene in the surroundings of Trieste can also be found in the testimonies of M. Milič, I. Grilanc, A. Vidali, and N. Kapun Ban, which were collected in 1991. Their transcripts are kept by the author. See also Luana Grilanc. Testimony of Marica Pipan, recorded in November 2016 in Trieste, in the program 28.11.2016, *Za svobodo, za kruh* (Trieste: Rai Regional-Trieste, Slovenian program, 2016); Luana Grilanc, Testimony of Stanka Hrovatin, recorded in April 2014 in Trieste, in the program 28.04.2014, in *Eyewitnesses* (Trieste: Rai Regional-Trieste, Slovenian program, 2014).

establishment of a new linguistic hierarchy in the postwar educational system and broader society. Anna Maria Mori and Nelida Milani write about the latter in their book *Bora*, as does Marisa Madieri.⁴¹ The latter recalls, vaguely but painfully, the unpleasant period that followed the end of the war when she was in the last three years of primary school in Rijeka. Classes were still taught in Italian, but Serbo-Croatian became a compulsory subject. Along with this came new teachers for every subject, and she missed her “good old Italian teacher.”⁴² Traces of the trauma as a result of the establishment of new authorities and resistance to the new official language are also recorded in the psychiatric files of patients who came to Trieste from Istria for treatment.⁴³

The fact that the trauma associated with language prohibition or imposition was not specific to the multiethnic environment of Trieste or Istria is also confirmed by the case of Carinthia, where fear, anger and pressure accompanied official language policy after World Wars I and II. Even after the plebiscite of 1920, which was favorable to Austria, belonging to the Slovene minority became a pretext for persecution and forced germanization.⁴⁴ The persecution of the German language among the population remaining within the borders of the new Yugoslav state, especially in the smaller settlements in Styria and Kočevje, is remembered as traumatic.⁴⁵

Women's War Trauma in the Great War

The psychiatric records from Trieste and Ljubljana show that when hospitalized during or at the end of WWI, many patients or their relatives directly mentioned wartime experiences and events that had caused or

41 Anna Maria Mori and Nelida Milani, *Bora* (Cles: Frasinelli, 2005), 40–41.

42 For more on the atmosphere after the end of the war and the period of fear that her family experienced, also due to police investigations, before leaving for Italy, see Marisa Madieri, *Verde acqua* (Turin: Einaudi, 1987), 15–18.

43 ASTs, CC, box 70, n. 102/1948. In this context, the case of A. S., who lived in Opicina (Opčine) in a predominantly Slovene area and feared that she would be killed because she did not speak Slovene, is also interesting, despite the fact that the area was under the administration of the Allied authorities and not the Yugoslav authorities (ASTs, CC, box 68, n. 139/1947).

44 Marija Makarovič, ed., *Življenjepisi koroških Slovencev. Tako smo živeli*, 5 (Klagenfurt: Mohorjeva družba, 1997), 57; Angela Breitneker, ed., *Življenjepisi koroških Slovencev. Tako smo živeli*, 2 (Klagenfurt: Mohorjeva družba, 1995), 70; Kati Andrejčič, ed., *Življenjepisi koroških Slovencev. Tako smo živeli*, 7 (Klagenfurt: Mohorjeva družba, 1999), 75, 93, 85–108.

45 Helena Jaklitsch, “Pozabljeni sosed,” *Ars & Humanitas* 13 (2019): 78–96; Dragan Potočnik, “Mariborski Nemci v letih 1918–1941,” *Kronika* 47 (1999): 143–151.

aggravated their psychiatric or neurological problems. In Trieste, fear of deportation to the Kingdom of Italy or internment in the interior of Austria was mentioned in some cases. The latter was the case for the so-called *regnicole*, immigrant women from the Kingdom of Italy who, after Italy's entry into the war and the opening of the Isonzo Front, found themselves on Austrian blacklists, especially if their husbands or sons had joined the Italian army as volunteers.⁴⁶

Women whose husbands, sons or brothers had been conscripted into the Austro-Hungarian army were hospitalized for mental distress, nervous agitation, depression, melancholia, dementia and other neurological disorders. The lack of information about their husbands, sons and brothers on distant fronts, especially if they were in captivity, deepened feelings of anxiety over their potential deaths and was a trigger for anxiety and grief, symptoms which psychiatrists categorized as early dementia, schizophrenia, and melancholia among others. The military conscription of the head of the family or other male members of the family during both World Wars meant the loss of an important source of family income and labor support, which had a particularly negative impact on the already fragile family balances in socially deprived environments. Often, however, it also adversely affected the material and emotional condition of middle-class women. The drudgery of fieldwork, housework and material procurement contributed to physical exhaustion and, with it, the mental burnout of women, mothers and daughters, especially farmers and workers, who, as a rule, sought help first in general hospitals and, when that proved insufficient, in psychiatric institutions.

A. D., born in Trieste in 1902, was hospitalized in 1935 with a diagnosis of catatonic syndrome and negativism and, a year later, with schizophrenia. A note sent by her mother to the medical staff shows that WWI was a particularly traumatic period for A. D. To begin with, her family had to move from Trieste to Friuli, where she had to do hard labor on a farm at her father's behest, which left her exhausted. Despite her father's opposition, she decided to enter a boarding school with her mother's support and complete a technical high school in Sacile run by nuns. However, her arrival at the boarding school coincided with the breakthrough of the German and Austrian troops in October 1917, and the withdrawal of the Italian army from Friuli. With the general exodus of civilians and troops, the girl was left to fend for herself and returned unaccompanied to her family. Her father,

46 ASTs, CC, box 21, n. 99/1916, box 21; CC, box 23, n. 144/1918. For more on this, see Cecotti, *Un esilio che non ha pari*, 49–69.

who had retreated beyond the Piave during this pandemonium, did not allow the rest of the family to follow him. A. D. stayed on the estate with her mother and lived to see the end of the war in Friuli. She lived through bombings, fires, famine, and manifold extortion by German and Austrian soldiers. Her file does not mention specifically what type of extortion.⁴⁷ The fact of the matter is “her health was no longer in a normal state on her return to Trieste.” Her psychosomatic disorders, especially those of the stomach, began to intensify.⁴⁸

Among the women hospitalized at the Trieste hospital during the war and in the first years after it were many diagnosed with early dementia and depression. The 29 women who were brought to the Trieste psychiatric hospital from the Wagna refugee camp after the end of the fighting also suffered from these conditions. Most of the women were from Gorizia and Istria (especially Pula/Pola). From the very scant medical histories, it is possible to ascertain that their illnesses were related to their refugee status and to a lack of information regarding men who had been conscripted into the war.⁴⁹

Since the late 1980s, historiography has been shedding light on the extent of the refugee population in the Isonzo/Soča basin, both on the Austrian and Italian sides, and has drawn attention to the degree of deprivation experienced by refugees in the Austrian refugee camps in particular. Through the oral testimonies collected by Dorica Makuc and Vili Prinčič, it is possible to grasp the specificities of the women's refugee experience, itself marked by the loss of home and general deprivation, the difficult coexistence in shacks and other unfavorable housing conditions, as well as being confronted with a hostile environment.⁵⁰ Feelings of uprootedness, being second-class,

47 In the psychiatric documents I consulted in Trieste, I found three cases of rape during WWI or at the end of it: one in Friuli, one in Trieste and one in Istria. In all cases, the rape was of young and unmarried women. In the case of the patient from Cervignano who was diagnosed with melancholia, the interpretations differ. The doctors mention an affair that the patient had with a soldier with whom she became pregnant, while she herself claimed to have been raped (ASTs, CC, box 21, n. 122/1918). In the case of the hospitalization of G. B., a domestic worker from Trieste who was diagnosed with early onset dementia, it was mentioned that she had been raped by soldiers. In the case of M. T., reference is also made to the psychological problems that arose after the attempted violence. Worth mentioning is the case of a mentally unstable girl whose parents from Villesse attempted to have her hospitalized in order to protect her from potential sexual violence by the military (ASTs, CC, box 21, n. 258/199).

48 ASTs, CC, box 21, n. 122/1918.

49 See for example ASTs, CC, box 21, n. 25/1918; CC, box 22, n. 171/1918; CC, box 23, n. 18/1920; CC, box 24, n. 169/1919; CC, box 24, n. 263/1918.

50 Paolo Malni, *Fuggiaschi: il campo profughi di Wagna 1915–1918* (San Canzian d'Isonzo: Eizioni del Consorzio culturale del Monfalconese, 1998); Dorica Makuc, “Voci di guerra e di confine,” in *La gente e la guerra*, ed. Lucio Fabi (Udine: Il campo, 1990), 235–263. On how, in the spring

and displacement are also described in many of the collected testimonies documenting women's refugee experiences on the Italian peninsula.⁵¹ They can also be found in the accounts of those who survived the refugee experience in Carniola and Styria, so to speak "among their own people," which undoubtedly contributed to its traumatic character. The fact that the refugees from Gorizia were received as strangers by many locals in Ljubljana or Maribor is strongly etched as trauma in the memories of many.⁵²

The traumatic experience of war was also linked to forced displacement during the inter-war period and during WWII. The file of a teacher-refugee, born in 1895, who was hospitalized in Ljubljana in March 1945, states that she fell ill during her time spent as a refugee. She had been away from home for 30 years. She first taught in Slovenian schools in Trieste until the rise of fascism and the abolition of Slovenian education there. She had to emigrate to Styria in Yugoslavia. It was from there she was deported to Serbia with other Slovenian teachers by the German authorities in April 1941. How and when she returned to Ljubljana is not stated, but the psychiatric record shows that she stayed with her brother for two and a half months and then in Ljubljana with her sisters, where she felt she was a nuisance: "The patient has been quite neat for about a month now, and without any noticeable abnormalities. She is fully aware of her illness and is cooperative. She also remembers every small detail. It all originated, she says, with her difficult life as a refugee living with relatives, being almost completely dependent. Now that her pension has been recognized, she is much better."⁵³

Shelling and bombing by aircraft were some of the triggers of psychological problems among women who had not withdrawn from the war zone and its immediate hinterland after the fronts had opened. Several women were hospitalized in Ljubljana, and several cases were recorded in Trieste

of 1919, the barracks in Wagna were occupied by refugees from the former Habsburg lands and especially from Lower Styria in Malni, *Fuggiaschi*, 171–172.

51 Petra Svoljšak, *Slovenski begunci v Italiji med prvo svetovno vojno* (Ljubljana: Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije, 1991).

52 The refugees in Gorizia who were of Slovene nationality were ridiculed with the epithet "*Lahi, Taljani*" (i.e., with dialectal or derogatory forms used in Slovene to refer to Italians). Similarly dismissive attitudes were observed in Styria and Carniola. The phenomenon bears strong similarities to the dislike and stigmatization experienced by Istrian refugees after the end of World War II and after their arrival in Italian cities, especially in the North of Italy; Enrico Miletto, *Novecento di confine. L'Istria, le foibe, l'esodo* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2020). More on the Istrian exodus and memory in Pamela Ballinger, *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 168–206; Nemec, *Dopo venuti a Trieste*.

53 Archive EIPT, box 49, n. 3271.

where women from the Isonzo basin, Karst and Istria, as well as from Friuli, sought help.⁵⁴ A 62-year-old widow of a prison guard, who experienced several hospitalizations and transfers from the Maribor psychiatric hospital to the one in Ljubljana in the 1920s and early 1930s, became very frightened during her time as a servant at the Red Cross in Aurisina (Nabrežina), in the immediate hinterland of the front line: “Seven airplanes came and dropped bombs on the town, and she was not allowed to hide anywhere because she was assigned to the infectious diseases ward.”⁵⁵ References to the harmful effects of aerial bombardment during WWI appear less frequently in autobiographical sources. However, the latter shows the fear and anxiety caused by modern destructive technology, as well as the difficulty of integrating it into the traditional imagination.⁵⁶

The Traumas of World War II

Similarly to WWI, the conscription of relatives and the loss of contact with them during WWII were a source of fear, depression, paranoia, and hallucinations for women—mothers, sisters—who were brought to psychiatric hospitals in Ljubljana and Trieste. The psychiatrists in both Trieste and Ljubljana treated these patients, who were suffering from illnesses that had been triggered and intensified by the arrests of the locals by both the occupying forces, the home guard and the partisans, by the repression, executions and forced mobilizations of their husbands, brothers and sons into the German army. A 43-year-old miller’s wife from the Grosuplje area was very frightened when her husband was taken away by members of the home guards, and she was left alone in the house with her two children.⁵⁷ After being hospitalized, she was restless, and lamented that her husband had been murdered. She blamed herself for his death, declaring herself a sinner. Self-blame was also present in the case of the illiterate peasant woman whose son was taken away by the partisans and whose house was destroyed by the Nazis. The patient saw danger everywhere and, in a state

54 Parish cook C. C. was diagnosed with “senile dementia” after she was frightened by the planes and “started to go nuts” (ASTs, CC, box 23, n. 171/1918).

55 APBL, 3094, box 47. The patient’s mental state deteriorated after the death of her daughter. She attempted suicide, was diagnosed as psychopathic and sent to a forced labor camp.

56 The latter can be seen in the memoirs of Jožefa Lovrenčič Jarc, in *Sveti Blaž je imel devet sestra ..., Spomini Pjepe Ljubseve z Manderja*, ed. Luisa Gergolet (Doberdò del Lago: Slovene Cultural and Recreational Association Jezero, 2010).

57 Archive EIPT, box 47, n. 3094.

of delirium, felt guilty for what had happened.⁵⁸ The hanging of her son in Ghega Street in Trieste, where one of the worst Nazi massacres in Trieste took place, visibly worsened the psychological state of his mother, a 49-year-old housewife.⁵⁹ The mental state of the widow living in Trieste, originally from Macerata, was also linked to the knowledge of her son's death in the Mauthausen camp.⁶⁰

When their husbands, sons and brothers were interned in Italian and German camps, their wives, mothers and sisters experienced severe emotional upheavals. M. S., who ran a pastry shop with her husband in Ljubljana, was "deeply frightened" by her husband's internment, especially because of the preliminary police investigation.⁶¹ A. T.'s hospitalization followed the internment of her husband, an electrician at the Slavija bank in Ljubljana, in a camp on the island of Rab. Her mental state visibly deteriorated when rumors surfaced that her husband had been shot. She visited the graves of shot hostages in Ljubljana and "saw her husband shackled in Rab." She was convinced that the arrest was the result of an informant at work.⁶² In the case of B. S., the depression occurred after her husband's internment in Dachau. The bombing of the house where she lived and, later, the attack by the Yugoslav Army on the locale where she had moved contributed to the deterioration of her mental state: "Several bombs were dropped on the house where she was brought with her two children, which made my wife, who was already very frightened, very afraid. Last night she suddenly started screaming that they were dropping bombs again, that they were going to blow everything up, etc."⁶³

In the psychiatric records of women's hospitalizations during WWII, airplane bombing is mentioned more frequently than in those of WWI due to the scale, duration and lethality. The population was confronted with bombings both in urban and rural areas, especially in places where important industrial and military installations were present. It bears

58 Archive EIPT, box 62, n. 4125.

59 ASTs, CC, 203/1946, box 65. The Trieste Nazi massacre in the Rittmeyer building, 12 Carlo Ghega Street on April 23, 1944, took place in retaliation for the bombing of a German military canteen. The Nazis took 51 prisoners (including six women and several 16–17-year-old boys) from the city's prisons and hung them from the windows and corridors of the Rittmeyer Palace so that they were on public display (Marina Rossi, "Gli impiccati di via Ghega," in *Un percorso tra le violenze del Novecento nella provincia di Trieste* (Trieste: Istituto regionale per la storia del movimento di liberazione nel Friuli-Venezia Giulia—Provincia di Trieste, 2006), 57–62.

60 ASTs, CC, box 66, n. 544/1945.

61 Archive EIPT, box 51. Hospitalized on 16. II. 1945, discharged on 23. IV. 1945.

62 Archive EIPT, box 46, n. 3055.

63 Archive EIPT, box 24, n. 3242.

mentioning that few records limit themselves to a single trigger when referring to the diagnosis and the circumstances in which the psychological problems arose, yet still cite bombing as a key event in the patient's condition.

Taking into account the range of wartime aggression during which mental problems or mental illnesses arose in individuals, as indicated in the records of psychiatric hospitals in both Ljubljana and Trieste, we find that it is certainly narrower than the range covered by the memory sources or testimonies of women who actively participated in the conflict as activists, couriers and fighters. It is clear from their autobiographical accounts and testimonies that the persecution, torture, arrests, internment, and deportations that left deep trauma during the war were only mentioned as exceptions in the psychiatric records in the time frame covered by the study. It is, therefore, worth drawing on them in order to more fully understand the psychological effects of the war on women's bodies and emotions, as well as the ways in which these effects were endured, forgotten and repressed. This is a subject that has not yet been systematically studied in the North Adriatic region. It is touched upon by individual studies but mostly documented in the numerous interviews and oral and written testimonies collected over the last few decades. A telling example in this respect is the biography of Milena Gulin from the Gorizia area, who experienced a succession of traumas in the pre-war, wartime and postwar periods. As a young girl, Milena was confronted with an uncertain and precarious situation during WWI, when she lived as a refugee in Lower Styria among those she called "her own people," yet who, as a rule, did not like the Gorizian refugees. Returning home to her new country, Italy, she had to face feelings of inferiority due to fascism, which deprived Slovene-speaking people of the right to speak their own language in schools and offices and, as attested to by her story, also on the streets. The ban on the use of her mother tongue, which she also sensed through the lens of her parents' concern, caused her to feel fear, which deepened as the fascist regime intensified. During WWII, she was deported to the Nazi camp Bergen Belsen. After liberation, she returned home, fearing that her father and her sister, Zora, who had also been deported, would not return from Germany. At home, she learned that her brother Pepe had been executed as a partisan. Her account, which she passed on to her daughter, shows that the trauma of the war was prolonged during the postwar period. When she attended rallies pleading to return Gorizia to Yugoslavia, she experienced violence at the hands of the Anglo-American police. She was a member of the victorious partisan side, which, in Gorizia

and its surroundings, found itself in a subordinate position and also in the role of victim.⁶⁴

The sequence of traumas is also evident in the biography of Anna Ragusa, a worker from Gradisca. During WWI, she was a refugee in Wagna. Upon her return, her family was left with nothing and lived in abject poverty. After she was married and became a mother, she worked in a factory and was subjected to exploitation by her employers and was subjected to exploitation.⁶⁵ During WWII, she was deported to Auschwitz for nine months and, upon her return, had to face the death of her husband and son. Her husband had died as an internee, her son as a partisan. Her other son, aged 13, was waiting for her at home. "I fell ill and the doctor told me it was nothing, but that I was underfed, completely exhausted, he told me to rest and eat slowly, slowly. [...] I was in bed for fifteen days, but I didn't sleep because, you know, when there's pain, I had this fixed idea that I was going to throw myself out the window because I couldn't find anyone at home, I was alone and I didn't even remember my child because of the pain I was in, to tell you the truth."⁶⁶

The trauma chain is also evident in the testimony of Emma Tul, who speaks of her childhood poverty, partisan activity, deportation to Auschwitz and later to Hirtenberg. After surviving the death march and reaching Mauthausen, she contracted typhus in April 1945. She feared she would not survive. She returned home to Caresana (Mačkovlje) near Trieste completely drained. She retreated into silence. She was unable to work, a particularly traumatic situation for a poor girl. No one came to her aid except her father. She was also devastated that after the war, rumors spread of her having gone to Germany as a deportee to escape the atrocities of war.⁶⁷ "Of course

64 Silvia Hollenbaugh, *Storia di Milena. Le memorie di una giovane goriziana slovena sotto il nazifascismo fra Italia e Jugoslavia* (Gorizia: SZS Books-LLC, 2023), 184–185. Former deportees from the German camps and partisan women in Carinthia also experienced postwar violence because of their political activism in the Slovenian ranks and their sympathy for Tito's Yugoslavia. Anica Šporn carried out intelligence, ideological and field work in the partisans. After the war, she was arrested 23 times: "the only reason for these arrests was that I was a youth functionary who loved my Slovenian people in Carinthia" Anica Šporn, "Iz mojega življenja", in *Koroška v borbi: spomini na osvobodilno borbo v Slovenski Koroški* (Klagenfurt: Association of Former Partisans of Slovene Carinthia, 1951), 154.

65 Chiara Fragiaco, "Donne isontine tra dittatura, guerra e dopoguerra," in *Sarà ancora bello: storie di donne della Venezia Giulia tra fascismo, Resistenza e dopoguerra*, ed. Silva Bon et al. (Gorizia: Centro isontino di ricerca e documentazione storica e sociale Leopoldo Gasparini, 2010), 119–121.

66 Fragiaco, "Donne isontine tra dittatura," 144.

67 Ema Tul, *Spomini bivše deportiranke. Testimonianza di un'ex deportata* (Mačkovlje–Caresana: Municipality Dolina et. altri, 2003), 53.

I could not forget the camp. Health problems were a constant for many years. Like most deportees, I carried the pain inside me during those years. I systematically refused invitations to speak about these experiences in the village or in schools. The wounds were too painful.”⁶⁸

As Silvija Kavčič notes in her study of Slovenian women prisoners who survived the Ravensbrück concentration camp for women, their tragedy was that “they found themselves in an emotionally completely different situation compared to their peers who had not experienced a concentration camp.”⁶⁹ The war and the deportation had interrupted their schooling, friendships, and other ties. On their return home, they had to face the deaths of loved ones, their parents, husbands, fiancés, siblings and relatives. Marta Ascoli, a Jewish woman from Trieste, recalled that she was indifferent to everything for a long time after returning from Auschwitz. After seeing only death around her, everyday tasks seemed meaningless. It was only later, after her travels, that she recovered physically, “but not in the nerves, and I shunned any responsibility.”⁷⁰

Postwar Upheavals and Trauma

In the turbulent postwar situation marked by the arrival of new military and civilian authorities (Italian in the Julian March, Yugoslav in the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs—the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes onward from December 1, 1918), many patients, regardless of gender, were confused by the time-oriented questions of the psychiatrists in both Ljubljana and Trieste. They were geared towards specific events (the end of the war, the name of the Italian or Yugoslav king, the name of the new capital, etc.). Not only the new authorities but also psychiatrists expected individuals to adapt quickly to the new situation, which was particularly difficult for the uneducated and often also for minorities (Slovene, Croatian in Italy; German in Yugoslavia), who had the prospects of a subsequent change of borders in sight and did not take the new changes as definitive.

68 Tul, *Spomini bivše deportiranke*, 55.

69 Silvija Kavčič, *Preživele smo in spominjamo se. Slovenske jetnice v ženskem koncentracijskem taborišču Ravensbrück* (Ljubljana: Sofija, 2008), 179. German original: *Überleben und Erinnern. Slowenische Häftlinge im Frauen-Konzentrationslager Ravensbrück* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2007).

70 Marta Ascoli in Gabriella Musetti, ed., *Donne di frontiera. Vita società cultura lotta politica nel territorio del confine orientale italiano nei racconti delle protagoniste (1914–2006)* (Trieste: Il ramo d'oro Editore, 2006), 83.

The belief that the Italian-Yugoslav border would move westwards persisted among the politically organized Slovene and Croatian public until the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo in 1920. Similar hopes were held by the German and Hungarian populations in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes until the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye (which came into effect on July 16, 1920). These expectations can be observed in many of the records of both male and female patients in Trieste and Ljubljana. The disorientation of individuals associated with their new nationality was particularly characteristic of those originally hailing from places where peacetime had not completely snuffed out all violence, such as the former Austrian Littoral. Transitional insecurity did indeed contribute to, or intertwined with, psychological instability. The new institutional framework, which also included psychiatrists and the healthcare system in general, in many cases deepened the individual's distress and their rejection of novelty. This is particularly evident among those patients who, before the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, sought medical help in the best psychiatric and neurological clinics of the monarchy.

It bears pointing out that the loss of pre-war citizenship and the difficulty in obtaining a new one did not completely restrict patients' mobility, but it did limit it and had a significant impact on family relations, in many cases contributing to the separation of couples and the division of families. Some of the hospitalizations in the psychiatric hospitals in Trieste were due to a partner's departure to Austria, whether voluntary or forced. A lack of national belonging and, in particular, national sensibilities could lead to losing one's job and, with it, to the onset of precarious material conditions, bringing about the onset of psychological problems and deteriorating health conditions. H. A. lost her job as an accounts clerk with the regional government "because of her German name" when the "upheaval" took place. She spent 16 months learning to sew in order to find a new profession and fell ill from exhaustion.⁷¹

After November 1918, the consequences of hatred of the other and the stigmatization of renegades, individuals who did not follow the demands of their own community, became apparent both in the wider community and in the family environment. The daughter of a hotelier in Postojna, who married an Italian officer despite her family's opposition, was accused of being a renegade. The clinical description shows that E. P., 28, began to exhibit her first nervous problems after her marriage because the couple did not have sufficient resources for married life, which forced her husband

71 Archive EIPT, box 61, n. 4030.

to accept military service in Tripoli, Libya.⁷² At that time, Mrs. E. P.'s health deteriorated. She came into conflict with her brother-in-law, partly because she wanted to take over the management of the hotel without success. During a trip to Ljubljana, she had a dispute with the Yugoslav police, for which she was sent to prison and later hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital in Ljubljana.⁷³

Accusations of national renegadeism were more frequent in multiethnic and frontier environments, where the new state authorities imposed national orthodoxy. In 1926, after several hospitalizations in a psychiatric hospital in Trieste, M. S. was diagnosed with early-onset dementia. She feared that the Carabinieri would murder her as a traitor to her country or threaten her family and relatives. She was convinced that she was politically suspect in the eyes of the new authorities and that people thought poorly of her. In 1918, she had worked for the Austrian army in Portogruaro, which, in the eyes of Italy's most ardent patriots, undoubtedly looked like treason. It is highly significant that the psychiatrist did not specify which army she worked for, although the temporal context suggests that it was the Austrian army. The omission of this reference should not be regarded as a rarity but rather as the rule in both the Trieste and Ljubljana psychiatric documents. Psychiatrists omitted or minimized information that was not in line with the expectations of the new authorities that could have been used by said authorities to the detriment of their patients. Other biographical experiences also became burdensome for M. S. Between the ages of 10 and 18, she lived in a boarding school in Ljubljana, where she graduated in the field of manual labor. After graduating, she took a job as a private teacher in Celje. Later, she worked as a housekeeper for various families in Trieste. Her biography confirmed her domestication in the Habsburg environment and the "deficit" of Italian patriotism, or incompatibility with the ideal type of the new Italian citizen on the eastern frontier.⁷⁴ V. S., originally from the Canary Islands, married A. R., a resident of Trieste, and miscarried during the Spanish flu. Her husband, who allegedly treated her harshly, first committed her to a

72 ASTs, CC, box 26, n. 233/1920.

73 E. P. met her husband, born in Livorno but originally from Turin, in 1919, when he came to Inner Carniola as a non-commissioned officer in the Bersaglieri. Her family opposed their relationship. Despite their opposition, E. P. followed the Italian non-commissioned officer to Padua, but as they did not have enough money to live together, he decided to go to Tripoli, where his wife would have to join him. The file does not explain why she returned to Postojna after her marriage, where her brother and two sisters lived. However, she mentions that she became depressed in her husband's absence and thought of suicide (ASTs, CC, box 26, n. 233/1920).

74 ASTs, CC, box 71, n.335/1931.

psychiatric hospital in Trieste and later took her to Ljubljana, where she told the psychiatrist: "So I keep saying I am not Triestine and not a Yugoslav, and that I am, and will be, here and everywhere, and always, only a Spaniard."⁷⁵

The issue of patients' national and political belonging and their difficulty in accepting postwar political changes and new borders, which were the subject of psychic pain as well as nightmares and hallucinations, were also prominent after WWII. A. A. from Monfalcone was hospitalized in Trieste and suffered from severe headaches that occurred during aerial bombings. It was because of these headaches that she moved to the countryside for a few months. She was born in Neukirchen in 1896 and, after eight years of schooling, took up a job as a laborer. During WWI, she was employed for a year in the Wöllersdorf factory and often went to Hungary to get food. At work, she met a man from Koper/Capodistria. She married him in 1918 and settled in Monfalcone after the end of the war, where her husband was employed in a shipyard. They had a daughter who was employed by the Allies in Palmanova after the end of WWII. Her anxiety stemmed from the conviction that she was living in a hostile environment. She felt that women of Slovene nationality were threatening her because her family held Italian sentiments but also because she was German. On the other hand, she claimed that she did not have many enemies because she helped others. She kept in contact with Slovene women who bought food from the farmers. It bothered her that they spoke to each other in Slovene.⁷⁶ Individual indications suggest that her fear was also linked to the fact that buying necessities was becoming more difficult for women in the postwar political situation compared to wartime.

The negative impact that disrupting the black market can have on those who make a living from it can also be seen in the case of a patient from Trieste who had been summoned to the police station several times in the past. She told the psychiatrist that she was not dealing in illicit goods and was only reselling bourgeois dresses and other goods in the Istrian countryside. For three months, however, she had been unable to carry out her work in Zone B, which was crucial for her survival and for the university studies of her daughter, who was attending the Faculty of Political Science despite her father's attempt to stop her. The psychiatric record of 7/7/1945 shows that "the daughter was Italian and Catholic, the patient was Slavic, from a Slavic family, but she became accustomed to the mentality of the Italian part of the family. Her husband is a fanatical Italian, whereas the other members

75 Archive EIPT, 3891, box 57.

76 ASTs, CC, box 67, n. 189/1947. The hospital also mentioned tensions with the communist environment, in which her daughter had her Italian cocardia removed.

of both families, either Slavs or Italians, are mild people, conciliatory." The patient mentioned that "he was not in a condition to support her, he did not work willingly and he was wasting money" as one of the reasons for the conflict with her husband, and that he was cheating on her on top of that.⁷⁷

Some psychiatric records reflect the effects of the politicization of women at the end of WWII, who were subjected to a half-concealed stigmatization in the psychiatric environment.⁷⁸ The anamnesis from the Trieste mental hospital presents B. V., born in 1909, as a fanatic: "She leads a group, attends party meetings, is excessive in all her manifestations and quarrels with her mother about it. [...] It seems that she went to rallies every evening and talked about 'our' Trieste, about it being Yugoslavia." Her medical history mentions that the patient shouted in Slovene. The manic condition she was diagnosed with was said to have been aggravated by the absence of her husband. Her husband, who had joined the partisans during the war, had been working in Yugoslavia for two years after the end of the war and had returned to visit her once.⁷⁹ In his absence, she lived with her mother-in-law, who sold milk in town. Her sister's statement shows that she was wounded during WWI and that their brother was killed by the Germans during WWII.

On the basis of the material examined in Trieste, the conclusion may be drawn that the end of the war caused a great deal of discomfort and fear, particularly among the Italian population (The First Trieste Trial), and especially among those who were of Slovenian or Croatian descent but who had married Italians during the war, or who had drifted away from their own community and were hostile to the partisan or Yugoslav side. On May 25, 1945, G. E. was brought to a psychiatric hospital in Trieste for an "emotional crisis" after two neighbors took her husband to prison for allegedly collaborating with the fascists in the trial against Bidovec and others killed in 1930.⁸⁰ According to her, it was a case of revenge. Her daughter was arrested the same evening but was immediately released.⁸¹ In this case, as in others, psychiatrists were rather imprecise in giving information about the course of the arrests and the violent events themselves.

The records are similarly vague and incomplete concerning the political backgrounds against which the arrests of family members, mostly husbands,

77 The case is described in great detail in ASTs, CC, box 66, n. 544/1945.

78 Behavioral stigma associated with different "mental" conditions in Leese, "The Limits of Trauma," 11.

79 She attended six classes and then took a job as a housekeeper in Trieste, ASTs, CC, box 69, n. 177/1947.

80 ASTs, CC, box. 63, n. 234/1945.

81 The woman in question was sent home on June 4, 1945.

took place. The patient, a Sicilian by origin, who first lived in Ilirska Bistrica and later in Fažana (Fasana) and Sečovlje (Secciole) after her marriage to a financial official, reacted traumatically to her husband's arrest. During the war, when her husband was in Dalmatia with the Italian army, she returned to Sicily to live with her family because even then, the "break-ins, partisans, etc." were a source of anxiety and discomfort for her. "After the bouts and anxious perceptions (when her husband was taken away at the end of the war), she was so frightened that she threw herself into a well ... she worried that she would lose her husband and his property," but also her son. The psychiatrist noted that her assumption of her husband's death was entirely plausible, which was not the case for her six-year-old son.⁸²

In some cases, there was also a visible refusal of the Yugoslav authorities, either during their 40-day presence in Trieste or during the Yugoslav military administration in Zone B. E. F. from Trieste shouted, "Long live Il Duce, long live fascism" in front of the Yugoslav partisans. When she tried to explain to a psychiatrist why she had been taken to prison, she claimed that she had not wanted to betray her country. As for her ideological orientation, while contradictory about her adherence to fascist ideology and her interest in politics, she was adamant about her rejection of the Yugoslav authorities.⁸³ The arrival of Yugoslav troops in Gorizia and Trieste, and above all, the establishment of a Yugoslav military administration in Istria, was a turning point for the majority of the Italian population, and a highly traumatic one, as is evident from the many testimonies both oral and written, as well as memoirs, correspondence and other ego documents. For many Italian men and women, or those who felt a sense of belonging to Italy, it gave rise to feelings of a world gone awry,⁸⁴ which were also reflected in the statements of persons with mental problems.

T. M., a housewife from Izola (Isola) married to a fisherman, suddenly started singing loudly: "Nella patria di Rossetti (non se parla che in italian), etc.," and finished by shouting, "We are Italians here, Italians died for us. They are life, they are everything." She scowled at the Yugoslavs for the damage they had done "because they accuse people ... but they are all sinners."⁸⁵ B. R.'s anxiety is also linked to the postwar political situation. B. R., originally from Istria, lived in Monfalcone, where she rented a room

82 ASTs, CC, box 65, n. 302/1944. On August 29, 1945, she returned to Sicily accompanied by her brothers.

83 ASTs, CC, box 64, n. 285/1945.

84 Enrico Miletto, *Novecento di confine. L'Istria, le foibe, l'esodo* (Milano: Franco Angeli 2021).

85 ASTs, CC, box. 70, n. 102/1948.

to a Slovenian teacher who displayed a red star tricolore banner. She was treated for depression in a psychiatric hospital as early as 1939. At the end of the war, her son returned from prolonged captivity. As an Italian soldier, he had been a prisoner of war in Egypt, South Africa, Scotland and England. On his return home, he was always dissatisfied and particularly demanding about his food. The shouting of passers-by when they saw the Slovenian banner, proclaiming her and her son as “sell-outs, filthy traitors,” made the patient extremely nervous and psychologically stressed.⁸⁶

The many autobiographical testimonies of Istrian refugees, both written and oral, document the collective trauma of the Italian population's confrontation with the Yugoslav authorities in Istria and the difficulty of persevering in a territory occupied by the Yugoslav army.⁸⁷ A patient from Istria who came to be treated in a hospital in Trieste did not want to talk about her life in Zone B because she wanted to avoid the difficulties of returning home.⁸⁸ Similarly, a patient from the island of Cres who was brought to Trieste for psychiatric treatment by her husband, a fisherman by profession, did not want to answer questions about politics: “I don't read newspapers, I don't know anything, I don't talk ... I don't want to have a hard time.”⁸⁹ In other cases, too, it is possible to ascertain that the patients were increasingly aware of the consequences of the new revolutionary regime and did not hide their fear and apprehension that in describing their illnesses, they might say something that could put them at the mercy of the new Yugoslav authorities.⁹⁰

86 ASTs, CC, box 67, n. 421/4.

87 Ester Barlessi, “Semo qua,” in *Letteratura dell'esodo. Pagine scelte, note critiche e bibliografiche*, ed. Giacomo Scotti, *La Battana* 28 (1991): 27–32, 99–102; Silvia Zetto Cassano, *Diventerai* (Trieste: Battello stampatore, 2022). On the difficult integration of Istrian refugees into the Trieste environment, especially on the displacement of women hospitalized in the 1960s and of Istrian descent in Nemec, *Dopo venuti*, 195–212.

88 ASTs, CC, box 68, n. 65/1947.

89 ASTs, CC, box 68, n. 241/1947. On the desolate atmosphere, the daily departure of relatives and acquaintances, Elsa Fonda, *La cresta sulla zampa* (Marina Anzio: La voce e il segno, 2011), 83–95.

90 In her studies of the Istrian region during and after World War II, M. Orlić analyzes the national indeterminacy among large portions of the Istrian population. Immediately after the conflict, many Istrian inhabitants identified as “indeterminate” in the 1945 census conducted by Yugoslav authorities, later published in French in 1946 for the Paris peace negotiations. This reveals a collective sense of bewilderment and uncertainty among the civilian populations of the Upper Adriatic in the postwar years. Cf. Mila Orlić, “Né italiani né slavi. State—e Nation—building jugoslavo nel secondo dopoguerra in Istria,” *Contemporanea* 4 (2019): 563–588; Mila Orlić, *Identità di confine. Storia dell'Istria e degli istriani dal 1943 a oggi* (Rome: Viella, 2023).

Conclusion

The psychiatrist Kostnapfel, on the basis of his clinical and general observations, noted that war is often followed by social and political disorientation and that even the social order is threatened “by dissociated persons who have risen to important positions under the influence of the inconstant conditions of war.” Among those who assume leading positions, there can be psychopaths who are intolerant of foreigners, dissenters, those who believe in the maxim “In the victor, there lives the intoxication of victory,” in many—I daresay—the ‘pathological intoxication of the victor,’ when sober judgment is impaired due to emotional impulses ... Later on, even the victors may develop mental disorders and problems, often rooted in the postwar period. The war came just before, and in the distant past, there was childhood.”⁹¹ The Ljubljana psychiatrist also cited other unpleasant consequences: “emotional instability, ambivalence, social and political disorientation.”⁹² These were emotional states that characterized individuals and communities even after the end of WWI, especially in the context of defeated countries such as Austria, but also in the territories of the victors among those who did not feel themselves to be fully equal citizens of the new homeland. The destabilizing power of the Great War, beyond scale in its modernity and in the great mental break it represented, is also documented by the psychiatric sources analyzed here. Soldiers who had lost their identitarian anchors on the battlefields had problems expressing the horrors of war and integrating themselves into everyday life after the end of the Great War. Civilians, women in particular, also experienced traumatic interventions in the spheres of subjectivity, mentality and memory after the end of the war, which were linked to the disruption of the wartime situation and the establishment of new family equilibria.⁹³ G. M. Thomas argues that “[w]hile there were indeed triggers of mental illness for civilians in the postwar period, they were of a different variety than those that caused hysteria among wartime soldiers. Grief due to personal loss or anxiety about economic problems were qualitatively different stimuli than immediate war fear for one’s own life. The triggers experienced by civilians in the postwar period were more likely to cause various ailments such as melancholia or anxiety.”⁹⁴

91 Kostnapfel, *Vojna kot sprožilni vzrok*, 15–16.

92 Kostnapfel, *Vojna kot sprožilni vzrok*, 15.

93 Gibelli, *L'officina della guerra*, 123.

94 Thomas, *Treating the Trauma of the Great War*, 93.

Comparing the psychological consequences of the two wars, Gibelli argues that WWII was an extension of WWI and, therefore, psychologically less destructive.⁹⁵ Along with Enzo Travers, we can say that it was an overture to the prolonged European civil war.⁹⁶

P. Leese takes a different view, arguing that the scale and duration of psychological suffering in WWII was unprecedented. Its unparalleledness was in the intense emotional states that accompanied fascism, in the outbreak of war, in the mass violence and displacement, and in the extreme emotional suffering of separation from family and community and death. "All this put pressure on rational behavior, impassive temperaments and civilian nationalism in the postwar years."⁹⁷

Sticking to the panoramic view, we can more easily attach ourselves to Leese than to Gibelli. However, upon changing the scale and focusing the analysis on the micro level, then we can also agree with Gibelli, but only at the cost of limiting the assessment of psychological suffering in World Wars I and II to the male population. If we take the female population into consideration, WWII appears to have been more destructive and more emotionally and mentally disruptive than WWI. The number of women hospitalized during the war did not change radically, neither in Ljubljana nor in Trieste, and the same holds true for the first postwar years. Many of the women hospitalized after the end of the war had already received psychiatric treatment before and during the war, which means that situational factors and emotional shocks contributed to mental disorders, especially in patients with pre-existing neurological or psychiatric problems.⁹⁸ However, in the course of WWII, the active participation of women in armed and clandestine struggles led to a greater number of women being exposed to the triggers that caused hysteria among the soldiers; however, the material reviewed presents this as an exception to the rule.⁹⁹

A comprehensive review of the clinical material reviewed and its comparison with autobiographical sources shows that it was in the multiethnic and border areas where women were most exposed to violence and the fear and psychological trauma that went with it. This not only held true during the war but also during the inter-war period, and especially in the postwar period, when conflicts and violence were prolonged even in peacetime. In

95 Gibelli, *L'officina della guerra*, 8–13; 15; 206–207.

96 Enzo Traverso, *Fire and Blood: The European Civil War, 1914–1945* (London and New York: Verso, 2016).

97 Leese, "The Limits of Trauma," 6.

98 Thomas, *Treating the Trauma of the Great War*, 93.

99 Karge, *Der Charme der Schizophrenie*, 14.

general, the postwar reality in the North Adriatic region required a high capacity for adaptation, which psychologically weaker women, in particular, did not possess. Age, education and social status were important factors, as was the political credo of a better tomorrow.

About the Author

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2. Gendered Experiences of Fear During War: Insights from Psychiatric Records in Ljubljana¹

Ana Cergol Paradiž

Abstract: This chapter examines the gendered dimensions of fear during wartime through an analysis of psychiatric records from the Ljubljana psychiatric hospital, exploring how fear was experienced, interpreted, and medicalized during WWI, WWII, and their aftermaths, situating emotional suffering within broader political and social upheavals. During WWI, psychiatrists largely dismissed fear as a cause of mental illness, privileging hereditary explanations. From the late 1930s, and especially during WWII, they increasingly acknowledged war-related external factors, using diagnoses such as anxiety psychosis to legitimize suffering caused by occupation, captivity, and violence. The chapter shows how gender norms shaped interpretations of fear: men's fears were linked to threatened authority and masculinity, while women's were framed as moral or emotional, often obscuring their political origins.

Keywords: fear, war and psychiatry, gender, psychiatric case files, Slovenia (World Wars)

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Introduction

On June 12, 1944, a 37-year-old woman diagnosed with “depressive anxious psychosis” was transferred from jail to the psychiatric hospital in Ljubljana. Her words and physical condition bore testimony to severe past physical violence, details of which remained scant in the records, partly due to the patient’s confused speech. Was she imprisoned for involvement in the resistance movement? She expressed profound distrust towards the physicians, whom she believed to be policemen in disguise. Similarly, she harbored hostility towards fellow patients, whom she suspected of being spies. She placed paper rolls on her bedside table, claiming they were makeshift bombs to fend off police officers, at least momentarily. When visited by police agents after a month of hospitalization, she became even more agitated, screaming for them to kill her, before attempting suicide. However, approximately six months later, she was getting better. On May 12, 1945, just a few days after the end of World War II in Europe, she appeared somewhat detached and moody, yet without other psychological disturbances.² Consequently, she was discharged home with a physician’s note stating: “She still feels too weak for the outside world, but will attempt ... In retrospect, she describes her illness—as fear and suffering.”³

The described case points to the close interconnection between severe mental distress (amidst extreme political events) and the emotion of fear. The patient’s body and her (pathological) discourse—albeit confused and ambiguous—convey the underlying causes of fear. The psychiatrist, using the diagnosis of “depressive anxious psychosis,” interprets fear as a contributing factor to the mental illness. However, the patient’s self-narrative (or self-diagnosis) goes even further. Unlike the psychiatrist’s diagnosis, she not only portrays fear as the cause of illness but essentially equates fear with the illness itself.

This chapter explores all the aforementioned perspectives. It aims to investigate how emotions of fear and anxiety were reflected and evolved over time, particularly during (in connection with) the political upheavals of World War I and World War II and in both postwar periods. The analysis will especially draw on 2,223 medical records from individuals hospitalized in the psychiatric facility in Ljubljana,⁴ present-day Slovenia, from 1910–1945.

2 Archive EIPT, box 7, no. 421.

3 Archive EIPT, box 7, no. 421, p. 5.

4 The “madhouse of Studenec,” as it was called, had opened its doors in 1881 and was later renamed the *Hospital for Mental Disorders* (presently known as the Psychiatric Clinic of Ljubljana).

The patients under consideration were predominantly born in the former Austro-Hungarian province of Carniola, with a smaller number from Styria, the Austrian Littoral, Carinthia, and other locations. Most were small farmers, farm laborers, or manual workers, with a smaller proportion employed as craftsmen or in white-collar professions. Of the total, 1,146 (52 percent) were women and 1,077 (48 percent) were men.

The use of psychiatric patient files as historical sources for understanding past emotions is naturally subject to methodological limitations. "The psychiatric narrative of the case file contains a number of layers of meaning, and extracting any 'authentic' voice of patients from it may easily prove a misguided effort."⁵ Furthermore, one must also consider that "psychiatric interviews always occurred in the context of an extreme imbalance of power between patients and their doctors."⁶ However, the advantages of such sources, particularly when contextualized, outweigh their limitations.

Examining the manifestations of fear in psychiatric case files is a particularly valuable approach for shedding light on the gendered dimensions of psychological suffering during the (post)war periods, especially in contexts where the medical profession had not fully embraced the evolving, elusive and still contested concept of trauma and similar psychological/psychiatric concepts.⁷ Firstly, fear is inherently tied to the experience of war⁸ and is one of the emotions most prominently reflected in the anamneses and the described (body) language of patients, even in settings like the Ljubljana

The psychiatric ward at Poljanski nasip and St. Joseph's Hospice were also part of the institution in addition to the central building at Studenec. Preceding WWII, the Hospital for Mental Disorders held 472 beds at Studenec, 398 at Poljanski nasip and 120 at St. Joseph's Hospice. "During World War II, the Germans occupied two-thirds of the hospital and used it for military purposes. The hospital also served as a base for the Liberation Front." Zvonka Zupanič Slavec, "Razvoj psihiatričnih ustanov v Ljubljani: Bláznica v Civilni bolnici (1786–1881) in Umobolnica na Studencu (1881–)," *Strokovna revija ISIS* 21, no. 10 (2012): 56. Apart from that, in the interwar period there was only one additional psychiatric hospital in Slovenia, that of Novo Celje. It housed 380 beds.

5 Ana Antić, *Therapeutic Fascism, Experiencing the Violence of the Nazi New Order* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2017), 27.

6 Antić, *Therapeutic Fascism*, 29.

7 Peter Leese, "The Limits of Trauma: Experience and Narrative in Europe c. 1945," in *Trauma, Experience and Narrative in Europe After World War II*, ed. Ville Kivimäki and Peter Leese (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 3–26.

8 As Petteri Pietikainen suggests: "Historians of fear in the twentieth century have often looked to wars and other conflicts as source material, as expressions of fear and anxiety are anything but difficult to find there." Petteri Pietikainen, "The Republic of Fear: Mental Illness in the Finnish Civil War of 1918," *Social History of Medicine* 36, no. 2 (2023): 340. See also: Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2005).

psychiatric hospital, where psychiatrists, as will be discussed later/in the first chapter, paid limited attention to external, environmental factors in psychiatric disorders.⁹ Furthermore, the fears men and women experienced and the ways in which they expressed them, and especially how psychiatrists interpreted them, were strongly influenced by specific cultural and political environments and the expected gender roles,¹⁰ as emotions are always also expressions of power-relations and “emotional norms are both produced and sustained by dominant institutional arrangements.”¹¹ Differing constructs of soldiers’ fears were, for instance, particularly shaped by varying interpretations of masculinity.¹²

Fear and Psychiatric Diagnoses

As Michl and Plamper ascertain, the diagnoses invented and utilized by psychiatrists during WWI reveal much about how the pathogenesis of various psychological disorders was perceived differently in individual countries, particularly in relation to the consequences of wartime-induced fear.

In Germany, for example, psychiatrists generally adhered to pre-war diagnostic frameworks, interpreting soldiers’ and civilians’ mental health issues primarily as stemming from endogenous or hereditary factors. Anxious soldiers were often viewed with suspicion, their trembling and stuttering seen as attempts to feign symptoms solely to claim pensions. In France and especially Russia the interpretations of war induced fear were less monolith and greater attention was paid to environmental (war-related) factors. In France, diagnoses such as “war anxiety” were introduced during WWI to highlight the unique psychological distress caused by war.¹³

Slovenian physicians from the period under consideration had specialized in psychiatry at Austrian universities, so it is not surprising that they

9 Janko Kostnapfel, *Slovenski psihiatri* (Radovljica: Didakta, 1996).

10 Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History*.

11 Joanna Bourke, “Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History,” *History Workshop Journal* 55, no. 1 (2003): 119.

12 Susanne Michl and Jan Plamper, “Soldatische Angst im Ersten Weltkrieg. Die Karriere eines Gefühls in der Kriegspsychiatrie Frankreichs und Russlands,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 35 (2009): 209–248.

13 Michl and Plamper, “Soldatische Angst im Ersten Weltkrieg,” 209–248.

followed German/Austrian models of explaining psychological disorders.¹⁴ This is illustrated by the public assertions of Fran Goestl, a Slovenian psychiatrist who studied in Vienna and worked at the psychiatric hospital in Gorizia, later continuing his career at the psychiatric hospital in Ljubljana after World War I.¹⁵ In his 1922 popular science book on psychiatry, where he primarily referenced German authors, Goestl explained that intense emotions, including fear, do not lead to mental illness unless there is an underlying predisposition. Even in times of war, contrary to what many believe, a strong and healthy mind will remain sane.

However, in the late 1930s, sources indicate that Slovene psychiatrists began to adopt slightly different interpretations. This is evidenced by the individual diagnoses. Nearly all diagnoses that considered external factors or explicitly mentioned fear were recorded between 1936 and 1945.

More precisely, among the 1,402 patient records examined from the Ljubljana Psychiatric Hospital between 1910 and 1945, nine diagnoses (0.6 percent) directly mention fear and similar emotions. In 69 cases (3 percent), the diagnoses imply “external” factors related to the environment and the psychological and emotional responses associated with them. Interestingly, diagnoses that directly mention fear and similar emotions were more frequently ascribed to women than to men. The diagnoses that imply external factors were more or less even (3.4 percent of all women compared to 2.7 percent to all men). The other diagnoses were accruing to gender and time of the first hospitalization distributed as is shown in table 1.

These disparities (especially those in relation to diagnoses that mention fear) may be attributed to prevailing conceptions of masculinity and femininity, alongside the perception that emotions, particularly fear, exert a greater impact on women than on men.¹⁶ Sources from other countries confirm such an assertion. Anna Grillini’s observations regarding interwar Italian psychiatry underscore the notion that psychiatric paradigms reaffirmed the fragility of female nerves and the heightened vulnerability of women’s minds to environmental factors.¹⁷

14 Kostnapfel, *Slovenski psihiatri*. It is nearly the same with Serbian and Croatian psychiatrists from that period; see Antić, *Therapeutic Fascism*.

15 Kostnapfel, *Slovenski psihiatri*.

16 Michl and Plamper, “Soldatische Angst im Ersten Weltkrieg,” 209–248.

17 Anna Grillini, *La guerra in testa* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2018), 154.

Table 1: Psychiatric Diagnoses by Gender and Period of First Hospitalization, Ljubljana Psychiatric Hospital (1911–1945).

	1911–1920		1921–1930		1931–1940		1941–1945	
	total		total		total		total	
	Ž	M	Ž	M	Ž	M	Ž	M
<i>Alcoholismus Chronicus</i>	4	36	4	33	6	25	1	14
amentia	38	25	33	12	1	1	0	0
brain injury, status post com- motionen cerebri	1	2	1	1	4	3	1	4
debilitas, idiotia, imbecillitas	12	34	36	40	4	21	5	
dementia paralytica	2	12	7	11	3	3		
dementia senilis or arteriosclerosis	20	20	32	17	13	14	5	4
depressio, psychosis climacteria or puerperalis	0	0	2	0	11	0	7	
depressio, melancholia	65	20	59	18	29	6	11	7
epilepsia	16	16	21	32	18	13	8	6
hysteria, hysterical reaction	2	1	0	1	2	0	6	2
mania, cyclophrenia	39	15	43	7	24	6	3	1
naurasthenia		2	0	1	0	0	0	0
paranoia	9	16	3	6	1	5	0	2
paraphrenia	1		0	0	15	8	1	1
progressive paralysis, dementia secundaria	2		6	2	17	15	6	8
psychopathia		1	1	0	15	11	23	18
psychogenic reaction, reactive psychosis	12	9	6	8	8	11	15	7
psychosis	42	62	130	140	72	92	10	13
<i>schizophrenia, dementia praecox sine psychosi</i>	1		1	1	4	4	2	4
	2	6	5	3	26	21	13	8
Other	21	20	9	8	15	14	8	9
?	21	20	9	8	15	14	8	9
TOTAL BY GENDER	305	314	419	367	295	287	127	109
TOTAL	619		786		582		236	

However, in the case of women, public discourse typically associated this acknowledgment of environmental factors in the development of psychiatric illnesses with personal issues (such as unrequited love, family problems, etc.), frequently overlooking the influence of political circumstances.¹⁸ In

18 Margaret Higonnet, “Speaking Silences: Women’s Suicide,” in *The Female Body in Western Culture*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 68–83.

countries and regions where the psychiatric profession began to observe the impact of political violence on the development of psychological trauma already during World War I, this recognition was largely reserved for male soldiers. As noted by Dagmar Wernitznig, regarding the psychiatric hospital, which, like the Ljubljana hospital, was formerly part of the Habsburg Monarchy but after 1918 found itself on the other side of the border in the Republic of Austria:

Habitually eliminated from the equation of war and trauma by the medical community, the narratives of female civilians with mental problems were mostly devoid of the diagnostic terminology that was otherwise readily applied to soldiers' anamneses [...] female patients during postwar times in the first half of the twentieth century overall were denied the terminology and diagnostics of traumatic effects, even then already sometimes available for or at least recognized in the medical community regarding soldiers.¹⁹

The patient files from the psychiatric hospital in Ljubljana reveal a somewhat different picture, as the terminology that indirectly acknowledged trauma (or more precisely environmental factors) began to appear later. This shift in diagnostic practices was partly due to a broader paradigm shift in Slovenian psychiatry. Younger psychiatrists, such as Mihael Kamin and Janez Kanoni, were slightly more inclined to recognize environmental factors in the development of mental disorders.²⁰

After WWII, specifically in 1952, Slovene psychiatrist Lev Milčinski addressed the concept of "war neurosis" in the Slovene Medical journal *Zdravniški vestnik*, with a particular emphasis on "fear neurosis" (Schreckneurose or anxiety state). This condition, he explained, manifested after "acute psychological traumas, such as the explosion of a nearby grenade, severe bombings, or narrow escapes from encirclement."²¹ Two decades later, Kostnapfel conducted the first Slovenian in-depth study on the psychological issues of former Partisans, in line with developments across Yugoslavia.²²

19 Dagmar Wernitznig, "The Madwoman in the Cellar: Trauma and Gender After Both World Wars—A Field Study of Psychiatric Files," *On Culture: The Open Journal for the Study of Culture* 11 (2021): 4–6.

20 Kostnapfel, *Slovenski psihiatri*.

21 Lev Milčinski, "Vojne nevroze," *Zdravniški vestnik* X (1952), 234.

22 For Croatian and Serbian context regarding this subject during this subject see: Ana Antić, *Non-Aligned Psychiatry in the Cold War: Revolution, Emancipation and Re-Imagining the Human Psyche* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

This study focused not on hospitalized patients but on those receiving outpatient treatment. Kostnapfel's research strongly emphasized the role of fear experienced by these individuals during the war.²³

This is also reflected in the patient records themselves, which provide more detailed descriptions of patients' experiences, moreover narration and explanations from relatives were included, while older records primarily focused on hereditary or familial histories and physical characteristics.

However, from 1941 onwards, the increasing recognition of psychogenic factors in mental illness was also shaped by the traumatic and radically different experiences of occupation and civil war, a topic I will return to later.

Fear and Separation

Imminent death, which threatened both soldiers and civilians, may have been perhaps the most significant, though not the sole, "source of emotion"²⁴ or trigger of intense fear during uncertain socio-political times. As Peter Leese suggests, "psychological injury [in wars] attaches to a far greater variety of circumstances than direct exposure to atrocity."²⁵

As a crucial initial catalyst for mental distress, the frightening uncertainty individuals faced upon sudden separation from significant others was revealed in many patient records. Separation, especially during wartime conditions, was during both world wars followed by a series of varied and sometimes intricate circumstances (deployment of soldiers to the frontlines, internment, arrests, fleeing, labor migrations, deaths ...) and also additionally triggered very diverse, sometimes unforeseen fears, which were simultaneously a reflection of the entanglement in the emotional culture of the time.

The most common cases involve parents who were deeply frightened when their children were called up for military service, arrested or died during both either war²⁶ or women who longed for their lovers engaged on the battlefield.²⁷

23 "By reliving and analyzing the depicted lives of our patients during the war, we all likely recognize the exceptional role and significance of that affect we call fear." Kostnapfel, *Vojna kot sprožilni vzrok*, 10.

24 Peter Stearns, "Teaching about the History of Fear," *International Journal of Fear Studies* 2, no. 1 (2020): 9–16.

25 Leese, "The Limits of Trauma," 9.

26 Archive EIPT, box 60, no. 3947.

27 Archive EIPT, box 57, no. 3816.

During WWI, such cases were frequently diagnosed as melancholia, a condition that, as shown in table 1, was particularly prevalent among women.

Fear following separation, associated with a diagnosis of melancholia, is exemplified in the case of a farmer's wife from Carniola. She began to feel that she was "losing her mind, constantly thinking that her husband had been killed in the war; as a result, she could find no peace, continually wandering around and asking others if what she had dreamt about her husband was true."²⁸ When her husband eventually returned home, she believed him to be a ghost. Another typical example related to separations involves cases of refugees who lost touch with their families.

For instance, in 1918, a 22-year-old nurse was admitted to the psychiatric hospital in Ljubljana. She arrived as a refugee with her family from the former Austrian Littoral,²⁹ which was annexed by Italy after the war and where many Slovene speaking inhabitants lived. Later, she became separated from her relatives. While her father was hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital, her mother returned to their home, leaving her alone to work as a nurse in a Ljubljana district hospital. During her stay in the hospital, she was haunted by the fear of abandonment, longing to reunite with her family at their rural home, even though she knew they were suffering there.

Fear and Responsibility/Traditional Responsibilities

Soldiers' fears were also related to parting ways with their loved ones. For instance, among the records from WWI, we find the case of a man conscripted into the army, who was particularly disturbed by the thought of leaving behind several children, a heavily pregnant wife, and an ill mother incapable of managing the household. The tears shed by his family upon his departure were repeatedly described to hospital staff as "irritating." It can be presumed that by using such terminology, he attempted to display emotional detachment from sentimentality, which did not align with his self-perception as the "head of the household"—a role he was unable to fulfill due to his departure.³⁰

The protagonist's evident concern for his family's well-being, combined with heightened anxieties stemming from the weight of traditional male

28 Archive EIPT, box 14, no. 944.

29 For further discussion on female refugees, particularly from Austrian Littoral, and their psychological traumas, refer to Marta Verginella's chapter in this volume.

30 Archive EIPT, box 12, št. 770

responsibilities—particularly intensified by his absence—likely contributed to his mental illness, alongside other factors. Similar cases from World War I are documented across rural European contexts, where men experienced comparable distress tied to family obligations and wartime separation.³¹

The fact that the economy was not in ruins upon their return, but rather managed by the wives who had remained at home, did not reassure some of the soldiers in the sample from the Ljubljana hospital. Instead, it sparked new uncertainties in them, which, due to deeply entrenched traditional gender roles, along with other consequences of the war, could even lead to domestic violence.

One such case involves a farmer from a small village in Carniola, who was conscripted into the army in May 1915 but did not participate in direct combat; instead, he worked on the railway. He described the work as exhausting. He fell ill in the autumn and was subsequently transferred from one Austrian psychiatric hospital to another. He continued to experience difficulties after the war. According to his wife, he was always healthy and a good husband and father before the war. However, after the war, he underwent a significant transformation. He began to physically abuse his wife and children. He complained that his wife, who now had to manage the entire household, was squandering everything, and he accused her of infidelity. He clung to such ideas even in 1940 when he was diagnosed in the records with schizophrenia,³² which was also in general more prevalent among the analyzed male patients, especially during and right after WWI (see table 1).

In traditional rural communities, women who assumed the management of farms during the war were met with accusations and anxieties from returning husbands and other male relatives, both after 1918 and again after 1945. Evidence of this is not only found in the accounts of psychiatric patients, but even more frequently in court cases, particularly those involving divorce³³ or the death of a husband. For instance, in 1946, a farmer from the Postojna area submitted the following request to the court:

31 Grillini, *La guerra in testa*.

32 Archive EIPT, box 13, no. 840.

33 Divorce records reveal how wartime and postwar changes undermined previously stable marriages. Janez Cvirn, for example, used such sources to highlight the increase in divorces in Slovenia following World War I, a trend observed in many regions. Contributing factors included the rise in impulsive wartime marriages and, in some cases, the altered personalities of spouses as a result of the war; Janez Cvirn, *Boj za sveti zakon: prizadevanja za reformo poročnega prava od konca 18. stoletja do druge svetovne vojne* (Ljubljana: Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije, 2005).

I am the registered landowner of the estate [...] but I am unable to manage the estate myself because my wife hinders me in this regard [...] My word holds no authority, as she runs everything her own way. She sells the livestock from the barn and the hay, and she collects the money, which I never even see. I demand that my wife relinquish the management of the estate to me and stop treating me like a mere servant.³⁴

A female farmer from Zagorje complained to the local People's Liberation Committee:

My husband, [...] an activist of the Liberation Front since 1942, was taken to Germany in the autumn of 1944 and never returned. I am living on his property, which he managed himself until his arrest, after which I took over his responsibilities. In January 1946, his brother returned from the National Liberation Army [...], a trained tailor who had never been involved in the management of the family estate. Since his return, my position in the family has significantly deteriorated.³⁵

The author of the aforementioned petition trusted that the new socialist authorities would intervene in her favor, sparing her the need to file a lawsuit. However, the fact that post-World War II Yugoslavia had formally committed to gender equality³⁶ often did not materialize in practice. This was also partly due to the unease with which many common people (and local authorities), out of fear of the unknown and the wish to restore pre-war gender norms, accepted these changes. The tendency to return to pre-war traditional norms, to retraditionalize family life, and to restore normalcy³⁷ can also be observed in psychiatric files. Roles that women assumed after the war, often in line with the directives of the new socialist authorities, were sometimes recorded in the reviewed psychiatric files as deviations from

34 Archive PAK, Okrajno sodišče Postojna, Sp 19/46.

35 Archive PAK, Okrajno sodišče Postojna, Kn 379/46.

36 Regarding the position of women after WWII in Slovenia see for example: Mateja Jeraj, *Slovenke na prehodu v socializem: (vloga in položaj ženske v Sloveniji 1945–1953)* (Ljubljana: Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 2005).

37 During both World Wars, women gained greater autonomy within the family and more opportunities to engage in public life. However, in the postwar periods, many were pushed back into the private sphere as “cultural demobilization” set in—an effort to abandon wartime mentalities. Public discourse favored a return to pre-war patriarchal norms, viewing family, motherhood, and marriage as stabilizing forces essential for reconstruction; Ingrid Sharp and Matthew Stibbe, eds., *Aftermaths of War Women's Movements and Female Activists, 1918–1923* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

normal behavior. Neglecting traditional female duties, such as housekeeping and motherhood, was perceived—as it had been in previous periods—as a symptom of mental illness.

Indicative in this context is the description of a patient diagnosed with climacteric psychosis, whose husband reported that the first signs of illness began to show immediately after World War II when she entered the People's Committee of the new socialist state. Since that time, she began to neglect herself, her children, and the household, constantly thinking only of politics. Later, she also showed other psychotic signs (aggressiveness, nonsensical speech ...).³⁸ Such cases offer, as Ana Antić suggests, “a unique insight into complicated processes through which societies identify their norms and values, and exclude those forms of thought and behavior considered unacceptable or subversive,”³⁹ also in terms of gender relations.

Fear and Sexual Behavior

As demonstrated by Jason Crouthamel's study on Germany, public perceptions during and after WWI suggested not only a shift in gender roles but also an alteration in sexual behaviors. This anxiety was fueled by psychiatrists, who stoked fears that the war had “unleashed forms of violence and sexual dysfunction that threatened postwar society and its attempts at recovery.”⁴⁰ It was believed that men, due to the trauma of war, had lost their virility, potentially becoming homosexual or impotent.⁴¹ Similarly, Slovenian psychiatrists after World War I noted abnormal sexual behaviors as a consequence of the war. However, they were more concerned with the increase in sexually transmitted diseases, not only among men but, for the first time in history, even among women.⁴²

Evidence indicates that individuals internalized these anxieties. Patient records from Ljubljana document instances of soldiers returning from combat who experienced guilt due to acts of masturbation⁴³ or harbored unfounded fears regarding sexually transmitted diseases or even

38 Archive EIPT, box 78, no. 5180.

39 Antić, *Therapeutic Fascism*, 28.

40 Jason Crouthamel, “Male Sexuality and Psychological Trauma: Soldiers and Sexual Disorder in World War I and Weimar Germany,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 17, no. 1 (2008): 60–84.

41 Crouthamel, “Male Sexuality,” 62.

42 Fran Goestl, *Misterij duše* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1922).

43 Archive EIPT, box 57, no. 3849.

impotence.⁴⁴ For example, one soldier from the Novo Mesto area believed that during the war, his wife had coerced him into being vaccinated, which he thought had deliberately rendered him impotent for a period of time. In 1920, a landowner from Verd, diagnosed with melancholia, reported to his physicians during his hospitalization that he had observed some form of lesion on his penis, attributing it to sexual intercourse he engaged in as a soldier.⁴⁵

However, the predominant focus of Slovenian public discourse during World War I was not on male sexuality but rather on female sexuality. The role of the Catholic Church, which, as Joanna Bourke suggests, held “a central position in producing fearful stimuli,”⁴⁶ should not be underestimated in this context, especially because it exerted significant influence on the general populace, particularly women, in Slovene-speaking regions during the first half of the twentieth century. The Catholic moralists contended that during WWI, women deviated from the ideal of Catholic sexual purity due to their husbands’ absence and their increased interactions with soldiers.⁴⁷

Records from the Ljubljana psychiatric hospital also reflect these fears, mixed with feelings of Christian guilt and sinfulness. For instance, a 24-year-old postal worker, admitted to the psychiatric hospital in December 1915, believed that evil spirits were possessing her, turning her into a snake, and that anything she touched became impure. She claimed she was the devourer of the entire world and had even consumed God, leading to His annihilation. The attending psychiatrist noted that she blamed herself for an “unnatural, perhaps overly pronounced longing for men,” though her mother insisted that her interactions with officers had always been purely platonic.

Similar feelings were expressed by an unmarried waitress who spent her youth in Trieste, where she met a café owner with whom she lived in a common-law relationship. While living with him, she enjoyed a comfortable life. However, during the war, he abandoned her, leaving her destitute. After engaging in a sexual relationship with an officer, she contracted syphilis. Following World War I, desperate and impoverished, she migrated

44 Archive EIPT, box 61, no. 4033.

45 Archive EIPT, box 57, no. 3861.

46 Bourke, “Fear and Anxiety,” 112.

47 Irena Selišnik and Ana Cergol Paradiž, “Womens’ Sexual Morality and the First World War in Slovenia,” in *Uzduž i poprijeko: brak, zakon i intimno građanstvo u povijesnoj i suvremenoj perspektivi: radovi sa znanstvenog skupa “Marija Jurić Zagorka—život, djelo, naslijeđe / Intimno građanstvo, obitelj, brak, spolnost i zakon u povijesnoj i suvremenoj perspektivi” održanog 20.–22. studenog 2014. u sklopu osmih Dana Marije Jurić Zagorke* (Zagreb: Centar za ženske studije; Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2016), 171–189.

to Slovenia, where she worked in a factory. In 1925, she was admitted to the Ljubljana Psychiatric Hospital and diagnosed with progressive paralysis.⁴⁸ During her stay, she lamented that she was eternally condemned because she had lived in concubinage.⁴⁹

The frequent fear of condemnation and possession among women during and after the war, as noted by Anna Grillini, can be understood in light of the unique circumstances they faced in these periods. Beliefs about possession often reflect a lack of control over one's life and actions—common elements in women's lives, shaped by paternal and marital authority and physical invasions, such as during pregnancy. Beliefs in damnation offered an explanation for the immense suffering and loss that affected women's lives. Faced with events so destructive and incomprehensible, they attributed these experiences to the intervention of demonic forces.⁵⁰

Fear and Guilt

In psychiatric records of the Ljubljana hospital, an excessive fear of personal responsibility and guilt persisted throughout the interwar period, intensifying further during WWII.⁵¹ These emotions remained particularly pronounced among female patients; however, they no longer carried such distinctly religious connotations. There are numerous examples of patients who believed that their small and everyday mistakes in relation to the “enemy” had dramatic consequences, not only for themselves but also for their loved ones or the entire community.

An illustrative example in this regard is the case of a 34-year-old farmer who was admitted to the psychiatric hospital in Ljubljana in August 1943 with a diagnosis of psychotic disorder. Her problems began when, a month before, the Italians in her village began “collecting” people for internment.

48 Between 1921 and 1930, more women than men were hospitalized for progressive paralysis in the Ljubljana psychiatric hospital, despite this condition previously being considered by Slovenian psychiatrists as primarily affecting men.

49 Archive EIPT, box 57, no. 3812.

50 Grillini, *La guerra in testa*, 146–147.

51 The psychiatric files from Ljubljana thus support Marc S. Micale's assertion that, alongside fear, guilt emerges as a particularly prominent emotion in psychiatric accounts from Central and Eastern Europe—the region described as the central “zone of death” and for example in case of Yugoslavia as site of a cruel civil war, where the “enemy” was close, familiar and ever present; Mark S. Micale, “Beyond the Western Front: Shell Shock as a Historiographical Success Story,” in *Trauma, Experience and Narrative in Europe After World War II*, ed. Ville Kivimäki and Peter Leese (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 48; Antić, *Therapeutic Fascism*.

She began to express fears that she and her family would also be taken away because she had failed to provide the authorities with accurate information about her relatives (specifically, she allegedly did not report her mother to them). Subsequently, she developed widespread physical pain, lost her ability to eat or sleep, and attempted to end her life by throwing herself into the river. In the psychiatric hospital, she continued to assert that she had caused the deaths of everyone in her village by not reporting her mother. After a year, she was discharged, deemed fully recovered.⁵² According to the psychiatrists, she came to recognize the “irregularity of her delusional ideas and interpreted them—similar to the first case described—as an expression of internal fear and horror.”⁵³

Why was the fear that even the most ordinary and innocent actions would have such a fateful and destructive impact on the world present among patients? And this precisely during WWII, when the wheel of history was undoubtedly turning more independently of the desires of “ordinary people” than ever before. This fear may have been shaped in part by the general development of individual psychological disorders, which were deeply influenced by the pervasive atmosphere of uncertainty. Additionally, the constant fear of making a fatal mistake was likely fueled by an acute awareness of the terrifying social climate, one enforced not only by occupying forces but also intensified by the specific, complex dynamics of civil war. In such a context, even the smallest act of betrayal or a seemingly harmless lie could realistically have unforeseen and severe consequences. These delusions may also indicate a form of “survivor’s guilt,” with patients feeling spared while others were put to death.

The sense of guilt documented in the Ljubljana wartime records was consistently associated with perceived failings in the treatment of allies rather than acts committed against enemy combatants. However, studies conducted by Kostnapfel on Partisan veterans reveal that postwar, many Partisans and members of the Yugoslav army began to experience feelings of remorse related to the liquidation of enemy soldiers.⁵⁴ It is possible thus to connect these narrations also with the notion of perpetrator trauma or even more accurately with the notion of moral injury, “a haunting, profound shame about harming another human being that retrospectively violates the perpetrator’s personal moral standards.”⁵⁵

52 Archive EIPT, box 38, no. 2564.

53 Archive EIPT, box 38, no. 2564, p. 5.

54 Kostnapfel, *Vojna kot sprožilni vzrok*.

55 Micale, “Beyond the Western Front,” 49.

Fear and the Future

In 1939, when war erupted in Europe but had not yet reached Yugoslavia, tension and fear were already present in Ljubljana, as Mojca Šorn infers from various sources. Similar to many other parts of Europe,⁵⁶ a “war psychosis” emerged, despite efforts by the press to provide a calming influence. Readers paid close attention to reports from other parts of the world, and instructions on how to prepare for war became increasingly frequent. However, during this initial period, when Slovenian territory had not yet been directly impacted by the war and subsequent occupation, this pervasive climate of fear had not yet deeply penetrated the psyche of psychiatric patients.⁵⁷

The world in which the thoughts of Ljubljana’s patients revolved—unless delving into the supernatural and dealing with demons and evil spirits, as I will return to later—remained relatively limited at least until 1941. Fear was not directly linked to broader socio-political events.

An important exception in this regard is a smaller group of individuals among the patients who came from more cosmopolitan environments, traveled a good deal (for example migrated for work) and were more attuned to political events. Some of these individuals had already expressed fears regarding the impending (Second World) war before it erupted in the Slovenian territory.

Towards the end of 1940, for instance, a man born in a small village near Maribor was hospitalized in the Ljubljana Psychiatric Hospital. He had allegedly served on the Isonzo Front during the First World War and as a volunteer in the battles for Carinthia. He later traveled extensively throughout Europe (including Scandinavia) and America. By profession, he was a typesetter and correspondent for various foreign newspapers. He fell ill, purportedly, when he was called to serve as a soldier in Ptuj in the spring of 1940, where he became fearful. Consequently, he returned home shortly thereafter. He then became agitated and marched around his room every night. During the day, he attended funerals and conversed with the dead. He was greatly affected by the “current world situation” and was distressed by “social injustice.” He feared participating in the war, as he claimed to be a staunch pacifist and detested those in uniform. He was allegedly a member of a pacifist organization and was even expelled from Germany in 1938 due to his pacifist beliefs. It is not possible to determine from the records

56 Bourke, “Fear and Anxiety.”

57 Mojca Šorn, *Življenje Ljubljančanov med drugo svetovno vojno* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2007), 34–35.

whether all the information he provided was true. However, they certainly depict a man who was fearful partly because he was well-read and aware of the implications of the broader socio-political circumstances on the eve of the Second World War.⁵⁸ A similar case in 1940 involved a curator at a museum in Zagreb who was hospitalized in the psychiatric hospital with a diagnosis of paraphrenia. The background of his hospitalization was more complex; supposedly, he underwent a psychological change when, in 1933, he accidentally set fire to a commercial building while lighting fireworks, leading to the ire of the gymnasium principal. He was deeply troubled by the incident, became withdrawn, worked excessively, and eventually began to develop psychotic thoughts, which were generally non-religious in nature and occasionally, as in the above case, tied to broader societal events.⁵⁹ “When the Germans attacked Norway, he became deeply depressed because he feared an air raid. He had all the windows closed.”⁶⁰

In August 1939, a worker from the Serbian part of Yugoslavia expressed similar concerns about the German threat. He had worked for several years as a guard on the border with Bulgaria before moving to Munich, Germany. There, he observed “many flags,” which can be assumed to have been Nazi symbols. He believed this did not bode well for Yugoslavia, fearing that all Yugoslavs would be forced to remain in Germany. This thought terrified him to the point that he wished to leave immediately. After spending several days in the Ljubljana psychiatric hospital, his fear subsided. Although he was diagnosed with schizophrenia, he was declared cured by the doctors and discharged from the hospital a few months later.⁶¹

Similar narratives can also be found in individual cases among female patients, especially if they came from a more cosmopolitan environment. For example, on August 25, 1938, the wife of an architect from Velenje was admitted to the Ljubljana psychiatric hospital with a diagnosis of schizophrenia. Her illness reportedly began a week earlier when she “traveled to Austria, where the persecution of Jews there deeply affected and greatly disturbed her, particularly because she had some financial dealings with them. She became intensely fearful of being arrested and imprisoned and began to suspect that various ornaments concealed symbols, such as sickles hidden in floral designs, which she associated with the Russian Republic.”⁶²

58 Archive EIPT, box 12, no. 809.

59 Archive EIPT, box 43, no. 2857

60 Archive EIPT, box 43, no. 2857, p. 4.

61 Archive EIPT, box 57, no. 3829.

62 Archive EIPT, box 57, no. 3803.

In other cases, pathological fear of the impending war was not a consequence of higher mobility and formal education but rather of experiences from the previous war. Foreign studies have shown that World War I veterans were more emotionally affected by the looming threat of war due to bitter memories than the rest of the population.⁶³ Records from Ljubljana reveal that such re-experiencing could also be observed among civilians. One notable example in this context is the case of a tailor's wife who was hospitalized in 1938 for endogenous depression. Her brother had been wounded in the head during World War I and lost a leg, after which he suffered from nervous illness and eventually took his own life. The patient's brother's death deeply affected her, but she eventually recovered.⁶⁴ "Her current condition began this autumn," her medical records state, "when war tensions arose, and she feared that her husband would be conscripted and that she would lose him."⁶⁵ The losses the patient experienced after the previous war triggered a pathological fear of potential losses in the approaching war.⁶⁶

Fear and (Physical) Violence

Fears associated with threats of death and physical violence were the most prominent in psychiatric files from Ljubljana. These explanations primarily reflect the genuine conditions and authentic emotions of the patients. However, it is also important to consider that medical personnel gave varying levels of attention to different forms of physical violence during specific periods. Furthermore, they assigned these forms of violence differential significance in contributing to the development of psychological illnesses.

Records from the World War I era report on the mental suffering and fears experienced by soldiers who were wounded in combat or afflicted by illnesses such as dysentery, the Spanish flu, and similar diseases during the conflict. However, these events are typically not described as direct causes of psychological disorders or even postwar fears. The failure to acknowledge these connections likely stemmed from the prevailing attitude among Slovenian psychiatrists of the time, who were generally reluctant to recognize disability claims related to war-induced psychological issues.⁶⁷

63 Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History*.

64 Archive EIPT, box 57, no. 3775.

65 Archive EIPT, box la 57, no. 3775, p. 2.

66 Archive EIPT, box 57, no. 3775.

67 Archive EIPT, box 9, no. 596.

One of the few exceptions may have been an 18-year-old baker who voluntarily enlisted in the war in 1915. He was deployed to Russia, where he was subsequently wounded. In 1919, he was once again called up and, “as a soldier, was wounded in the left shin near Radgona in Hungary.” From that point on, he became extremely fearful. In February 1920, he was hospitalized with a diagnosis of *dementia praecox* (schizophrenia), and in October he was discharged home with an improved condition and granted a 50 percent work disability.⁶⁸

A different outcome was experienced by the son of a landowner from Mozirje,⁶⁹ who began his service in 1914, fighting in Galicia, where he suffered a right shin injury caused by a horse. He subsequently fell ill, reportedly due to poor nutrition, and received treatment at the Maribor hospital. From there, he was sent to the Italian front, and later through Tyrol to the Russo-Polish front. His psychological difficulties began after the war; he felt an obsessive urge to confess, developed a fear of darkness, sensed that the entire house was spinning around him, and experienced auditory hallucinations. In 1921, he was admitted to the Ljubljana psychiatric hospital, like many other soldiers with an unclear diagnosis of “*amentia*,” that was otherwise more frequently diagnosed in women. After four months of treatment, he returned home improved. As in many similar cases, no mention was made of any disability compensation.⁷⁰

The prevalence of various forms of physical violence and the ability to detect them were influenced by the political context. It may therefore be no coincidence that insights into alleged violence within psychiatric institutions became available immediately after World War I, a period during which patients were transferred across the newly established border from Austrian or Italian institutions to the Ljubljana psychiatric hospital. Records from this period provide some indications of violent treatment in Austrian and Italian hospitals towards patients who were classified as Slovenes.

The medical personnel at Ljubljana’s psychiatric hospital appeared more inclined to document instances of violence occurring in psychiatric institutions across the border by the staff who belonged to another state

68 Archive EIPT, box 57, no. 3852.

69 For insights into how Yugoslav authorities addressed the issue of war disability compensation for cases involving psychological illness, see Heike Karge, *Der Charme der Schizophrenie. Psychiatrie, Krieg und Gesellschaft im kroatisch-serbischen Raum* (Südosteuropäische Arbeiten, Bd. 164) (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2021); for a focus on the Slovenian context specifically, see Janoš Kastelic, “Psihiatrična obravnava veteranov prve svetovne vojne na Slovenskem” (master’s thesis, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, 2023).

70 Archive EIPT, box 57, no. 3849.

(and nation). Perhaps for this reason, we find records of a woman reportedly mistreated by the staff at the psychiatric hospital in Trieste (Italy) and a man allegedly tortured in the psychiatric hospital in Klagenfurt (Austria).⁷¹

During World War II, fear experienced by both male and female patients in “captivity”⁷² occupies a prominent place in the psychiatric records. The legitimacy of this fear is often embedded directly within the diagnosis (anxiety psychosis, etc.), as if the psychiatrists—many of whom supported the resistance movement—sought to indirectly and perhaps covertly document the violence perpetrated by the occupiers or collaborators. Fear in the eyes of patients and psychiatrists gain legitimacy.

The reasons for imprisonment, interrogation, or internment in these cases were not documented in detail. I thus agree with Marta Verginella’s hypothesis, which sees in such incomplete records the intent to protect members of the resistance movement, such as Partisans.⁷³ Among the few cases that provide some insight into the reasons for imprisonment, we find examples like a 15-year-old boy who stole some small things⁷⁴ or a 16-year-old who allegedly, and without realizing it, crossed the barbed wire which had been erected around Ljubljana from February 23, 1942 to May 9, 1945.⁷⁵

We also learn that a private official from Škofja Loka was imprisoned in connection with an attack on Lož, which, according to his records, was allegedly organized by Chetniks in 1941. In reality, however, the attack was carried out by Partisans.⁷⁶

The violence to which patients were subjected during imprisonment or internment is described in detail. Records mention beatings, threats of execution, and confinement in solitary cells. Even more thoroughly documented are the fears of these individuals. The most common fear expressed in their accounts is the fear of re-internment, combined with paranoid fears of being followed—concerns that were not unfounded, as in many cases, such fears were later realized.⁷⁷

71 Archive EIPT, box 58, no. 3891.

72 I use the term captivity as an “umbrella term that referred both to concertation camp survivors and prisoners of war” and also prisoners during war in general. For more about the relation between the state of captivity and war traumas see Gabor Csikos, “The Origins of Madness: Former Prisoners of War in Psychiatric Care in the Hungarian Stalinist Era,” *Central European Horizons* 3, nos. 1–2 (2023): 148–173.

73 See Verginella’s chapter in the same volume.

74 Archive EIPT, box 61, no. 4072.

75 Archive EIPT, box 59, no. 3893; Šorn, *Življenje Ljubljančanov*.

76 Archive EIPT, box 16, no. 1065.

77 Archive EIPT, box 16, no. 1066.

Such testimonies can thus be associated with “anticipatory anxiety,” which, according to Mark S. Micale, particularly affected populations—especially civilians—in Central and Eastern Europe during World War II. It was when trauma arose “not so much from witnessing or experiencing violence at every moment as from the ever present fear that previously inflicted extreme violence will resume.”⁷⁸

Individuals who survived captivity exhibited a profound fear of leaving their homes and re-engaging with society, feeling anxious about “any kind of noise.” During the period of the Italian occupation of Ljubljana, some anticipated a German takeover, fearing that their comrades would be killed. They also harbored fears of losing their sanity as a result of their traumatic experiences. Within institutional care, they often displayed confusion, autistic-like behaviors, and a tendency to avoid social interactions. Many showed a lack of motivation to work, had poor appetites, and, most notably, suffered from sleep disturbances, with numerous reports of horrifying nightmares. Some individuals also experienced suicidal thoughts.

Patients of this kind typically did not remain in the hospital for extended periods and were generally not subjected to the more invasive treatments already in use at the Ljubljana psychiatric hospital at the time, such as the cardiazol cure,⁷⁹ which was used to treat schizophrenia.⁸⁰ However, many were readmitted within a short period, often after only a few months. Others were discharged as fully recovered, though this was relatively rare across the hospital’s overall patient population. When sharing their perspectives on the causes of their hospitalizations, these individuals often cited political circumstances and the trauma they had endured. Their behavior reveals attempts to resist threatening situations, including by moving to different occupied zones (e.g., from the German to the Italian occupation zone). Some patients even chose to re-admit themselves to the psychiatric hospital, seeking refuge from their persecutory thoughts.⁸¹

Alongside those who had experienced captivity, another notable category in WWII-era hospital records was that of collaborators, who, especially towards the end of the war, feared persecution by partisans. Their narratives

78 Micale, “Beyond the Western Front,” 45.

79 Archive EIPT, box 61, no. 4069.

80 Patient files from Ljubljana generally reflect treatment practices similar to those documented in other Yugoslav psychiatric facilities, where, as Ana Antić suggests, “the 1930s saw the introduction of novel organic therapeutic techniques for managing severe psychotic disorders. These included insulin therapy, cardiazol shock therapy, and electroconvulsive therapy (ECT)”; Antić, *Therapeutic Fascism*, 12.

81 Archive EIPT, box 16, no. 1066.

are marked by accounts of escape (often from near-certain death) and hiding in various collaborationist strongholds.⁸² Among hospitalized patients with ties to collaborationist authorities, women were also represented, particularly near the war's end or shortly thereafter.⁸³ For instance, in March 1945, a severely frightened woman was admitted to the Ljubljana psychiatric hospital shortly after surviving a bombing in Ljubljana. Her diagnosis of an "excessive reaction" likely stemmed not only from the bombing but also from previous events when she was captured by partisans in the Karst region.

When partisans found anti-communist literature in her suitcase and learned her husband was a Home Guard officer, they threatened to execute her and ordered her to follow them into the forest. Serbian volunteers, however, were alerted and managed to drive off the partisans. Before fleeing, one partisan turned to her and fired his revolver; she collapsed as if struck. Only after the partisans departed did she realize she had not been hit."⁸⁴

In the days and weeks following World War II, several members of the Yugoslav army—former Partisans—were also hospitalized, experiencing an intense re-living of wartime events. However, unlike other patients, these individuals expressed heightened emotions of agitation and anger rather than fear and were often diagnosed with a "hysterical reaction." Hysteria, a common diagnosis in the nineteenth century, had almost entirely disappeared from the records in Ljubljana in the preceding decades. Between 1941 and 1945, it reappeared in eight cases, six of which involved women (see table 1).

The wartime case files reviewed speak of the physical violence endured by both men and women. However, while they relatively frequently report instances of imprisonment, beatings, torture, and death threats, they largely remain silent on the issue of sexual violence. This supports the assumption that such topics, even in 1945 and during the transition to socialism, continued to be relegated to the margins in Slovenian society. They were treated, to borrow a term used by Dagmar Wernitznig in similar cases from Carinthia, as a kind of taboo.⁸⁵ Several scholars have pointed out that "large-scale traumatic events such as war implicate the nation-state as a masculinist structure with a vested interest in creating and then disavowing

82 Archive EIPT, box 61, no. 4067.

83 Archive EIPT, box 61, no. 4029.

84 Archive EIPT, box 57, no. 3830, p. 5.

85 Wernitznig, "The Madwoman in the Cellar."

the trauma suffered by women,” which subsequently leads to the “exclusion of women’s experiences, particularly in the context of sexual violence.”⁸⁶

The fears surrounding the experience of sexual violence can be read and interpreted in this context. One of the few case files in the sample that directly addresses rape during wartime and postwar conditions dates back to the postwar period. On September 14, 1945, the widow of a fallen partisan from the Cerklje area, diagnosed with depression, was admitted to the Ljubljana psychiatric hospital. Like other women in the sample, she described her illness as fear. This fear arose after she was raped by two Serbian soldiers (most likely after the war).⁸⁷ Her primary concern was the possibility of pregnancy. The physician who referred her to the psychiatric hospital understood her distress, as noted in his referral letter: “Please address the issue of a possible abortion.”⁸⁸ This note is surprising given that at the time abortion was still illegal in Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, it seems that under the chaotic (post-)war circumstances, partisan healthcare was willing to tolerate such measures.⁸⁹

The fear of pregnancy turned out to be unfounded, as the patient’s menstruation returned during her stay at the psychiatric hospital, which also seemed to have a positive effect on her mental state. As noted in her file: “She no longer places the same importance on the incident with the soldiers as she did before, even laughing about it now, although she refuses to provide any further statement on the matter when asked again.”⁹⁰ It appears that the patient spoke about the rape only due to the fear of a possible pregnancy. Once that fear was alleviated, her experience of sexual trauma seemingly lost its legitimacy as a narrative. Her story was once again cloaked in silence, as may have been the case for many similar experiences at the time.

86 Agatha Schwartz and Tatjana Takševa, “Between Trauma and Resilience.: A Transnational Reading of Women’s Life Writing about Wartime Rape in Germany and Bosnia and Herzegovina,” *Aspasia* 14 (2020): 126.

87 Archive EIPT, box 57, no. 3789.

88 Archive EIPT, box 57, no. 3789, p. 4.

89 For more about partisan healthcare and abortion see: Jelena Batinić, “Motherhood and the Yugoslav Communist State in the Revolutionary Era, 1943–1953,” in *Parenting and the State in Britain and Europe, c. 1870–1950*, ed. Hester Barron and Claudia Siebrecht (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 255–276; Maja Vehar, “Odnos partizanskega zdravstva do spolnega in reproduktivnega zdravja na Slovenskem,” *Retrospektive: znanstvena revija za zgodovinske in sorodna področja* 2, no. 1 (2019): 8–35.

90 Archive EIPT, box 57, no. 3789, p. 2.

Conclusions

While the link between fear and war may seem self-evident, it is neither straightforward nor detached from the specific socio-historical contexts and expected social/gender roles of the time. This nuanced relationship offers an alternative lens for examining the connections between wartime trauma and gender. It allows for comparative insights into the impacts of both World Wars on ordinary individuals and highlights the unique features of the experience from the analyzed region alongside commonalities observed across different regions.

Over time, the emotion of fear became increasingly recognized in Slovenian psychiatric discourse, from World War I through the post-World War II era. As shown in prior sections, psychiatrists acknowledged the diverse fears people harbored, influenced by both immediate war conditions and shifting societal roles.

Separation anxiety—particularly the fear of being parted from loved ones—was prominent in both wars. During World War I, however, this anxiety was heavily associated with the burden of responsibility felt by men as primary providers. Both postwar periods reveal insecurities tied to changing gender roles, with anxieties around sexuality featuring prominently in the psychiatric files. Among women, these fears often intersected with a sense of Christian guilt, a theme that persisted in Slovenian records up to World War II, when such guilt took on more secular dimensions.

In a region marked by both a harsh occupational regimes and civil war, concepts like “survivor’s guilt” and “moral injury” offer an explanation for the distress observed among patients admitted to Ljubljana’s psychiatric hospital. Fears associated with death and physical violence were the most prominent in the records, reflecting both the patients’ authentic emotional experiences and the brutal political realities of the time—realities that, particularly in WWII, saw violence also visited upon civilians.

It is also important to consider the evolving focus of psychiatric personnel on different forms of physical violence in specific periods. WWII-era psychiatric records prominently note fear among patients held in “captivity,” with diagnoses such as anxiety psychosis sometimes used to legitimize these fears. It appears that psychiatrists, many sympathetic to the resistance, may have employed these diagnoses to subtly document the violence inflicted by occupiers, thus recognizing and legitimizing the patients’ fears from both medical and socio-political perspectives. In the end, many patients themselves equated fear with their illness, weaving their voices into the record and thus bearing witness to, and legitimizing, the suffering they endured during wartime.

About the Author

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3. Traumas and Displacement Among Women from the Province of Gorizia During and After WWI (1915–1933)

Francesco Toncich

Abstract: This essay explores how war and postwar trauma affected women in the former Austrian Province of Gorizia/Gorica/Görz and Gradisca. The region faced severe violence during WWI and, afterward, occupation and forced annexation by the Kingdom of Italy. For over a decade, many women endured continuous physical, emotional, and social trauma that left lasting scars. Most were Slovenian-speaking, exposing them to cultural and linguistic oppression and growing violence by the Fascist regime. After the destruction of Gorizia's psychiatric asylum in 1916, the Sant'Ossvaldo hospital in Udine became the main institution housing these women. Medical records from Udine reveal key aspects of their lives and the wider society, both deeply damaged by war and its aftermath.

Keywords: trauma, Italian fascism, gender, First World War, post-Habsburg transition

This chapter¹ deals with traumas among the female population as a result of the First World War and the postwar transition within the Italian “Province of Gorizia.” After being annexed into the Kingdom of Italy after November 1918

¹ The chapter presents this analysis as part of a larger research project, “Public Health in Transition (1918–1924),” which the author conducted at the Department of History at the University of Ljubljana and was financed by the Marie-Skłodowska-Curie-Actions (HORIZON-MSCA-2021-PF-01, No. 101068435). I would like to express my sincere thanks to Marta Verginella and Maura Hametz for their valuable comments and corrections, which helped to further develop the text.

and declared a new region, this province included a vast and diversified territory ranging from Gorizia and Gradisca to include the Eastern Karst plateau, the Isonzo/Soča Valley and South Carniola.² During WWI, the Isonzo/Soča Valley and the Eastern Karst particularly, became one of the major sites of the Austro-Italian military confrontation, and its entire population suffered “total war.”³ The postwar transition here turned out to be quite singular in nature, as these territories became a new borderland between two successor states (the Kingdom of Italy and the S. H. S. Kingdom), even as most of the inhabitants were culturally diverse. An analysis of public health and psychiatry in the Province of Gorizia during and after WWI seeks to widen the postwar perspective since historiography has mostly focused on military and political aspects. The history of psychiatry in the provinces of Gorizia and Trieste has received more attention with regard to the second half of the twentieth century, following the reform of the psychiatric institutions in Italy launched in this peculiar border area under the direction of Franco Basaglia in the 1960s–1970s.⁴ By comparison, the involvement of civilians in warfare and their displacement and internment during WWI in Trentino, South Tyrol and Austrian Tyrol have recently been the subject of a flourishing transnational history of psychiatry.⁵

Particular thanks go to the workers at the Udine Department of Mental Health for having helped me considerably in my research in the archives of the former psychiatric hospital in Udine.

2 In order to reflect and acknowledge the cultural and linguistic complexity of the region, bilingual place names are used throughout this article. In cases where a locality has more than two linguistic variants – such as Trieste/Trst/Triest or Gorizia/Gorica/Görz – only the first and currently official denomination is adopted for reasons of readability and consistency.

3 Lucio Fabi, *Gente di trincea. La Grande Guerra sul Carso e sull'Isonzo* (Milan: Mursia, 1994), 311–319.

4 John Foot, *The Man Who Closed the Asylums: Franco Basaglia and the Revolution in Mental Health Care* (London: Verso, 2015).

5 Elisabeth Dietrich-Daum, Hermann J. W. Kuprian, Siglinde Clementi, Maria Heidegger, and Michaela Ralsereds, eds., *Psychiatrische Landschaften. Die Psychiatrie und ihre Patientinnen und Patienten im historischen Raum Tirol seit 1830* (Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2011); Anna Grillini, *La guerra in testa* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2018); Francesco Frizzera, “Population Displacement in the Habsburg Empire during World War I,” in *World War I in Central and Eastern Europe: Politics, Conflict and Military Experience*, ed. Judith Devlin, John Paul Newman, and Maria Falina (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 60–72.

“Traumatized” Women at the Beginning of the “Second Thirty-Years’ War”

An analysis of women’s traumas is not only intended to shed light on a neglected corner of history. Rather, the gender perspective is of broader importance and can shed light on further general aspects of war and postwar society. Quoting Christa Hämmerle, “the war societies of 1914 to 1918, as well as the complex consequences of WWI, cannot be adequately grasped and understood without taking into account the analytical and relational category of gender.”⁶ Records from psychiatric institutions in Gorizia and Udine describe the miserable fates of hundreds of women, tragically bound together by the great turmoil of the war and postwar period. Psychiatry stood at the center of their lives, acting as a crucial state institution which aimed to remove problematic, non-normative people from society, thereby obscuring their individuality. Patients became tiles in a bigger mosaic, which is currently under-researched and poorly understood.

The difficult interconnections between individual lives and common war experiences have already been the object of analysis, although this has not always been the case for women.⁷ Scholarly focus has been on the trauma experienced by men, specifically soldiers, and is still heavily focused on the traumatic war experiences of militarized men,⁸ dealing with a pervasive “crisis of masculinity.”⁹ WWI’s character as a “total war” often gets missed and the marginalization of the “home front”¹⁰ automatically relegates women to their traditional and normative role as dependent on men.¹¹ The comparison between medical records of women and men reveals significant discrepancies resulting from the rigid internal binary gender structure of psychiatry. Gender played a pivotal role in developing psychiatric diagnostic

6 Christa Hämmerle, “Traditionen, Trends und Perspektiven: Zur Frauen- und Geschlechtergeschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges in Österreich,” *Geschichte und Region/Storia e regione* 23, no. 2 (2014): 22. The translation from the original German text is by the author.

7 Cf. Herfried Münckler, *Der große Krieg. Die Welt 1914–1918* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2013), 18–19.

8 Cf. Nigel Hunt, *Landscapes of Trauma: The Psychology of the Battlefield* (London/New York: Routledge, 2020), VIII.

9 Cf. Fiona Reid, *Broken Men: Shell Shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain 1914–30* (London: Continuum, 2014).

10 Oswald Überegger, “Crimini di guerra nel primo conflitto mondiale. Per una storia interdisciplinare della violenza,” *Studi storici* 63, no. 2 (2022): 407–440.

11 Christa Hämmerle, *Heimat/Front. Geschlechtergeschichte(n) des Ersten Weltkrieges in Österreich-Ungarn* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2014), 10–11.

apparatuses, long before the clash of WWI.¹² Starting from the second half of the nineteenth century, the medical establishment had already begun to diagnose and fear a crisis of “masculinity” spreading through Europe and North America, observing symptoms of the progressive fragmentation of the mythical monolithic masculinity. The adoption of the diagnosis of “hysteria” in men (till then exclusive to women) made the gender boundaries dangerously porous, which WWI exacerbated. After the war, psychiatry was asked to restore this gender boundary.¹³

Victoria Stewart’s observation that the “‘shell shock’ model of trauma could be misleading because it downgrades the extent to which other aspects of war experience are traumatic”¹⁴ prompts a reconsideration of the subject of “trauma” as a complex consequence of long-lasting and repeated experiences resulting not exclusively from violence performed within institutionalized frames, such as the army or police. “Trauma” can also arise from horrifying changes within a socioeconomic and geopolitical environment, a prolonged sense of fear, loss and destruction due to the displacement of individuals and the disintegration of civil and social systems. These factors caused dramatic alterations of personal and collective reference points and of perception in a broader perspective.¹⁵ In order to express a holistic interpretation of a “trauma” it may be helpful to “refer to the multiple stressors that people are exposed to when they have experienced war, either directly or indirectly. These stressors can be psychological, chemical, biological, mechanical, social, economic, cultural, and so forth, and are often experienced simultaneously, which demonstrates the intense and complex quality of the stress of war.”¹⁶ Moreover, a traumatic experience can be both individual and collective, most of the time it is both simultaneously, which augments the complexity of its consequences. “Trauma” was not a diagnostic term used by the doctors of that time, but rather a part of today’s medical-psychological and cultural background, following the establishment of the so-called

12 Cf. Hans-Georg Hofer, *Nervenschwäche und Krieg. Modernitätskritik und Krisenbewältigung in der österreichischen Psychiatrie 1880–1920* (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau, 2004).

13 Bettina Bock von Wülfigen, “Die Krise des Individuums und seine Heilung durch Vererbung,” in *Dämonen, Vamps und Hysterikerinnen. Geschlechter- und Rassenfigurationen in Wissen, Medien und Alltag um 1900*, ed. Ulrike Auga, Claudia Bruns, Dorothea Dornhof, and Gabriele Jähnert (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011), 134.

14 Victoria Stewart, *Women’s Autobiography: War and Trauma* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 10.

15 Überegger, “Crimini di guerra nel primo conflitto mondiale,” 413.

16 Stanley Krippner and Teresa M. McIntyre, “Overview: In the Wake of War,” in *The Psychological Impact of War Trauma on Civilians: An International Perspective*, ed. Stanley Krippner and Teresa M. McIntyre (Westport, London: Praeger, 2003), 6.

“Post Traumatic Stress Disorder” (PTSD) diagnosis in the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁷ The text will therefore use original diagnoses of the patients’ admission anamnesis in the asylum.

The focus on women’s trauma also proposes ways to rethink the concept of “postwar transition.” For many people in the Julian March, the armistice in November 1918 did not represent the end of a nightmare. It marked the beginning of a transition period during which the civil population experienced further multiple traumas. Between 1914 and 1945 the so-called “European Civil War” or “Second Thirty-Years’ War” meant a general outbreak of political social violence erupting in Europe as a consequence of WWI as a “total war,” which became polarized in the major clash between communism and anti-communist forces, primarily fascism.¹⁸ A longer-term perspective has already been adopted in the international historiography of psychiatry.¹⁹ Within this larger frame, a peculiar feeling of anxiety can be observed in the new “Venezia Giulia” (Julian March) in the years following November 1918. The Julian March seemed to follow the instability and violence arising within post-Habsburg Central European societies.²⁰ Case analysis demonstrates a shared and growing disorder among female civilians connected to “uncertain states” (in this case the sovereignty of the Italian Kingdom) trying to assert their legitimacy and governance over recently conquered territories.²¹

In Italy, this case coincided with the rise of the fascist regime. With the promulgation of the “Unified Text of Public Security Laws” in 1926 and the new Penal Code in 1930, psychiatric hospitals became part of the control apparatus of the fascist state.²² Due to its politicization, the diagnostic and

17 Cf. Jason Crouthamel and Peter Leese, “Introduction,” in *Psychological Trauma and the Legacies of the First World War*, ed. Jason Crouthamel and Peter Leese (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1–21.

18 Enzo Traverso, *Fire and Blood: The European Civil War, 1914–1945* (London, New York: Verso, 2016).

19 Gregory M. Thomas, *Treating the Trauma of the Great War: Soldiers, Civilians and Psychiatry in France, 1914–1940* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009); Dagmar Wernitznig, “The Madwoman in the Cellar: Trauma and Gender After Both World Wars—A Field Study of Psychiatric Files,” *On Culture: The Open Journal for the Study of Culture* 11 (2021): 1–23.

20 Cf. Ota Konrád and Rudolf Jučera, *Paths out of the Apocalypse: Physical Violence in the Fall and Renewal of Central Europe, 1914–1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

21 Maura Hametz, “Uncertain States: Repatriation and Citizenship in the Northeastern Adriatic, 1918–1921,” *Acta Histriae* 21, no. 4 (2013): 791–808; Maura Hametz, “Anxious ‘Italians’: Security and Welfare in the Upper Adriatic, 1918–1924,” *Annales. Series historia et sociologia* 32, no. 4 (2022): 591–602.

22 Cf. Paolo Francesco Peloso, *La guerra dentro. La psichiatria italiana tra fascismo e resistenza (1922–1945)* (Verona: Ombre corte, 2008); Matteo Petracci, *I matti del Duce. Manicomi e repressione*

treatment practice can hardly be considered “objective” or “scientific.”²³ However, the lack of objective diagnosis in psychiatric practice is not limited to fascism: psychiatric diagnoses of “mental diseases” were created well before the clash of WWI, which strongly reflected the sociocultural, economic and political contexts, and showed influences from more general discourses about “modernity,” above all from “anti-modernist” movements inspired by Morel’s “degeneration theory.” This also had strong implications for the gender construction in European societies.²⁴ The rise of fascism and the inclusion of psychiatry into the fascist state apparatus dramatically augmented the pressure and control over women’s bodies, feelings, behaviors and sexuality.²⁵

The “Province of Gorizia” and Its Asylum: The Building of a New “Border Province” (1915–1933)

Both war and transition strongly influenced psychiatric institutions in these territories. The upheavals and geopolitical changes between 1915 and 1918 dramatically reshaped the area between the Habsburg County of Gorizia and Gradisca and the southwest parts of the province of Carniola, which were occupied by the Italian army and assigned to the Italian Kingdom in the Peace Treaty of Saint Germain in September 1919 and the Treaty of Rapallo in November 1920.

At the end of the war, within its new borders, Italy ruled over a significant part of the population that did not recognize itself as Italian in either nationhood or language: in 1921, out of a population of about 900,000 (not including Fiume/Rijeka), more than 400,000 people declared themselves to be Slovenian-speaking in the Julian March.²⁶ The exact size of the living population is difficult to establish, thanks to the geopolitical-administrative situation and people leaving and entering the territory, resulting from the upheavals of WWI and the dubious calculations made by the Italian state afterwards. The last Austrian census of 1910 in the former Austrian County

politica nell'Italia fascista (Rome: Donzelli, 2014); Annacarla Valeriano, *Malacarne. Donne e manicomio nell'Italia fascista* (Rome: Donzelli, 2017).

23 Heike Karge, *Der Charme der Schizophrenie. Psychiatrie, Krieg und Gesellschaft im kroatisch-serbischen Raum* (Südosteuropäische Arbeiten, Bd. 164) (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), 16–17.

24 Hofer, *Nervenschwäche und Krieg*.

25 Valeriano, *Malacarne*, 44–46; 75–76.

26 Milica Kacin-Wohinz and Jože Pirjevec, *Zgodovina Slovencev v Italiji 1866–2000* (Ljubljana: Nova revija, 2000), 27.

of Gorizia and Gradisca shows that almost 59 percent of the population, consisting of about 26,000 inhabitants, was Slovenian-speaking.²⁷

After the armistice of November 3, 1918, the Italian army still occupied the Julian March: the “new provinces” experienced an “armed normalization” which came to an end with the rise of the fascist regime.²⁸ A “Military Government” (created in November 1918) lasted until August 4, 1919, when it was replaced by the “General Civil Commission,” which was eventually abolished in October 1922. The new “Province of Gorizia” was created in July 1919 within the Julian March and included the previous centuries-old Habsburg County of Gorizia and Gradisca and the militarily occupied South Carniolan districts of Idrija and Postojna. The province was short-lived: it was incorporated into the province of Udine in January 1923 and renamed “Province of Friuli,” which lasted until the end of 1926. In 1927, a second “Province of Gorizia” was established by the fascist state ranging over a territory of almost 2,700 km² and with a population of about 210,000 in 1931.²⁹ In the meantime, the promulgation between 1925 and 1930 of the fascist laws and the new penal code hastened the total assimilation of the new provinces into Italian statehood.

The first Habsburg asylum in Gorizia (the “Provincial Psychiatric Hospital Franz Joseph I”), opened by the provincial administration in 1911,³⁰ was destroyed during the bombing of Gorizia between 1915 and 1916. Its patients and hospital staff were evacuated in December 1915 and transferred to the main Moravian psychiatric asylum in Kroměříž/Kremsier. In June 1919, the Province of Gorizia closed the asylum, the staff was dismissed, and the patients were “repatriated” to Italy, where they were placed in the psychiatric hospital of Siena (Tuscany), while the new hospital in Gorizia was being rebuilt.³¹

It would be over a decade before the new Italian “Provincial Psychiatric Hospital of Gorizia” opened in June 1933. Due to the erstwhile absence of a psychiatric hospital in Gorizia, new patients from the province were admitted to the nearby asylum of Sant’Osvaldo in Udine. Nevertheless, the shift from

27 *Spezialortsrepertorium der österreichischen Länder: bearbeitet auf Grund der Ergebnisse der Volkszählung vom 31. Dezember 1910. Vol. VII, das österreichisch-illyrische Küstenland* (Vienna: Verlag der k.k. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1918), 29.

28 Annamaria Vinci, *Sentinelle della patria. Il fascismo al confine orientale 1918–1941* (Bari: Laterza, 2011), 17–23.

29 *VIII censimento generale della popolazione. 21 aprile 1936/XIV. Vol. II/32, Provincia di Gorizia* (Rome: Istituto centrale di statistica del Regno d’Italia, 1937), V.

30 Cf. Marco Plesnicar, *L’ospedale psichiatrico di Gorizia Francesco Giuseppe I. Nascita e sviluppo dell’istituzione manicomiale nel dibattito politico provinciale (1861–1911)* (Mariano del Friuli: Edizioni della Laguna, 2011).

31 ApGo, Giunta provinciale di Gorizia, Manicomio, b. 859, f. 5018.

Gorizia to Udine was not a smooth one since, unlike the County of Gorizia, which was structured under the Habsburg system until November 1918, the Province of Friuli followed the Italian psychiatric system. Moreover, the two provinces had different war experiences. Friuli was definitely less war-torn than the Gorizia region; however, it had become the logistical center of the Italian army.³² The asylum in Udine had been confiscated by the Italian army in 1915 and was used to care for wounded soldiers from the nearby battlefield.³³ Hospitalization of civilians from the occupied territories had initially been conceived of as a “temporary” solution.³⁴ Nonetheless, this practice lasted until the opening of the new hospital in Gorizia in 1933, even after the hospital had returned to civil authority in March 1920.³⁵

Although in the early years, women from the province of Gorizia in the Udine asylum constituted less than 10 percent, between 1923 and 1933 they increased and fluctuated between 16 and 21 percent of the total annual admissions. The records of the hospitalization of women from the vast province of Gorizia show an extraordinary number of cases coming from the areas alongside the Isonzo/Soča warfront.³⁶ This horrific concentration of mental disorder cases coming from the Province of Gorizia was testified to by the official statistics: in 1933, annual hospitalizations from the province of Gorizia reached 2.28 percent, while cases in the rest of the Kingdom of Italy stood at 1.80 percent.³⁷

“Things Appear to Her as in a Movie Theater”: Hallucinations and the Clash with Modern Warfare

I have observed that she is prey to a form of hallucinatory delirium in which fake images, sometimes frightening ones, appear in her mind, from which she tries to escape by every means possible, even by acts that endanger her life. She sometimes sees in bystanders, figures that frighten her and drive her to push them away at all costs, sometimes endangering others.³⁸

32 Fabi, *Gente di trincea*, 312.

33 AsUd, Deputazione Provinciale di Udine, b. 588, 5129.

34 AsUd, Deputazione Provinciale di Udine, b. 588, 4901.

35 AsUd, Deputazione Provinciale di Udine, b. 590, 58.

36 AopUd, Registri, Donne.

37 Ospedale psichiatrico provinciale. *L'ospedale psichiatrico provinciale di Gorizia* (Gorizia: Tip. Sociale, 1933), 33.

38 AopUd, Donne, 3309.

A physician thus described the delusion of a woman from Medea³⁹ who was brought into Sant'Ossvaldo asylum in Udine in April 1917, diagnosed with "hallucinatory amentia." Audio-visual hallucinations proved to be one of the most common symptoms among hospitalized women from the warfront area. This is attested to by several medical records from the archive of the psychiatric hospital in Gorizia before its closure and subsequent destruction. For many of the female patients, the physical and emotional involvement in warfare became the etiological cause of mental and behavioral disruption. The vision of a huge mass of male soldiers bringing weapons, tanks, trucks and guns into their traditional familial and social environment was perceived as a threatening and shocking experience.

For many women in this area, the multisensorial experience of the enormous destructive potential of modern warfare was so devastating that its "spectacle" dramatically accelerated and distorted their perception of the rhythm of life.⁴⁰ On April 8, 1917, Teresa, a 40-year-old housewife and refugee, was hospitalized in Udine due to "paranoic dementia." She came from Monfalcone/Tržič, a small industrial port city on the edge of the Gorizian Karst, which was situated along the Southern part of the Isonzo/Soča front.⁴¹ Her clinical diary suggests that she observed the horrific spectacle of the bombings over the Karst so that she started to experience "multiple personalities and very vivid visual hallucinations with terrifying contents." Much more interestingly, the doctor noticed that "she claims things appear to her 'as in a movie theater.'" ⁴² Teresa's record combines two main elements of general European modernity such as cinema and industrialized warfare, and underlines the sensational and shocking impact on society of the introduction of modern technologies, already before the Great War.⁴³ This particular witness of the war inferno evokes Paul Virilio's analysis of the horrific influence of both modern war and cinema over the means of perception within European society:⁴⁴ technologized warfare

39 Patients' personal data is kept anonymous to respect the sensitive information contained in the medical records. Only their first name, age and place of origin are mentioned. Although most of the patients were Slovenian-speaking, on the medical records personal data were transcribed in their Italian variants by the Italian authorities.

40 Fabi, *Gente di trincea*, 321.

41 Cf. John R. Schindler, *Isonzo: The Forgotten Sacrifice of the Great War* (Westport, London: Praeger, 2001).

42 AopUd, Donne, 3298.

43 Cf. Wolfgang Schäffner, "Das Trauma der Versicherung. Das Ereignis im Zeitalter der Wahrscheinlichkeit," in *Modernität und Trauma. Beiträge zum Zeitenbruch des Ersten Weltkrieges*, ed. Inka Müller-Bach (Vienna: WUV, 2000), 104–120.

44 Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (London, New York: Verso, 1989), 26.

represented one of the many elements (but clearly the most devastating one) of a longer and more general process of the “transformation of the world” since the second half of the nineteenth century,⁴⁵ when intellectuals and scientists in Europe and North America had already diagnosed a shocking clash with “modernization” in urban and industrial environments.⁴⁶

Psychiatric files reveal the shocking impact of Gorizian women’s exposure to “modernity” in the form of warfare. On the Austrian side of the old border, they experienced this shock twice. The Austrian declaration of war in July 1914 and the call to arms of their able-bodied male relatives often resulted in a distorted perception of reality expressed through audio and visual hallucinations.⁴⁷ Less than a year later, the same women experienced a second but much more intense shock at Italy’s declaration of war and military occupation in May 1915. The front on the Isonzo/Soča River and the Western Karst became one of the most static and cruel points of the Austrian-Italian frontline. To overcome the exhausting military impasse, the two armies made use of the most modern and destructive technologies, such as grenades, bombing aircrafts and gas bombs.⁴⁸

The feeling that life accelerated dramatically during wartime was also conveyed by Virginia, a 41-year-old woman from Gorizia, who was one of the thousands of civilians who remained living in the city during the battles and bombings.⁴⁹ A note in her file reveals an initial resilience employed to adapt to this “new life,” despite physical injuries: “She says that she had become completely used to, and was no longer affected by the frequent bombardments, even though she was clearly wounded in the chest and cheek by small pieces of shrapnel in August 1916.”⁵⁰ However, this adaptive “normality” proved ephemeral, as in April 1917 she mentally collapsed and ended up in the Udine hospital.

The impact of the destructive power of modernity was long-lasting, and the evidence of war trauma appears in the medical records up until the

45 Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Beck, 2009).

46 Hofer, *Nervenschwäche und Krieg*, 32.

47 Cf. ApGo, Giunta provinciale di Gorizia, Manicomio. The same reactions are reported from the medical files from the psychiatric hospital of Pergine: Grillini, *La guerra in testa*, 71–72. For further cases of women involved in warfare on the Austrian-Italian front, look up Marta Verginella, “Profughe slovene tra Grande Guerra e ascesa del fascismo,” *Storia delle donne* 9 (2013): 142–144.

48 Schindler, *Isonzo*, 152–155.

49 Lucio Fabi, “La gente e la guerra,” in *La gente e la guerra*, ed. Lucio Fabi (Udine: Il Campo, 1990), 21–33.

50 AopUd, Donne, 3294.

early 1930s. In June 1925, 17-year-old Luigia from Vipavski Križ was hospitalized in Udine suffering from “cerebral palsy,” attributed to witnessing the terrible spectacle of the air-bombing in Kostanjevica/Castagnevizza which happened nearly a decade before, on June 20, 1916.⁵¹ Moreover, the war had a devastating impact on entire communities, above all those in the rural and mountain villages stranded in the war’s path without means to flee, and compelled into forced labor by occupying armies.⁵² Consequently, local populations in the upper Isonzo/Soča Valley became “involuntary hostages” of both armies. This resulted in “the gradual elimination of the distinction between combatants and non-combatants [...],” which became a practice generally used by armies to “guarantee law and order and thus the security of the occupying troops.”⁵³ The tragic destiny of small villages emerges in women’s medical records which testify to the almost complete destruction and traumatization of entire communities.⁵⁴ Mental “epidemics” could break out in small rural communities, such as in a tiny mountain village close to Breginj, in the proximity of the Kobarid/Caporetto frontline. In less than two months, between September and November 1916, three women from this village were admitted to Sant’Osvaldo hospital with the same diagnosis of “circular psychosis” (a historical diagnosis for bipolar disorders) established by the same Italian military doctor.⁵⁵

“Barbed-Wire Disease”: Displacement and Incarceration as a Communitarian Experience

Following the catastrophic defeat of the Austrian army on the Galician front in the autumn of 1914, a general fear of an “internal enemy” spread within the Austrian military command, thereby organizing forced evacuations of civilians in and around war-torn territories. Of almost a million displaced people in total within the Monarchy, about 200,000 individuals

51 AopUd, Donne, 4647.

52 These kinds of war crimes against civilian populations were widespread in the frontline areas and consequently cannot automatically be excluded from historical research, although the sources omit those aspects. Cf. Hämmerle, “Traditionen,” 44–45; Grillini, *La guerra in testa*, 87.

53 Irène Herrmann and Daniel Palmieri, “A Haunting Figure: The Hostage Through the Ages,” *International Review of the Red Cross* 87, no. 857 (2005): 140–141.

54 AopUd, Donne, 5516.

55 AopUd, Donne, 3163; 3164; 3209.

were evacuated from the Southern Front and interned in camps in regions within the empire, after May 1915.⁵⁶ In those camps, refugees were forced to work, facing a shortage of food and goods and an increase in disease, above all during the big famine in 1917–1918.⁵⁷ Also from the Italian side, following the occupation of the Posočje region, the Italian army proceeded to transfer parts of the local populations and gather them in concentration camps. Moreover, the Italian state immediately sought to legitimize its sovereignty over the local population in the territory, now regarded as a “redeemed” part of the Italian “national body.”⁵⁸ The administration of public health, including the practice of hospitalization in psychiatric asylums, became pragmatic tools to establish governance in the occupied war territory.

At the end of the war in November 1918, refugees were slowly repatriated, although their return was complicated by the severe damage which had occurred during the war and the presence of new borderlines and citizenships which disrupted pre-war communities.⁵⁹ From March 1919 onwards, the Civil Government for the Julian March and the Italian Army organized the construction of barracks in the former battle areas to house the considerable local homeless population, to avoid crowding into the few houses still accessible and to prevent the spread of epidemic diseases. For the women returning from concentration camps, life in those barracks among the rubble could only have prolonged their feelings of confinement and imprisonment.⁶⁰ In many women’s records in the Udine asylum, the topic of war and postwar displacement and internment—both in camps and hospitals—is notably present among the “etiological causes” of mental distress and represents a common thread, binding together their experience in the war and postwar period.

In his influential 1918 study “*Stacheldraht-Krankheit*” (“barbed-wire disease”), the Swiss physician and psychiatrist Adolf Lukas Vischer diagnosed a peculiar kind of trauma that emerged among civilians following

56 Frizzera, “Population”; Walter Mentzel, “Weltkriegsflüchtlinge in Cisleithanien 1914–1918,” in *Asylland wider Willen. Flüchtlinge in Österreich im europäischen Kontext seit 1914*, ed. Gernot Heiss and Oliver Rathkolb (Vienna: J&V, 1995), 34–37; Petra Svoljšak, “L’occupazione italiana dell’Isonzo dal maggio 1915 all’ottobre 1917 e gli sloveni,” *Qualestoria* 26, no. 1/2 (1998): 54–63; Paolo Malni, *Fuggiaschi: il campo profughi di Wagna 1915–1918* (San Canzian d’Isonzo: Edizioni del Consorzio culturale del Monfalconese, 1998).

57 Frizzera, “Population,” 69–70.

58 Svoljšak, “L’occupazione italiana dell’Isonzo,” 42–43; Kacin-Wohinz and Pirjevec, *Zgodovina*, 23; Fabi, *Gente di trincea*, 316.

59 Fabi, *Gente di Trincea*; Cf. Verginella, “Profughe slovene.”

60 ASTs, R. Governatorato della Venezia Giulia, Atti generali, b. 224/2, 101649. Malni, *Fuggiaschi*, 167–171.

experiences of deportation and internment in concentration camps. Their symptoms looked similar to those of traumatized soldiers and seemed to have the same long-lasting effect on the victim's psyche.⁶¹ This kind of trauma often led to sudden outbreaks even after years. Up until the early 1930s, cases of "barbed wire" trauma among several women from Gorizia were found in Udine's asylum.

Connected to its latency, this mental disease presented the characteristic of "collective" trauma. The communitarian aspect of displacement and incarceration resulted in being crucial for the subsequent dealing with mental consequences. Families or entire communities—mostly rural—had been held in refugee camps for many years, living in miserable conditions. Upon their return, the individual and collective levels of such a traumatic experience intertwined, causing them to develop both an individual and a shared adapting and healing process, which the current psychiatric terminology refers to as the "trauma membrane": "The *trauma membrane* is a temporary psychological structure, a buffer zone or covering that protects traumatized people as part of the healing process in the aftermath of catastrophic stress. This term reflects intrapsychic, interpersonal, and communal processes that protect individuals and communities [...]."⁶² This complex construct, encompassing both individual and communitarian levels, aimed to protect both individuals and communities from further traumatic stress in the postwar period. When this "membrane" breaks, traumatic experiences reappear virulently in individuals, which is what frequently happened in the postwar climate of violence.

From many records it emerges how several women from those communities experienced the war and its aftermath as a watershed in their personal and social lives. Many had previously been physically and mentally healthy; however, after having experienced violence, exhaustion, cold, starvation and diseases in camps, they experienced a physical decline, reproductive disruptions, physical illness and mental distress. Many of them lost their sense of time and space, suffered an identity crisis, or developed new forms of addiction to alcohol or drugs, the long-lasting effects of which could negatively affect the entire family and small communities.⁶³ Maria, a 45-year-old married woman, had lived with her husband in Gorizia since

61 Adolf Lukas Vischer, *Die Stacheldraht-Krankheit. Beiträge zur Psychologie des Kriegsgefangenen* (Zurich: Rascher, 1918).

62 Erin Martz and Jacob Lindy, "Exploring the Trauma Membrane Concept," in *Trauma Rehabilitation After War and Conflict: Community and Individual Perspectives*, ed. Erin Martz (New York: Springer 2010), 27.

63 Cf. Cf. AopUd, Donne, 3060; 3297; 4110; 4156; 4267.

their marriage in 1913. She was interned in the Wagna refugee camp together with her family in 1915, where her first daughter died during the long and harsh internment: “She started to drink and be lethargic. After the war, she continued to only drink grappa and eat very little.” She even started begging to pay for her drink, dragging her family into moral “disrepute” so that her second daughter, whom she had given birth to after the war, was placed in an orphanage. In September 1929, she was found on the street in a state of unconsciousness and hospitalized in Sant’Osvaldo.⁶⁴

Dealing with Cultural Diversity: Language as a Means of Resistance and Opposition

For millions of people, WWI constituted a critical watershed in the legal question of belonging.⁶⁵ Above all else, however, the legal rearrangements and difficulties regarding citizenship, war and postwar turmoil caused an emotional and psychological shock. Displacement and migration flows and the disappearance of a centuries-old multinational empire meant for many civilians a dramatic rupture of familial and social networks and emotional bonds, since families were often split by the introduction of new borders. Moreover, many women had been deeply affected by the loss of the imperial horizon with its multicultural system, political and cultural symbols, rituals, and points of reference, while new nation-states imposed their monolingual order. The sudden shift from a multilingual to a nation-state system forced non-Italian-speaking women of the Gorizia province to re-consider their sense of belonging, which often caused them to experience a mental blackout and an identity crisis.

In April 1926, a 24-year-old woman from Branik/Rifembergo was interned in Udine for “mania” and “premature dementia.” Angela “spoke only Slavic” and was so euphoric that she was isolated and sedated. The medical certificate stated that “in February she ran away from home and walked alone towards the Yugoslav border of Postumia. At one point, she was stopped and brought back home, where she often refused food [...]”⁶⁶ Numerous women from the Gorizian province, like Angela, experienced a “double internment,” namely as patients in the asylum and, at the same

64 Cf. AopUd, Donne, 5940.

65 Daniela L. Caglioti, *War and Citizenship: Enemy Aliens and National Belonging from the French Revolution to the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 283–286.

66 Cf. AopUd, Donne, 4899.

time, as “aliens” in a new nation-state, which they perceived as unfamiliar and hostile. The fragmentation of the Habsburg Empire and the emergence of new nation-statehood and new militarized borders increased anxiety and distorted the perception of their environment, which appeared to be a continuation of the imprisonment suffered during the war.⁶⁷ For many of them, the proximity of the Yugoslav state might have seemed to represent a possible escape route.

Many files of the “*goriziane*” in Udine reveal elements of linguistic diversity and hybridity, especially in patients’ ego documents (letters or writings), regarded as evidence of their “mental confusion” by the Italian medical staff. Practices of segregation of Slovenian-speaking women from the rest emerge in sporadic notes by nursing staff in Udine, stating that they kept the women who “only spoke Slavic” among themselves in separate groups.⁶⁸ Moreover, Italian doctors in Udine added comments, conceiving linguistic diversity not as intellectual capacity, but as a disturbing barrier to comprehension and communication. In October 1925, 28-year-old Giustina from Trnovo/Tarnova was hospitalized due to “early dementia” and “political delirium” with “delusions of persecution and grandeur.” At the hospital intake, the official noted, “she speaks a lot [...] but always with clenched teeth, so that it is very difficult to understand what she says. She also intersperses sentences in Italian, Slavic and German.”⁶⁹ To overcome this communication barrier, starting from 1925, the hospital in Udine was equipped with an Italian-Slovenian translator during interview sessions with the psychiatrists, although it did little to improve the situation.⁷⁰

The outbreak of nationalism and political violence in local society was a thread connecting the war and postwar period, which also became apparent in the Udine asylum from the late 1920s onwards. The internment of “aliens” in the Sant’Osvaldo asylum was directly connected with the political violence and confinement practiced by both the liberal and fascist states against parts of the local populations in the “new provinces,” considered “internal enemies.”⁷¹ Those women from this territory considered to be “threats” were systematically deported and interned in camps on

67 Peloso, *La guerra*, 175–178.

68 Cf. AopUd, Donne, 3525.

69 Cf. AopUd, Donne, 4776.

70 Cf. AopUd, Donne, 3586; 4783; 4787.

71 Borut Klabjan, “Borders in Arms: Political Violence in the North-Eastern Adriatic After the Great War,” *Acta Histriae* 26, no. 4 (2018): 985–1002.

the Italian peninsula,⁷² making the barrier between political confinement and psychiatric hospitalization porous.⁷³ Particularly during the rise of fascism, elements of cultural and political otherness appeared more and more frequently in medical anamneses. Meanwhile, women increasingly claimed that they were “victims of political persecution.”⁷⁴

Nonetheless, female patients could not merely be considered passive victims. They were able to “communicate” their own reaction and opposition to authorities through both verbal and body language.⁷⁵ The most common practices of resistance among the patients were mutism and refusal of food, which may already have begun before, within their own homes and social environment. However, the medical files in Udine demonstrate further specific forms of resistance toward authorities after the women were hospitalized, most often by those deliberately speaking in Slovenian, even though many of them were bilingual, as a way of refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the new state represented by the medical personnel. During her interview in March 1925, Antonia, a 55-year-old married housewife from Vipava, was described as “constantly hostile, especially towards doctors. She refuses to talk to them or else answers them in Slavic.”⁷⁶ Even the presence of a translator proved useless, as several of these women refused to answer even questions translated from Italian into Slovenian.

“She Shouted at the Royal Carabinieri”: Facing and Fearing a New State and Regime

At the beginning of the war, the huge mass of soldiers appearing in their domestic and social environment provoked a deep shock among women. Women frequently mixed images of modern soldiers with apocalyptic and religious depictions,⁷⁷ creating hybrid multisensorial hallucinations of “demons and soldiers.”⁷⁸ This happened at a moment when the martial court in war-torn areas, immediately in July 1915, brought about the suppression

72 Gorazd Bajc, “Internments after the First World War: The Case of Women in the Northern Adriatic (1918–1920),” *Acta Histriae* 26, no. 4 (2018): 1017–1040.

73 Cf. Peloso, *La guerra*, 52; Petracci, *I matti del Duce*.

74 AopUd, Donne, 5705.

75 Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830–1980* (London: Virago, 1985), 5.

76 AopUd, Donne, 4563.

77 Cf. Grillini, *La guerra in testa*, 39–40.

78 Cf. ApGo, Giunta provinciale di Gorizia, Manicomio, b. 10, 1051; 1081. AopUd, Donne, 3586.

of personal and social freedom.⁷⁹ Consequently, a generalized paranoia at being considered enemies and spies affected numerous women. The war introduced forced politicization and nationalization, which were likely previously absent in their self-perception. In a “total war,” being “indifferent” was no longer an option. Hence, fearing deportation or even death, women’s crises erupted into violent and disruptive acts to dissociate themselves from the enemy. Desperate self-identifications easily led to a “hypertrophy of national passion,”⁸⁰ as happened with Olga, a 34-year-old woman from an upper-class Italian-speaking family of Cormons. In December 1916, she was interned in Udine, suffering from “hysterical psychosis,” “persecutory ideas and patriotic exaltations.” She obsessively tried to prove—even through letters—that she wasn’t a spy, rather quite the opposite, the most fervent Italian patriot and irredentist. Her boisterousness and desperate political obsession were found to be excessive even by the Italian doctors.⁸¹

This traumatic “identity displacement” left profound scars throughout the postwar years, at a time when, on a local level, the Italian state was establishing its authority in the “new provinces” with some difficulty. On a national level, the fascist regime was rising. The women’s initial fear of soldiers mutated into a fear of police authorities, regardless of their nationality or spoken language. Maria, an Italian-speaking 36-year-old woman from Monfalcone/Tržič, was hospitalized in Udine in August 1917, suffering from “persecutory paranoia”: “She shouted at the Royal Carabinieri, saying that she was being persecuted and mistreated by all. [...] A few days earlier, during a similar attack, she had insulted soldiers on the street and gone so far as to hit a Carabiniere with an umbrella, who was trying to calm her down.”⁸²

The Carabinieri became a feared archetype of the state’s violence: during WWI, the Royal police corps had already been responsible for counterespionage and maintaining strict discipline in the occupied war territories, carrying out punitive actions, even against civilians.⁸³ After the war, they proved to be the strong arm of the new state in the Julian March, and eventually colluded with the action squads, namely by their deliberate non-intervention regarding the assault on the Narodni Dom (the Slovene cultural center located in the city center of Trieste) by fascist

79 Frizzera, “Population,” 64.

80 Ernesto Sestan, *Venezia Giulia. Lineamenti di storia etnica e culturale* (Rome: Edizioni Italiane, 1947), 103.

81 AopUd, Donne, 3215.

82 AopUd, Donne, 3388.

83 John Gooch, *The Italian Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 132–133.

squads on July 23, 1920.⁸⁴ The Carabinieri uniform was perceived as a visible violation of one's private space, as with the case of Francesca, an 18-year-old unmarried Slovenian-speaking homemaker from Vrtojba/Vertoiba who was hospitalized in July 1923: "She was always healthy until the year 1920. She then became very frightened after a search by the Carabinieri. From then on, her illness has progressively worsened."⁸⁵ Furthermore, the abundance of public security acts and documents in the psychiatric files show the pervasive and oppressive presence of the Carabinieri during patients' arrest and transfer to the asylum. This became part of the Carabinieri's methods to control and repress the civilian population.

The postwar socioeconomic crisis and the rise of fascism became additional causes of trauma. On September 16, 1922—almost a month before the March on Rome (October 27–31)—Luigia, a 65-year-old widow from Crauglio (near San Vito al Torre), entered the asylum in Udine due to "the hardships and emotions of the world war." She was malnourished and showed signs of severe physical trauma dating back to the previous year. The clinical diary specifies, however, that Luigia had "worries about her financial condition" and had recently begun to have persecutory ideas connected to politics: "The sick woman has persecutory thoughts, and she accuses the fascists of trying to rob and kill her."⁸⁶

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, those cases started to acquire a clearer political and national connotation. The case of Zorca, in June 1931, shows how the mental state of a 17-year-old peasant from a tiny village like Koprivšče (from Kal nad Kanalom) could be affected by major national-political factors as well as by the widespread feeling of being threatened among the Slovenian-speaking population in the Julian March. Although the "etiological motives" of Zorca's mental state are unspecified, a note in her medical records offers a revealing detail: "Early in December 1930, her symptoms worsened as she feared that family members would be arrested."⁸⁷ Her fear coincides with the time just after the big "Triestine trial" conducted by the "Special Tribunal for the Defense of the State" when, in September 1930, four Slovenian-speaking Italian citizens and members of the anti-fascist organization TIGR were condemned and executed in Trieste for terrorist actions against the Italian (fascist) state. Both trial and execution received

84 Maura Hametz, "The Carabinieri Stood By: The Italian State and the 'Slavic Threat' in Trieste, 1919–1922," *Nationalities Papers* 29, no. 4 (2001): 559–574.

85 AopUd, Donne, 4111.

86 AopUd, Donne, 3937.

87 AopUd, Donne, 6425.

significant media attention on national and even international levels⁸⁸ and were followed by an anti-Slavic surge in “Venezia Giulia,” with the aim to definitively separate the Slovenian and Croatian-speaking population living in the Julian March from the Yugoslavian State, which represented an attractive cultural and national alternative to the Italian State.⁸⁹ Pragmatically, Zorca “even refused to answer questions put to her in Slovenian.”⁹⁰

Restoring Gender Hierarchies in Fascist Asylums: Women’s Absence and Psychiatric “Omertà” Regarding Physical and Domestic Violence

Because of their linguistic conciseness, asylum documents are well suited to forms of “omertà.” However, a careful reading of women’s anamnesis reveals a widespread fear of “men” as well as signs of their physical and psychological violence towards women. It is difficult to find clear evidence of sexual violence perpetrated by men in the medical files due to a lack of clinical interest and an atmosphere of omertà. In addition to the lack of a diagnostic apparatus and clinical interest on the part of Italian psychiatry, violence, especially rape,⁹¹ was, for the most part, kept quiet, also by the victims themselves, as a consequence of moral shame and social stigma, which often triggered an explosion of guilt and persecutory thoughts.⁹² Sporadically, and briefly, medical reports refer to trauma caused by sexual abuse, but reporting these crimes did not imply that justice would be served. It highlights the woman’s solitude and the perpetrator’s impunity, whether he

88 Jože Pirjevec, “Bazovica 1930,” *Prispevki za zgodovino delavskega gibanja* 21 (1981): 162; Marta Verginella, “Drugi tržaški proces,” in *Primorski upor fašizmu 1920–1941*, ed. Milica Kacin-Wohinz and Marta Verginella (Ljubljana: Društvo Slovenska Matica, 2008), 262; Borut Klabjan and Gorazd Bajc, *Ogenj, ki je zajel Evropo: Narodni dom v Trstu 1920–2020* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2021), 284.

89 Vinci, *Sentinelle*, 195.

90 AopUd, Donne, 6425.

91 About the still less thematized question about sexual violence during the wars of the twentieth century, cf.: Hämmerle, “Traditionen,” 46; Marcello Flores, ed., *Stupri di guerra. La violenza di massa contro le donne nel Novecento* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2010). Concerning mass rapes in Friuli during 1917–1918, cf. Meta Remec, “Posilstva v času prve svetovne vojne,” *Zgodovina za vse* 25, no. 1 (2018): 5–30.

92 Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur, “Introduction,” in *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*, ed. Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 7–8.

be a soldier or a civilian. In war time, the military and psychiatric institutions protected the male perpetrator.⁹³

It's even harder to establish if a woman was a victim of violence and sexual abuse outside of an institutional framework, such as within her own family or social environment. In the postwar time, the patriarchal system of "omertà" functioned as a shield. It worked to render the victim—a woman—silent and absent. Analyzing "men's fantasies" in the post-WWI German society, Klaus Theweleit postulates the general absence of the female figure in male narration: when men write about women, the male ego entirely occupies the narration. As a result, women seem to be fully dependent on men and are relegated to their roles of wife and mother: in written material produced by men, women disappear dialogically, even if the discourse is about them.⁹⁴ Typical forms of "silencing women's voices" in post-WWI society⁹⁵ are present in women's psychiatric records.

The characteristic discursive absence of women—or at least their discursive decentralization—is particularly noticeable in the copious correspondence, included in many women's records in Udine, held between the hospital director and the patients' male relatives. This form of communication took place man-to-man, while the female patient remained dependent and silent, relegated to an inscrutable background. Medicine, psychiatry and family (all under men's rule) became central institutions for controlling and repressing female non-conformity to fulfil fascist eugenic and demographic policies.⁹⁶ Often, in their letters, male relatives expressed their preoccupations and fears concerning women acting in a non-normative manner. This reveals symptoms of a more general and longer-lasting transformation of the structural crisis of the male authority of "modern times," which was exacerbated by the war.

"Mad" women communicated, through rage and non-normative behavior, their distress and antagonism against their environment and its rules,⁹⁷ which sometimes even crossed strict gender boundaries.⁹⁸ Women showed emotional detachment and repulsion towards the family and their role as

93 Cf. ApGo, Manicomio Provinciale Francesco Giuseppe I di Gorizia, b. 12, f. 1101.

94 Klaus Theweleit, *Männerphantasien 1+2* (Munich/Zurich: Piper, 2000).

95 Wingfield and Bucur, "Introduction," 10.

96 Maria-Sophia Quine, *Population Politics in Twentieth Century Europe Fascist Dictatorships and Liberal Democracies* (London/New York: Routledge, 1996).

97 Valeriano, *Malacarne*, 129–131.

98 From the nineteenth century, medical discourses were developed to prove that "angry women" were sick and dangerous to their reproductive organs: Ute Frevert, *Emotions in History: Lost and Found* (Budapest/New York: Central European University Press, 2011), 92–100.

wives and mothers. However, the more doctors investigated the etiological causes, the greater the number of cases of domestic violence emerged, sometimes in correlation with war experience or the return of a male relative from the front. Men, mostly former soldiers, were dealing with a widespread crisis of masculinity as a psychological consequence of the war experience, which increased their anxiety and anger on both an individual and familial level.⁹⁹ However, documents mostly keep silent about the negative impact the return home of veterans had on the entire family. A parallel analysis of records in the Sant'Osvaldo asylum of male patients from the Gorizia province shows a broad and diversified spectrum of injured and traumatized veterans who were hospitalized due to their violent behavior within their familial and social environment. Some hospitalized men declared how much they perceived the women in the family as threats, and, in turn, women expressed their fear of violent relatives coming back from the front.¹⁰⁰

Given that warfare and postwar violence became intertwined in this borderland, violence experienced by women was found to be more endemic. In such a Gordian knot of multiple forms of violence, domestic cruelty towards women could hide under other forms of trauma. This became a strategy for covering men's responsibility for their violent actions, as in the case of 28-year-old Anna from Kobarid, who was hospitalized in April 1932. Her husband stated that her mental distress was caused by war trauma. Nevertheless, physicians also noticed many signs of recent physical violence on her body but were unable to reach a clear diagnosis. Eventually, the patient's mother intervened to prove that her daughter had not suffered any remarkable shock during the war, but, on the contrary, her husband was covering up his violent and sadistic behavior towards her using war trauma as his excuse; begging the asylum's director to protect her.¹⁰¹ Through her "madness," Anna—with her mother's help—tried to signal and challenge male violent authority and escape her living nightmare. Nevertheless, fascist psychiatry acted again as an institutionalized means for restoring the honor of the patriarchal system after WWI.¹⁰² Anna was declared "incompetent," a generic term used in cases of an unclear diagnosis; the absence of a clear diagnosis exposed her once more to familial violence, and so she was sent back to her husband. Obedience to the patriarchal family was restored and the case dismissed.

99 Maureen Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 260–261.

100 Cf. AopUd, Uomini, 5682.

101 AopUd, Donne, 6692.

102 Regarding the aim of Italian and German fascists to restore strong and honorable notions, which was eroded by societal transformations after WWI, cf. Frevert, *Emotions*, 80.

Conclusion: Loss of a World, Loss of Independence

Historians have recently outlined how WWI and, more broadly speaking, the twentieth century, cannot superficially be understood as simply a period of women's emancipation.¹⁰³ Women's involvement in labor markets in European societies certainly increased in wartime. However, this did not account for every aspect of a woman's life, much less for mental illness and psychiatric treatment. From the perspective of the psychiatric field dealing with a warfront territory and borderland like the Province of Gorizia, a far less positive image emerges. Before WWI, many hospitalized women were leading independent and active social and working lives, but because of physical or mental scars caused by the war, they lost their autonomy.

This is particularly evident in the cases of women who had already achieved independence well before the war, such as Antonia, a 24-year-old unmarried woman from Brestovica pri Komnu/Brestovizza. Before the war, she worked independently between the Slovenian Karst and Trieste and had achieved a degree of economic self-sufficiency and personal autonomy, circumstances that led to a rupture with her family, who regarded her as a morally dubious woman. While living as a war refugee, she suffered severe frostbite that led to the amputation of both feet, condemning her to the use of prostheses and severely limiting her mobility. Deprived of the possibility of sustaining herself economically, she subsequently developed depression accompanied by suicidal tendencies. Her case reveals the precarious condition of socially isolated women whose lack of familial support often resulted in prolonged institutionalization within the framework of postwar Fascist psychiatry.¹⁰⁴

Additionally, their situation worsened after their own environment and perspective disappeared, be it the Austrian empire or their family and sociocultural network. From the point of view of the political and psychiatric authorities, already coping with the masculinity crisis, women's suffering fell by the wayside and became once more anchored to previous gender prejudices and stereotypes.¹⁰⁵ This was even more true for the women who were culturally and socially "alien." In this former frontline and unstable borderland, the Italian state and, later, the fascist regime, concentrated their control and governance at the cost of the local populations, especially the

103 Hämmerle, "Traditionen," 39; Valeriano, *Malacarne*; Frevert, *Emotions*, 84.

104 AopUd, Donne, 5044.

105 George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 61.

non-Italian-speaking ones. Their “trauma languages”¹⁰⁶ reveal a spectrum of actions, behaviors and self-representations of those women who tried to communicate their inner distress and resistance towards the multiple and continuous upheavals which dramatically affected their small and large “world.” Psychiatry, at least in fascist Italy, acted as a repressive institution with the support of the state and the connivance of patriarchal society: it served as a powerful means for rebuilding men’s authority and gender hierarchies after the war crisis by controlling, repressing and silencing the voices of non-normative women.

About the Author

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¹⁰⁶ Cf. Peter Leese, Julia Barbara Köhne and Jason Crouthamel, eds., *Languages of Trauma: History, Memory, and Media* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2021).

PART II

**Wartime and Postwar Trauma
in Autobiographical Sources
and Film**

4. ***“I Don’t Know What Historians Who Have Recorded Everything, All Human Suffering, Will Tell”*: Narrating Trauma During and Post World War II**

Manca G. Renko

Abstract: The chapter examines the relationship between history and trauma, framing trauma as both a lived human condition and a narrative structure that exceeds specific historical events. Through life writings by four women—Maria Antonietta Moro, Kristina Brenk, Nedeljka Pirjevec, and Maja Haderlap—it explores experiences of war, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and transgenerational trauma, with a particular focus on World War II and its aftermath. These texts show how trauma persists across time, shaping memory, identity, and historical consciousness. The study addresses the difficulties of narrating trauma, including silences, linguistic limits, and social denial, as well as the entanglement of individual and collective histories. Writing appears as a vital practice of survival, testimony, and ethical engagement with the past.

Keywords: trauma, life writing, World War II, memory, transgenerational history

Discussing trauma and history leads to a temptation to rephrase Walter Benjamin’s renowned quote from *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, his final essay written shortly before his suicide induced by the trauma caused by fascism. A paraphrase might substitute the word *culture* for *history* and *barbarism* for *trauma*: *There has never been a document of history, which is*

*not simultaneously one of trauma.*¹ The intertwining link between history and trauma is profound, necessitating historians to consistently acknowledge that trauma is not simply a theoretical framework imposed upon history, but rather an inherent condition within historical contexts. Frequently, historians use the term *trauma* from a lay perspective that perceives it as a distressing or tragic event. However, insights from trauma studies reveal that the essence of trauma transcends the mere historical event itself; it primarily centers on the individuals (or collectives) who endured it. It is an intrinsically human² condition, more concerned with how people are capable of recounting and narrating their personal histories rather than being solely rooted in the historical events. Cathy Caruth referred to PTSD as “a symptom of history,”³ Paul Outka named it a “pathology of history”⁴ and Suzette A. Henke designated the twentieth century as the “century of historical trauma.”⁵ These assertions remain valid, not solely because earlier times lacked trauma, but because the field of trauma studies crystallized during the twentieth century. Judith Herman explicates that trauma studies as a discipline were intricately intertwined with political movements and their contexts. For instance, from the peace movement’s role in defining PTSD to the pivotal research conducted during the women’s liberation movement on the trauma stemming from domestic and sexual violence.⁶ Since the mid-1990s trauma studies emerged as an interdisciplinary field in the humanities and social sciences, such as history, literary studies, anthropology, usually separating their research from cognitive sciences. According to Dominick La Capra, the investigation of trauma within significant historical events constitutes crucial modern thought. This becomes pertinent in comprehending the post-World War II era, particularly when examining Holocaust testimonies.

1 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 256. The original quote is: “There has never been a document of culture, which is not simultaneously one of barbarism.”

2 I believe that trauma extends beyond a human experience and affects animals too. Historians encounter challenges in interpreting sources related to animals, as methodologies for such analysis remain underdeveloped. It’s notable that the lack of sources is a shared characteristic among the most traumatized communities throughout history.

3 Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 5.

4 Paul Outka, “History, the Posthuman, and the End of Trauma: Propanolol and Beyond,” *Traumatology* 15, no. 4 (2009): 76–81.

5 Suzette A. Henke, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), xi.

6 Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 65.

A thorough understanding of these testimonies necessitates an adaptation of psychoanalytic concepts within historical analysis, complemented by socio-cultural and political critique.⁷ Historiographical shift towards memory studies with keywords such as “trauma,” “victimhood” and “witnessing” became, as Stefan Ludwig Hoffmann claims, also a way of coming to terms with the past, oriented especially around the Holocaust as the event from which human rights had supposedly emerged.⁸ Numerous studies have explored the significance of trauma in history, examining its impact on past, memory, and narratives. These studies highlight that trauma cannot be relegated solely to the past, as its effects persistently resurface in the present through distressing reenactments, nightmares, and flashbacks. Consequently, trauma can be understood as a transitional state, compelling individuals to remain tethered to the past, hindering their ability to fully engage with the present or envision the future. It exists as an intermediary phase between past and present.

This chapter will analyze texts recounting traumatic experiences, encompassing themes spanning war, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and transgenerational trauma induced by World War II. Although history is filled with traumatic events, the sources of trauma are relatively rare. There is no section in the archives labeled “trauma,” and most life writings don’t emphasize trauma directly, on the contrary, they even hide trauma in most unlikely places, such as fictionalized narratives, overcompensating or obsessive repeating, while at the same time not acknowledging the traumatic issue.

Throughout my research on women navigating postwar transitions, I encountered texts that left a profound impact on my understanding of the past. However, despite their resonance, I found their relevance limited within my other historiographical essays. Trauma necessitates its distinct space, demanding careful consideration and attention. What was striking about these texts wasn’t solely the content (*what* is written), though undoubtedly significant and emotionally charged, but rather, it was their distinctive narrative style (*how* it was written) setting them apart from conventional autobiographical or historical testimonies. Notably, there exist compelling similarities among literary, testimonial, generational, and memorial

7 Dominick La Capra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), xxix.

8 Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, “Introduction: Genealogies of Human Rights,” in *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1–26.

representations of traumatic experiences, yet, as Meg Jensen emphasizes, they manifest distinct dissimilarities in other aspects.⁹ The aim of the article is not to compare traumas, but to give each traumatic narrative enough space to be analyzed; in order to represent different national, social, generational and national contexts as well as different registers in which trauma is inscribed. The article will center on five distinct texts authored by four diverse women. Among these are Italian partisan Maria Antonietta Moro (1919–2009), whose diary, composed during World War II, is her sole written work and was posthumously published by her daughter. Also included is Slovene writer and editor Kristina Brenk (1911–2009), whose unpublished personal diaries are housed in the National University Library of Slovenia. Additionally, Slovene actor and writer Nedeljka Pirjevec (1932–2003) wrote the autofictional book titled *Zaznamovana* (Marked), published in 1992. Lastly, Slovene-Austrian writer Maja Haderlap (1961–), who writes in German, authored the autofictional novel *Engel des Vergessens* (Angel of Oblivion, 2012), followed by the novel *Nachtfrauen* (Night Women, 2023), which delves into many of the same traumatic themes.

These texts predominantly fall within the realm of life writing, a genre encompassing various modes and registers of autobiographical motives. Understanding the diverse discourses within life writing becomes paramount when tracing how traumatic experiences are depicted. According to several psychiatry researchers, PTSD is characterized as a form of “failed memory processing.”¹⁰ Post-traumatic symptoms stem from biochemical processes in the brain, initiated by the traumatic event, which disrupt the brain’s capacity to generate a coherent and chronologically accurate account of the traumatic experience—an autobiographical narrative. Due to the inability of providing a consistent chronology—an essential symptom of PTSD—Meg Jensen, in discussing the recollection of trauma, employs the term “negotiated truth.” This term was coined by fiction writer J. G. Ballard. She views the notion of “negotiated truth” as the primary rhetorical device employed within post-traumatic autobiographical narratives.¹¹ In his analysis of Holocaust writings, Dominick La Capra highlights trauma as a “disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates voids in existence.”¹² La Capra underscores that the study of traumatic events presents particularly

9 Meg Jensen, *The Art and Science of Trauma and the Autobiographical: Negotiated Truths* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 7.

10 Robert Stickgold, “EMDR: A Putative Neurobiological Mechanism of Action,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 58, no. 1 (2002): 61–75.

11 Jensen, *The Art and Science of Trauma*, 2.

12 La Capra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 41.

challenging issues in representation and written accounts. The problem with autobiographical narrations in regard to history and trauma, claims La Capra, is that “one disorientingly feels what one cannot represent; one numbingly represents what one cannot feel.”¹³ When tracing trauma in literary works, Kathryn Robinson adds that to write trauma means “writing wounds” and reading trauma is “finding strategies to read such wounds.”¹⁴ In addition to the challenge of crafting a chronological narrative, language itself becomes an obstacle for traumatized people. As Leigh Gilmore articulates, “trauma is beyond language in some crucial way” and is consequently deemed “unrepresentable.”¹⁵ The difficulty in verbalizing traumatic experiences pushes the boundaries of self-representation to its limits.

But traumatic experiences don't remain unspoken only due to limitations of language, but also because they cannot be articulated in social contexts that have no available narrative forms or templates in which to give voice to traumatic experiences. The women discussed in this chapter were survivors of different sorts of violence, but for a long time and in different ways, remained silent because as Judith Herman proves, “denial, repression and dissociation operate on a social as well as on individual level.”¹⁶ For them it was impossible to speak of rape or domestic violence while it was happening, because the society was not yet ready to condemn these cruelties as crimes. In this sense, it is important to have in mind that an understanding of psychological trauma begins with rediscovering history.¹⁷

Understanding trauma inherently means negotiating with public and political questions. Trauma is not just an intimate psychological wound, but can, in a wider context, also show societal pathologies that go beyond particular personal experiences. Articulating trauma, especially collectively, can bring political change. Dian Million speaks of *felt theory*, when she makes the case for remembering and understanding the impact of Canadian First Nation women's first-person and experiential narrative on white, mostly male scholarship and examines how the suppression of this *felt experience* has been a collaboration between colonization, racism and sexism.¹⁸ Articulation of trauma is a threat to political power structures or

13 La Capra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 42.

14 Kathryn Robinson, *Writing Wounds: The Inscription of Trauma in Post-1968 French Women's Life Writing* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2004), 15.

15 Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), 6.

16 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 14.

17 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 15.

18 Dian Million, “Felt Theory: An Indigenous Feminist Approach to Affect and History,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 24, no. 2 (2009): 53–76.

as Million claims, the personal narratives are political acts in themselves: “Native women’s personal narrative explored the radicalized, gendered, and sexual nature of their colonization. In doing so, they transformed the debilitating force of an old social control, *shame*, into a social change agent of their generation.”¹⁹ The history of trauma and its stories has always been politicized, even in the way how seriously we are taking trauma or to what degree do we believe it. The study of psychological trauma is an inherently political enterprise because it calls attention to the experience of oppressed people.²⁰ Melissa Febos writes that the resistance to memories of traumas is always in part—and often nothing but—a resistance to movements for social justice.²¹ To be able to hear and recognize trauma, means being prone to social and political injustice that causes harm. To articulate trauma, as well as taking the trauma of others seriously, is a political act, giving power to those who often have none (left).

Most of the traumatic texts that I have encountered were written by women who were born too early to possess the knowledge or understanding of what we today can clearly recognize as abuse that leads to trauma. But they did feel like they had to write about their experience in order to try to understand it. These women were in different ways involved in WW2, and all of them decided to use the tool of writing to express their experiences. For some of them, this was the only text they had ever written, and for others, writing was part of their job or daily professional or intimate routine. In the 1980s, social psychologist James W. Pennebaker studied expressive writing and found it can bring various psychological and physical benefits. Writing about trauma, according to Pennebaker’s theory, boosts the immune system, reduces obsessive thinking, and contributes to overall well-being.²² He also explored how this practice can extend to entire communities affected by war or political events, shaping collective memory.²³ As the texts will show, all four women wrote to make sense of their experience or even to understand it.

The following case studies of trauma writings will be analyzed individually. The aim of the article is not to compare trauma and its writings, but

19 Million, “Felt Theory,” 54.

20 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 408.

21 Melissa Febos, *Body Work: The Radical Power of Personal Narrative* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), 18.

22 James W. Pennebaker, “Writing about Emotional Experience as a Therapeutic Process,” *Psychological Science* 8, no. 3 (1997): 162–166.

23 James W. Pennebaker, Rim Bernard, and Dario Paez, eds., *Collective Memory of Political Events* (New York: Psychology Press, 1997).

to show how each narration of a traumatic story differs and demands from historians the use of different contextualization skills, discourse analysis and, above all, historiographical and personal sensibility.

Maria Antonietta Moro (1919–2009): “How Many Souls Are in My Body?”

Maria Antonietta Moro, a former student at the boarding school in Gorizia situated on the Yugoslav (Slovene)-Italian border, encountered various factions during World War II. Positioned amidst Slovenian and Italian partisans, Italian fascists, and German occupiers, her experiences were profoundly shaped by the turmoil of the era. As she worked as a nurse attending to wounded Slovenian partisans, her engagement evolved into political activism, aligning herself with the Slovenian liberation movement—a stark contrast to her Catholic upbringing and familial environment.

It was from 1943 to 1945 that Moro commenced writing a diary, a remarkable and distinctive piece of life writing that remained undisclosed throughout her lifetime. Following Maria Antonietta's passing in 2009, her daughter, psychoanalyst Lorena Fornasir, discovered and subsequently published the diaries. The published work, *Tutte le anime del mio corpo. Diario di una giovane partigiana (1943–1945)*,²⁴ presents a compelling narrative, delving not only into war events but also providing insightful glimpses into her self-representation and personal reflections. The following are select examples (emphasis added by the author of the article):

Yugoslavia fights for life, Italy for the act of killing and being killed. **Nataša**, though born Italian, doesn't carry that sentiment within her.²⁵ (November 1942)

Me, She, Him—Two who are one, and **Me** alone. [...] She and him are sharing a kiss. **Me** walks out and tears cry. Planes fly overhead, leaving a long trail of white smoke. [...] The planes release numerous bombs somewhere, then gracefully turn like monstrous, jubilant birds. [...] **Me** thinks of the people who weep when they witness these dreadful

24 For this research the Slovene translation was used that was published with the title *Vse duše mojega telesa* (Sophia 2020, translated by Nevenka Troha). All quotations in the text are translated from Slovene, German and Italian into English by the author of the article if not marked differently.

25 Maria Antonietta Moro, *Vse duše mojega telesa*, trans. Nevenka Troha (Ljubljana: Sophia, 2020), 18.

war birds destroying their homes, and of others who rest eternally with eyes open, gazing toward the sky. [...] **Me** cries because **Me** thinks of the rooms with windows on which there are bars that cannot be unlocked, where her 'daddy' and 'the little one' have been locked for many days.²⁶ (February 1945)

Lidija Slataper is dead, like a dangerous spy [...] she was shot by 'Italian friends.' **Nataša** will take her place very quickly.²⁷ (June 1943)

The pupil M. A. M. was placed second in the final exams, Nelly is third, Anica has to repeat in October. Gita did not attend the exams. She wore a partisan uniform and was not interested in diplomas. A barrage of lead put her to sleep eternally in August.²⁸ (June 1943)

I'm alone once more. This time, profoundly so. That night, the railwayman handed us large explosive confetti. [...] **I'm** also dreadfully afraid of myself. **I'm** afraid of a nervous breakdown, and that I am injured.²⁹ (March 1945)

These excerpts illustrate the varied struggles the narrator faced during the war. Her shifting self-identification—from **Nataša** to **Me** in the third person, **MAM**, and simple **I**—adds complexity. This may not be solely due to the need for secrecy in wartime diaries, as she could have used a consistent code name. Instead, the fragmented notion of self represents how trauma is portrayed throughout her writing. As observed by La Capra, trauma disrupts the self, creating gaps in existence and posing challenges in self-representation.³⁰ Psychoanalyst Lorena Fornasir defined this fractured identity of her mother as a coping mechanism to keep herself whole in the times when she was affected by anxiety, constant risk, air strikes, emptiness, fear and lack of love. Different characters of the narrator were, according to Fornasir, representing different personalities or masks that the narrator had to wear on the scene of war.³¹ The case of Maria Antonietta Moro isn't solely about the war's horrific scenes, but rather about a pure traumatic event. Living in an area where borderland fascism (*fascismo di confine*) was systematically practiced since the early 1920s exposed Moro to various forms of violence (and fear) for two decades, starting from her childhood, long before joining the Partisans. The Fascist culture of violence is not simply a political tool for

26 Moro, *Vse duše mojega telesa*, 55.

27 Moro, *Vse duše mojega telesa*, 59.

28 Moro, *Vse duše mojega telesa*, 59.

29 Moro, *Vse duše mojega telesa*, 65–66.

30 La Capra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 42.

31 Moro, *Vse duše mojega telesa*, 29.

reaching and maintaining power but an integral part of its constitution.³² In 1948, Italian writer Natalia Ginzburg (1916–1991), only three years senior to Moro, expressed in a *Mercurio* magazine issue following 20 years of fascism, her sentiment of “writing for the sake of writing to see if we are still alive.”³³ War and fascism deeply ruptured her life, leading her to remark later: “This is something that is incurable and will never be cured no matter how many years go by.”³⁴ Ginzburg, who was a professional writer and an intellectual, wrote in order to see if she is alive; and this might also resonate with Moro. To write a diary every day during a war, means to be still alive. Splitting the narrative voice that can also be split on a multigenerational level is together with absence, repetition and indirection, one of the most common characteristics of trauma.³⁵ Moro’s writing demonstrates how particular experiences are embedded in the narrative and the kinds of “self” which construct and are constructed emerge from the double process of remembering and representing, experiencing and narrating. Composing “self narratives” is a process of “self discovery,”³⁶ meaning that finding the voice in which one can write is an exercise in self-representation that is not equally approachable for all social groups. Moro was not only traumatized by the war and/or fascism, but she also lacked the skill of self-narrating and self-representing that didn’t come naturally to the women of her generational and educational background.³⁷ However, one also needs to be aware of the possibility to analyze Moro’s (and other’s) experience beyond biographical or historiographical objectives and take into account the post-modern theories of autobiography. These theories underscore a paradoxical duality within the expression of the self. On the one hand, there exists the recognition that speaking inherently involves articulating elements of oneself. Conversely, the concept of desubjectification³⁸ warns that communication forces us to compromise our intimate identity by employing language as a medium—a

32 Federico Finchelstein, “From Holocaust Trauma to the Dirty War,” *Historical Reflections* 41, no. 3 (2015): 47–58.

33 Natalia Ginzburg, “On Women,” trans. Alessandra Bastagli, *New York Review of Books*, December 22, 2022, accessed December 23, 2022, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2022/12/22/on-women-an-exchange-natalia-ginzburg-alba-de-cespedes/?lp_txn_id=1406004.

34 Natalia Ginzburg, *The Little Virtues*, trans. Dick Davis (London: Daunt Books, 2018), 79.

35 Nicolle Sutterlin, “History of Trauma Theory,” in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, ed. Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja (New York: Routledge, 2020), 14.

36 Jensen, *The Art and Science of Trauma*, 80.

37 To get an idea of what diary writing meant for a woman of her generation, I suggest reading Alba de Cespedes, *Forbidden Notebook*, translated by Ann Goldstein (London: Pushkin Press, 2023).

38 Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

shared tool that transcends individuality. This paradox is further manifested in the post-narratological perspective, which delineates the split nature of an autobiographical subject: one who experiences past events and another who narrates these experiences. Desubjectification also echoes in the examination of the “integral witness,” claiming that testifying about trauma necessitates a fundamental disjunction between the silent, traumatized subject and the vocal, narrating “I.” It is within this non-coinciding space, this disparity or residual gap, that Agamben suggests the birth of a witness occurs.³⁹ In this sense, Maria Antonietta Moro serves not only as a narrator but also as a witness to the horrors of war and the unspeakable realities of personal existence that were too complex to comprehend concurrently. This complexity was evident in her own reflections as she wrote in April 1945, questioning herself: “How many souls are in my body? Today, there are at least 20 of them, and the number will increase [...]”⁴⁰

Kristina Brenk (1911–2009): “And Yet I Think It Is Right to Write This Down. Maybe This Is the Only Way to Settle.”

Kristina Brenk, a Slovene editor, translator and writer, left an indelible mark in postwar Slovenia, Yugoslavia, primarily known for her contributions to children’s literature. Her significant role as an editor was pivotal in establishing the children and young adult book publishing industry. Her academic pursuits led her to study psychology and pedagogy at the University of Ljubljana, and she earned her doctorate in 1939 in Prague. During the war, she was involved in the Liberation Front and imprisoned (she had her firstborn while in prison). For nearly a quarter-century, from 1949 until her retirement in 1973, she served as an editor at the Mladinska knjiga publishing house. Her impact reverberated not only within the cultural community but also extended beyond, making her a revered figure and a respected public intellectual in Slovenia. The National University Library houses an extensive collection of documents associated with Brenk, a repository that, during my previous engagement with it a few years ago, still awaited comprehensive cataloging. Despite this, I had the opportunity to peruse through a significant portion of these documents, possibly numbering in the hundreds or thousands. Notably, among her remarkable legacies are

39 Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

40 Moro, *Vse duše mojega telesa*, 75.

her numerous diaries, wherein she candidly delves into intimate details of her personal life and emotions that were never before publicly disclosed. Contained within these diaries are sections that stand as literary marvels, showcasing Brenk's artistry, while others capture the everyday minutiae of life.

Brenk's extensive life writings merit both scholarly exploration and public recognition, areas that have not yet fully embraced her oeuvre and, unfortunately, also surpass the confines of this chapter's scope. Her writings encapsulate pivotal twentieth-century events, chronicling the interwar struggles with poverty, wartime experiences, participation in the anti-fascist resistance movement, the postwar (re)construction of a socialist Yugoslavia, the interplay of politics and economics in her professional life, politicization of both everyday life and professional endeavors and Yugoslav wars in the 1990s.

Amidst these larger historical landscapes, Brenk's personal narratives are threaded with introspections and struggles. Her writings touch upon themes of perpetual overwork juxtaposed with a quest for solace through labor, experiences tinged with a sense of lovelessness, the complexities of motherhood, and bouts of depression. Within her texts, an elusive yet perceptible undercurrent of fear or trauma often lingers, evading precise definition yet palpably felt by the reader. Many of her compositions originate from realms of profound sadness, fear, or anger. Paradoxically, for Brenk, writing serves as an empowering endeavor—an intellectual means to confront, at least in part, the encroaching fear. As aptly captured in her 1986 writings:

"Fear is my destiny," a sentence springs from my mind, a book title occurs to me, something I've intended to write for thirty, forty years, yet it will remain unwritten. Crush the fear, obliterate it, for it serves no one, harming you and yours. Take a pill instead; it won't harm you as much as fear does, physically and mentally. Though I'm not allowed to read [...], I still read [...]. I shouldn't watch TV, but I do. I'm not permitted to think, yet I think.⁴¹

While war is a recurring theme in her diaries, Kristina Brenk doesn't explicitly draw connections between her wartime experiences and the life she led postwar. Instead, her writings frequently highlight the interwar period

41 Kristina Brenk, Manuscript 29/2010, M17, March 14, 1986, National University Library, Ljubljana, Manuscript Department. All quotes are translated by the author of the chapter.

as significantly more traumatic, particularly her schooling years under the tutelage of nuns in Maribor and the fear that due to her family's poverty, she will have to become one as well. She vividly recounts feeling frightened, cold and hungry, all while becoming aware of the stark social inequalities of the Yugoslavia.⁴² This period of her life emerges as a recurring traumatic event in her diaries. Brenk revisits these memories, often embellishing with additional details, yet the fundamental essence of the narrative remains consistent throughout her writings.

As we explore the diaries from the 1950s, a shift becomes evident—post-war violence, once confined to the forests and streets, infiltrates the domestic realm. An excerpt from Brenk's 1957 diary opens with an impassioned plea: "Please destroy it! Destroy! Burn!"⁴³ Despite her plea, she refrained from burning or destroying these diaries herself. Given that she preserved these writings for over half a century, it's apparent she deemed them important to retain. Within these diaries unfolds one of the most poignant and heart-wrenching narratives, vividly portraying instances of domestic violence.

Tuesday night. I'm still sick with horror. From this horror, to experience a murderer who beats you, beats you, beats you, and when you're already dead, he hits you again, pours poison into a living wound. In this way, to humiliate a person to the point of worthlessness, to deny absolutely everything that gives you the right to live.

Let me repeat these obscene curses with which he filled my ears, let me repeat these stupid threats that his patience with me was now over, that there was nothing in the 22 years that could have remained worthy of him pushing me around on the ground, was all over my face and that I no longer had the strength, no pride, to leave.

I carry this disgusting picture of humiliation, which I have experienced so many times, in my whole body. [...] How I hate myself! The horror repeated a million times; the evening of the drunkard's wife. And yet I think it is right to write this down. Maybe this is the only way to settle.⁴⁴

In many of Brenk's diary entries, we observe that her writing grapples with the immediate reality of domestic violence she endures, and consistently, throughout her works, she underscores the vital role of documenting her

42 Kristina Brenk, Manuscript 29/2010, M17, January 7, 1986.

43 Kristina Brenk, Manuscript, 29/2010, M18, 1957.

44 Kristina Brenk, Manuscript, 29/2010, November 26, 1957.

experiences (*"I have to write every day, even if only for half an hour. Everyday."*⁴⁵ or *"How good it is that I have this torn notebook. Now I wouldn't want to live without it."*⁴⁶). We witness a woman utilizing writing as a coping mechanism for over half a century, navigating through her trauma, depression, and anxiety. She finds herself torn between instructing the reader to destroy her notebook if found and emphasizing the significance of her writing as her sole form of self-defense. Writing is a way to survive, a way to reclaim dignity, a way to archive what one cannot say out loud. Brenk's "maybe this is the only way to settle" is what Leigh Gilmore calls "an alternative jurisdiction for self representation" in which "survivors can produce an alternative jurisprudence about trauma and identity."⁴⁷

Not until the women's liberation struggle of the 1970s was it recognized that the most common PTSDs are not those of men in war but of women in civilian life.⁴⁸ These traumatic events were hidden in the sphere of personal, private lives and, as Herman emphasized: "The cherished value of privacy created a powerful barrier to consciousness and rendered women's reality practically invisible. [...] Women did not have a name for the tyranny of private life."⁴⁹ It wasn't solely about the women who were silenced but also about a society complicit in silencing them, relegating their encounters with violence to the private or domestic sphere. In this context, it is crucial to recall Million's assertion about how personal narratives alone can dismantle patriarchal and violent structures by overcoming the notion of shame employed to maintain social control.

Nedeljka Pirjevec (1932–2003): "No, I Say, No, as He Reaches Between My Legs Again"

Nedeljka Pirjevec, a Slovenian actress, translator, and writer, was raised in a family deeply involved in the anti-fascist resistance in Primorska, a border area with a presence of strong fascist violence already after World War I. Her literary debut arrived in 1992, at the age of 50. In her auto fictional novel, *Zaznamovana (Marked)*, she intricately explores the traumatic experience taking care of her dying husband, the renowned Slovenian philosopher and

45 Kristina Brenk, Manuscript, 29/2010, February 2, 1958.

46 Kristina Brenk, Manuscript, 29/2010, April 4, 1958.

47 Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography*, 143.

48 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 57.

49 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 57, 58.

professor Dušan Pirjevec, an event that significantly *marked* her. Within the novel, Pirjevec intertwines recollections of her own life, including her childhood in a partisan family, her bohemian student days in Ljubljana, navigating through two marriages, her professional journey, and the ambivalence prevalent in socialist Yugoslavia. The trauma stemming from the passing of her husband initiates a profound self-examination, setting off a sequence of introspection and evaluation in an endeavor to fathom and manage the pain. Even the title of the novel, *Marked*, hints at her being marked by pain and fear, be it fascism, sexual violence, the physical pain of an ectopic pregnancy that no one takes seriously, or the emotional pain of losing a loved person. Despite enduring the era of Fascism and World War II, the narrative of *Zaznamovana* does not prominently focus on potential traumatic repercussions. However, she does recall being haunted by the story of an Italian civil servant who lived in the same village as her family, who was tortured and killed by the Fascists, despite being Italian, solely because he didn't align with the fascist ideology ("I can't forget the event, but eventually it recedes into a kind of fog"⁵⁰).

Nedeljka Pirjevec's novel was groundbreaking for various reasons, notably in challenging numerous taboos, particularly concerning sexuality, a subject rarely approached so openly by Slovene women writers of her generation. However, viewed from a contemporary standpoint, many of the depicted sexual encounters appear non-consensual, which is unsettling for present-day readers. Surprisingly, upon its original release three decades ago, there was no questioning of rape. This might be attributed to the way sexual experiences are casually described as part of the coming-of-age narrative, with rape not highlighted as a traumatic event, but rather merely depicted as an incident. Or because the concept of consent only recently became relevant when talking about sexuality.⁵¹

This is how she described her first sexual encounter:

How childish you are, he says, rolling over to me and throwing himself at me, as if he were jumping into the water from the side, so that I could easily scream. He is unbelievably heavy, and now I also smell a nasty, strong smell, which, together with the massive weight of his body, almost suffocates me. *No*, I say, *no*, when he reaches between my legs again [...] The suffocating smell makes me feel dizzy, as if I were in a wine press.

50 Nedeljka Pirjevec, *Zaznamovana* (Ljubljana: DZS, 2005), 25.

51 Katherine Angel, *Tomorrow Sex Will Be Good Again: Women and Desire in the Age of Consent* (London: Verso, 2021).

[...] his hand deftly pulls my skirt up, clumsily pulls down my panties. *Help me a little*, he says, then he pushes himself into my wetness: “*Don’t screw me up again*,” he says, making me shrink as much as I can under the log weight of his body. [...] When he penetrates me, it hurts a little, and when it starts to hurt, I try to move because the small stone under the lower back is pressing me terribly, right at the seam between the pelvis and the spine, right where a dangerous inflammation will start in a few years. [...]”⁵²

Pirjevec acknowledged that her first sexual encounter was rape, but she mixed violence with love and partly even romanticized her experience: “We hardly say anything, I’m still a little ashamed, but I’m even more stunned, in love with this uncouth young man, this foreigner, who actually raped me. [...] The murderous scent of my tormentor mingles with mine and becomes gentler.”⁵³

In the 1980s, Diana Russel conducted a survey of more than 900 women chosen at random that revealed that one woman in four of those questioned had been raped. One in three had been sexually abused in childhood. Russell’s study eventually gave rise to further investigation of the frequency and long-term effects of sexual and domestic violence on women’s mental health.⁵⁴ However, this examination occurred approximately three decades after Pirjevec had been raped and mistook the assault as an experience of young love. Detecting trauma or explaining traumatic events becomes a historiographical challenge when the victim herself remains unaware of the trauma inflicted upon her. As Catherine Caruth points out, literature, akin to psychoanalysis, explores the intricate relationship between knowing and not knowing. It is within this precise intersection—where comprehension and ignorance converge—that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience find their common ground.⁵⁵ The notion that a text may possess insights beyond the author’s intention is exemplified by a sentence following the description of rape: “I try to move because the small stone under the lower back is pressing me terribly, right at the part between the pelvis and the spine, right where a dangerous inflammation will start in a few years.”⁵⁶ While the detail about the stone might seem

52 Angel, *Tomorrow Sex Will Be Good Again*, 46, 47.

53 Angel, *Tomorrow Sex Will Be Good Again*, 47.

54 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 60.

55 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore–London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

56 Pirjevec, *Zaznamovana*, 47.

inconsequential (how could such discomfort outweigh the trauma of the assault?), what resonates is how the narrator attributes a later health issue to this stone. The narrator, in blaming the stone for the future health problem, connects the pain of an illness that develops much later with her initial sexual encounter, suggesting that the experience of trauma remains attached to the body's memory. Trauma can be defined as a wound that is inflicted upon the mind. This wound cries out and addresses people in the attempt to tell of a reality or truth that is otherwise not comprehensible.⁵⁷ Trauma is haunting us in the most unexpected ways, ways that we cannot articulate. "Folk wisdom," Judith Herman reminds us, "is filled with ghosts who refuse to rest in peace in their graves until their stories are told."⁵⁸

In Pirjevec's novel, the theme of sexuality consistently raises questions about consent. This is evident in various instances, such as her first husband's anger when she refused intercourse or her second husband persuading her into a threesome despite her initial horror. Throughout the text, the depiction of sexual pleasure is invariably entwined with pain. In a later interview, she expressed this connection with the words: "Love is mortal. The one who experiences it knows it's death. Thanatos is always there. Love and death are inexorably intertwined."⁵⁹ The relevance of Pirjevec's traumatic sexual narrative lies in its illustration of the intricate complexities surrounding rape and abuse, including the intricate emotional landscape between the perpetrator and the victim associated with such experiences.

Contemporary society condemns rape across moral, political, civil, and legislative realms. However, it took decades of activism and professional efforts to acknowledge and address the pervasive issue of rape and sexual assault. The case of Pirjevec underscores that trauma extends beyond the individual to societal spheres. When a society normalizes or romanticizes abuse, the victim is inevitably influenced by these societal attitudes and norms. But it is also important not to appropriate Pirjevec's experience to historicize sexual assault or absence of consent beyond what the text itself entails. This case isn't suitable for feminist revisionism (although many other texts may still need to be revised, uncovered, contextualized and understood). When Pirjevec was asked if the woman in her novel is "a victim of an expansion of male energy"⁶⁰ (sic! not violence, not

57 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 17, 18.

58 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 13.

59 Nedeljka Pirjevec, "Ljubezen in smrt sta zmeraj v paru," by Ženja Leiler. *Literatura* 5, no. 26/27 (1993): 48.

60 Pirjevec, "Ljubezen in smrt sta zmeraj v paru," 48.

dominance, but *male energy*), she replied: “No. I believe a woman feels completely satisfied and happy when she experiences that she can give herself strongly and completely to someone. I hope it’s the same with men, but I don’t know.”⁶¹ Despite the temptation of reading beyond explicit and literal, the only feminist position here is, I believe, to let Pirjevec have the last word.

Maja Haderlap (1961–): “I’m Afraid That Death Has Taken Root Inside Me”

Maja Haderlap, a bilingual Slovenian-Austrian writer (a member of the Slovene minority in Carinthia), renowned for her award-winning novel *Engel des Vergessens*, published in German in 2011 and translated into English as *Angel of Oblivion* in 2016. The autofictional novel explores the transgenerational trauma of the Slovene ethnic minority in Austria caused by WWII and its aftermath. While the text is autobiographical, drawing on Haderlap’s memories, family recollections, the broader community’s experiences, and archival documents, it must be approached as both fictional and nonfictional. As Thomas Couser highlights, we shouldn’t disregard that all memoirs are, to some degree, inherently fictive, as memory is an actively constructive process rather than a passively mimetic one.⁶² In September 2023, Haderlap’s second novel with the title *Nachtfrauen (Night Women)* was published and despite the fact that it is clearly a work of fiction, it is impossible to oversee how she constructs fictional narratives from nonfictional fragments that she has already used in *Angel of Oblivion*. The literary and autobiographical representations in both books align seamlessly with trauma studies conducted by psychiatric experts within the Slovene Community of Carinthia, as studied by Daniel Wutti in his work *Drei Familien, Drei Generationen*. The primary theme of both books revolves around the transgenerational trauma experienced by the Slovene minority in Austria, where they played a pivotal role in the anti-Nazi resistance movement. However, they were subsequently politically exploited by Austrian postwar politics that appropriated their resistance for its own benefit, but offered them very little in return. In Daniel Wutti’s study on transgenerational trauma within the Slovene minority in Austria, he

61 Pirjevec, “Ljubezen in smrt sta zmeraj v paru,” 48.

62 Thomas Couser, *Memoir: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 74.

notes how political circumstances led to the “sequential traumatization” of World War II victims due to anti-Slovene politics of Austria and a pro-Nazi local environment.⁶³ This also led to retraumatization in 1972, when with so-called *Ortstafelsturm*⁶⁴ reached its peak and politicized the second generation of the Slovene minority in Austria, children of the survivors.⁶⁵ Second generation, as Wutti reports, often experienced violence in school and is emotionally closely connected to the experience of those who experienced World War II.⁶⁶ One common denominator of traumatic experience in transgenerational trauma is silence—the inability of survivors to talk directly about their experiences. The children of the survivors, however, understand the horror without words, finds Marija Jurič Pahor, who researched transgenerational trauma in postwar generations with special emphasis on Slovene national minorities in Austria and Italy.⁶⁷

The novels of Maja Haderlap contain recurring themes associated with trauma, including the portrayal of language⁶⁸ as a wound, the protagonist's disbelief in their own traumatic experiences (evident in the grandmother's experience of concentration camp in *Angel of Oblivion* and self-skepticism concerning Mira's childhood sexual assault), instances of depression (observed in the narrator in *Angel of Oblivion* and in Mira), an overwhelming sense of guilt without apparent cause (experienced by the narrator due to her cousin's accidental drowning and by Mira after her father's death, both incidents were unfortunate coincidences leaving them burdened by guilt throughout their lives), a complex relationship with leaving their home village for a larger city, and childhood sexual abuse. The example of the latter can almost be read as escalating; what was only hinted at in a few lines in the *Angel of Oblivion* represents one of Mira's fundamental confessions

63 Daniel Wutti, “Transgeneracijski prenosi v družinah koroških Slovencev,” *Razprave in gradivo: Revija za narodnostna vprašanja* 70 (2013): 46.

64 The term *Ortstafelsturm* or *Ortstafelstreit* refers to a decades-long controversy in a region of the Austrian state of Carinthia regarding the number of traffic signs displaying bilingual topographic inscriptions in German and Slovenian. The conflict intensified in 1972 after a long-standing history and was only politically resolved in 2011.

65 Wutti, “Transgeneracijski prenosi v družinah koroških Slovencev,” 49.

66 Daniel Wutti, *Drei Familien, drei Generationen. Das Trauma des Nationalsozialismus im Leben dreier Generationen von Kärntner SlowenInnen* (Klagenfurt: Drava, 2013), 105.

67 Marija Jurič Pahor, “Transgeneracijska transmisija ‘taboriščne izkušnje’ in molk,” *Razprave in gradivo: Revija za narodnostna vprašanja* 48 (2006).

68 Language as a traumatic experience stands as a significant motif in postwar Austrian (Carinthian) literature; two noteworthy authors who explore trauma through language are Peter Handke and Ingeborg Bachmann.

in *Nachtfrauen*. Haderlap addressed different aspects of trauma through different generations and relationships. The narrator in *Angel of Oblivion* is traumatized by her father's aggression, self-destruction, alcoholism and violence ("Father's fits of nerves over the years infuse us children like an invisible poison, drop by drop."⁶⁹). The father experienced childhood trauma due to war, including the deaths of people he loved, torture, and a general sense of unwelcomeness he felt in postwar Austria as a Slovene person, where his resistance and sacrifices appeared to be disregarded and scorned by the German-speaking society. His experiences led to severe depression and PTSD ("He is susceptible to destructive tendencies. [...] We watch how he undermines his role as father, how he tries to turn us into sidekicks who have to put up with his raging fury, how he draws us into his old horror and tries to impress his pain on us, pain we can intuit but not grasp, how he wants to undo his devastation with ours, and wants us to understand that horror is the essence of life."⁷⁰) Grandmother, who survived Ravensbrück concentration camp, for years couldn't find words to describe what happened to her ("She says, as she always does, *je bilo čudno*. It was strange, she says, although she means it was terrible, but the word *grozno* doesn't occur to her."⁷¹) Grandmother is the primary emotional and historical connection of the narrator; through her, she learns the most about life, later also the most devastating experiences. The struggle in the concentration camp was lifelong and recurring every night before bedtime: "Late into the night, she constantly repeated her prayers [...] She was saved, yes, but whether or not she's glad she's alive, that she can't say."⁷² Cathy Caruth asks herself the same question when discussing the experience of trauma: "Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?"⁷³

"I'm afraid that death has taken root inside me, like a small black button, like a lattice-work of dark moss creeping invisibly over my skin,"⁷⁴ writes Haderlap in autofictional *Angel of Oblivion*. And about her protagonist Mira in *Nachtfrauen* she writes: "She wonders whether she could have passed on her ancestor's depression to her, whether her own fears had something to do with the unfortunate Nazi era, as a late consequence that was passed on

69 Maja Haderlap, *Angel of Oblivion*, trans. Tess Lewis (New York: Archipelago Books, 2016), 165.

70 Haderlap, *Angel of Oblivion*, 164.

71 Haderlap, *Angel of Oblivion*, 12.

72 Haderlap, *Angel of Oblivion*, 71.

73 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 25.

74 Haderlap, *Angel of Oblivion*, 184.

from generation to generation.”⁷⁵ Both fictional and nonfictional women deal with the question of transgenerational trauma, with a history that is inherited, a family that can’t be chosen, and sadness that is never fully cured, but can be, after struggling with language for years, finally articulated. Writing does not cure you, writes Meg Jensen, but it provides a holding space for traumatic memories and forms a barrier between present-day life and the past.⁷⁶ But it would be wrong to exchange “holding space” for “healing” or as Haderlap herself said: “I didn’t write the novel for therapeutic reasons [...] It was nice for me to observe how the text develops its mechanisms, how it grows and collapses according to its internal laws. It was also important to me that, in addition to the autobiographical elements, I was assembling a mosaic of the fates of other Carinthian Slovenes.”⁷⁷

In Conclusion: From World War II to the Yugoslav Wars

This chapter examines the writings of four women profoundly impacted by trauma, specifically connected to World War II. The selection of these texts aims to showcase diverse registers and narratives present in traumatic writings, focusing particularly on exploring the historical connections between the past in which certain events happened, the period during which each text was composed, and the present in which these texts are being read. There is intentionally no comparison between the texts, treating each trauma as a world of its own, incomparable to others. Historians often seek resemblances, patterns, and principles to generalize historical experiences or the human condition. While this approach might be, to a certain degree, also applicable here, I believe it would undermine the different narrative powers of the texts as well as trivialize the singular experiences. Nevertheless, to conclude, I wish to highlight a common theme or recurring pattern present in all texts, barring one. This represents how it is impossible to be cured from the experience of war and how, no matter how many years pass, the fear remains.

75 Maja Haderlap, *Nachtfrauen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2023), 74.

76 Jensen, *The Art and Science of Trauma*, 5.

77 Jerneja Jezernik, “Maja Haderlap, pisateljica: Angel pozabe je postal moja pripoved,” *Pogledi*, October 25, 2011, accessed October 6, 2025, <https://pogledi.delo.si/ljudje/angel-pozabe-je-postal-moja-pripoved>.

As Yugoslav wars broke out in the 1990s, more than four decades have passed since Maria Antonietta Moro experienced war. She still lived in Italy, geographically close to the war, but far enough that she could feel like she was safe. But as her daughter remembers, her mother was filled with terror and said that “death has returned with the winds from the East” and that “war knows no borders.”⁷⁸ She couldn’t stand the sounds of airplanes, they reminded her too much of the airplanes of 1945.

On June 2, 1991, Kristina Brenk wrote in her diary: “I can’t write [...]. And yet I will, because it will probably soothe me. Bombs are thrown at young boys [...] I don’t know what historians who have recorded everything, all human suffering, will tell ... The sun still shines,⁷⁹ the leaves, the grass grow against the sun ...”⁸⁰ And two days later: “I would like to paint with words what it is like for people who carry fear and anxiety in their hearts. [...] We are all afraid of bombs, fire, death and everything bad.”⁸¹

Maja Haderlap writes about her father in Austria: “The threat of war in Slovenia almost makes Father lose his mind.”⁸² Then she continues: “The war breaks out in Bosnia, in Kosovo, and in Croatia. I hear Father, I hear many neighbors and acquaintances complaining in the first months of the war that they can’t bear to watch the news on television [...] The memories of the residents of these valleys begin to revolt, they rise up and take over. After the end of Nazism, they still knew their stories [...] they could recognize themselves in another’s suffering.”⁸³

Trauma is a never-ending transition, it places its survivors in an in-between state, caught between a world they knew before and a future full of uncertainty. Each new war or each new act of terror can make the past wars reappear, making it impossible to leave the history behind. As Palestinian author Adania Shibli wrote in her partly historical novel *Minor Detail*, no more than 112 pages long, which took 12 years to write and deals with the gang rape and murder of a Bedouin Palestinian girl by Israeli soldiers in 1949 (historical part) and a woman who becomes obsessed with this *minor detail* of history many years later (fictional part): “Suddenly fear descends on me. Or maybe it’s been inside me this entire time and simply

78 Moro, *Vse duše mojega telesa*, 19.

79 This could be a coincidence, or the translation of the last words attributed to Sophie Scholl, before being murdered by Nazis: *Die Sonne scheint noch*.

80 Kristina Brenk, Manuscript 29/2010, M17, July 2, 1991.

81 Kristina Brenk, Manuscript 29/2010, July 4, 1991.

82 Haderlap, *Angel of Oblivion*, 232.

83 Haderlap, *Angel of Oblivion*, 235.

strikes whenever it wants.”⁸⁴ In this perpetual cycle, trauma is never truly buried—it resurfaces, haunting the present and perpetuating a legacy of fear and pain.

About the Author

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84 Adania Shibili, *Minor Detail*, trans. Elisabeth Jacquette (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2023), 88.

5. Warrior or Victim? Representations of Women in Post-1945 Films Set in the Northern Adriatic Borderlands

Dunja Jelenković

Abstract: This chapter examines representations of women in Italian, Yugoslav, and Slovenian films about the (post-)World War II conflict in the Northeast Adriatic borderlands. Focusing on trauma linked to migration, violence, armed conflict, and death, it analyzes four widely circulated fiction films released between 1949 and 2018. Treating public display as central to film's role in shaping cultural memory, it is exploring how female characters respond to trauma and how images of their suffering are mobilized in specific political contexts. It compares meanings produced during 1945–1954 with those after 1991, tracing a shift from early Cold War portrayals of women as warriors to post-socialist representations emphasizing women primarily as victims in contemporary regional cinema debates today and collective memory formation processes overall.

Keywords: cinema, cultural memory, film festivals, war trauma, women

The chapter explores the representation of women in Italian and Yugoslav (Slovenian) films about the (post-)WWII struggle for the northeastern Adriatic borderlands. Filmmakers in both countries produced several films set during this historical period. They featured women in prominent roles, often presenting the emblematic elements of this history in conflicting ways: as migration/exodus, occupation/liberation, nationally/ideologically motivated crimes. The chapter focuses on the films' depictions of women's traumatic experiences of migration, armed conflict, various forms of violence, and death. Taking public showings as a pillar of the potential

of cinema to participate in the process of cultural memory creation, the chapter centers on four fictional films that were shown on television and/or which made notable appearances in major international film festivals: *Na svoji zemlji/On Our Own Land* (France Štiglic, YUG, 1948), *La città dolente/The Suffering Town* (Mario Bonnard, ITA, 1949), *Trst je naš/Trieste Is Ours* (Žiga Virč, SLO, 2009) and *Rosso Istria/Red Land* (Maximiliano Hernando Bruno, ITA, 2018). The chapter demonstrates how cinematic images of female suffering have been used for the creation of preferred cultural memories¹ in the political context of the post-1945 and post-1991 transitions in the region. By comparing the Italian and (post-)Yugoslav, as well as the historical and contemporary perspectives, the chapter charts the evolution of the political use of images of war related trauma in these films, from the early Cold War to the contemporary post-socialist societies as they move to represent the female figure, first predominantly as a warrior and fighter, either for her own or for the future of the collective, and then predominantly as a political and/or war victim stripped of the power to resist.

The chapter is situated at the intersection of cultural history, film studies and film festival studies.² Its focal methodological tool is contextual film analysis, which takes into account the political, social and cultural background of the film's production. Additional methodological tools include an investigation of the archives related to the public showings of the films in question. Starting from the principle that a work of art can have real influence and achieve its propagandistic value only if it is shown to the people, one of the key premises in selecting the four films for analysis was that they were widely seen on television and/or at festivals. The chapter takes public screenings as a pillar of a film's potential to participate in the

1 Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 65 (1995), 125–133; Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* [The Long Shadow of the Past: Culture of Remembrance and Politics of History] (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2006).

2 The chapter was developed within the research project "CBA TRIESTE: The Cinematic Battle for the Adriatic—Films, Frontiers and the Trieste Crisis (1945–1954)," which received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 101020692 (MSCA-IF-EF). The project was conducted at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, in collaboration with the University of Ljubljana and the ERC project Eirene (2021–2024). It dealt with the political use of cinema in relation to the Yugoslav-Italian dispute over the borderland, taking into consideration three levels of cinematic action: film production, circulation in international festivals and their critical reception. The term Trieste Crisis was used to designate the entire period during which there was no actual border between Italy and Yugoslavia, 1945 to 1954, and the contested territory, or its part, was divided into two military zones, one under Anglo-American control and the other under Yugoslav control.

process of cultural memory creation and argues that film festivals, television, film archives and their online platforms not only promote certain versions of memory, but act as places of memory themselves.³

The position of women within the social, political and cultural developments impacted by frequent border changes in the northeastern Adriatic region has been broadly discussed in scholarship related to the EIRENE project. This has facilitated the vital intersection of perspectives from diverse disciplines, including contemporary history, gender studies, and migration and identity studies.⁴ When it comes to film scholarship, the cinematic depiction of the role of women in the major historical events in the northeastern Adriatic remains largely under-investigated. There have been some studies which have tackled the contribution of cinema, in general terms, to the creation and promotion of contradictory cultural memories related to the struggle for this region. This has included the analysis of the Western depiction of Cold War Trieste,⁵ the treatment of the struggle for the border in contemporary Italian TV series,⁶ the political context that has inspired contemporary TV production on this theme,⁷ and its presence at film festivals.⁸ Some films about the contested zone have been examined in the broader context of the study of cultural production, primarily literature, promoting rival historical narratives of the twentieth-century conflicts in the border area.⁹ In addition, some non-academic publications have presented a

3 Pierre Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de mémoire*, Vol. I–III (Paris: Gallimard, 1997 [1984]).

4 Marta Verginella, "La mobilità femminile tra confini politici e nazionali nell'area alto-adriatica tra Ottocento e Novecento," *DEP: Deportate, Esuli, Profughe* 38 (2018): 69–82. Marta Verginella, "Political Activism of Slovene Women in Venezia Giulia after World War I and the Rise of Fascism: From Autonomy to Subordination," *Acta Histriae* 26, no. 4 (2018): 1041–1063; Gorazd Bajc, "Internments after the First World War: The Case of Women in the Northern Adriatic (1918–1920)," *Acta Histriae* 26, no. 4 (2018): 1017–1040; Petra Testen Koren and Ana Cergol Paradiž, "The Excluded Amongst the Excluded? Trst/Trieste and (Slovene) Servants After the First World War," *Acta Histriae* 29, no. 4 (2021): 887–920; Manca G. Renko, "Autobiographical Testimonies of the Post-War Transition," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 61, no. 3 (2021): 190–212.

5 Katia Pizzi, "Trieste, Film and the Cold War: Sites of Memory in the Borderlands," in *Borderlands of Memory: Adriatic and Central European Perspectives*, ed. Borut Klabjan (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019), 289–300.

6 Susanne Knittel, "Memory Redux: The Foibe on Italian Television," *The Italianist* 34 (2014): 170–185.

7 Marta Verginella, "Tra storie e memoria. Le foibe nella pratica di negoziazione del confine tra l'Italia e la Slovenia," in *Il perturbante nella storia. Le foibe*, ed. Luisa Accati and Renate Cogoy (Verona: QuiEdit, 2010), 27–91.

8 Dunja Jelenkovic, "The Cinematic Battle for the Adriatic: Film Festivals and the Trieste Crisis," *Cinergie—Il cinema e le altre arti* 22 (2022): 55–68.

9 Natka Badurina, *Strah od pamćenja. Književnost i sjeverni Jadran na ruševinama 20. stoljeća* [Fear of Remembrance: Literature and the Northern Adriatic on the Ruins of the Twentieth

partial overview of Italian films about the fight for the contested territory.¹⁰ Certain representational aspects of interest for this study—namely the cinematic portrayal of female involvement in armed conflicts, either as active soldiers or as war victims—have been discussed in publications dealing with other case studies. For example, research on Yugoslav partisan cinema has included analyses of the figure of the female partisan.¹¹ Similarly, scholarship about world cinema has offered substantial insights into representations of female suffering resulting from war related trauma, as observable from publications about Korean,¹² Bangladeshi,¹³ Polish,¹⁴ and Bosnian cinema,¹⁵ as well as the Spanish Civil War.¹⁶ These publications build upon the rising scholarly interest in the relationships between the screen and trauma, which in the post-Yugoslav context is best exemplified in Dijana Jelača's *Dislocated Screen Memory: Narrating Trauma in Post-Yugoslav Cinema* (2016), and specifically the chapter "Unsettling Empathies: Screen, Gender, and Traumatic Memory."¹⁷ Nevertheless, as of yet there has been no published academic account of the on-screen representation of female trauma in the (post)WWII conflict over the northeastern Adriatic borderlands. Finally,

Century] (Zagreb: Disput, 2023).

10 Alessandro Cuk's monographs on the Italian films from the 1940s and 1950s: *Il cinema di frontiera* (Venice: Alcione Editore, 2007) and *La questione giuliana nei documentari cinematografici* (Venice: Alcione Editore, 2012).

11 Miranda Jakiša and Nikica Gilić, eds., *Partisans in Yugoslavia: Literature, Film and Visual Culture* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015); Natascha Vittorelli, "With or Without Gun: Staging Female Partisans in Socialist Yugoslavia," in *Partisans in Yugoslavia: Literature, Film and Visual Culture*, ed. Miranda Jakiša and Nikica Gilić (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015), 117–137; Nađa Duhaček and Marijana Stojčić, "From Partisans to Housewives: Representation of Women in Yugoslav Cinema," *Časopis za povijest Zapadne Hrvatske* 11 (2016): 69–108.

12 Hye Seung Chung, "From Saviors to Rapists: G.I.s, Women and Children in Korean War Films," *Asian Cinema* 12, no. 1 (2001): 103–116.

13 Kaberi Gayen, "Women, War and Cinema: Construction of Women in the Liberation War Films of Bangladesh," *French Journal for Media Research* 3 (2015), accessed December 22, 2024, <https://frenchjournalformediaresearch.com:443/lodel-1.0/main/index.php?id=478>.

14 Elzbieta Ostrowska, "Invisible Deaths: Polish Cinema's Representation of Women in World War II," in *Embracing Arms: Cultural Representation of Slavic and Balkan Women in War*, ed. Helena Gosciło and Yana Hashamova (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2012), 29–58; Magdalena Podsiadło-Kwiecień, "War Rape in the Face of Heroic Narrative: The Case of Polish Cinema," *Transmissions: The Journal of Film and Media Studies* 2, no. 1 (2017): 132–149.

15 Olivera Simić and Zala Volčić, "In the Land of Wartime Rape: Bosnia, Cinema, and Reparation," *Griffith University Law School Research Paper*, no. 16–01 (2016), accessed December 22, 2024, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2747379>.

16 David Archibald, *The War That Won't Die: The Spanish Civil War in Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

17 Dijana Jelača, *Dislocated Screen Memory: Narrating Trauma in Post-Yugoslav Cinema* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 59–102.

no published study has offered a comparative analysis of the representation of female involvement in these political and military events in films made on both sides of the (former) Italo-Yugoslav border.

The chapter will first briefly explain how the four analysed films came to prominence, in light of the political transitions of 1945, the year which marked the end of the Second World War and the creation of socialist Yugoslavia, and 1991, which marked the beginning of its violent break-up.¹⁸ This part will also examine the impact on their public screening of the end of the Trieste Crisis in 1954 and of the establishment of the National Memorial Day *Giorno del ricordo* in 2004. The analysis will then move to the examination of the four selected films. Organized chronologically, it will first discuss the two films made in early post-WWII, *On Our Own Land* and *The Suffering Town*, and then the two contemporary films, *Trieste Is Ours* and *Red Land*. By illustrating how cinematic images of female suffering in this region have been used for the creation of cultural memories suitable for particular political contexts, this chapter aims to contribute a better understanding of the political use of both female trauma and the silver screen.

Influence of Political Transitions on the Cinema Sector: 1945, 1954, 1991, 2004

The years 1945 and 1991 both witnessed drastic political transformations in the Yugoslav space that resulted in border changes, within Yugoslavia itself (the establishment of socialist republics in 1945, and of independent states in 1991), and in the international context of the disputed borderlands (the establishment of military zones A and B in 1945, and of the state border between Italy and Slovenia in 1991). The end of the Second World War in 1945 and the beginning of the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s, together with the social and political developments that accompanied them, inspired changes in filmmakers' interest in the history of the northeastern Adriatic borderlands, including transformations in the portrayal of female (war) trauma in the region, as will be discussed in the next part of this chapter.¹⁹

18 Proclaimed by Tito's partisans in 1943 in the territories under their control, socialist Yugoslavia was effectively created in 1945, after the end of the war.

19 The fall of the fascism in Italy (1943), the establishment and fall of socialism in Yugoslavia (1945, 1991), the strengthening of right-wing parties in both countries and the establishment of cultural policies that support these political systems.

This was followed by a change in the ways that the popularization of these films was secured, from film festivals as the most common method of their promotion in the early Cold War, to television broadcasts in contemporary times, as detailed below.

Cinema played a prominent role in documenting the Yugoslav partisans' military and ideological struggles, including their diplomatic efforts to take over Trieste and the surrounding area after the Allies had prevented them from doing so in 1945.²⁰ There was an abundance of Yugoslav films made regarding the contested borderlands, and international screenings of these films were carefully planned.²¹ In line with those efforts, the first Yugoslav film ever shown at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival (1949) was the feature *On Our Own Land*, which depicts how Tito's partisans liberated the region of the Slovene Littoral (Slovenian: Primorska), positioned in the heart of the contested territory.²² The Cannes screening secured the film's international visibility, but also its cult status in the local context.²³ The collapse of the socialist state in 1991 favored this film being again appreciated: in the context of the establishment of national cinema industry in

20 The Yugoslav antifascist partisan movement led by Josip Broz Tito liberated the area from German occupation in 1945. The partisans hoped to integrate this area into socialist Yugoslavia, but the Western Allies opposed this in order to prevent the spread of communist hegemony too far into the West. In one of the first manifestations of the Cold War, the area was divided into two occupation zones, under Anglo-American and Yugoslav jurisdictions, respectively. After the signing of the Paris Peace Treaty (1947) most of the contested land was divided between Italy and Yugoslavia, however the zone-division remained until 1954 in what was called The Free Territory of Trieste. For more on the Trieste Crisis, see: Jože Pirjevec, *Tržaški voz: o zgodovinskih dogodkih in političnem razvoju v letih 1945–1980* (Trieste: Založništvo tržaškega tiska, 1985); Giampaolo Valdevit, *La questione di Trieste 1941–1954: Politica internazionale e contesto locale* (Milan: Angeli, 1986); Pirjevec, "Trst je naš!"; Federico Tenca Montini, "... Trst ne damo!" *Jugoslavija i Tršćansko pitanje, 1945–1954* (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2021).

21 From 1945 to 1947 out of 76 films produced in Yugoslavia, seven dealt with the northeastern Adriatic, making it one of the most common film themes in that period, together with WWII crimes and the country's postwar reconstruction. The first film ever sent to a festival abroad was the documentary *Juljska Krajina/Julian March* (FP FRNJ, Radoš Novaković, 1946), sent to Cannes in 1946 but rejected by the festival.

22 At the time, festivals sent out invitations via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The invited country's cinema officials would then send to the festival a selection of films of their choice. The Yugoslav institution in charge of that process in the 1940s was the government's Committee for Cinematography. Yugoslavia obtained the majority of the region of Primorska through the Paris Peace Treaty (1947). The date of the signing of the Treaty, September 15, is now celebrated in Slovenia as a national holiday, The Day of Return of Primorska to the Mother Country. The holiday was established in 2005, shortly after the establishment of the *Giorno del ricordo* in Italy, discussed in more detail later on.

23 Jelenkovic, "The Cinematic Battle for the Adriatic," 55–68.

place of that of the supranational Yugoslav one. *On Our Own Land* has often been celebrated as the first achievement of modern Slovenian cinema, its original socialist context largely being overlooked.²⁴ When it comes to Italy, during the Trieste Crisis there was a rich production of newsreels about the borderlands, but only two feature films were made—*The Suffering Town* (1949) and *Hearts Without Borders/Cuori senza frontiere* (Luigi Zampa, Lux Film, 1950), both about Italians who were faced with the urgent need to decide in which country they would live, Italy or Yugoslavia. Initially, these films had minimal exposure at film festivals, but they caught the public's attention in the 2000s, when their restored copies began touring festivals as a part of various retrospectives and special programs.²⁵ Most significantly, *The Suffering Town* was screened at the Venice Mostra in 2008, as well as at several festivals on the other side of the former Italo-Yugoslav border (Pula [ITA: Pola], Belgrade).²⁶ It is widely available online; for instance, it was streamed free of charge on the Adesso Cinema platform at the occasion of the *Giorno del ricordo* in 2021.²⁷

How did the renewed (festival) interest in this film come about? In order to understand the dynamics of the changes in the popularization of this theme (that is, the dynamics of how it came to be overlooked), apart from the transitions of 1945 and 1991, two more years should be examined. The first is 1954, when the Trieste Crisis was resolved by the division of the contested territory between Italy and Yugoslavia, and Tito began to develop good relationships with both the East and the West, becoming one of the leading figures of the Non-Aligned Movement. This led to a decrease in filmmakers' interest in the issue of the borderlands; instead, the focus of state propaganda shifted to the promotion of the country's "third way."²⁸ In Italy, this cinematic theme had been of more interest in the disputed region than in the rest of the country, while 1954 saw it become an unnecessary source of potential controversy with Tito, whose influence had grown in

24 Similarly, the film is often presented as the first Slovenian, instead of the first Yugoslav film screened at Cannes ("Restavrirana slovenska klasika Na svoji zemlji režiserja Franceta Štiglica na Kongresnem trgu" published on the Slovenian Film Center's webpage, accessed March 2, 2023, <https://www.film-center.si/sl/novice/7640/restavrirana-slovenska-klasika-na-svoji-zemlji-reziserja-franceta-stiglica-na-kongresnem-trgu>). See also Špela Čizman and Andrej Šprah, eds., *France Štiglic: filmska zapuščina* (Ljubljana: Slovenska kinoteka, 2021).

25 Jelenkovic, "The Cinematic Battle for the Adriatic," 55–68.

26 In 2016 it was shown at the Nitrate Film Festival in Belgrade, and in 2021 at the Pula Film Festival.

27 "Adesso Cinema," accessed December 22, 2024, www.adessocinema.it.

28 The change of focus of state propaganda was also favored by the distancing from Stalin in 1948.

the meantime. The second year to take note of is 2004, when the *Giorno del ricordo* was established in Italy to commemorate the Italians who emigrated from socialist Yugoslavia after the Second World War (known in the public discourse as *esuli*, i.e., the exiles), and the victims of the 1943–1945 *foibe* massacres—crimes in which Yugoslav partisans took revenge on local Italians accused of collaboration by throwing them into the hundreds meter deep natural pits, referred to as *foibe* in the local dialect.²⁹ This accelerated the notice of this historical theme and its accompanying depiction in film—it became regularly discussed in schools and on national television, its popularization no longer being limited to the activities of interest groups such as the associations of *esuli*, Italians who had emigrated from Yugoslavia.

In the post-socialist context of the 2000s, the interest in this topic has been renewed on the other side of the border as well, but with a significantly more alternative approach, usually resulting in small to medium budget films.³⁰ One of the most notable examples is the short comedy *Trieste Is Ours* (2009). A student project created in co-production with RTV Slovenia, the film depicts a Slovenian man who, more than half a century after the Second World War, forms his own partisan unit and embarks on a campaign to conquer Trieste. The film's festival life was relatively modest and limited to the local framework. Despite this, it managed to acquire recognition—a slot on national television in 2009 enabled it to be seen by an audience from all over Slovenia, while the public condemnation of the then Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Franco Frattini, caused it to be heard about on the other side of the border as well.³¹ Frattini expressed his surprise that Slovenian national television took part in the production of such a

29 The *Giorno del ricordo* is marked on February 10, the date of the signing of the Paris Peace Treaty (1947). Picking the anniversary date of the Treaty which had partially resolved the territorial dispute between the two countries as the day of commemoration of what is termed the “tragedy of the Italians” (Article 1, Law of March 30, 2004, n. 92, published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale*), demonstrates the position of the 2004 Italian government and the political party behind this initiative, the far-right National Alliance (*Alleanza nazionale*), towards the 1947 division of the contested territory. In addition, the *Giorno del ricordo* has been the cause of controversy due to persistent political manipulation of historical facts. The instrumentalization of cultural memory of the *esuli* and *foibe* victims is discussed in detail in Tullia Catalan's article “Il Giorno del ricordo fra celebrazioni, sguardi esterni e stereotipi,” *Italia contemporanea* 296 (2021): 124–144. The year 2004 also marked the end of the last of Yugoslavia, renamed the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro.

30 See for instance the work of documentary filmmaker Anja Medved from Nova Gorica.

31 A. J., “Trst je naš! Moti tudi italijanskega zunanjega ministra” [Trieste Is Ours! This Also Bothers the Italian Foreign Minister], *MMC—RTV SLO*, November 5, 2009, December 22, 2024, <https://www.rtvsl.si/kultura/film-in-tv/trst-je-nas-moti-tudi-italijanskega-zunanjega-ministra/216205>.

politically controversial film, which according to him was “throwing salt in the Italian wound.”³²

Since the 1990s television has been the dominant medium for the popularization of this historical theme, and this is especially so in Italy. An increased public interest in this topic and the strengthening of the political right have also inspired the production of new films about the “Eastern” border, mostly large projects, financially supported by the national television channel Rai in the role of (co-)producer, as explained in the last part of this chapter. As such, these films are mainly screened on television, while festivals rank second in their promotion. This is also related to their quality—employing a made-for-television format, with basic, even simplistic narratives and aimed at the widest possible audience, most often they do not meet the level of artistic standards required for film festivals. This is exemplified by *Red Land*, about Norma Cossetto, an Italian student and the daughter of a local fascist, who was killed by partisans in 1943. The film became widely known in Italy after being shown in the Senate on November 6, 2018, which was followed by a flurry of media reports.³³ Its visibility also increased with multiple TV broadcasts on Rai to mark the *Giorno del Ricordo* (2019, 2021, and 2023).³⁴

Changes in dominant policies due to the strengthening of right-wing parties in Italy, as well as across the post-Yugoslav states, led to an increase in the need for faster and greater popularization of politically useful topics such as this one. Television as mass media played an important role in this popularization, particularly following the fast development of digital forms

32 A. J., “Trst je naš!”

33 See Rai TG 2 report, accessed June 21, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzkE5UxcOIU>.

34 The film’s popularization was also reinforced by its introduction in schools in some parts of Italy, namely in the Veneto region, where organizations of Italians who emigrated from Yugoslavia (*esuli* organizations) are particularly active and the right has been in power since 1995. A DVD with a shortened version adapted for schools was produced with the support of the Veneto Region and the *esuli* association *Associazione Nazionale Venezia Giulia e Dalmazia* (2020). Similarly, the graphic novel *Foiba Rossa—Norma Cossetto storia di un’italiana* (Emanuele Merlino and Beniamino Delvecchio, Milan: Ferrogallico, 2018) has been distributed to pupils in various Italian middle schools. These initiatives are a part of a larger process of institutionalization of politically constructed memory of Italian martyrdom, personified in Norma Cossetto as its central, female figure. As the culmination of this process, the introduction of these two artistic productions in schools gives them the legitimacy of truthful representations of history, despite their arbitrary character. See: Federico Tenca Montini, “‘Foiba rossa’. Considerazioni su un fumetto sulle foibe,” *Novecento*, October 15, 2019, accessed September 23, 2023, <https://www.novecento.org/uso-pubblico-della-storia/considerazioni-su-un-fumetto-sulle-foibe-6132>.

of filming since the 1990s.³⁵ These political, technological and cultural policy shifts also influenced changes in narrativization of this conflictual past. At the same time, these developments were also under the influence of this narrativization, resulting in a doubly interrelated process. Coterminous with this process, the representation of women and of female trauma also underwent transformations, influenced significantly by the shifting geopolitical, historical and technological background.

Female Victimhood and Warriorhood, 1945–1954

Produced in the middle of the Trieste Crisis, the Yugoslav feature film *On Our Own Land* and the Italian *The Suffering Town* offer two radically different visions of the female role in the military and political events of a few years earlier. Both films have women in main supporting roles, however, they differ in the level of political engagement assigned to them, which is also reflected in their reaction to traumatic experiences, as will be discussed below. When it comes to these traumas, as *On Our Own Land* is about the war, and *The Suffering Town* about the postwar period, the films explore varying levels of trauma, ranging from family separation (both films), worrying for one's (unborn) child (both films), abandoning one's home (*The Suffering Town*), separation from a partner (both films), physical violence, the death of a partner and one's own death (*On Our Own Land*).

The black and white war drama *On Our Own Land*, set in the final years of the Second World War, shows the villagers from Baška Grapa in the Slovene Littoral, all ethnic Slovenians, in their war reality: waiting for news of their loved ones and suffering torture at the hands of the Germans. In hopes that the partisan victory would end the centuries-long foreign rule over their village, they all, but one, help the partisans. Among several female roles, none is principal, in line with the common socialist cinematic depiction of female experience of war, which often preferred portrayals of women as a collective (partisan) force to depictions of their individual endeavors.³⁶ Namely, partisan films made an important contribution in raising the visibility of women as active members of the communist-led antifascist movement, reflecting the female emancipation process which started with

35 Due to the increasingly rapid development of social networks as a means of information, after 2004, the Internet also had a very significant role in this process.

36 See Duhaček and Stojčić, "From Partisans to Housewives," 78–79; Vittorelli, "With or Without Gun," 117–136.

the socialist revolution. Yet when it comes to the cinematic portrayal of women's engagement in the war, female roles were usually supporting, less complex and developed than those reserved for their male comrades.³⁷ *On Our Own Land* follows this ambivalent pattern. The main protagonist is an old man called Sova, who leads the local partisan unit. The unit however includes two women, Tildica and Nančika. They appear in roles traditionally reserved for men, shooting at the Germans and carrying heavy loads side by side with their male comrades, thus breaking with gender normative stereotypes. However, although in some scenes we see them in the trench, in another they are helping the wounded in a partisan hospital, thus following a more traditional depiction of a partisan woman, as one who supports the men and tends to them as medical staff.

Furthermore, young Nančika joins the partisans, but quickly has to leave the army as she has fallen ill with a mental condition that renders her weak and confused. This is her reaction to the trauma she has been exposed to: the violence of the battlefield, but also the worry for her loved one, a man who she has been waiting for since he joined the partisans, knowing nothing of his whereabouts. The scene of her leaving contributes to the creation of the contradictory image of the female partisan: she is wearing a uniform, however, being ill with no physical wounds makes her look like she does not belong in this costume. As we know, mental illnesses are seen as a "feminine" trait in gender stereotypes, which contributes to the image of women as the "softer" and "weaker" sex, and as individuals of unreliable character.³⁸ This scene thus shows the moment of her transition from the non-traditional female role of warrior to a more traditional role of a woman as an individual with psychological problems. Finally, although female protagonists are relatively numerous in this film, only two heroines join the army and have the glorious experience of participating in liberating

37 See Vittorelli, "With or Without Gun," 117–136. Yet, this did not correspond to the real role of women in the anti-fascist movement, as they were much more numerous, active and involved than suggested by Yugoslav films; Jelena Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans: A History of World War II Resistance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Among the exceptions where a female partisan is the film's main character, we can mention the first feature made in socialist Yugoslavia, *Slavica* (Vjekoslav Afrić, 1947) about Dalmatian partisans' struggle against Italian occupation. The leading actress Irena Kolesar who played Slavica, a factory worker turned partisan-woman, was herself a partisan since the age of 17.

38 Woman, as presented by the partisan films, is, as Vittorelli resumes it, a "socialist icon of femininity [who] adopts masculine attributes but is thrown back on her femininity" (Vittorelli, "With or Without Gun," 119).

the region from foreign rule.³⁹ For these two women, trauma is the result of having seen combat, which renders them heroines. For the other women there is simply trauma, without any of the glory of battle. The way in which these traumas are depicted, and especially these women's attitude towards the experience of suffering, is what creates the imaginary of revolutionary women even when they are not in the roles of soldiers, but of civilians and/or war victims. This is exactly what distinguishes them from the women who starred in Italian films about events in the disputed region, specifically the film *The Suffering Town*, as will be discussed below.

The Italian melodrama *The Suffering Town* is set in the early postwar period, in 1947, when the Paris Peace Treaty established that the coastal town of Pula would pass from Anglo-American to Yugoslav jurisdiction.⁴⁰ The film deals with the mass Italian departure from the town following this decision, and in particular with the story of a young couple with a baby, torn by the husband's desire to remain in communist-led Yugoslavia. The two main female antagonists are the Italian Silvana, a wife and mother who wants to leave for Italy because, as she implies, Pula "is no longer her home" being "occupied" by the Slavs/communists, and Lubitza, a wicked Slavic partisan who invades her physical, symbolic and emotional space by moving into her building and taking her bed, exerting political power in her hometown, and flirting with her husband. In addition, numerous other women appear in the film, mostly shown as refugees.

In line with the patriotic maternity models promoted in postwar Italy,⁴¹ the film begins with a dedication to the woman-mother: "To the mother who always knows and accepts the spirit of sacrifice."⁴² This provides a framework for the plot, implying that the main character Silvana's decision to leave Pula is a sacrifice that she makes with great difficulty in order to provide her child with a dignified life. Such a life, the film suggests, is impossible in a communist country, as obvious from the depiction of a lack of basic necessities (there is no milk for the baby), the rude and loud behavior of the

39 The Slovenian Film Database's list of credits lists the names of six actresses and 21 actors: <https://bsf.si/en/movie/na-svoji-zemlji>, accessed June 22, 2023. In addition, women appear as extras in several group scenes.

40 Both films present the contested region as predominantly Italian, i.e., Slavic—*On Our Own Land* through its title, and *The Suffering Town* by including excerpts from the newsreel *Addio, Pola* (La Settimana Incom Nr. 46, February 1947), and thus using actuality footage as a signifier of authenticity.

41 Stefania Bernini, "Mothers and Children in Post-War Europe: Martyrdom and National Reconstruction in Italy and Poland," *European Review of History* 22, no. 2 (2015): 242–258.

42 Orig. *Alla madre che sempre conosce ed accetta lo spirito di sacrificio*.

newcomers who are now leading the country (partisan celebration with folk dances), and the manner in which they violate human rights (the political prisoners' camp and Silvana's husband's escape). Throughout the film, Silvana is presented as above all a mother, which is a well-known symbol of nation in the nationalist imaginaries across the globe.⁴³ This symbolic figure not only represents the nation, but, as Klaudija Sabo points out, it is also in its service by giving birth to the new generation of border keepers.⁴⁴ In that framework, mother(hood) is presented as inseparable from two other keywords: religion, as a symbol of purity and chastity, and home, as a symbol of national territory (the word motherland being synonymous with homeland). Consequently, Silvana is usually depicted indoors, and when she is pictured outside it is for reasons related to caring for her baby. In one instance she goes out to find her main ally, the priest who, as she says, "buried her mother, married her and baptized her child" and thus took part in all the phases of the symbolic circle of motherhood passed from one generation to another.⁴⁵ Silvana now needs his help to save her "poor" child by emigrating.⁴⁶ Her choice to emigrate is imposed upon her by the circumstances. As such it is presented as a postwar trauma—departure is presented as a fight for freedom, a loss of the right to stay, a loss of home and a necessary sacrifice for one's own child. Silvana's response to this ordeal is dignified calm, highlighted by numerous scenes in which other women cry over their fate. The film repeatedly presents female trauma precisely through the sound of crying heard in the background, in addition to the scenes of desperate looking refugees. The tragic impression is emphasized by one scene in which Silvana and the baby leave in the rain, in a somber atmosphere of the night in an abandoned town.

The Yugoslav feature film *On Our Own Land* also shows women as mothers: some are mothers to small children, some to adult men and women. Moreover, the end of the film suggests that the partisan Tildica might be pregnant, as she says to her fiancé Drejc in a romantic war scene, "We are

43 See, for instance: Samita Sen, "Motherhood and Mothercraft: Gender and Nationalism in Bengal," *Gender and History* 5, no. 2 (1993): 231–243.

44 Klaudija Sabo, "Warrior Meets Mother: The Visual Representations of Female Figures in the 1990s in Croatia," *TheMA: Open Access Research Journal for Theatre, Music, Arts* IX, nos. 1–2 (2022): 8. On the role of women as border keepers in the Italo-Slovene borderlands see: Marta Verginella, *Ženska obrobja: vpis žensk v zgodovino Slovencev* [Women's Periphery: The Entry of Women into the History of Slovenes] (Ljubljana: Delta, 2006).

45 The quoted text are Silvana's words from the film *The Suffering Town* (translated by the author).

46 The quoted text are Silvana's words from the film *The Suffering Town* (translated by the author).

not alone anymore.⁴⁷ Yet, even when romantic, the women of *On Our Own Land* are fighters and revolutionaries who have clear political beliefs, express them openly and have an active role in society. In light of the war-context and the depicted relationships between the characters, in addition to the (prospect of) the death of one's romantic partner, the major traumas shown in *On Our Own Land* are the death of one's offspring and one's own death. The mothers' anxiety is evident in the scenes that suggest the possibility of a child loss—in a rare scene where a woman is crying, it is when Nančika goes to war and her mother sheds a tear. However generally, in contrast to *The Suffering Town*, there is almost no crying in this film. Moreover, women approach death calmly and decisively, implying that it is a terrible and unwanted, but legitimate sacrifice to be made for liberty. This is also observable in the scene when the Germans brutally kill elderly Ana in front of her husband and young grandson—Ana discreetly sheds one single tear before she silently closes her eyes.

Mothers from this film sacrifice their lives not only for their own, but also for other women's children. In one of the scenes, German soldiers break into the house of a young woman and separate her from her three small children. This is followed by one of the film's central scenes—the locals, women and old men are all gathered in the square, while the German soldiers choose whom to shoot. When the aforementioned young mother is separated from the crowd, another woman, Angela, steps forward and says: "Leave the mother to the children, mine are provided for." Before walking to her death, Angela utters the line that the film is entitled after: "I will take off my shoes because this is the last time I will walk on *my own land*." This scene represents the determination and political activism of civilian women even when faced with imminent death. Since children symbolize the country's future, when Angela chooses death so that their mother might live, she takes on a political role despite not being a political activist. As Natascha Vittorelli remarks, whether or not they carried a gun, women in partisan films were portrayed as fighters.⁴⁸ The scene ends with the image of four pairs of shoes. We hear gunshots in the background. The tragedy is thus implicitly shown, without naturalistic depictions characteristic of nationalism oriented cinematic representation of war crimes that we will see, for instance, in the *Red Land*.

47 All the quotes are protagonists' words from the film *On Our Own Land* (translated by the author).

48 Vittorelli, "With or Without Gun," 117–136.

These examples demonstrate that female courage in 1940s film production was presented in line with the construction of, on the one hand, an image of a society-oriented revolutionary icon in service of the multi-ethnic socialist narrative and, on the other, the image of a traditional family-oriented woman in service of a pro-nationalist and anti-socialist narrative. This conforms with the dominant models of femininity promoted in the two countries at the time.⁴⁹ Although both in Yugoslavia and Italy women took an active part in the resistance movement, Stefania Bernini explains that in the Italian postwar commemorative discourse, the memory of women's military engagement was overshadowed by the celebration of their role as mothers and wives.⁵⁰ According to Bernini, this was the way to praise the collective sacrifice while "re-collocating women in their dutiful position at home."⁵¹ *The Suffering Town* demonstrates that this attitude was extended to the portrayal of women's engagement in the dramatic events of the postwar division of the Northern Adriatic. Conversely, in Yugoslavia, the new state was born from the socialist revolution, and the Second World War was its founding myth—this resulted in the celebration of the socialist principles established during the war, including the legalization of gender equality and women's active involvement in military forces and politics. Against these backgrounds, two different types of cinematic portrayals of women were generated in the two countries, not only in terms of the existence of explicit depictions of women in military roles or the lack thereof, but also in terms of the depiction of their proactiveness, defiance and attitude towards the past and the future as symbols of tradition, i.e., modernity. In *The Suffering Town* Silvana leaves, stating that her home is now on the other side of the Adriatic, since the Others have come to her hometown. In *On Our Own Land* the discourse is the opposite—instead of the attitude: "my homeland is elsewhere *because* the Others have come here," the local women's attitude is: "my homeland is still here *although* the Others have come here." This demonstrates the difference between the victim in the traditional, tragic and nationalist cinematic portrayal and the revolt of the female revolutionary in early socialist cinema. In the first case, the woman's courage and fighting spirit are reflected in the fact that she rejects a certain political situation with the personal gesture of leaving. In the second case, she stays in order to

49 For Italy see Bernini, "Mothers and Children in Post-War Europe," 242–258. For Yugoslavia see: Chiara Bonfiglioli, "Women's Political and Social Activism in the Early Cold War Era: The Case of Yugoslavia," *Aspasia* 8 (2014): 1–25.

50 Bernini, "Mothers and Children in Post-War Europe," 247.

51 Bernini, "Mothers and Children in Post-War Europe," 253.

fight back—when she is a soldier, she fights with weapons, and when she is a civilian, she does it through assisting the partisans and symbolic gestures such as the death of the barefoot Angela “on her own land.” In short, from the multinational Yugoslav socialist perspective, the woman is presented as fighting for what she believes will be a better future for society. In contrast, from the postwar nationalist Italian perspective of the events in the Northern Adriatic, she is presented as a victim of an imposed tragedy—her look at what she considers her homeland implies a look into the past from which she must depart. However, she still retains a certain power, in this case the power to decide to leave, a quality that she would be stripped of in contemporary cinematic construction of the female image in relation to the struggle for this contested region, as will be demonstrated below.

Contemporary Evolutions: From Victim to Martyr, From Warrior to Neo-Revolutionary

In the 2000s, both the cinematic representation of the victimized Italian woman and of the revolutionary Yugoslav woman have grown into their own caricatures. The Italian woman, who, from the anti-socialist perspective of the early Cold War, was presented as a victim of the exodus, in the contemporary post-socialist nationalism becomes a martyr who is tortured, raped and thrown into a pit to die in the worst agony, as we see in the feature *Red Land*. The Yugoslav partisan woman in contemporary Slovenian cinema becomes a pop version of the revolutionary icon who, at the end of the short comedy *Trieste Is Ours*, appears as a revelation on horseback. Such an evolution of the depiction of women in films about the borderlands has been inspired by political developments in the two countries. In Italy, the left has been weakening since the 1990s, culminating in the victory of the far-right Giorgia Meloni in the 2022 elections. Notably, Meloni drew on the memory of the Italian victims in Yugoslavia in her political campaign, illustrating how these past events continue to haunt the present. The rise of the (radical) right has resulted in the making of films whose plots are constructed on, and further construct, victim-centered narratives of the Italian war and early postwar experience—they are mostly large-scale productions about the *foibe* and the exodus, supported by the state-owned television station, Rai.⁵² Their

52 One of the globally most used denial strategies in the process of cultural memory construction implies a shift of focus from one's own nation's culpabilities to its victimhood. This is how in a period of only a few years the *foibe* went from being a relatively marginal episode of the Italian

central motif is frequently female suffering, which is used as a symbol of the suffering of Italy itself, as explained below. In contrast, in Slovenia, the cultural and political landscape provides for a patchwork of nationalist and yugo-nostalgic trends, facilitating a larger variety of cinematic approaches when it comes to memories of the conflictual past. Namely, the beginning of the nationalism-inspired Yugoslav wars in 1991 created space for harsh criticism of socialism across the former union, best evidenced from an important body of revisionist and negationist WWII historiography that started to emerge in that period.⁵³ Conversely, in the 2000s, after enough time had passed since the war, more space (re-)opened for criticism of the politics of the 1990s, and consequently for nostalgic depictions of the former country, often in cinema and pop-culture, a tendency that goes hand in hand with a positive memory of the partisan movement.⁵⁴ However, the same period also witnessed a radicalization of historical revisionism which commenced in the 1990s. Within it, the communists' actions are not only critically examined, but the partisans are broadly presented as wrongdoers,

war experience to becoming the central element of the war memory in this country. Most of the artistic productions that have helped this process bring forth a decontextualized depiction of the *foibe* crimes, omitting or making insufficiently clear the background of the Second World War and the 20-year repression of non-Italian populations by the fascist authorities (Federico Tenca Montini, "Politika sjećanja za postideološka vremena: slučaj Italije" [Memory Policies for Post-Ideological Times: The Case of Italy], *Politička misao* 53, no. 3 (2016): 13; Verginella, "Tra storie e memoria," 90–91). Apart from the *Red Land*, the most notable example is the film/TV series *Il cuore nel pozzo* (Alberto Negrin, RAI, 2005). There are also more than a dozen documentaries and TV programs available on the streaming platform Rai Play, such as: *La grande storia—L'Italia di frontiera: la guerra, le foibe, l'esodo* (2020), *Dossier storie—L'arcipelago foibe* (2017), *Dossier—La memoria delle foibe* (2021), etc.

53 For Slovenia see: Oto Luthar and Heidemarie Uhl, eds., *The Memory of Guilt Revisited* (Vienna: Vienna University Press, 2019), 35–42; and Oto Luthar, "Post-Communist Memory Culture and the Historiography of the Second World War and the Post-War Execution of Slovenian Collaborationists," *Croatian Political Science Review* 55, no. 2 (2018): 33–49. For Croatia, see: Ivo Goldstein, *Povijesni revizionizam i neoustaštvo u Hrvatskoj: Hrvatska 1989–2022* [Historical Revisionism and Neo-Ustasha Ideology in Croatia: Croatia 1989–2022] (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2023). For Serbia see: Dubravka Stojanović, *Ulje na vodi: Ogledi iz istorije sadašnjosti Srbije* [Oil on Water: Essays on the History of the Present Day in Serbia] (Belgrade: Pešćanik, 2010), 85–126.

54 Tanja Petrović, "The Past That Binds Us: Yugonostalgia as the Politics of the Future," in *Transcending Fratricide: Political Mythologies, Reconciliations, and the Uncertain Future in the Former Yugoslavia*, ed. Srdja Pavlović and Marko Živković (Baden: Nomos, 2013), 133–134. See also Dunja Jelenković, *Festival jugoslovenskog dokumentarnog i kratkometražnog filma, 1954–2004. Od jugoslovenskog socijalizma do srpskog nacionalizma* [Yugoslav Documentary and Short Film Festival, 1954–2004: From Yugoslav Socialism to Serbian Nationalism] (Belgrade: Filmski centar Srbije, 2023), 340–344. See also Milica Popović, "Post-Yugoslav Memories as a Resistance Strategy and the Political Significance of Yugonostalgia" (PhD diss., Institut d'études politiques de Paris—Sciences Po and University of Ljubljana, 2021).

and Nazi and fascist collaborationists as victims.⁵⁵ The student film *Trieste Is Ours* emerges amid this complex socio-cultural and political context of the fusion of positive memories of the partisan struggle and the negation of its core value, entangled with the increasingly pronounced relativization of fascism in neighboring Italy, pivoted on the very memory of the struggle for the borderlands. Filmmaker Žiga Virč claimed that he was not interested in establishing historical truth with this film, but rather in playing with the notions of past and present through a story of characters who re-enacted historic battles.⁵⁶ Yet the film represents a solid contribution to the landscape of mediatized images which influence and are influenced by the cultural memory of the struggle for the borderlands, and, consequently, of the role of women within it.

The film deals with the Slovenian trauma of the loss of Trieste in the style of partisan films, as a parody or an homage, depending on the reading. Franc, a contemporary middle-aged Slovenian man is obsessed with Tito, the anti-fascist movement and the idea that Trieste should belong to Slovenia. He thus organizes his own partisan unit which he prepares to liberate this city again. For this purpose, his “soldiers” numbering a dozen, three of whom are women, are dressed in partisan uniforms and use real guns and bombs. Scenes from their headquarters are combined with scenes in which the protagonist interacts with “civilian” contemporaries who are not playing his game: local policemen and policewomen, his wife Marija and daughter Mateja. They show different levels of understanding of his activities: the police engage in armed conflict with his unit, his wife thinks he should return to reality but is quite compliant, while his daughter ignores him (she pretends to be asleep while he tells her about the partisans) and, to his great disappointment, shows no knowledge or interest in the Slovenian anti-fascist past. These scenes portray the antagonisms in contemporary Slovenian society, demonstrating the gap between the young and old generations in terms of their views of the antifascist past, the division of the borderlands and their importance.

In contrast, *Red Land* is a tragic 2 hr. 30 min. tribute to Norma Cossetto, a victim of the partisan retaliation against presumed war enemies, when numerous Italians accused of being fascists or collaborating with them were

55 Oto Luthar, “The Sanitation of Slovenian Post-Socialist Memorial Landscape,” in *The Memory of Guilt Revisited*, ed. Oto Luthar and Heidemarie Uhl (Vienna: Vienna University Press), 261–275.

56 Enrico Maria Milič, “Il regista di ‘Trst je naš’: ‘Siamo nel 21esimo secolo, guardiamo avanti,’” *Bora.La*, November 27, 2009, accessed September 25, 2023, <https://bora.la/2009/11/27/il-regista-di-trst-je-nas-siamo-nel-21esimo-secolo-guardiamo-avanti>.

thrown into the *foibe*, the deep natural pits characteristic of the region. Being a woman, only 23 years old, and a prominent student, Norma Cossetto has become an emblematic victim of the *foibe* massacres, and she is presented accordingly in the film. All these three elements—her youth, female gender and student-status—symbolically show that by murdering her, the partisans committed a violent act against the very future of the Italian nation. The film shows Norma's murder as a symbolic attempt to kill the country's future, because since the mother figure is a metaphor for the nation, being murdered, Norma was prevented from ever becoming one. In any case, the violent death of a young person represents an interruption of their path to realizing their role in society. In addition, killing a student is an attack on the best that society has, its brainpower. Furthermore, the red color mentioned in the film's title, *Red Land*, represents blood, communism, and the bauxite from Istria, and thus holds a triple symbolism related to Norma's death. In fact, the land is red because it is drenched in the blood of Norma and the other victims of the *foibe*. It is also red because it was, as presented by the film, "invaded" by the communists, the perpetrators of these crimes. It is also red because it is rich in bauxite, the mineral Norma wrote about in her graduate student thesis, the one she was stopped from ever finishing by her violent death.⁵⁷

The culmination of this tragic image of female suffering is the exceptionally extended two-minute-long rape scene. Such an unnecessarily naturalistic representation of this crime and the cruelty with which the partisans are depicted again generate an idea of them as foreign invaders. *The Suffering Town* was among the first films that helped establish the myth of Slavic communists as the evil Others persecuting the local Italians. However, in *Red Land* this image grew into a much more grotesque portrayal of partisans as rapists and murderers led by xenophobic and racist ideas. In *The Suffering Town* the idea of the symbolic invasion of Italian territory was forged through the scenes of the partisan woman flirting with Silvana's husband, imposing her language and customs, and moving into Silvana's building. In *Red Land*, not only do the partisans conquer what is presented as national Italian territory with weapons and in uniforms, but their brutal campaign of conquest culminates in the most violent and ferocious way possible, in the aforementioned rape scene, as a symbolic penetration into somebody else's territory, presenting, as Podsiadło-Kwiecień puts it, "the most gender-determined form of wartime violence."⁵⁸ Following the rape,

57 Similar symbolism is used in the title of the graphic novel *Foiba rossa*, as explained below.

58 Podsiadło-Kwiecień, "War Rape in the Face of Heroic Narrative," 133.

this territory is also ethnically cleansed, when the local Italians, including Norma and other women, are thrown into a pit. The film ignores the multiethnic structure of the Yugoslav partisan movement and nor, for that matter, does it mention that the partisan forces in Istria also included many Italians. Similarly, it also ignores the movement's ideological, antifascist quality. This combination of omitted facts serves as the basis to present the partisans' activities as ethnically motivated. Accordingly, Norma is also presented as the partisans' national, and not ideological enemy, and thus also as a national victim.⁵⁹

It is worth noting that a similar method for the construction of the image of female trauma was evident in the TV series *Il cuore nel pozzo* (Alberto Negrin, Rai, 2005), which depicts three situations in which Italian women are raped by Yugoslav partisans. The first major TV production about the *foibe* crimes, *Il cuore nel pozzo* has over time been established, as Federico Tenca Montini describes it, as a kind of "electronic monument" or an "official filmic version" of the history of the struggle for the borderland.⁶⁰ Likewise, the graphic novel about Norma Cossetto *Foiba rossa* (2018) also resorts to graphic depictions of rape to construct images of female suffering—entirely black and white, its only scene in color is the one where red blood flows from between Norma's legs.⁶¹ In that way, the rape sequence is positioned as central, reminding the reader that the red color from the publication's title symbolizes not only communists, but also the brutality of their alleged crimes. The feature *Red Land*, released in the context of such a cultural production that had already established rape by the "invaders" as the central symbol of Italian (post-)war suffering, thus serves to reconfirm this imaginary. Together with the other two examples, *Red Land* helps engrave the image of rape on the collective memory of war, thereby contributing to the understanding that the Italian war and early postwar experience was predominantly that of the victim.

When it comes to the depiction of Norma's response to the violence she is exposed to, *Red Land* is, unlike *The Suffering Town*, set in wartime. That is why, unlike Silvana, who is presented as an elegant lady throughout the entire film, Norma's elegance is visible only until the partisans get hold of her—then we see her shaggy, dirty, muddy, torn, and humiliated as they take

59 There is a lack of historical data on the phenomenon of rapes carried out by partisans against the female population. While it is conceivable that the phenomenon was present, these cases were de facto few in number, and not as common as in areas of Eastern Europe or in Germany and Austria at the end of the war.

60 Tenca Montini, "Politika sjećanja za postideološka vremena," 16.

61 See Tenca Montini, "Politika sjećanja za postideološka vremena," 7–25.

her away as a prisoner. The film being shot in color makes her disheveled appearance even more noticeable. The image of Norma Cossetto's trauma represents the culmination of the construction of the image of the symbolic humiliation of Italy itself. Accordingly, Norma's response to such an ordeal, despair, is presented as the only possible response given the gravity of the crime. This also contributes to the creation of an even more brutal image of the perpetrators.

Regarding the portrayal of women in post-Yugoslav film, generally speaking, they tend to abandon their role of revolutionary as established in the 1940s and 1950s cinema.⁶² Instead, they are usually presented either as mothers⁶³ or war victims.⁶⁴ The latter is mostly the case in films from the 1990s that dealt with ongoing wars or the memory of the civil war that was fought in Yugoslavia during the Second World War.⁶⁵ Made in 2008, Žiga Virč's film departs from those trends.⁶⁶ The film makes numerous ironic but also nostalgic references to the portrayal of women in partisan films: they are present in almost every frame, shooting and throwing grenades along with the men. The most overt reference is the scene in which a young male partisan falls to the ground wounded. He is approached by a female partisan nurse, as understood by the red cross on her armband. The way they address each other, and the way she gently holds his head, gives the impression that they are in a romantic relationship. Seeing this, a German soldier deliberately aims at the wounded partisan, killing him before her eyes. She just sighs, as if someone who was not close to her had died. In so doing, she puts the social role of warrior before her emotional wellbeing, as a reminder of the importance that the partisan-women from socialist cinema accorded to their social and military engagement.

62 The dominant image of women in Yugoslav socialist cinema changed over time, and as of the late 1960s included more and more portrayals of women as housewives and consumers; Duhaček and Stojčić, "From Partisans to Housewives," 69–102.

63 Sabo, "Warrior Meets Mother," 7–10.

64 Jelenković, *Festival jugoslovenskog dokumentarnog i kratkometražnog filma*, 360–368, 406–425.

65 Like the contemporary Italian films about the *foibe* crimes, the mainstream cinematic production from the Yugoslav republics which were involved with the wars in the 1990s often referred to the past crimes against one's own nation in order to justify the political decisions from the present. Just as in Italy today, the mass promotion of the victimization war narratives in 1990s Yugoslavia was inspired by the strengthening of the right-wing, whose structures also often financially helped the making of these films. See: Jelenković, *Festival jugoslovenskog dokumentarnog i kratkometražnog filma*, 329–439.

66 For more about this film see Mirt Komel, "Trst je naš! Post-Socialist Slovenian Partisan Cinema," in *Partisans in Yugoslavia: Literature, Film and Visual Culture*, ed. Miranda Jakiša and Nikica Gilić (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015), 347–362.

The film's climax is the appearance of the protagonist's daughter on horseback at the moment when he is about to be arrested. In this dramatic final scene, the young woman first calmly observes the conflict between the "partisans" and the police from a height. She then gallops past between her father and the police, resulting in the handcuffs intended for him falling to the ground. She wears a modern blue scarf around her neck, and on her forehead a partisan cap with a red star, a gift from her father. She then picks up the Slovenian flag from the times of socialist Yugoslavia and continues her powerful gallop. The resolution brought by her appearance is not only that she saves the "partisans" from the police, but also that by this act she shows that she has finally understood the value and importance of the partisan legacy that her father tried so hard to pass on to her. As a young woman shown on horseback, a universal symbol of freedom and determination, Mateja is a symbol of the Slovenian future. Nevertheless, she is also an emblem of feminist empowerment, taking action instead of conforming with the prevailing images of female victimhood. Yet, there is no real trauma in this film, which is a statement in itself. Depicting the struggle for disputed territory in such a humorous way, as already mentioned, was seen negatively in Italian right-wing circles. The (communist) silence about the crimes associated with the struggle for the contested region contributed to the construction of an extreme image of these crimes when they began to be evoked, as we see in *Red Land*. Taking that into account, we can conclude that the humorous approach to the memory of the conflict over this territory also contributed to the construction of a grotesque and overemphasized image of female suffering on the other side of the border in the cinematic representation of this historic episode.

Conclusion

We have seen how the cinematic narrativization of the female role in the struggle for the border on the Slovenian side has transformed itself from early socialism to post-socialism, from the protagonist of a war drama to the protagonist of an ironic comedy. Such a transformation fits into broader political and social trends. Namely, at the time of the making of the film *On Our Own Land*, the Trieste Crisis was at its height. Cinema being an important link in communists' forging desirable memories of the past, it was used to reconfirm that the northeastern Adriatic was a Slovenian land, liberated by Yugoslav partisans. The female merit in that struggle was duly highlighted in this film—in doing so the film took part in the promotion of

(declarative) gender equality, as another element of the Yugoslav socialist agenda. Yet, although partisan films contributed to raising the visibility of women fighters in the collective imaginary, most did not contribute to creating female partisan stars, but rather an army of caregivers in supporting roles. As we have seen, this is in part also the case of *On Our Own Land*. In spite of this, the women in this film are emancipated from the traditional portrayal of housewives seen on the Italian side, in *The Suffering Town*. This is because they are openly expressing their political opinions and taking action in war regardless of whether they are presented as civilian victims, partisan nurses, or active soldiers. In accordance with the communist ideals of building a better future together, the victims, civilians or partisans, were shown as focused on the interests of the collective, and not on their own suffering. In contrast to the nationalist portrayal of Silvana and Norma, the socialist woman from the late 1940s was politically responsible. The inclusion of women in the army was part of the narrative of their active inclusion in social and political flows, in accordance with the communist ideal of gender equality. *On Our Own Land* represented an (ambivalent) attempt to establish gender equality, while *Trieste Is Ours* is a contemporary reminder of those attempts.

When it comes to the transformation of the narrativization of the (female) struggle for the border in Italian cinema, the traumas depicted in *The Suffering Town* are much more subtle than those we see in the later production and the film *Red Land*. They include a lack of milk, the invasion of personal and social space by the Other, and the most pronounced trauma of abandoning a home. There is no war trauma because this is not a war film, but a film about the consequences of war on the Italian population from Pula. *The Suffering Town* is clearly anti-socialist and victimizing, but in this period no brutal cinematic depictions of Italian suffering in the region were yet present. Within such a narrativization, the victimization of women as particularly striking symbols of the nation (due to the idea of female vulnerability and the ability to bear offspring) was also relatively moderate. Conversely, *Red Land* much more obviously satisfies the need for right-wing populism to portray its own national group as a victim by using the image of the most brutal female victimhood to construct that narrative. A woman is a particularly useful and suitable symbol for such a representation because women, children and the elderly represent the most fragile part of the population. Such a transformation of cinematic trends is a logical consequence of Italy's role in the Second World War. Namely, it was necessary for the social and political conditions to be created for the kind of presentation of female trauma offered by *Red Land*—in the first

years after the war, knowing that Italy was on the side of the Axis, it was difficult to portray the aggressor-nation as a victim, and it was also difficult for such a narrative to be well accepted.

On the contrary, more than 70 years after the end of the Second World War, when enough time has passed since those events, and the right-wing parties have strengthened significantly, better conditions have been created for the relativization of the Italian role in the war. The mere fact that the filmmakers' focus has moved from the postwar to war trauma, and from the story of the exodus to the story of the *foibe* crimes, also represents a sort of escalation of the cinematic image of the struggle for the border. Considering the emblematic nature of the *foibe* crimes and the extent of Italian migration from socialist Yugoslavia, these images are particularly useful and suitable for forging tragic cinematic imaginaries about these events. From the post-socialist perspective, as the role of women in Italian cinema transformed itself from a victim of political pressure to a victim of physical violence, the role of the colonizers has also evolved from the uncouth female Slavic partisan who colonized the Italian woman's space (apartment, town, emotional space) to the ruthless male partisans who not only colonized her land, but also abused (colonized) her body by raping and brutally murdering her. By presenting the retaliations of the multiethnic communist-led movement as predominantly nationally motivated, and their victims as symbols of national martyrdom, the film participates in the creation of a distorted image of the Second World War—it uses and abuses the memory of female war trauma to fit a patriarchal and nationalist ideology, the one which revitalizes fascist crimes, by equating fascism and communism, that is, fascism and antifascism.

About the Author

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PART III

**Wartime Violence and Postwar
Executions**

6. The Representation of Wartime Rape and the “Investigation into Violations of the Law of Nations Committed by the Enemy” (1915–1920)

Teresa Bertilotti

Abstract: This study examines representations of wartime rape during World War I in posters and cinema, alongside analysis of Italy’s postwar “Investigation into Violations of the Law of Nations” (1915–1920). Promoted by the Italian government after the defeat at Caporetto, the inquiry documented crimes committed by Austrian and German forces in the occupied Upper Veneto, including sexual violence. The study analyzes the language of collected testimonies to determine whether, and how, wartime imagery and discourse shaped accounts of rape, influencing interpretations of sexual violence, civilian reactions, and women’s actions. The analysis draws on scholarship from twentieth-century conflicts, especially the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, when renewed attention to wartime rape provided methodological tools for reassessing sexual violence in earlier conflicts.

Keywords: First World War, propaganda, rapes, Italy, gender, sexualized violence

Introduction

As early as the beginning of World War I, public discourse on the war made frequent use of the rapes committed by German troops during the invasion of Belgium and Northern France. It was mainly through visual images that crimes, actual or alleged, against women and the family were conveyed,

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and World War I saw the spread of these images on an unprecedented scale. After the end of the conflict, the Italian government carried out an investigation to determine what violations had been committed by the Austrian and German troops in the Upper Veneto region they occupied after the October 1917 offensive.¹ Among the “violations of the law of nations,” the investigation also considered the commission of rape.

In the following pages, I will analyze that government investigation, focusing on the language used in the collected testimonies in order to ascertain if and how the visual representation of rapes committed during the conflict served to orient those same testimonies, attributing a certain meaning to those acts, to the reactions on the part of the population, and to the behavior of women.

As a result of the conflicts in recent decades, particularly those in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, new attention has been focused on the phenomenon of wartime rape. As Elizabeth Heinemann has written, “in the early 1990s, rape in the wars in the former Yugoslavia and in the genocide in Rwanda received widespread media coverage, reflecting changed attitudes toward such systematic gendered violence”; furthermore, “revelations of sexual abuse of prisoners by personnel at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and reports of rape in ongoing conflicts in Sudan, Uganda, and Congo have drawn renewed attention to an ancient problem: sexual violence in conflict zones.”² Research on such realities, aimed at understanding sexual violence in contemporary conflicts, has developed new tools of inquiry that, as we shall see, are useful in investigating and rereading past conflicts, particularly during World War I in the area of the North Adriatic, a central point of focus in the present volume.

Representation

Propaganda, especially British propaganda, leveraged crimes against women and the family by using gender-based violence to justify military, foreign, and domestic policy. British narratives of atrocities were central to the creation of an international gendered language aimed at justifying the

1 On the occupation of the Veneto region, see Gustavo Corni, “L’occupazione austro-germanica del Veneto nel 1917–1918: sindaci, preti, austriacanti, e patrioti,” *Rivista di storia contemporanea* 3 (1989): 380–408.

2 Elizabeth Heinemann, “Introduction: The History of Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones,” in *Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones*, ed. Elizabeth Heinemann (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 1.

"just war," language which has widely been used since to target Western public opinion.³

Moreover, as Jean Bethke Elshtain has written, one must consider how "our dominant symbols of male fighters and female noncombatants, recognizable as the Just Warrior and the Beautiful Soul, continue to resonate in contemporary discourse and in popular understanding."⁴ Propaganda made extensive use of visual media, particularly "the poster was poised to become the preferred propaganda medium of the war."⁵ As Leanne Green points out,

Pictorial publicity from both public and private concerns used rhetorical frameworks of national loyalty, gender and anti-German rhetoric to manipulate public opinion. War publicity was instrumental in providing a link between the state and the masses. Also used by charities and other interest groups, it was perceived as a crucial and effective link to the public.⁶

As is well known, in the postwar period, such violence was questioned and even denied,⁷ but the extensive work of authors such as John Horne, Alan Kramer and Lawrence Zuckerman is somewhat more cautious in offering full confirmation of hard-to-verify sex crimes. Nevertheless, their studies offer an indictment of German conduct in Belgium and France that leaves open the possibility of widespread abuse of civilian populations. While these authors are inclined to downplay some of the more sensational stories that gained credibility during the war (particularly allegations that the Germans deliberately cut off the hands of young children and amputated the breasts of rape victims to punish them for having been exposed to sexually transmitted diseases), their accounts lead us to consider the possibility that

3 Nicoletta F. Gullace, "Sexual Violence and Family Honor: British Propaganda and International Law during the First World War," *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 3 (1997): 715.

4 Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War: With a New Epilogue* (The University of Chicago Press, 1995), xii.

5 See Pearl James' introduction in her edited volume *Picture This: World War I Posters and Visual Culture* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009): 1–36.

6 Leanne Green, "Advertising War: Picturing Belgium in First World War Publicity," *Media, War & Conflict* 7, no. 3 (2014): 310.

7 See Nicoletta F. Gullace, "War Crimes or Atrocity Stories? Anglo-American Narratives of Truth and Deception in the Aftermath of World War I," in *Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones*, ed. Elizabeth Heinemann (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 105–121; and Nicoletta F. Gullace, "Allied Propaganda and World War I: Interwar Legacies, Media Studies, and the Politics of War Guilt," *History Compass* 9, no. 9 (2011): 686–700.

mass rape accompanied the invasion and occupation.⁸ Horne and Kramer's research also helps us "to understand how the issue was imaginatively and intellectually transformed by the process of cultural mobilization on both sides throughout the conflict."⁹

This is propaganda that hinges on the construction of the enemy, represented above all as a barbarian: it is no coincidence that one of the most frequently used words for the enemy is "Hun,"¹⁰ an enemy that brings a "primitive" war, whose anti-modern nature is symbolized by the destruction of cultural goods such as cathedrals and libraries. One need only think of the destruction of the cathedral of Reims, which recurs in various representations, for example in the cinema with the film *Mères françaises* [Mothers of France], a propaganda movie produced by the French government and directed by Louis Mercanton and René Hervil, which focuses on the drama endured by mothers, and their spirit of sacrifice, the ultimate expression of patriotism. The protagonist is Sarah Bernhardt, a widow and the mother of a fallen soldier, as she is portrayed against the background of the cathedral of Reims, a symbol of national identity as the city where the kings of France were crowned, here half destroyed by German bombings.¹¹

The enemy is also often connoted in racial terms: the German is portrayed as an Asian barbarian or as an African savage who then takes on an animal likeness, typically a gorilla, or even utterly inhuman, such as an ogre.¹²

The spread of these representations is also transmitted by cinema. As far as Italy is concerned, suffice it to mention a few titles: *Passano gli Unni* [The Huns Are Coming], which recounts the German invasion of Belgium, directed by Mario Caserini and premiering in April 1916 in Rome and Paris, where it enjoyed enormous success. Also revealing is a film directed by Febo Mari entitled *Attila*. Many of these films are aimed at ridiculing the enemy. As Mario Isnenghi has pointed out about the newspapers aimed at soldiers, the technique used is that of "burattinizzazione del nemico" [puppetization

8 John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Lawrence Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium: The Untold Story of World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

9 Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, 2.

10 Nicoletta F. Gullace reconstructs the use of the word "Hun" in "Barbaric Anti-Modernism: Representations of the 'Hun' in Britain, North America, Australia and Beyond," in *Picture This: World War I Posters and Visual Culture*, ed. Pearl James (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 61–78.

11 Louis Mercanton and René Hervil, *Mères Françaises*, France 1917; the film was distributed in the United States where it was very successful, under the title *Mothers of France*, and distributed in Italy under the title *Madri francesi*.

12 Gullace, "Barbaric Anti-Modernism," 68.

of the enemy], aimed at teaching readers “a odiare e disprezzare i tedeschi (nel caso italiano soprattutto gli austro-ungarici), in maniera metodica, ma con leggerezza, su un piano umano, metapolitico” [to hate and despise the Germans (in the Italian case especially the Austro-Hungarians), in a methodical way, but lightly, on a human, metapolitical level.]¹³ Cinema and theater, in fact, lend themselves well to the operation of the “deformazione del nemico [...], uno dei primi risultati dello stato di guerra: contraffazione politica e militare, stravolgimento dei suoi moventi e fini, negazione della sua umanità, esclusione dai limiti stessi della natura umana, riduzione a tratti animaleschi e subumani” [deformation of the enemy ... one of the first results of the state of war: political and military counterfeiting, distortion of (the other's) motives and ends, denial of his humanity, exclusion from the very limits of human nature, reduction to animalistic and subhuman traits], which, in Italy, “trovano appoggio innanzitutto nel vasto serbatoio di risonanze emotive, di figure e sentimenti depositati nella memoria collettiva dal Risorgimento in poi” [find support first and foremost in the vast reservoir of emotional resonances, figures and feelings deposited in the collective memory from the Risorgimento onward.]¹⁴

The enemy is ridiculed or dehumanized, and the cinema, like other visual devices, taking up the elementary structures of national discourse,¹⁵ uses rape committed during the war, along with the mourning of mothers and widows and the different roles assumed by women during the conflict, particularly that of the nurse, to emphasize the brutality of the enemy.¹⁶ Examples include Amleto Palermi's film *Amore di Barbaro* [Barbarian Love] and Ugo Falena's *Il figlio della guerra* [The Child of War], both in theaters in 1916: the former “riproduce, in una tela drammaticissima, gli orrori dell'invasione tedesca” [reproduces, on a dramatic canvas, the horrors of the German invasion]¹⁷ and presents the theme of a child born of rape; *Il figlio della guerra* tells the story of a young woman who is raped and impregnated. Concerning theater, it suffices to mention Annie Vivanti's play *L'invasore*

13 Mario Isnenghi, *Giornali di trincea (1915–1918)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), 144–145.

14 Isnenghi, *Giornali di trincea (1915–1918)*, 145. Austria-Hungary is seen as having usurped the Italian territory that after 1866 remained beyond the Isonzo border.

15 See Alberto M. Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento. Parentela, santità e onore alle origini dell'Italia unita* (Turin: Einaudi, 2000); Alberto M. Banti, *L'onore della nazione. Identità sessuali e violenza nel nazionalismo europeo dal XVIII secolo alla Grande Guerra* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005).

16 For an analysis of entertainment and how the enemy is constructed, see Teresa Bertilotti, “Ad altezza d'occhio: dispositivi visuali e sguardi sul nemico,” in *Fratelli al massacro. Linguaggi e narrazioni della Prima guerra mondiale*, ed. Tullia Catalan (Rome: Viella, 2015), 131–149.

17 Vittorio Martinelli, *Il cinema muto italiano. I film della Grande Guerra. 1916, parte prima* (Turin: Nuova ERI—Edizioni RAI, 1992), 24.

[The Invader], which debuted in Milan in the fall of 1915 and focused on the theme of the rapes of women in Belgium during the German occupation, a theme that the author would take up again with her novel *Vae Victis*.¹⁸

It is no coincidence that the entertainment industry devotes so much space to the war and violence against women. The world of culture and entertainment, in fact, had immediately mobilized in the wake of the invasion of Belgium¹⁹ and dedicated films and plays to the country symbolic of the enemy's brutality. As Louella Parsons, a writer, screenwriter and feared US film critic, noted in an article which appeared in *Photoplay* in September 1918, for the mobilization of the home front, there were no more effective weapons fired against the Prussian Empire than the cinematic stories that recounted German atrocities.²⁰ As Gian Piero Brunetta notes, cinema, therefore, was not interested in seeking "le funzioni di pura riproduzione realistica quanto quelle emotive, per rafforzare i vincoli ideali e sentimentali tra casa e trincea, e favorire un senso di unanime partecipazione economica allo sforzo bellico" [the functions of pure realistic reproduction as much as emotional ones, to strengthen the ideal and sentimental bonds between home and trench and foster a sense of unanimous economic participation in the war effort].²¹

Investigation into Violations of the Law of Nations by the Enemy

The Commission was established in November 1918 with the task of estimating the extent of personal and property damage and ascertaining the individual responsibilities of the military.²² Availing itself of the cooperation of the Military Authorities, the Commission visited the places that had been occupied by Austrian and German troops after the defeat of Caporetto on

18 Annie Vivanti, *L'invasore* (Milan: Quintieri, 1915); Annie Vivanti, *Vae Victis* (Milan: Quintieri, 1915).

19 Sophie de Schaepdruyver, "Occupation, Propaganda and the Idea of Belgium," in *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914–1918*, ed. Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 267–294.

20 Quoted in Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema mondiale I. L'Europa. Miti, luoghi, divi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999), 251.

21 Brunetta, *Storia del cinema mondiale*, 251.

22 The findings of the Commission are archived in the Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Rome under the title: *Commissione reale d'inchiesta sulle violazioni del diritto delle genti commesse dal nemico (1915–1920)* and have been partly published in *Relazioni della Reale Commissione d'inchiesta sulle violazioni del diritto delle genti commesse dal nemico* (Milan: Bestetti & Tumminelli, 1920–1921), Vols. 1–7.

October 24, 1917: a strip of the Asiago Plateau and the Upper Veneto, but also some towns in Trentino and Venezia Giulia.

As part of the investigation, a questionnaire was prepared regarding personal and property damage and the treatment of prisoners of war. Concerning personal damage, among other things, the Commission wanted to ascertain whether the enemy in military actions had used gas, had killed soldiers or officers who had surrendered, had neglected to rescue the wounded, had directed fire at hospitals or other medical facilities, whether people from the army and civilian population had been or were injured during bombardments, whether as a result of requisitions and depredation, the inhabitants had been deprived of the goods necessary for their sustenance, and “se nelle terre invase la soldatesca nemica si sia abbandonata a violenze contro le persone con uccisioni e ferimenti di cittadini inermi e con stupri di ragazze e di donne maritate, specificando i fatti e le singole responsabilità” [whether in the invaded lands the enemy troops had indulged in violence against people by killing and wounding unarmed citizens and by raping girls and married women, specifying the facts and individual responsibilities].²³

The investigation concerns claims related to war damage, primarily referring to material damage rather than moral damage. The investigation consists mainly of reports from civil and ecclesiastical authorities and the military, as well as complaints from private individuals, and focuses mainly on damage to property and industry, exploitation of the civilian population, and the conditions of internees.

The report dwells on the offensive of October 1917 when the Upper Veneto region was occupied by the Austrian and German troops and the “Commissione si è trovata di fronte a tale copia di sevizie patite dalle nostre sventurate popolazioni, da giudicare il loro martirio in nulla inferiore a quello sofferto dalle popolazioni della Francia e del Belgio sotto l’invasione germanica o da quelle Serbe sotto l’invasione austriaca” [Commission was confronted with such an image of the hardships suffered by our unfortunate populations, that it judged their martyrdom to be in no way inferior to that suffered by the populations of France and Belgium under the Germanic invasion or by those of Serbia under the Austrian invasion].²⁴ The reference to a “martyrdom” that is equal to that suffered specifically by the populations of France and Belgium is immediate, an inevitable touchstone for highlighting the extent of the cruelties perpetrated by the invaders and referring back to the discourse on war carried on by the propaganda as discussed previously.

23 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. IV (*L'occupazione delle provincie invase*), 131.

24 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. IV (*L'occupazione delle provincie invase*), 149.

Regarding violence against women, the Commission notes that “delitti contro l'onore femminile” [crimes against women's honor] constitute a

quadro criminale di proporzioni non minori di quello dei delitti commessi a scopo di rapina ... In chi ha raccolto le testimonianze della popolazione dei territori invasi, la narrazione delle violenze carnali lascia un senso di sdegno e ribrezzo ... Nel territorio di Vittorio e di Conegliano, dove rimasero per cinque mesi i germanici, e nel Feltrino, dove più a lungo rimasero gli ungheresi, molte ragazze, spaventate dal contegno brutale degli Imperiali, abbandonarono le proprie case, si nascosero nelle campagne per avere salvo l'onore”

[a picture of criminal activity that is not inferior to that of crimes committed for the purpose of robbery ... In those who have collected the testimonies of the population in the invaded territories, the narrative of rape leaves a sense of outrage and revulsion ... In the territory of Vittorio and Conegliano, where the Germans stayed for five months, and in the Feltrino area, where the Hungarians stayed longer, many girls, frightened by the brutal demeanor of the Imperials, abandoned their homes and hid in the countryside to preserve their honor].²⁵

The spectrum of violence committed against women

va dai casi estremi di aggressione violenta contro la vittima, accompagnati da omicidi o ferimenti contro i famigliari che ne tentavano l'ultima difesa, ai casi comuni di stupro con minaccia a mano armata, fino ai casi non meno abbietti, in cui gli ufficiali nemici, speculando sulla fame della popolazione, condizionavano alla dedizione del corpo delle donne la consegna della farina necessaria per sfamare le famiglie di queste. Triste eredità lasciata dall'invasione restano gl'innocenti nati dalla violenza nemica. Solamente presso l'ospizio dei figli della guerra (San Filippo Neri, eretto a Portogruaro) ne sono stati raccolti oltre duecento

[ranges from the extreme cases of violent aggression against the victim, accompanied by murder or wounding of family members who attempted their last defense, to the common cases of rape at gunpoint, to the no less abject cases in which enemy officers, speculating on the hunger of the population, conditioned the dedication of women's bodies on the

25 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. IV (*L'occupazione delle provincie invase*), 149.

delivery of the flour needed to feed their families. A sad legacy left by the invasion remain the innocents born of enemy violence. At the children of war hospice alone (San Filippo Neri, erected in Portogruaro) over two hundred were collected].²⁶

These acts of violence were so widespread throughout the territory “che quasi ogni Comune lamenta vittime più o meno numerose” [that almost every township complains of rather numerous victims].²⁷

Beyond the quantitative aspect, the collected testimonies themselves are very interesting for the assessments they express. The very wording used by the Commission is significant, which qualifies violence against women as “crimes against women’s honor,” a theme which will be discussed later, and establishes a difference between rapes perpetrated against “girls” and those against “married women.” A distinction taken up in many testimonies, for example, the testimony of a parish priest, declares that “vennero stuprate ragazze ed anche donne maritate, ma non è possibile precisare i fatti e responsabilità poiché i danneggiati o per pudore o per naturale riservatezza non li denunciano” [girls and also married women were raped, but it is not possible to determine the facts and responsibility because those who were harmed do not report them, either out of modesty or natural reticence].²⁸ This testimony introduces a central theme—the failure to report the violence suffered—to which we will return.

Who is capable of perpetrating such violence? The “barbari” [barbarians], the “eredi di Attila” [heirs of Attila] according to Sister Maria Elena Zuccoli, Mother Superior of the Institute of Providence in Udine, who thus defines the Hungarians and Bosnians.²⁹ As one mayor reported, “appena invaso il territorio si è riversata una fiumana di orde barbariche” [as soon as they invaded the territory, a flood of barbarian hordes poured in],³⁰ while a parish priest considers Hungarian soldiers barbarians and brigands in reporting on the “vandalismo dei briganti dalla divisa ungherese” [vandalism of brigands in Hungarian uniform].³¹ The mayor of Rocca Pietore reports that “le truppe nemiche, ritirandosi... trascesero a violenze contro le persone, percuotendo vecchi e donne e minacciando selvaggiamente col fucile, colla pistola e con la baionetta. E ciò era sistematico.... A Sopracordevole i barbari

26 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. IV (*L'occupazione delle provincie invase*), 150.

27 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. IV (*L'occupazione delle provincie invase*), 152.

28 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, 494.

29 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, 138.

30 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, 645.

31 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, 645.

penetrarono nella stanza dove boccheggiava moribonda” [the enemy troops, retreating... descended into violence against people, beating old men and women and savagely threatening them with rifle, pistol and bayonet. And this was systematic.... In Sopracordevole, the barbarians penetrated the room where a woman was gasping for breath], a woman of about 30 years of age, “la smossero con brutalità, cercando bottino nel pagliericcio e fra le coperte” [they moved her about brutally, searching for booty in the straw mattress and among the blankets].³² The end of the war, therefore, can only mean liberation from barbarism: “Finalmente il 4 novembre, data imperitura ed incancellabile, il nostro valoroso e glorioso esercito, ebbe a liberarci da quei barbari briganti” [At last on November 4, an imperishable and indelible date, our valiant and glorious army, liberated us from those barbaric brigands].³³

As previously pointed out and as we have seen, in various contexts, beginning with the military, violence against women takes on a connotation that fails to take into consideration the female realm and is instead aimed at “delineare negativamente il nemico e massificare contro di lui, oltre che sentimenti umanitari, un odio di *maschi* e di *possessori* espropriati” [negatively depicting the enemy and, in addition to humanitarian concerns, amassing against him the hatred of *males* and dispossessed *possessors*], as Mario Isnenghi has pointed out in analyzing trench newspapers and Daniele Ceschin for other newspapers as well.³⁴

From what has been said, it seems clear that the “representations of sexual violence in war do not simply occur after the fact: rather, they are often part of the conflict itself. Indeed, such representations help rivals to define themselves against each other.”³⁵

It is the very masculinity of combatants that is questioned: “so we see that many men regard their masculinity as compromised by the abuse of ‘their’ women. At heart is the outcome for the men, not the suffering of the women.”³⁶

32 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, 385–386.

33 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, 671.

34 Isnenghi, *Giornali di trincea*, 177–178; Daniele Ceschin, “L'estremo oltraggio”: la violenza alle donne in Friuli e in Veneto durante l'occupazione austro-germanica (1917–1918),” in *La violenza contro la popolazione civile nella Grande Guerra. Deportati, profughi, internati*, ed. Bruna Bianchi (Milan: Unicopli, 2006), 165–184.

35 Heinemann, “Introduction: The History of Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones,” 19.

36 Ruth Seifert, “War and Rape: A Preliminary Analysis,” in *Mass Rape: The War against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, ed. Alexandra Stiglmayer (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994),

Women Do Not Report Out of Modesty

A giudicare dallo spavento generale, dice il sig. (Pietro) Mandruzzato (Sindaco di Belluno), in cui per tanti mesi si trovavano le nostre donne, convien credere che i casi di violenza carnale e le minacce [sic] insidiose siano stati più frequenti di quel che noi sappiamo. È naturale che per un senso innato e profondo di pudore le nostre donne tacciano certe onte. Così io so che nelle frazioni, a S. Gervasio per esempio, una donna violentata ha taciuto l'offesa subita.

[Judging from the general terror, says Mr. (Pietro) Mandruzzato (Mayor of Belluno), in which for so many months our women found themselves, it must be believed that the cases of rape and insidious threats were more frequent than we know. It is natural that out of an innate and deep sense of modesty our women keep quiet about this kind of shame. I know that in the hamlets, in S. Gervasio for example, a woman who was raped kept silent about the offense she suffered.]³⁷

There are numerous testimonies about the “modesty” women have in reporting the violence they have suffered. Francesco Agosti, Director of the Civil Hospital of Belluno, reports that he “aver medicato per ferite e contusioni di vario grado almeno una ventina di donne, così conciate per essersi opposte a soldati austriaci che volevano violentarle” [treated for wounds and bruises of various degrees at least 20 women, so damaged for having resisted Austrian soldiers who wanted to rape them] and adds that

questi tentativi venivano fatti più spesso da gruppi di soldati che da individui isolati. In città sono stati meno frequenti che in campagna, ed anche in campagna le case più molestate erano quelle isolate. Comunemente i soldati nemici ed anche gli ufficiali tentavano le violenze carnali nelle case, dopo esservi penetrati colla forza, e cercavano di riuscire nei loro intenti minacciando le vittime prescelte con le armi, rivoltelle e pugnali.

[these attempts were made more often by groups of soldiers than by isolated individuals. In the city, they were less frequent than in the country, and even in the country, the most harassed houses were the isolated ones. Commonly, enemy soldiers and even officers attempted rape in houses, having penetrated them by force, and tried to succeed

37 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, 21.

in their intentions by threatening their chosen victims with weapons, revolvers and daggers.]³⁸

Dr. Agosti believes that rape, for the most part, remained ignored because “nelle campagne il pudore inibisce alle vittime di denunciare l’onta patita” [in the countryside modesty inhibits victims from denouncing the shame they suffered].³⁹

Agosti records the treatments he gave, and his diary is punctuated with entries about violence against women: on December 19, 1917, Austrian soldiers entered a house in the hamlet of S. Gervasio and “hanno tramortito a furia di pugni e di bastonate il vecchio padre e l’unica figlia, e li hanno trascinati nei campi. La figlia in quelle condizioni è stata violata” [with fists and blows, they incapacitated the old father and his only daughter and dragged them into the fields. The daughter in that condition was violated]; on January 29, 1918, a woman with “varie abrasioni al viso e alle mani. Racconta che alcuni soldati bosniaci, entrati nella casa della donna, con minacce a mano armata, l’hanno imbavagliata, trascinata nella stalla e violentata” [various abrasions on her face and hands was accompanied to the hospital. She recounts that some Bosnian soldiers, who entered the woman’s house with armed threats, gagged her, dragged her to the barn and raped her],⁴⁰ and so forth.

Numerous mayors state that “per un senso di pudore le vittime non desiderano fare denuncia” [out of a sense of modesty the victims do not wish to press charges], but they affirm that “fatti simili si verificarono in più località” [similar events occurred in multiple locations]⁴¹ The mayors are echoed by the parish priests—“vennero stuprate ragazze ed anche donne maritate, ma non è possibile precisare i fatti e responsabilità poiché i danneggiati o per pudore o per naturale riservatezza non li denunciano” [girls and also married women were raped, but it is not possible to determine the facts and responsibility because those who were harmed do not report them, either out of modesty or natural reticence]⁴²—and the Carabinieri: “si vocifera pure che 2 figlie di certo Tommaso Giotto di Colbertaldo siano state stuprate in quegli stessi giorni e circostanze, ma la famiglia cerca nascondere il fatto e nulla si è potuto sapere di positive” [it is also rumored that two daughters of a certain Tommaso Giotto of Colbertaldo were raped

38 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, 30.

39 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, 30.

40 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, 30.

41 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, 331.

42 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, 494.

in that same period and under the same circumstances, but the family tries to hide the fact and nothing definite could be known].⁴³

There are many testimonies emphasizing the infrequent reporting of rapes “il cui controllo è reso difficile per il naturale pudore delle donne che ne furono vittime” [confirming the events is made difficult due to the natural modesty of the women who were victims]; “la delicatezza estrema dell’argomento ha reso difficile l’accertamento dei fatti” [the extreme delicacy of the subject made it difficult to ascertain the facts]; “la voce pubblica conferma che parecchie donne maritate e nubili furono violate brutalmente. Però il pudore fa tacere le vittime” [public knowledge confirms that several married and unmarried women were brutally violated. However, modesty silences the victims].⁴⁴

Sexual violence is considered first and foremost a “disgrace”: two women “furono violentate da soldati nemici che le costrinsero a subire l’onta, con la baionetta in canna” [were raped by enemy soldiers who forced them to suffer disgrace, with a bayonet in the rifle barrel], writes a Captain De Marchi.⁴⁵ The violence suffered, then, is connoted primarily by the discredit that follows, a kind of mark of infamy to which dishonor, humiliation and shame are corollary. With some frequency, the expression “la donna ha subito l’oltraggio del nemico,” [the woman has suffered the outrage of the enemy] is used: the word “outrage” does not demarcate the scope of action to the woman alone but amplifies it by placing “the blame” on the victim’s entire household.⁴⁶

This is even more the case when the violence suffered brings with it an illness, as in the case of a 50-year-old woman who had been “oltraggiata venne poi ricoverata nell’ospedale di Feltre perché contagiata” [outraged was then hospitalized in the Feltre hospital because she was infected],⁴⁷ or when a child is born from the violence. In order to deal specifically with this occurrence, a hospice—the San Filippo Neri Institute—was established to take in the so-called “children of war” with the aim of “ricomporre la pace familiare turbata e la rovina morale portata da queste vittime innocenti”

43 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, 495.

44 The first two testimonies are from mayors, the third from a priest in *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, 541, 544 and 644.

45 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, 255.

46 Andrea Falcomer, “Gli ‘orfani dei vivi’. Madri e figli della guerra e della violenza nell’attività dell’Istituto San Filippo Neri (1918–1947),” *Deportate, esuli, profughe. Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile* 10 (2009): 79.

47 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI.

[restoring the family peace that has been disrupted and the moral ruin that has been brought about by these innocent victims].⁴⁸

According to the investigation cited above, there were 165 rapes reported in which the victim's details are known; the investigation reports an additional 570 cases of rape without, however, providing the identity of the victim.⁴⁹ At the San Filippo Neri Institute, whose activities ceased in 1928 when the "children of war" were relocated to different institutions, it was ascertained that 42 births were the result of sexual violence: 39 by Austrian and German soldiers and three by Italian soldiers.⁵⁰

The Institute's sources do not distinguish whether the births were the result of a relationship that was violent or illegitimate, but out of approximately 194 cases, it appears that there were 115 children born from relationships between soldiers and Italian women, 46 were children of Austrian and German soldiers, while the remaining 69 were the result of relationships with members of the Italian army; it is valid to think that even during the Italian occupation in the territories subject to Austria-Hungary, incidents of rape occurred.⁵¹ In this regard, it suffices to mention the diary of Vincenzo Rabito, who recounts in detail the rape, by three Italian soldiers, of a woman belonging to the "razza maledetta" [accursed race], namely, Slovenian.⁵²

The women who evade attempts at violence are considered heroic, a point that many testimonies emphasize, because, in so doing, these women avoid a "scandal." This is evident from the testimony of the parish priest of a village of Belluno who reports that "un capitano bosniaco tentò parecchie volte violare certa De Barba De Boba Amabile, la quale riuscì sempre onestamente a respingere le insidie dell'immondo satiro" [a Bosnian captain attempted several times to violate a certain De Barba De Boba Amabile, who always managed to honestly repel the wiles of the unclean satyr], while when some Hungarian soldiers kidnapped a girl, "per l'intervento pronto del parroco, venne evitato uno scandalo" [due to the prompt intervention of the parish priest, a scandal was avoided].⁵³

The shame from sexual violence is not accompanied by a sense of community solidarity but by guilt. As was noted by the UN Commission, with

48 Falcomer, "Gli 'orfani dei vivi,'" 79; this provides additional insights into the sense of shame and guilt felt by women who entrust their children to the Institute and the pain caused by their separation from their child.

49 Ceschin, "L'estremo oltraggio."

50 Falcomer, "Gli 'orfani dei vivi,'" 78.

51 Falcomer, "Gli 'orfani dei vivi,'" 78.

52 Vincenzo Rabito, *Terra matta* (Turin: Einaudi, 2007), 120–135.

53 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, 403 and 710.

respect to the rapes committed during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the code of honor that characterizes communities “obscures the violent nature of the crime and inappropriately shifts the focus toward the imputed shame of the victim and away from the intent of the perpetrator to violate, degrade and injure.”⁵⁴

At the same time, “while the raped woman is expelled from the social and from humanity, the patriarchal structure is strengthened and purified” as Franco asserts, citing the work of Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen about ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, who further argue “that rape pollution consolidates the perpetrators in a ‘brotherhood of guilt,’ giving them a sense of community derived from the victim’s abjection. It is also an act of initiation, serving to strengthen ties to the army or the nation, and on the side of the victim, the same act often resists translation into language and thus cannot serve as the basis for the formation of a social bond” and thus “‘hypermasculinity’ is exalted insofar as the female, as well as the male enemy, are degraded.”⁵⁵

Rape, therefore, is a “massive attack on female subjectivity that goes as far as to destroy it. If you suppress and silence this experience, it means that in a cultural context, the experience of women and, therefore, female subjectivity is extinguished. After that, there is only the female body, with which men have experiences, interpreting those experiences according to criteria that leave intact their social position of power.”⁵⁶

Also, as has been noted, genocide and wars are not only gendered but “often feminized through the positioning of women not only as sexual trophies that can be exchanged between male enemies, not only as markers of collective boundaries, but also as symbolic representations of national and ethnic collectivities.”⁵⁷

Rape is an experience that is shameful and therefore hidden, both by the women who have been victimized and by their families. This is why it is difficult to build a collective memory of sexual violence, due in part, as Ruth Harris has pointed out, to the fact that the models of gender relations

54 *Preliminary Report* submitted by Radhika Coomaraswamy, the special rapporteur on violence against women of the UN Commission on Human Rights, 50th session, November 1994, UN document EcN 41995/42, 15, cit. in Jean Franco, “Rape: A Weapon of War,” *Social Text* 25, no. 2 (2007): 31.

55 Franco, “Rape: A Weapon of War,” 29; Franco refers to Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen, “Becoming Abject: Rape as a Weapon of War,” *Body and Society* 11 (2005): 124.

56 Seifert, “War and Rape,” 67.

57 Ronit Lentin, “The Rape of the Nation: Women Narrativising Genocide,” *Sociological Research Online* 4, no. 2 (1999): 2.

and their representation are contradictory: in the newspapers that arrived to soldiers at the front, women were portrayed as deliberately betraying their men fighting at the front.⁵⁸ The campaign against pornography taking place in many European countries highlights women's alleged infidelity.⁵⁹ In fact, it is argued that, along with battles against the enemy, other battles were necessary: against pornography, sexually transmitted diseases, and neo-Malthusianism.⁶⁰

The historiography on civilian victims of world wars only gained ground at the end of the last century,⁶¹ and still in 1995, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau noted that forms of violence against women, which stand at the point of the intersection between the history of wartime violence and the history of bodies in wartime, had yet to be studied and written.⁶² Greater delays were recorded in the Italian case, and this must be attributed to the absence of a collective (national) memory of the year of occupation; added to this was the operation carried out by fascism that “nella scelta di rimuovere Caporetto e di declinare la Grande guerra nel senso di Vittorio Veneto, ha rimosso anche tutti coloro che della rotta o erano stati i presunti responsabili o ne avevano subito direttamente od indirettamente le conseguenze: prigionieri, internati, profughi, civili rimasti in territorio occupato” [in the choice to remove Caporetto and to define the Great War in terms of Vittorio Veneto, this also removed all those who had been or were presumed responsible for the rupture, who had directly or indirectly suffered the consequences: prisoners, the interned, refugees, civilians that remained in occupied territory].⁶³ Rapes committed at the hands of Germans and barbarians, which had been used to support the moral resistance of the populations in the early period of the war, were no longer “una vergognosa umiliazione e in ogni caso un’esperienza dolorosa che era preferibile dimenticare, se

58 Ruth Harris, “The ‘Child of the Barbarian’: Rape, Race, and Nationalism in France during the First World War,” *Past & Present* 141 (1993): 170–206.

59 See Teresa Bertilotti, “Donne eroiche e veneri vaganti. Luoghi di intrattenimento e rispettabilità,” in *La Grande Guerra delle italiane. Mobilitazioni, diritti, trasformazioni*, ed. Stefania Bartoloni (Roma: Viella, 2016), 295–316; for France, see Jean-Yves Le Naour, *Misères et tourments de la chair. Les mœurs sexuelles des Français, 1914–1918* (Paris: Aubier, 2002), in particular 223–248.

60 Luc Capdevila, François Rouquet, Fabrice Virgili and Danièle Voldman, *Sexes, genre et guerres (France 1914–1945)* (Paris: Payot, 2010), 111.

61 On the female victims, see Annette Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre. Humanitaire et culture de guerre; populations occupées, déportés civils, prisonniers de guerre* (Paris: Noesis, 1998); Bianchi, “I civili: vittime innocenti o bersagli legittimi?”, 13.

62 Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *L’enfant de l’ennemi 1914–1918. Viol, avortement, infanticide pendant la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Aubier, 1995).

63 Ceschin, “L’estremo oltraggio,” 166.

non per quel tanto che potesse servire ad alzare il prezzo dei risarcimenti richiesti. Più in generale, dopo il 1919 si preferì dimenticare Caporetto, e tutto ciò che n'era seguito, in nome di Vittorio Veneto" [a shameful humiliation and a painful experience which it was preferable to forget, if not for the fact that it could serve to raise the price of the compensation demanded. More generally, after 1919 it was preferred to forget Caporetto and everything that had followed in the name of Vittorio Veneto].⁶⁴

Violent Rape

A witness notes that some soldiers "stuprarono con violenza" [violently raped] a woman, and a priest states that other soldiers "s'impadronirono della povera donna e la violarono in modo indegno" [took possession of the poor woman and raped her in an unworthy way].⁶⁵ These are just two examples of expressions occur: the word "violent" is added to the word "rape" to "intensify" the testimony, as if the rape itself was not violent and unworthy enough.

Equally significant is the testimony of a lieutenant of the carabinieri and what is written in the investigation. The carabiniere officer reports an attempted act of violence in which a soldier attacked a woman, "tentò di sfogare su di lei il suo brutale istinto" [tried to vent on her his brutal instinct]; in the Commission's report it reads that everywhere "ufficiali e soldati germanici gareggiavano in cinismo e brutalità, e i comandi, cui gli abitanti ricorrevano, perché ponessero un freno al delittuoso costume, rispondevano con frasi di questo genere: *'Anche i soldati devono divertirsi'* oppure *'la Germania non viene ad imparare la moralità dall'Italia'*" [German officers and soldiers competed in cynicism and brutality, and when the populace went to the commanders to put a stop to the soldiers' criminal behavior, their commanders replied with statements such as: 'Even soldiers must have fun' or 'Germany does not need to learn morality from Italy.']⁶⁶ These testimonies introduce the theme of the unstoppable masculine "instinct." But it has been well-established that rape has nothing to do with the alleged male need for sex, as many studies have shown, and, as

64 Antonio Gibelli, "Guerra e violenze sessuali: il caso veneto e friulano," in *La memoria della Grande Guerra nelle Dolomiti*, ed. Mario Rigoni Stern (Udine: Paolo Gaspari, 2005), 176.

65 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, 486 and 409.

66 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, 329; *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, 155.

confirmed by the case described by Vincenzo Rabito, which states that rape cannot be attributed to the sexuality of men on the basis of their “nature.”⁶⁷

The male “instinct” is interpreted as a justification and, as is evident from several testimonies, this becomes even more legitimized in the case of married women. As asserted by the military command to which a family turned after several members of the family had been raped: “il comando militare del luogo, al quale i famigliari reclamarono, incaricò un ufficiale di compiere un’inchiesta; ma questi, saputo che le vittime erano spose, sospese l’inchiesta dicendo: ‘se son spose non importa’” [the military command in that place, which the family supplicated, commissioned an officer to carry out an investigation; but the officer, knowing that the victims were married women, suspended the investigation, saying: “if they are wives, then it does not matter”].⁶⁸

Rape, therefore, is not prosecuted and not only in the context of war: it is enough to recall that in Italy, the Zanardelli Code, which remained in force until 1930, classified rape as a crime against good manners and family order. The UN Commission on Human Rights has so far found that rape is the least punished war crime. The conclusion of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) indicted only three men on seven counts of violation of the laws or customs of war (torture, rape) and seven counts of crimes against humanity (torture, rape)—a poor conclusion indeed to the war in Bosnia, where thousands of women were raped during ethnic cleansing, and sexual violence is still being committed with impunity in the internal conflicts in Darfur, Congo and Colombia.⁶⁹

The testimonies of women who denounce the violence done to them do not require “intensifiers”: “tutti e tre, uno dopo l’altro, fecero strazio del mio corpo” [all three, one after the other, did torment my body]; “la notte del 4 novembre 1917 cinque soldati austriaci entrarono nella stanza dove io dormivo e, con minacce e percosse, hanno commesso successivamente violenze sulla mia persona” [on the night of November 4, 1917, five Austrian soldiers entered the room where I was sleeping and, with threats and beatings, subsequently committed violence against me]; four soldiers “vollero giacere con me violentandomi” [wanted to lie down with me by raping me].⁷⁰

We can therefore endorse what Ruth Harris has written in her analysis of The Commission’s investigation on what occurred in France, an investigation

67 See Seifert, “War and Rape.”

68 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, 155.

69 Franco, “Rape: A Weapon of War,” 23.

70 *Relazioni della Reale Commissione*, vol. VI, respectively on 151, 199 and 199.

similar to the one in Italy, which was responsible for shedding light on war crimes and which collected testimonies—dry, essential, often reticent—of women and soldiers. Unlike their female victims, the men linger on macabre details, often slipping into pornography, with the result that the discussion about sexual violence and war was more determined by male anxieties and fantasies than by the tragedy of women's experience.⁷¹

The testimonies of women, therefore, are few and scarce, even more rare are the autobiographical-historical documents. The diary of a peasant woman from Styria, who during the Second World War had suffered violence by soldiers of the Red Army, analyzed in this volume by Dagmar Wernitznig, is an exceptional case.⁷²

To conclude, we report in full one of the few female testimonies collected during the course of the "Investigation into the Violations of the Law of Nations Committed by the Enemy." This is the testimony of Elisa Minuzzi, 42 years old and resident in Conegliano, who calmly reports her dramatic personal experience:

La sera del 9 novembre 1917 non appena entrati i tedeschi in Conegliano, un militare portante una croce rossa sul braccio, che aveva preso alloggio nel piano sottostante al mio, entrò a mezzanotte nella stanza mia e per forza volle giacere con me.

Io cercai di oppormi in ogni modo, cercai di svincolarmi dalle sue strette, ma egli mi si fece sopra, mi strinse il collo e abusò della mia persona per 2 ore. Dopo di che tornò nel piano sottostante e la mattina appresso partì con altri suoi compagni. Ho l'impressione che la persona che mi violentò fosse il capo della comitiva.

Io mi trovavo in stato di verginità e purtroppo questo violento contatto ebbe la conseguenza che io rimasi incinta pur avendo 42 anni, e nove mesi dopo, e precisamente il 10 agosto diedi alla luce una bambina che allevai con molto stento avuto riguardo al mio depresso stato fisico.

Quando il militare entrò brutalmente nella mia stanza per allontanarlo cercai di chiamare soccorso ma era inutile perché nel piano sottostante vi erano gli altri suoi compagni e la strada era gremita di soldati avvinazzati.

71 Harris, "The 'Child of the Barbarian'."

72 See Wernitznig's chapter in this book; see also Selma Leydesdorff, *Surviving the Bosnian Genocide: The Women of Srebrenica Speak* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), which collects the testimonies of 60 women who survived the massacre at Srebrenica.

Dai parenti di certa Gaiot Carolina pure di Conegliano, già ottuagenaria, abitante in via Felice Cavallotti, intesi che altri soldati afferrarono la detta vecchia e dopo averle legato le mani ed imbavagliata abusarono di lei. Ho inteso che a Mareno di Piave in quel torno di tempi alcuni soldati germanici entrarono in una casa dove si trovavano un vecchio con tre sue nuore i cui mariti erano sotto le armi. Una di queste poté sfuggire alla violenza; due invece dovettero sottostarvi, né il vecchio poté difenderle perché fu reso all'impotenza in un canto della stanza dove si consumavano tali atti brutali.

La conseguenza fu che una delle spose rimase incinta e partorì una bambina

[On the evening of November 9, 1917, as soon as the Germans entered Conegliano, a soldier carrying a red cross on his arm, who had taken up accommodation on the floor below mine, came into my room at midnight and by force wanted to lie with me.

I tried to oppose it in every way, I tried to free myself from his grip, but he stepped on me, squeezed my neck and abused my person for two hours. After that, he returned to the floor below, and in the morning, he left with other companions. I have the impression that the person who raped me was the leader of the group.

I was in a state of virginity and, unfortunately, this violent contact had the consequence that I became pregnant despite being 42 years old, and nine months later, and precisely on August 10, I gave birth to a girl who I raised with very little respect for my depressed physical state.

When the soldier brutally entered my room to drive him away, I tried to call for help, but it was useless because on the floor below, there were his other comrades, and the street was full of soldiers.

The relatives of certain Gaiot Carolina, also of Conegliano, already octogenarian, inhabitant in via Felice Cavallotti, understood that other soldiers grabbed the old woman and abused her after having tied her hands and gagged her.

I have heard that in Mareno di Piave, some Germanic soldiers entered a house where an old man was with three of his daughters-in-law whose husbands were serving in the army. One of them managed to escape violence; two instead were subjected to it, and the old man could not defend them, because he was overpowered and left in a corner of the room where these brutal acts were carried out.

The result was that one of the daughters-in-law became pregnant and gave birth to a baby girl.]⁷³

Conclusions

As we have seen, for a long time, the acts of rape committed in the Italian territories remained unspoken of for several reasons: they occurred towards the end of the war and at the end of the war, with the advent of fascism; the fascists chose to forget the defeat of Caporetto in favor of emphasizing on the final victory; rape represented an experience that brought shame and was therefore hidden, both by women who had suffered violence and by their families. It is not by chance, then, that direct testimonies of women who were victimized are scarce and come predominantly from single women who could not hide what happened to them. All this prevented the formation of a collective memory.

Yet, during the war, especially in propaganda, there was much talk of rape: already in the first months of the conflict, sexual violence was present in the public discourse on the war, transposing the women who were victims of violence into the representation of a nation resisting assault by brutal men, and thus shifting the discourse towards considerations about infanticide and dangers to the race. In essence, rape takes on a connotation that disregards the female sphere and is instead aimed at arousing the hatred of the male possessors against the enemy.

Research has shown that representations of rape conveyed during the war had a direct impact on the reports provided by mayors, prefects, parish priests, doctors and private citizens to the Commission established in November 1918 tasked with ascertaining the extent of damage to persons and property and establishing the individual responsibilities of the military in the areas invaded by the enemy after the October 1917 offensive.

The present article also highlights the prejudices against women—the rape of married women is considered to be less serious than the rape of unmarried women—while research which has developed in different disciplinary fields as a result of contemporary wars, in particular the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina when between 20,000 and 50,000 women suffered sexual violence, has allowed us to re-read the Investigation with new tools designed to highlight, above all, the denial of female subjectivity.

73 Testimony of Elisa Minuzzi, resident of Conegliano, RRC, vol. VI, 87.

Finally, the present study emphasizes the near impossibility of prosecuting those responsible for acts of violence and the difficulty of defining the legal nature of wartime rape: suffice it to say that only in 1998 the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague ruled that rape is a crime against humanity and in 2003 the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (in 1994, 500,000 women were raped during the conflict) defined rape as genocide.⁷⁴

About the Author

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74 On acts of rape committed during conflicts in the twentieth century, see Marcello Flores, ed., *Stupri di guerra. La violenza di massa contro le donne nel Novecento* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2010).

7. Rape, Refugeeism, and Ruins: Trauma in Styria and Vienna in the Wake of the Second World War

Dagmar Wernitznig

Abstract: This chapter deals with a much-neglected topic: the mass rapes committed by the Red Army in the spring of 1945 in the Austrian province of Styria. For the purpose of this study, the postwar diary of an unidentified peasant woman and mother has been selected. By relating this individual text to a wider discourse about (para)military crimes, post-conflict trauma, and refugeedom, this contribution sheds a first light on ego-narratives by female voices that are, on average, not on the historiographic radar. This Styrian war log is then set into contradistinction to an urban, clinical context of the psychiatric chart of an intellectual woman who was institutionalized at the mental asylum of the Viennese General Hospital after having been similarly assaulted.

Keywords: sexualized violence, forced migration, maternalism, psychiatry

Es gab Schlimmeres als den Tod.¹

[Death is not the worst.]

¹ "Aus dem Kriegstagebuch einer oststeirischen Frau und Mutter" [From the war diary of an east-Styrian woman and mother], Steiermärkisches Landesarchiv [Styrian province archive], Sondersammlungen [Special collections], Sammlung 20. Jahrhundert [Collection twentieth century], Erlebnisberichte der Jahre 1944–45 Oststeiermark [Experience reports of the years 1944–1945 eastern Styria], box 43 (hereafter "Aus dem Kriegstagebuch"), 14. All translations from German to English by the author.

Früher habe sie nie Angst gehabt, erst seit der Kämpfe in Wien. Wenn sie einen Russen sehe, beginne sie schon zu zittern. Wenn jemand bei ihr sei, sei es besser.
 [She had never been afraid before, only since the fighting in Vienna. Whenever she sees a Russian, she starts to tremble. If someone is with her, it is better.]

S. T. (*1905 Vienna), January 8, 1946²

My mother lived through the Second World War as a little girl. Not even of school age yet, she had to run to bomb shelters all by herself when the air raids began, clutching her only companion and comfort, a doll that she still retains to this day, and harboring a handful of sugar cubes and crackers in her pocket as a “survival” ration. She was born in Dachau, Bavaria, which is another complex story, and raised in Graz, the province capital of Styria.³ When the last battles of this war were fought in the spring of 1945, she managed to get, literally, on the last evacuation truck out of this city, while the Red Army was dangerously coming closer. As a young woman and a refugee, she worked with displaced persons in Western Europe after the war, documenting their stories of loss, pain, grief, and deprivation. Even today, she gets anxious when she hears sirens, which remind her of the air raids, yet she buries these memories, refusing to articulate them in any shape or form, whether written or spoken, nor does she elaborate on the incarceration and torture of relatives during the Third Reich or the abduction of some of them after the war.

This contribution is about a female human being, who shared the same experience of fear and refugeedom in Styria, but who was not fortunate enough to escape to safety. Instead, she had to flee with her children from her home in eastern Styria and hide in various places, repeatedly chased and assaulted by gangs of Russian soldiers. Yet she managed to preserve her war memories, which she probably revised and compiled in retrospect to make sense of what happened as both personal therapy and a public statement. In the aftermath of the Second World War, society and scholarship alike were not ready or willing to be confronted with such haunting narratives.

Sexual violence against women and girls in Austrian, German, Hungarian, and Polish territories by the advancing Red Army remained a taboo subject in

2 Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv (MA 8), Allgemeines Krankenhaus, A56-Psychiatrie: Krankengeschichten: Frauen (hereafter AKH-A56), box 224 (journal number: 53; protocol number: 48). Due to ethical reasons, the mere initials of patients, not their full names, are provided.

3 With a total of 56 Allied air raids, Graz was the most bombarded city in Austria during the Second World War.

the decades after 1945.⁴ As Cold War rhetoric did not permit any questioning of the tactics or behavior of these soldiers, who were exclusively hailed as liberators from Nazi terror, their many victims had to endure the stigma and shame as well as mental and physical trauma in silence and in the shadows. One rare exception is the so-called Anonyma and her recollections and diary entries, which were wisely printed in 1954 without disclosing the author's name and as an English translation with the title *A Woman in Berlin* that aimed towards an international audience rather than a domestic German market.⁵ As a matter of fact, the German version that appeared five years later was very badly received by the outraged readership in Germany for addressing the unspoken, which resulted in Anonyma, shocked and re-victimized, prohibiting any further publication.⁶ Only after her death, there appeared a new edition in 2003 in German under the writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger's guardianship, followed by another in English two years later, whereupon the journalist Jens Bisky of the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* unscrupulously revealed Anonyma's actual identity.⁷ These re-publications of Anonyma's book and its movie adaptation in 2008 preceded another volume of the same caliber, whose author refused to stay anonymous.⁸ Shortly before her death, Gabriele Köpp (1929–2010), a retired

4 Estimates vary from hundreds of thousands, as cited in Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939–1945* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 308–320, to up to two million, as provided in Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 69–140, rape victims, with the figures for Berlin alone ranging between 95,000 and 130,000; see, for instance, Anthony Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945* (London: Penguin, 2002), 29, and James W. Messerschmidt, "The Forgotten Victims of World War II: Masculinities and Rape in Berlin, 1945," *Violence Against Women* 12, no. 7 (2006): 706. It is pertinent to emphasize that also a small percentage of male civilians faced the same attacks. Further, it is imperative to stress that combatants of the other Allied powers committed rape crimes as well, albeit not on such an enormous scale. See Atina Grossman, "A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers," in *West Germany under Construction: Politics, Society and Culture in the Adenauer Era*, ed. Robert G. Moeller (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 33–52, and J. Robert Lilly, *Taken by Force: Rape and American GIs in Europe during World War II* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

5 Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin*, translated by James Stern (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1954). *A Woman in Berlin* was also translated into Danish, Dutch, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Spanish, and Swedish.

6 Birgit Dahlke, "Tagebuch des Überlebens: Vergewaltigungen 1945 in ost- und west-deutschen Autobiographien," in *Autobiography by Women in German*, ed. Mererid Puw Davies, Beth Linklater and Gisela Shaw (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000), 203.

7 Respecting Anonyma's wishes posthumously, her given name is not disclosed in this chapter.

8 The director Max Färberböck produced a film about this diary, called *Anonyma—Eine Frau in Berlin*, with the actress Nina Hoss in the leading role. The English title of the movie is *A*

physicist, recalled her multiple rapes by Soviet soldiers which happened over a period of a fortnight in 1945, when she was a 15-year-old refugee in *Warum war ich bloß ein Mädchen? Das Trauma einer Flucht 1945* [Why was I just a girl? The trauma of an escape 1945].⁹

Throughout the twentieth century, girls and women like Gabriele Köpp or Anonyma were not classified as “worthy victims,”¹⁰ and their traumata were barely recognized by national governments or international human rights organizations. Only slowly and mostly sporadically was this gruesome chapter about one of the legacies of the Second World War opened from about the mid-1990s onwards. Norman M. Naimark was one of the first historians to dedicate a segment about Russian soldiers’ treatment of German women in conjunction with Soviet propaganda in *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation*.¹¹ For Vienna specifically, Irene Bandhauer-Schöffmann and Ela Hornung discussed the fate of female citizens in the post-1945 era.¹² By conducting interviews with four (three female; one male) Hungarian rape survivors, Andrea Pető, again, provided an astute contrastive analysis of the Red Army assaults in Budapest and Vienna.¹³ Concerning Hungary and also employing oral history, James Mark looked into the ambivalence of denials and depictions of rape and their politicization by talking to 76 Hungarian interviewees, 31 of whom were female.¹⁴

Woman in Berlin.

9 Gabriele Köpp, *Warum war ich bloß ein Mädchen? Das Trauma einer Flucht 1945* (Munich: Herbig, 2010).

10 Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 37–86.

11 Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 69–140.

12 Irene Bandhauer-Schöffmann and Ela Hornung, “Vom ‘Dritten Reich’ zur Zweiten Republik: Frauen im Wien der Nachkriegszeit,” in *Frauen in Österreich: Beiträge zu ihrer Situation im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. David F. Good, Margarete Grandner, and Mary Jo Maynes (Vienna: Böhlau, 1994), 225–246. In July 1945, the Austrian capital Vienna and its 21 districts became quartered between the Allied forces France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States. The Russian headquarters were located in the districts numbered 2, 4, 10, 20, and 21. The inner city of Vienna (i.e., the first district), again, was controlled by all four powers.

13 Andrea Pető, “Memory and the Narrative of Rape in 1945,” in *Life After Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe during the 1940s and 1950s*, ed. Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 129–148. One of the earliest attempts to assess stories of rape survivors of 1945 was Helke Sander’s documentary *BeFreier und BeFreite* (1992) or *Liberators Take Liberties* in English. Sander spoke with German women, next to some of their Russian perpetrators, and to German soldiers who also admitted to committing rape.

14 James Mark, “Remembering Rape: Divided Social Memory and the Red Army in Hungary 1944–1945,” *Past & Present* 188 (2005): 133–161.

Public and popular interest in this long-overlooked issue started to accumulate and coincide with the re-prints of *A Woman in Berlin* as well as the publication of Köpp's brave testimony¹⁵ and finally culminated in Miriam Gebhardt's *Als die Soldaten kamen: Die Vergewaltigung deutscher Frauen am Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs*, published in English as *Crimes Unspoken: The Rape of German Women at the End of the Second World War*. This new focus and public attention were not merely restricted to monographs, but also found expression in psychiatric projects initiated by trauma experts and aimed to save, document, and analyze the memories of the few survivors of these crimes who volunteered to share their stories before they passed away.¹⁶

This brief synopsis shows that, palpably, the academic emphasis is on Germany, with Berlin as its epicenter, as well as large cities like Vienna and Budapest. A particular myopia continues to exist towards lesser known, non-urban areas and the pain and shame of their violated inhabitants. In Styria, with its overwhelmingly agricultural and thus less densely populated areas, approximately 30,000 cases of sexual violence are estimated to have taken place during a period of 15 weeks,¹⁷ as compared to the metropolitan Vienna with 70,000 to 100,000 cases.¹⁸ In the eastern parts of Styria, where our protagonist is from, about 9,500 girls and women between the ages of 10 and 70 had the courage to seek medical help after the attacks. Furthermore, in the months of June and July 1945, over 400 abortions were conducted at

15 Ingeborg Jacobs, *Freiwild: Das Schicksal deutscher Frauen 1945* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2008); Ingo von Münch, "Frau, komm!" *Die Massenvergewaltigungen deutscher Frauen und Mädchen 1944/45* (Graz: Ares, 2009).

16 Philipp Kuwert, Thomas Klauer, Svenja Eichhorn, Elena Grundke, Manuela Dudeck, Georg Schomerus, and Harald J. Freyberger, "Trauma and Current Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms in Elderly German Women Who Experienced Wartime Rapes in 1945," *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 198, no. 6 (2010): 450–451; Svenja Eichhorn and Philipp Kuwert, *Das Geheimnis unserer Grossmütter: Eine empirische Studie über sexualisierte Kriegsgewalt um 1945* (Giessen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2011); Philipp Kuwert, Heide Glaesmer, Svenja Eichhorn, Elena Grundke, Robert H. Pietrzak, Harald J. Freyberger, and Thomas Klauer, "Long-Term Effects of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Compared with Non-Sexual War Trauma in Female World War II Survivors: A Matched Pairs Study," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 43, no. 6 (2014): 1059–1064.

17 Siegfried Beer, "Das sowjetische 'Intermezzo': Die 'Russenzeit' in der Steiermark. 8. Mai bis 23. Juli 1945," in *Geschichte der Steiermark: Vom Bundesland zur europäischen Region. Die Steiermark von 1945 bis heute*, ed. Joseph Franz Desput (Graz: Selbstverlag der Historischen Landeskommission für Steiermark, 2004), 50.

18 Barbara Stelzl-Marx, *Stalins Soldaten in Österreich: Die Innensicht der sowjetischen Besatzung 1945–1955* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2012), 411. Coming from Hungary, the Red Army marched onto eastern Styrian soil in the spring of 1945, and they reached the city of Graz in the night of May 8 to 9. From July 23 onwards, Styria came under British control, see, for instance, Stefan Karner, *Die Rote Armee in der Steiermark: Sowjetische Besatzung 1945* (Graz: Leykam, 2008).

the gynecological ward of the university clinic in Graz, and 12.5 percent of the 2,500 female patients tested at this hospital suffered from venereal diseases that had been transmitted by their perpetrators.¹⁹

One of these abused female civilians is the keeper of the aforementioned war diary, whose excerpted transcript miraculously found its way into the Styrian province depository and ended up in a collection of *Kriegserlebnisse*, of war or wartime experiences, for a planned manuscript. The irony, however, is that this woman—while reasonably protected in the countryside from bombings that rather targeted urban and industrial infrastructures during the actual war—came to live through more misery, starvation, and panic in the wake of this war. Simply entitled “From the war diary of an east-Styrian woman and mother” without providing any further details, her account of taking flight and unsuccessfully hiding from Soviet soldiers, including the rapes she had to endure, is designed to hide her identity and that of her family. Her name, age and profession are unknown, nor is there any information or data given about the number or age of her children. It can be assumed with great certainty that she was not a single mother but married, considering her rural and deeply religious environment, plus Third Reich ideology was heavily prevalent in Austria after its annexation in 1938. Nevertheless, her husband, who might still have been on the front or already deceased, is completely eclipsed from the picture, as are all her other relatives except for an uncle. What can easily be gathered and deciphered from her text is the fact that she is a farmer’s wife, owning a little cottage in the eastern part of Styria. This area was overrun by the Red Army right before Easter 1945, and her war—or postwar—diary symbolically follows and parallels the Passion of the Christ, which is another indicator of its author being strongly embedded in the profound Christian surroundings and traditions of peasant life at that time. It is also a ploy to highlight piousness and martyrdom during and after the brutal transgressions by the Russian military to soften the re-victimization or secondary victimization via the scornful judgment of her peers, especially male ones. As this woman, like so many others, had to continue living amongst the watchful eyes of her fellow villagers after 1945, it is quite understandable that she tried to appease their perception of her as a “ravaged” and hence “defiled” spoil of war with her devout rhetoric and style. Indeed, this strategy substantiates that her memories of these fateful months of Russian pillaging were jotted down or perhaps modified in hindsight and intended to be read by a wider audience since they were also incorporated into a publicly accessible archive—seemingly with her consent.

19 Beer, “Das sowjetische ‘Intermezzo,’” 50.

From a pragmatic point of view, it would have been almost impossible to summon the time, strength, or writing material in order to keep a journal and hang on to it during a hasty escape from marauding soldiers and amidst hunger and sleep deprivation.

This war diary opens with her hurriedly packing up her offspring and rushing out of her home on Good Friday for fear of approaching Russian forces. It then continues to illustrate the full horror of refugeeism and rape: Easter Sunday turned into her “Schreckenstag” [day of fright], when her hideout, which she shared with four other mothers and their children, was discovered by a troop of Soviet soldiers, whose faces and glances “troffen nur so von Lust und Gier” [were dripping with lust and greed].²⁰ After ogling them from head to toe, the men demanded food and especially wine and schnaps. Gulping down the women’s last reserves of meat and eggs, they threw the served dark bread on the floor, fancying white bread only. When the writer’s “gute Onkel, der etwas russisch [*sic*] sprach” [good uncle, who spoke some Russian]²¹ arrived—presumably to supply the women secretly with more provisions—he had to act as an interpreter. The soldiers queried the uncle whether the women were healthy and detailed that they had already divided them as human loot amongst themselves. Although all the women and children briefly managed to escape through a window when the heavily intoxicated warriors were not looking, they were soon chased after, shot at, and dragged back to the hideout. What happened next is, similar to most other accounts of the same nature, only hinted at and powerfully implied by a series of eight full stops:

In the subsequent passages, the author continues to communicate “das Wüten der Russen” [the fury of the Russians], which reduced women and girls to “Freiwild” [prey]²² who were mercilessly hunted and captured and who had lost any self-determination and no longer had control over their own bodies. These somber expressions of an inflicted state of physical and psychological enslavement and humiliation poignantly sum up and anticipate what Judith Butler observed about 60 years later in correlation with the terror attacks of 9/11 and concepts of violence, mourning, and politics: “It is important to claim that our bodies are in a sense *our own* and that we are entitled to claim rights of autonomy over our bodies.”²³

20 “Aus dem Kriegstagebuch,” 13.

21 “Aus dem Kriegstagebuch,” 13.

22 “Aus dem Kriegstagebuch,” 13.

23 Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004),

25.

The refugee and raped mother speaks further of murders, suicides, and an atmosphere of sheer panic and desperation without any opportunity to defend oneself or escape.²⁴ The intercourse forced upon her is never directly articulated; instead, she deflects her suffering by mentioning the screams and pleading, the “Jammern und Weinen” [whimpering and crying]²⁵ of other females during the act. The plotline then concludes with a particularly horrific scene: The multiple rape of a 72-year-old woman, who is symbolically referred to as a grandmother and who tried to protect the diarist and other women by hiding them in her barn, by a posse of “besoffener Russen” [drunk, more appropriately, wasted Russians]²⁶ from dusk until dawn. This tragic event is further intensified insofar as all the hidden women’s offspring, who were left with the elderly woman (since the Russian occupiers normally treated small children quite benignly), had to witness this night-long brutalization. After the Russians had finally left in the morning hours, the farmhouse was demolished and its walls perforated with bullets, while the grandmother, “zerzaust, zerissen und zerschlagen und geschändet” [disheveled, torn and smashed and ravaged],²⁷ had been dumped in the pigsty.

Although certainly adjusted and edited to a certain degree for adequate impact, this Styrian story is remarkable on a binary level. Firstly, it is one of the extremely rare reports from the rural margins of a landscape that ended up on the western fringes of the Iron Curtain, bordering the Soviet satellite states during the Cold War. Secondly, it is exceptional because it was produced by a narrator who—at first glance—easily fulfils the criteria and profile of a “subaltern.” As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak stated in her analysis of colonialism, agency, and gender: “[T]he subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.”²⁸ Ostensibly, the Styrian subject in question bears an intersectional subalternity by being born a female, who descended from the lower strata of society and belonged to a class whose utterances do not regularly feature in academic works, and by being—at least temporarily—a

24 Women or girls who tried to resist the attacks were executed, as were men who attempted to come to their rescue or hide them.

25 “Aus dem Kriegstagebuch,” 14.

26 “Aus dem Kriegstagebuch,” 15.

27 “Aus dem Kriegstagebuch,” 15.

28 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 287.

refugee without proper or permanent shelter.²⁹ With a rudimentary and demographically limited education that hardly extended beyond “the three Rs” and without any acknowledged intellectual authority, she is diametrically opposed to the sophisticated, erudite, and polyglot Anonyma, who was a journalist by training and had traveled widely throughout Europe before the Second World War, or Gabriele Köpp, a university professor of physics. In comparison with both Anonyma, who was single and childless in 1945, or Köpp, who herself was a mere child when the rapes happened, the Styrian victim’s domestic and maternal qualities were foregrounded. Her major concern remained the welfare of her offspring, and she desperately tried to shield them as best as possible from hearing or seeing the atrocities—something Joyce Carol Oates summarized vividly in her novel *Rape: A Love Story*:

The terror of what they were doing to your mother. What you would have to endure, hearing.

You did not think *rape*. The word *rape* was not yet a word in your vocabulary.

You would think *beat*, *hurt*. *Try to kill*.

You heard your mother’s cries, stifled screams. You heard her pleading with them. You heard them laugh at her.³⁰

Making light of her own rape would have implicitly undermined her children’s distress and shock as innocent bystanders. Accordingly, the Styrian woman’s narrative that encapsulates these intra-generational traumas, is, unlike Anonyma’s, completely devoid of gallows humor and sardonic wit about the soldiers’ physical and sexual transgressions so frequently found in *A Woman in Berlin* and that were an additional reason, why this book caused so much controversy. Comic vulgarities or obscenities as contextualized by Sigmund Freud in *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten* (*Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*)³¹ as instruments to cope with

29 Understandably, academic titles about trauma, auto/biography, and historiography, like Gabriele Rippl, Philipp Schweighauser, Tiina Kirss, Margit Sutrop, and Therese Steffen, *Haunted Narratives: Life Writing in an Age of Trauma* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013); or Dominick La Capra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), for example, do not normally appropriate texts by “common folks,” simply due to a lack or shortage thereof and for the obstacles in unearthing them.

30 Joyce Carol Oates, *Rape: A Love Story* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2003), 29–30.

31 Sigmund Freud, *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten* (Leipzig: Franz Deuticke, 1905).

victimhood or as a valve to release (sexual) tension are completely omitted in the Styrian text.

Regarding the strict socio-religious and post-Nazi framework within which it was conceived, the war diary is one of a handful that captures the Red Army's conduct in Styria from a female perspective. The overwhelming majority of writings about this time come from men, all of whom held key positions of secular or ecclesiastical power in the home of our female protagonist. Priests, mayors, physicians, or teachers, who were all exclusively of the opposite sex, mainly tended to elaborate on the violated and thus—by their traditional norms—shamed women for a political and decidedly propagandistic agenda and hence would not have approved of any humorous indecencies as coping mechanisms, nor would have the rest of society. Moreover, the blatant ellipsis of sexual violence in many male chronicles of the Red Army occupation in Styria perverted the female traumata into a *troumatisme*, a “hole in the truth,” as coined by Jacques Lacan, in post-conflict patriarchy and patriotism: “Quand je parle d'un trou dans la vérité, ce n'est pas, naturellement, une métaphore grossière, ce n'est pas un trou au veston, c'est l'aspect négatif qui apparaît dans ce qui est du sexuel, justement de son inaptitude à s'avérer. C'est de ça qu'il s'agit dans une psychanalyse.”³²

Stigmatized and silenced by such “holes in the truth” that prevented the female victims of gendered aggressions from “becoming whole” again, such women's voices were also heavily outnumbered by masculine recollections of the 1945 events and especially the Russian rampaging and plundering. In this light, the testimonial by the Styrian mother, refugee, and rape survivor appears even more unique and empowering: hers is *survival* writing in the truest sense of the word, adorned with a defiant refusal to stay victimized and counteracting the deprivation of speech, which, in turn, might open potential pathways for mental and physical healing.³³ The Styrian narrator had overcome the mode of the *unsayable*, even though her articulation of heavily traumatizing incidents in the past were buried in a repository until now. By putting words about abysmal abuse on paper, regardless—it has to be kept in mind—of social scorn or norms, she transcended the mere metaphorical usage of Sanford Budick's and Wolfgang Iser's notion of the “unsayable” and “modes of negativity.”³⁴

32 Jacques Lacan, *Mon enseignement* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), 34.

33 Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Cosmopolite de tous les pays, encore un effort!* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1997), 16–17.

34 Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser, eds., introduction to *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), xi–xxi.

For the second part of this chapter, a swift change of scenery from the rural environment of Styria to the urban setting of the Austrian capital, Vienna, in 1945 should illuminate another storyline of a female protagonist who expressed the “unspeakable” by utilizing a post-Freudian talking, not writing, cure as an attempt at self-healing within a clinical space. The trauma of the Viennese E. S., who was equally attacked by Russian soldiers in the spring of 1945 and ended up on the psychiatric ward of the Allgemeines Krankenhaus [General Hospital; hereafter AKH], juxtaposes the Styrian diarist’s fate in many instances. Unlike the Styrian peasant and mother, the single, childless teacher E. S. found herself on the opposite side of the social spectrum, residing in Austria’s biggest city and holding a degree of higher education. Yet analogue to the narrator from Styria, E. S. also exercised autonomy and agency in expressing her post-assault anxiety by having herself institutionalized in a mental asylum in search of therapy and help. In contradistinction to the Styrian case, however, E. S.’s endeavor to find closure in a medical facility after experiencing physical and mental trauma resulted in further violation of her body and mind via electroshocks to the point of oblivion.

Clinical protocols such as those endured by E. S. were frequently turned into a meta-text for postwar politics, inducing and engineering a new beginning and a collective identity as the Second Republic and hence a guilt-free country after seven years of *Anschluss* [annexation] that consisted of a purified and monolithic society without “ravaged elements” threatening to distort this impression. A pivotal point was the gendered restoration of traditional family parameters with rigorously masculinized and feminized roles. Especially maternalism and female caretaking were propagated, due to a substantial deconstruction of the conventional family unit and the considerable decimation of the male population on the battlefields. As many male spouses had fallen on the front or remained in POW camps, women were compelled to maintain their patriotic tasks and duties as sole keepers of the hearth and home, prescribed by the newly formed state.

Overall, the academic focus is almost exclusively placed on wartime traumas of military personnel. In contrast, there continues to linger a certain historiographic myopia towards non-combatants and their traumata, ordeals, and disorders on the home front and after armistices. This situation is particularly deplorable as most of the time, the psychiatric files of women and girls traumatized by military and paramilitary aggressions such as rape, for example, represent the only documentation of such incidents. Due to social and religious taboos, but also post-conflict political discourses that gravitated around patriotic and patriarchal nation building, such traumata

of female civilians stayed, at best, relegated to the margins or were, at worst, drastically silenced. Next to medical records on the “regular” wards of hospitals about abortions or the treatment of venereal diseases as a result of this type of sexual violence, clinical protocols of female mental patients, admitted after their brutalization, sometimes represent the only sources for more detailed information, albeit habitually through a decidedly gendered lens. This is also the case with the psychiatric ward of the AKH in Vienna that witnessed an enormous influx of female patients, starting in the spring of 1945 and coinciding with the Red Army taking the city and its (mostly female) inhabitants under their control. According to vague estimates for Vienna, approximately 70,000 to 100,000 women and girls were raped by Soviet soldiers,³⁵ as already mentioned earlier; some authors calculated as many as 240,000.³⁶ Usually too ashamed to come forward and, on average, also discouraged to report these crimes for lack of inadequate institutions that would take them seriously or aid them, the overwhelming majority of these female civilians were cast into the subaltern role of the silently suffering victim. To a certain extent, the female patients at the psychiatric clinic of the AKH were an exception to this sad scenario as they could express their experiences and tell their stories, even if they, too, were readily belittled and stigmatized as hysterics or sexual deviants by an almost exclusively male-dominated profession that was still strongly influenced by Freudian matrices of femininity. The psychiatric wing of the AKH was further significant in that it accepted a multi-layered spectrum of female mental patients, including all social strata and national backgrounds, unlike, for instance, private clinics.

For the following analysis, one specific case of a Viennese woman who had lived through physical transgressions by Soviet perpetrators during the initial phase of occupation from April to September 1945, is explained in detail. From the autumn of 1945 onwards, once Vienna became divided amongst all four Allies, these incidents somewhat subsided on a larger scale, although a fair amount of gendered violence was reported by the women and girls admitted to psychiatric hospitals, sometimes also involving soldiers of the other three Allied armies. It will become evident that the trauma of these patients was sidelined and relegated for the sake of “national healing”

35 Stelzl-Marx, *Stalins Soldaten in Österreich*, 411.

36 Marianne Baumgartner, “Vergewaltigungen zwischen Mythos und Realität: Wien und Niederösterreich im Jahr 1945,” in *Frauenleben 1945: Kriegsende in Wien*. 205. *Sonderausstellung des Historischen Museums der Stadt Wien*, 21. September bis 19. November 1995, ed. Peter Eppel (Vienna: Eigenverlag der Museen der Stadt Wien, 1995), 64.

and Cold War rhetoric that explicitly eclipsed such “controversial” subjects, so the Red Army could be unequivocally acclaimed to be liberators from the Nazi terror.³⁷

The sample case of E. S. has been selected from the countless women and girls in Vienna who suffered from Soviet aggression in 1945 to illustrate the political inferences of their diagnoses and treatment at the psychiatric clinic of the AKH. As already previously stated, female patients from all social strata arrived at this clinic after having survived sexual violence, which dovetailed with the liberation of Vienna and the eastern parts of Austria by the Red Army: There was the 17-year old pupil G. Z. (*1930 Vienna), for whom the psychiatrists benevolently approved of an abortion of her unborn, urging the Kaiser Josef Spital in the tenth district “das Gegebene zu veranlassen”³⁸ [to bring about the given], because she had been gang raped and impregnated by Russians after being provably abducted as a virgin, or the domestic servant P. S. (*1930 Vienna)³⁹ from Mistelbach in Lower Austria of the same age, gang raped by 22 Soviet soldiers and infected with gonorrhea; then there were the housekeeper L. G. (*1919 Vienna),⁴⁰ sacrificing herself as a target of rape to protect her 16-year-old niece, subsequently suffering a heart attack, and taken to the clinic by her fiancé, or the rural maid P. J. (*1915 Spannberg-Gänserndorf),⁴¹ both claiming that they were forced to endure multiple *Notzuchtattentate* [rape attacks] committed by the Red Army—13 and up to 30 times over several days, respectively.

Quite strikingly and unlike other inmates in this clinic during the investigated period from 1945 to 1948, practically all these traumatized patients had voluntarily come to the ward, admitting themselves freely and without reluctance or resistance. This might be interpreted as, on the one hand, an attempt to seek refuge in a reasonably safe haven of a city that was still plagued by crimes of convenience such as looting and pillaging—not merely by the Soviet troops—in an urban landscape of ruins and deprivation, where every day was a fight for survival, necessitating exhausting haggling for goods on the black market.⁴² On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly,

37 Miriam Gebhardt, *Als die Soldaten kamen: Die Vergewaltigung deutscher Frauen am Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2015), esp. 17–22; Pető, “Memory and the Narrative of Rape,” 129–148.

38 AKH-A56, box 242 (journal number: 18204; protocol number: 780).

39 AKH-A56, box 232 (journal number: 38529; protocol number: 1206).

40 AKH-A56, box 234 (journal number: 47604; protocol number: 1523).

41 AKH-A56, box 218 (journal number: 19504; protocol number: 761).

42 Bandhauer-Schöffmann and Hornung, “Vom ‘Dritten Reich’ zur Zweiten Republik,” 225–246; Franz Severin Berger and Christiane Holler, *Trümmerfrauen: Alltag zwischen Hamstern und Hoffen*

seeking treatment can be seen as an indirect cry for help, recognition, and treatment as victims of gendered violence. However, the trauma of these patients who voluntarily committed themselves was never directly addressed by the medical staff for matters of socio-political reticence at the dawn of the Second Republic which could not afford uncomfortably disruptive headlines and by a general lack of professional awareness of rape as a war or postwar crime.⁴³ Whereas combatants' and veterans' post-conflict symptoms had already been unanimously acknowledged since the First World War by the international medical community via various terms like "shell shock," the war or postwar stress and anxiety of their female relatives on the home front remained gridlocked in gendered diagnoses that derived from the nineteenth century and feminized assessments of hysteria.⁴⁴

The following is a close reading with excerpts from E. S.'s *Krankengeschichte* [medical history]. Born in 1910 in Maria Enzersdorf, a small village south of Vienna, E. S. is a particularly interesting case as she stands out amongst the others, due to her social status as an intellectual woman and her extraordinary encounter with the Soviet occupiers: Trained as an English teacher, holding a doctorate with distinction, and polyglot (she was fluent in English and Danish), she did not conform to the average portrayal of a helpless, naive victim or easy target for attacks.⁴⁵ Indeed, she "wehrte sich aus Leibeskräften"⁴⁶ [fought back with all her might] and successfully fended off her aggressors, two Russian soldiers, who invaded her apartment she shared with her mother in Stockerau, a small town northwest of Vienna. This

(Berlin: Ueberreuther, 1994), 19–44; Ela Hornung and Margit Sturm, "Stadtleben: Alltag in Wien 1945 bis 1955," in *Österreich 1945–1955: Gesellschaft, Politik, Kultur*, ed. Reinhard Sieder, Heinz Steinert, and Emmerich Tálos (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1995), 54–67; Wolfram Dornik, "Besatzungsalltag in Wien: Die Differenziertheit von Erlebniswelten: Vergewaltigungen—Plünderungen—Erbsen—Straußenwalzer," in *Die Rote Armee in Österreich: Sowjetische Besatzung 1945–1955. Beiträge*, ed. Stefan Karner and Barbara Stelzl-Marx (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005), 449–468.

43 Only in 2008 did the United Nations pass the Security Council Resolution 1820 about "Women and Peace and Security," confirming that "rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime"; Resolution 3, accessed July 20, 2024, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1820>.

44 Hazel Croft, "Emotional Women and Frail Men: Gendered Diagnostics from Shellshock to PTSD, 1914–2010," in *Gender and Conflict since 1914: Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Ana Carden-Coyne (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 110–123; Cecilia Tasca, Mariangela Rapetti, Mauro Giovanni Carta and Bianca Fadda, "Women and Hysteria in the History of Mental Health," *Clinical Practice & Epidemiology in Mental Health* 8 (2012): esp. 114–115; Dagmar Wernitznig, "The Madwoman in the Cellar: Trauma and Gender After Both World Wars—A Field Study of Psychiatric Files," *On Culture: The Open Journal for the Study of Culture* 11 (2021): 1–23.

45 AKH-A56, box 219 (journal number: 13684; protocol number: 566).

46 AKH-A56, box 219 (journal number: 13684; protocol number: 566), Krankheitsgeschichte.

incident happened on April 7, 1945, and both women, mother and daughter, claimed to have survived this assault reasonably physically unharmed. The mother, M. S., even submitted a handwritten and sworn statement to the medics, astutely recapturing in every minute and accurate detail what her daughter's psychiatrists subsequently and dismissively labeled as a "Russenabenteuer"⁴⁷ [Russian adventure]:

[S]ie [the Russians] stellten uns nun an die Mauer und rissen uns die Kleider auf und schossen auf uns. Die leeren Patronen warfen sie vor die Füße, mit Fußtritten an uns verließen sie die Wohnung. Wir kamen nach einer Stunde auf der Erde liegend zu uns. [...] Dann schleppten wir uns in den Garten und blieben in einem Tümpel versteckt liegen bis zum Morgen.⁴⁸

[They [the Russians] lined us up against the wall and tore open our clothes and shot at us. They threw the empty cartridges at our feet and left the apartment, kicking us. After an hour, we gained consciousness, lying on the ground. [...] Then we dragged ourselves into the garden and stayed hidden in a pond until morning.]

M. S. concluded by explaining that her daughter also had to endure "[s]tarke Nervenproben" [severe tests of nerves] as a "Flüchtlingsbetreuerin" [refugee coordinator] towards the end of the war.⁴⁹ This work with refugees and displaced persons, in combination with her educational background, enabled E. S. to put her "Russian adventure," as her doctors nonchalantly decided to call it, into a wider perspective, shrewdly subsuming "[m]an kann natürlich fortwursteln, das ist sehr österreichisch"⁵⁰ [of course, you can muddle along, that's very Austrian]. As a highly literate woman, quoting Plato and Descartes, for instance, she articulated herself eloquently and passionately in front of these physicians during her stay at the clinic from May 11 to August 2, 1945, for acute psychosis. For the sophisticated and knowledgeable E. S., frequently detailing her thoughts and feelings about world affairs and matters of war and peace in polished and mature language, her sessions with the medical staff, literally, could have become a talking cure: "Aber in letzter Zeit war es immer schwerer, denn das ist kein Krieg,

47 AKH-A56, box 219 (journal number: 13684; protocol number: 566).

48 AKH-A56, box 219 (journal number: 13684; protocol number: 566), Krankheitsgeschichte.

49 AKH-A56, box 219 (journal number: 13684; protocol number: 566), Krankheitsgeschichte.

50 AKH-A56, box 219 (journal number: 13684; protocol number: 566).

sondern Nervenkrieg. Wenn ich genug Willenskraft habe, dann werde ich wieder gesund. Kann ich dann aber nicht jemanden schaden? Denn hinter meiner Krankheit steht doch eine Realität.”⁵¹ [But lately it’s been getting harder and harder, because this isn’t a war, it’s a war of nerves. If I have enough willpower, then I’ll be healthy again. But then, can’t I harm someone? Because behind my illness, there is a reality.]

Nevertheless, her poignant elaborations about the political reality of her attempted rape and this “war of nerves” against the female population were delivered—in the words of the in-house psychiatrist Dr. Teirich—“geordnet und sehr fließend” [orderly and very fluent] became commonly disrupted by the same expert “wegen Zeitmangel”⁵² [due to lack of time]. Instead of fulfilling the role of an “accountable other, an other who can hear the anguish of one’s memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness”⁵³ that the profession of psychiatry was meant to entail, E. S.’s doctors resorted to the quick and convenient solution of muting her with electroshocks. This treatment was even more tragic and particularly problematic in that neither E. S.’s personal medical history nor her immediate or wider family background indicated any illnesses or hereditary mental diseases whatsoever, and this was also verified by the psychiatrists in charge who performed the electroshock therapy.

Accurately equating her first electroshock with an “Eheschock”⁵⁴ [marital shock], the unmarried teacher E. S. comprehended the violation and re-victimization of her body by the clinical personnel who preferred to ignore her traumatic story for the sake of social comfort and cohesion. She also clearly understood that with their frankness, she and her mother had gone against the grain by deconstructing the common code of collective oblivion during politically unstable times, openly voicing the unspoken, if only within the confines of a mental clinic, and therefore refusing to bury

51 AKH-A56, box 219 (journal number: 13684; protocol number: 566).

52 AKH-A56, box 219 (journal number: 13684; protocol number: 566). In the 1950s, Hildebrand Richard Teirich (1907–1978) acquired moderate fame as a noteworthy proponent of musical therapy, cf. Hildebrand Richard Teirich, ed., *Musik in der Medizin: Beiträge zur Musiktherapie* (Stuttgart: Gustav Fischer Verlag, 1958). From 1953 onwards, he practiced in Freiburg im Breisgau; before that, he was employed at the psychiatric wards of the university clinics in Graz (1948–1950) and Innsbruck (1947/48). For the years until 1945, there lingers a suspicious ellipsis in his online biography, available at https://austria-forum.org/af/AustriaWiki/Hildebrand_Richard_Teirich, accessed July 20, 2024.

53 Dori Laub, “Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening,” in *Testimonies: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (New York: Routledge, 1992), 68.

54 AKH-A56, box 219 (journal number: 13684; protocol number: 566).

their trauma. Shortly before her release and after a series of electroshock treatments, the staff of this clinic attested that E. S., in fact, had lost her memories about the Russian episode in April but was otherwise “über ihre sonstigen Angelegenheiten [...] durchaus orientiert”⁵⁵ [informed about her other affairs]. This medicalization of E. S., subdued by electroshocks and thus made “functional” again before leaving the mental ward for the outside world, epitomizes the gendered dualism of war and postwar transitions.

In *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, Margaret and Patrice Higonnet defined the model of a gendered double helix during times of conflict, in which the female status and worth are constantly downplayed and relegated for the benefit of male prerogatives in society—a phenomenon that can be transferred to peacetime as well:

This image [the double helix] permits us to look at women not in isolation but within a persistent system of gender relationships. The female strand on the helix is opposed to the male strand, and position on the female strand is subordinate to position on the male strand. The image of the double helix allows us to see that, although the roles of men and women vary greatly from culture to culture, their relationship is in some sense constant.⁵⁶

Although this rigorously dichotomous pattern is not undisputed and refers to gender roles during both World Wars, it is quite applicable to combatants' and non-combatants' experiences at any given time and all over the world. Whereas men are traumatized, wounded, or killed on battlefields during wars, women are traumatized, sexually violated, oftentimes beaten, tortured, or incarcerated in rape camps, and murdered during and after wars. Soldiers, when captured by the enemy, turn into POWs, girls and women into booty. Similarly, the aftermath of wars still offers more transnational, institutional, governmental, or socio-economic recognition of and treatment for veteran than civilian trauma. As Norman Mailer, himself serving in the Second World War and subsequently producing one of its epitome novels, *The Naked and the Dead*, nonchalantly put it: “A little bit of rape is good for a man's soul.”⁵⁷

55 AKH-A56, box 219 (journal number: 13684; protocol number: 566).

56 Margaret R. Higonnet and Patrice L.-R. Higonnet, “The Double Helix,” in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, ed. Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel, and Margaret Collins Weitz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 34.

57 Mailer's derisive sentence from his “Address on ‘Richard Milhous Nixon and Women's Liberation’” at the University of California at Berkeley was cited in *Time* magazine on November 6,

The United Nations was founded in the same year the Red Army (and other soldiers') rapes took place. Finally, United Nations bureaucracy, administration, and negotiations needed until 2008 to come up with the Security Council Resolution 1820, entitled "Women and Peace and Security," for gendered violence to be officially acknowledged as a war crime, at least on paper and with vague formulations.⁵⁸ It remains to be seen what the legacy of wars and armed conflicts will bring to female human beings in this century.

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1972, vol. 100, no. 19, "People" section: <https://time.com/vault/issue/1972-11-06/page/80>, accessed July 20, 2024.

58 The exact wording in this Resolution 1820 that was adopted by the Security Council at its 5,916th meeting on June 19, 2008 is "rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime"; Resolution 3, accessed July 20, 2024, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1820>.

8. A Contribution to the Knowledge of Violence Against Women in Slovenia and in the Neighboring Territory in the First Period After the Second World War

Gorazd Bajc

Abstract: The essay aims to present the main issues related to violence against women that occurred in the early post-Second World War period in Slovenia and neighbouring areas, particularly in the Northern Adriatic region (Venezia Giulia or Primorska, which included the cities of Trieste and Gorizia, as well as the surrounding areas and Istria). The analysis seeks to provide the first synthesis on the subject by comparing findings from various studies and memoirs with published and archival documents. Women who suffered various forms of violence, such as arrest and imprisonment, extrajudicial executions, or displacement, were particularly those suspected of having supported the partisan movement's interwar opponents or the Nazis/Fascists in the past, including women belonging to the German ethnic minority.

Keywords: women, violence, imprisonment, mass killings, Slovenia, Venezia Giulia

Introduction¹

On the European continent, the first period after the Second World War was marked by the revenge of the victors against the defeated: arrests, imprisonments, extrajudicial executions or mass killings, displacements, etc. There have been several relevant studies which explore this topic, and the best synthesis is provided by the British historian Keith Lowe.² He compares the terrible conditions in various European countries, taking into account that many women were also among the victims.

In Lowe's important book, the situation in Slovenia (as part of the former Yugoslavia) is only briefly mentioned, which is understandable considering that the topic of postwar revenge is very extensive. The aim of my work is therefore to shed light on the numerous episodes of violence to which women in Slovenia and neighboring areas, particularly in the Northern Adriatic region (the Venezia Giulia or *Primorska*, which included the cities of Trieste and Gorizia as well as the surrounding areas and Istria), were subjected in the early postwar period. Although there is a considerable amount of information on the subject of postwar violence in studies, memoirs and other sources, the specific issue of violence against women in this area has not yet been systematically presented. My purpose is to produce the first synthesis on the subject by comparing the results in many studies with published and archival documents.

Violence in Slovenia

In Yugoslavia, and in Slovenia in particular, the greatest postwar violence by the victors against the defeated was the extrajudicial executions of their enemies by the new Communist authorities. According to the Institute of Contemporary History in Ljubljana, the total number of Slovenian victims was 13,781. Of these, the overwhelming majority were *domobranci* fighters (the Slovene collaborationist formation), 11,616; the remainder were mostly

¹ The chapter was elaborated within the EIRENE project (full title: *Postwar Transitions in Gendered Perspective: The Case of the North-Eastern Adriatic Region*), funded by the European Research Council under Horizon 2020 financed Advanced Grant funding scheme [ERC Grant Agreement n. 742683]. The chapter is also the result of research activities of the research program n. P6-0372, and research projects n. J7-60128 and n. J6-60100, financed by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency—ARIS.

² Keith Lowe, *Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II* (London: Viking, 2012).

civilian victims.³ Among those killed were many others belonging to other collaborationist military formations, such as the Serbian Chetniks, Croatian Ustasha and others. The estimate of all those killed is 100,000 or more. At the end of the war, they escaped to Austrian Carinthia, from where many were forcibly repatriated to Yugoslavia by the British authorities. They were first taken to Yugoslav prison camps, and a considerable number were killed shortly afterwards. As many archival documents on the postwar killings in Slovenia have been destroyed, it is difficult to carry out a thorough historical reconstruction. As a result, we do not know how many of the executed civilians were women. We can, however, safely assume that a considerable number of said executed civilians were women given that during the war most men had been mobilized to one army or another.

There are existing photos⁴ and various testimonies and sources which indicate that there were some women who did not flee to Austria but were subsequently captured.⁵ The previously mentioned sources also indicate very difficult conditions for all these refugees and in particular for those who were forcibly repatriated, including women; who, for example, were

3 Vida Deželak Barič, "Posledice vojnega nasilja. Smrtne žrtve druge svetovne vojne in zaradi nje na Slovenskem," in *Nasilje vojnih in poveljnih dni*, ed. Nevenka Troha (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2014), 36. During this phase of postwar reprisals, around 1,300 more Slovenes died in other circumstances.

4 E.g., some photos in Drago Jančar, ed., *Temna stran meseca. Kratka zgodovina totalitarizma v Sloveniji 1945–1990: zbornik člankov in dokumentov* (Ljubljana: Nova revija, 1998), 394, 400–401; Janko Moder, *Dr. Valentin Meršol in slovenski veliki teden* (Celje: Društvo Mohorjeva družba-Celjska Mohorjeva družba, 2005), 183, 342; John Corsellis and Marcus Ferrar, *Slovenija 1945. Smrt in preživetje po drugi svetovni vojni* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 2006), 27, 60 117–118, 130, 183; Rozina Švent, *Slovenski begunci v Avstriji 1945–1950* (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU, 2007), 15, 68, 77, 112, 125, 143, 167, 171, 264, 292.

5 E.g., some documents in Jančar, *Temna stran meseca*, 398–399, 414; Milko Mikola, ed., *Dokumenti in pričevanja o poveljnih koncentracijskih taboriščih v Sloveniji. Vol. 2: Koncentracijska taborišča Št. Vid nad Ljubljano, Škofja Loka in Teharje ter taborišče za otroke Petriček* (Ljubljana: Študijski center za narodno spravo, 2008). The transcript of some testimonies in: Jože Dežman and Monika Kokalj Kočevar, eds., *Slovenija—duhovna domovina: zgodbe političnih emigrantov* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 2010). See also Jera Vodušek Starič, *Prevzem oblasti 1944–1946* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1992), 232, 242, 270; "Poročilo preiskovalne komisije—Vmesno poročilo Preiskovalne komisije o raziskovanju poveljnih množičnih pobojev, pravno dvomljivih procesov in drugih tovrstnih nepravilnosti," *Poročevalec Državnega zbora Republike Slovenije* 22, no. 42 (October 17, 1996): 23, 26, 34–35, 37, 39–40, 44, 49, 62, 72; Martina Grahek Ravančič, "V kolonah po štirje skozi Slovenijo," *Pripravki za novejšo zgodovino* 48, no. 2 (2008): 95–116; Ljuba Dornik Šubelj, *Ozna in prevzem oblasti 1944–46* (Ljubljana: Modrijan, Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 2013), 158–189; Milko Mikola, *Kazenske ustanove in zaporniki v Sloveniji 1945–1951* (Ljubljana: Nova obzorja-Inštitut Karantanija, 2016).

brutally treated by the Yugoslav (partisan) army while traveling from Austria to Slovenia.

According to some testimonies and sources,⁶ the communist government's secret political police OZNA (*Oddelek za zaščito naroda*) immediately made a selection among the returnees from Austria and began releasing women, children, minors and other civilians due to a lack of food for the prisoners. Men whose membership in enemy units could not be proven were also gradually released. We have no information on how many were released and among these, how many were women.

It is not the case, however, that all the women were released and indeed there is evidence that some were killed. After Slovenia became an independent nation, researchers, including forensic experts, found the remains of women among the dead while excavating pits where mass executions had taken place. Their number cannot yet be determined, but it is clear that there were many.⁷ There are documents and testimonies available regarding the women who were executed, published decades ago outside Yugoslavia by exiles who opposed the communist regime, as well as in some published documents and testimonies. As far as accounts of brutal killings are concerned, we can mention two that are somewhat similar in their dynamics (but obviously these are not the only cases). One survivor described how those who carried out the executions drove two cars full of Slovenian women towards one of the pits. The women were stripped completely before being shot. In total, he saw the bodies of about 50 women in the pit.⁸ According to another account, three truckloads of women and girls who had claimed to be relatives of *domobrance* were taken from the Teharje camp (one of the central camps in the postwar executions; the other camps were in Šentvid and Škofja Loka) to the pit where they were killed. Before this they were beaten, stripped of their clothing, etc. by the group that carried out the killings. Most of the women were thrown into the pit still alive, and then hand grenades were thrown down at them. Before this massacre, mothers had their children taken from them, including the youngest babies, and they too died in pitiful conditions.⁹

Not all the children were killed: some of those separated from their parents in the Teharje camp in June 1945 were placed in a series of youth

6 "Poročilo preiskovalne komisije," 7, 26–27, 49–50, 73.

7 Mitja Ferenc, *Prekopi žrtev iz prikritih grobišč (1991–2011)* (Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete, 2012).

8 Transcript of the document in Jančar, *Temna stran meseca*, 416.

9 Miha M. Vir [Mihael Brunec], *Pravi obraz osvobodilne fronte*, Vol. II (Buenos Aires: F. Žakelj, 1972), 68–69.

camps. The most famous was the *Petriček* camp near Celje. Here conditions were inadequate, and children were often beaten. In addition to memoirs, we have documents that reveal the precarious conditions endured by these children and their parents, primarily their mothers. For instance, on August 23, 1945, Rozalia Rajer was able to take back her three daughters and another girl. However, the authorities reserved the right to take back the four girls.¹⁰

Children were also imprisoned in other locations, for example in Strnišče, near Ptuj, where the largest postwar concentration camp was located (mainly for members of the German community, which shall be discussed further on). Their number is not known, nor is it known how many died there. Partial data indicates that 54 bodies were buried between August 5 and 15, 1945, and among them 13 were children (three of them girls), 10 were infants under one year old. Most died of diarrhea due to poor hygiene and food quality. In August, an International Red Cross Commission visited the camp and found the conditions disastrous. Many of the internees were later pardoned and released, while between 350 and 400 children were sent to a new location, Ormož Castle, but only a small number were accompanied by their mothers. Although the conditions there were better, between August 11 and September 22, 1945, 39 children (of whom 21 were girls) and a 76-year-old female companion died. Due to the poor conditions, three other very young girls soon died in the hospitals in Maribor and Ptuj. Some other children were taken back by their parents or relatives (if they were still alive) and others were orphaned. The latter were taken to Turnišče (in the Prekmurje region), waiting to be adopted. The harshest fate befell the children of the ethnic German minority who were deported from Yugoslavia

10 Regarding Rozalija Rajer and some other published documents in Jančar, *Temna stran meseca*, 504–506. Other documents and other sources (also concerning the Rajer case) in Mikola, *Dokumenti in pričevanja o povojnih koncentracijskih taboriščih*, Vol. 2, 323–336, 357–380, 385–390. Regarding memories Ivan Ott, *Otroci s Petrička: ukradeno otroštvo* (Celje: Celjska Mohorjeva družba-Društvo Mohorjeva družba, 2008). Regarding testimonies Majda Pučnik Rudl, “Nastaja dragoceno dokumentarno gradivo o terorju komunizma—o delu Komisije Vlade Republike Slovenije za izvajanje Zakona o popravni krivic,” in *Leto 1945—70 let potem*, ed. Marjan Maučec (Ljubljana: Državni svet Republike Slovenije, 2016), 207–219; and Dragica Gudrun Podmiljšak, [Testimony], in *Leto 1945—70 let potem*, ed. Marjan Maučec (Ljubljana: Državni svet Republike Slovenije, 2016), 213–214, 269–270. Concerning the memory of the *Petriček* youth camp Jože Dežman, “Otroštva diskriminiranih otrok žrtev titoističnega terorja in tabujev,” in *Zgodovina otroštva*, ed. Aida Škoro Babič, Mateja Jeraj, Matevž Košir, and Bojan Balkovec (Ljubljana: Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije, 2012), 657–659.

at the end of 1945 or at the beginning of the following year, together with the adult members of their families.¹¹

The above-mentioned violence against children (and mothers) was not an isolated case in postwar Europe. Lowe writes that in many places, numerous women had relationships with Germans during the war and gave birth to many children whose fathers were German soldiers. It is estimated that there were between one and two million of them. After the war, they were not accepted; on the contrary, they were a constant reminder of the shame of women, and they were victims of psychological and physical abuse.¹² At the same time, we can add that women were also victims of violence in some other parts of Europe, at least in the early postwar months. Lowe cites the case of Norway, where in the summer of 1945 thousands of women accused of having had relations with Germans were imprisoned and sent to concentration camps. As a result, those who had married Germans lost their citizenship and were deported to Germany with their children.¹³ In Western Europe, it was customary to take revenge on women by cutting off their hair, particularly in France, but also in other parts of Europe, such as Denmark, Norway, Italy,¹⁴ but that was not all. In some parts of Italy, for example, women were also victims of public lynchings;¹⁵ there were also many rapes, mainly by Red Army soldiers in Eastern Europe, but also by Western allies in other places.¹⁶

All testimonies and other sources agree that conditions in the prison camps in Slovenia were inadequate (starvation, very poor hygienic conditions, various diseases, violence by the guards, general fear among the detainees, etc.). The same applies to the camps for members of the ethnic German community. It should be remarked that many of the Germans who had been most exposed and collaborated with the Nazis had already fled Slovenia before the end of military operations in May 1945; this is also proven by the fact that in Slovenia only a few low-ranking Nazi officials were convicted and executed. Furthermore, many ethnic Germans (between

11 Janez Janžekovič, "Usoda otrok v koncentracijskem taborišču Sterntal," in *Zbornik predavanj 2014/2015* (Kidričevo: Zgodovinsko društvo, 2016), 12–15, 17–18, 21–23.

12 Lowe, *Savage Continent*, 164, 173, 176–177.

13 Lowe, *Savage Continent*, 174–175.

14 Lowe, *Savage Continent*, 163–172; cf. Mirco Dondi, *La lunga liberazione. Giustizia e violenza nel dopoguerra italiano* (Roma: Editori riuniti/l'Unità, 2008), 125–130.

15 Dondi, *La lunga liberazione*, 130; Marcello Flores and Mimmo Franzinelli, *Storia della Resistenza* (Bari-Roma: Laterza, 2019), 515.

16 William I. Hitchcock, *Liberation: The Bitter Road to Freedom, Europe 1944–1945* (London: Faber, 2008), 160–169, 194–195; David Stafford, *Endgame 1945: Victory, Retribution, Liberation* (London: Abacus, 2008), 314–315; Lowe, *Savage Continent*, 51–57.

15,000 and 16,000) had already fled Slovenia when the German army retreated at the end of the war. But the stigmatization of almost all Germans remained: among other things, they were victims of the widespread perception that they were collectively responsible for the actions taken by the Nazis. In fact, there were already a very large number of supporters of Nazism among the so-called *Volksdeutsches* before the war. The belief that their guilt was collective and that they would be expelled en masse after the war was held both in the partisan movement and within anti-partisan circles. In this respect, the treatment of ethnic Italians in Istria and Hungarians in Prekmurje was different—they were punished based on their individual actions before and during the war, and not on the basis of collective guilt.¹⁷

As for the rest of ethnic Germans, their fate was as follows: the first arrests and interrogations were carried out immediately after the liberation of individual cities or towns; in Prekmurje (the northeastern part of Slovenia, near the Hungarian border) this happened as early as April 1945, and in Styria from around May 11. The expulsion from Slovenia, which in May 1945 mainly involved groups of women and children, intensified in September of the same year and reached its peak in the winter of 1945–1946, when about 10,000 people, mostly *Kočevari* (from Kočevje—Gottschee), left Slovenian territory. Before that, an unknown number of deaths were recorded in the concentration camps, many of them female. An addition to the aforementioned Strnišče, the camps for the Germans were in Studenci, Brestrnica, Kamnica, Tezno, Teharje and Hrastovec.¹⁸

17 For differences in the treatment of Germans on the one hand and Italians and Hungarians on the other see Marta Verginella, "La Slovenia tra memorie ritrovate e storie sottratte," in *Naufraghi della pace. Il 1945, i profughi e le memorie divise d'Europa*, ed. Guido Crainz, Raoul Pupo, and Silvia Salvatici (Roma: Donzelli, 2008), 54–57. On the question of the nazification of the *Volksdeutsches* before the war, see Dušan Biber, *Nacizem in Nemci v Jugoslaviji 1933–1941* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1966).

18 For more information, see Dušan Nečak, ed., "*Nemci*" na Slovenskem 1941–1955: izsledki projekta (Ljubljana: Znanstveni inštitut Filozofske fakultete, 1998); Dušan Nečak, Boris Jesih, Božo Repe, and Peter Vodopivec, eds., *Slovensko-avstrijski odnosi v 20. stoletju / Slowenisch-österreichische Beziehungen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Ljubljana: Oddelek za zgodovino Filozofske fakultete, 2004); cfr. Marjan Toš, "Zbirno taborišče Hrastovec pri Lenartu," *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje* 74, no. 3/4 (2003): 425–450; Milko Mikola, ed., *Dokumenti in pričevanja o povojnih izgonih prebivalstva v Sloveniji* (Ljubljana: Študijski center za narodno spravo, 2009); The National Archives, Kew-London (hereafter TNA), FO 371/48892 R 17037/329/92; FO 371/48894 R 20693 and R 21192/329/92. As regards the total number of the so-called *Volksdeutsches* who had to leave cfr. Gregor Jenuš, "Nemška manjšina pri nas ne bo imela nobene pravice, ker je ne bo!" (Boris Kidrič, 15. 12. 1945): komunistični obračun z Nemci na Slovenskem in uničenje nemške manjšine," in *Leto 1945—70 let potem*, ed. Marjan Maučec (Ljubljana: Državni svet Republike Slovenije, 2016) 163–164. Concerning prison camps, see some published documents in Jančar, *Temna stran meseca*, 488–491; Zdenko

Regarding the camp in Hrastovec, the writer and translator Martin Pollack thoroughly investigated the traumatic fate of his elderly aunt, Paulina Bast Drolc from Laško. She was a German who married a Slovene, Franc Drolc, who was highly respected by the local community. Like many others, she was imprisoned in Hrastnik (she was deported there in mid-June 1945), where she died on August 24 at the age of 70 due to malnutrition and exhaustion. Pollack was able to discover that she was buried near the camp on August 26, 1945, but without a cross or gravestone, rendering it impossible to know the exact location of her remains. Among the names of the dead, he also mentions other women. Pollack also describes that many people accused of collaborationism were imprisoned in the camp and some were shot, without a trial or for trivial reasons.¹⁹

As one of the specialists, historian Dušan Nečak writes that the treatment of those imprisoned and the conditions in the camp are mentioned in the memoirs of the victims and the various reports addressed to Austrian and German authorities. From these reports, it can be summarized that the treatment of men was decidedly poor and that of women somewhat less so, but in general, conditions were similar to those in concentration camps in Germany during the war. These camps were dismantled throughout Yugoslavia by 1948.²⁰ What happened in Slovenia towards members of the ethnic German community was not very different from what happened in other parts of Yugoslavia, especially in Vojvodina, but also in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina; there is a good deal of information about the fact that many women were killed or suffered various forms of violence.²¹ And it should be added that this was not much different from what happened to the

Zavavlav, *Partizani, obveščevalci, jetniki: iz dosjeja Zavavlav 1944–1994* (Ljubljana: Horvat M & M, 1996), 279–293; Milko Mikola, ed., *Dokumenti in pričevanja o povojnih koncentracijskih taboriščih v Sloveniji*. [Vol. 1:] *Koncentracijska taborišča Strnišče, Hrastovec, Brestrnica in Filovci* (Ljubljana: Ministrstvo za pravosodje Republike Slovenije, 2007); cfr. Milko Mikola, *Neoprostljivo. Komunistični zločini nad ženskami in otroki na Slovenskem* (Ljubljana: Družina, 2024), 97–134.

19 Martin Pollack, *Ženska brez groba. Poročilo o moji teti* (Celje-Ljubljana: Društvo Mohorjeva družba, 2020), 8–22, 155–158. The facsimile of the document stating that Paulina Bast Drolc was buried on August 26, 1945, can be found in Mikola, *Dokumenti in pričevanja o povojnih koncentracijskih taboriščih v Sloveniji* [Vol. 1], 105.

20 Dušan Nečak, “Nemci v Sloveniji 1938–1948,” in *Slovensko-avstrijski odnosi v 20. stoletju / Slowenisch-österreichische Beziehungen im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Dušan Nečak, Boris Jesih, Božo Repe, and Peter Vodopivec (Ljubljana: Oddelek za zgodovino Filozofske fakultete, 2004), 366; Dušan Nečak, “Posebnosti obračuna z ‘Nemci’ na Slovenskem,” *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 53, no. 1 (2013): 110–111.

21 A review of the many sources in Vladimir Geiger, “Represija nad pripadniki nemške manjšine na Hrvaškem, v Bosni in Hercegovini ter Vojvodini, 1944–1948,” *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 53, no. 1 (2013): 122–136.

Germans in other parts of Europe. In Poland, for example, after liberation, the Poles imprisoned not only Nazis but also other Germans in concentration camps. The conditions there were very harsh, and the prisoners were treated violently, even brutally. The women there suffered just as much as the men: they were robbed of their children, constantly beaten and subjected to rape and sexual sadism.²² The violence after liberation was obviously influenced by the general stigmatization of Germans, and not only in Eastern Europe. Towards the end of the war, for example, Anglo-American soldiers were instructed not to fraternize with them.²³

After the war, members of the Hungarian community in Slovenia were also victims of repression. After the liberation of the Prekmurje region, the OZNA and district military commands, with the help of the special military security unit KNOJ (*Korpus narodne zaščite Jugoslavije*), interned most of the Hungarians and Slovenes who had been members of the extreme right-wing Hungarian party *Nyilaskeresztes Part* (Nylas) during the occupation. An internment camp, the first of its kind in Slovenia, was opened as early as April 5, 1945 in the village of Filovci. According to oral sources, between 200 and 288 were interned there. Conditions here were terrible, thus prisoners' wives (or other women) brought food to the camp, most of which was confiscated by the guards. The guards occasionally shot at family members and at times the relatives of the prisoners resorted to throwing food over the fence. Relatives were sometimes allowed to visit the prisoners, but this had to be done in the presence of a guard and outside the camp. Most of the imprisoned were released fairly quickly, while the more serious "criminals" were transferred to other camps in Styria. The Filovci camp was closed at the beginning of September 1945, no one having died there.²⁴

Due to the Strnišče camp being overcrowded, a new one was created in Hrastovec castle near Lenart, where 225 Hungarian families or 558 people from 19 villages of Prekmurje were imprisoned between July 9 and 15, 1945. Most of them were accused of collaborationism, of belonging to the Nylas party or of being related to suspicious persons; some had already been interned in the Filovci camp.²⁵ According to the report published in 1996 by the Commission of inquiry into the postwar executions (the so-called

22 Lowe, *Savage Continent*, 135–141.

23 Stafford, *Endgame*, 128–130.

24 Mikola, *Dokumenti in pričevanja o povojnih koncentracijskih taboriščih v Sloveniji* [Vol. 1], 21–22, 24, 294–304.

25 Mikola, *Dokumenti in pričevanja o povojnih koncentracijskih taboriščih v Sloveniji* [Vol. 1], 22, 64, 109; Attila Kovács, "Internacija prekmurskih Madžarov v taborišča Hrastovec in Kidričevo leta 1945," *Pomurska obzorja* 3, no. 5 (2016): 19–20.

Pučnikova komisija), they were detained for three months and among them about 30 percent were children and 40 percent women, including elderly women.²⁶ Other data show that the majority, just over 80 percent, were older people, women and children.²⁷ The percentage is partly confirmed by the names on the facsimile of one list (unfortunately partly incomplete as well as being difficult to read as it is handwritten).²⁸

Conditions here were also similar to those in Strnišče: food was barely edible, only the guards had access to any water, so diseases (typhus, diarrhea) spread quickly several people died.²⁹ On July 28, due to lack of space, all ethnic Hungarians who did not have children under the age of 15 were transferred to the Strnišče camp (which, as mentioned, was already full). Not long afterwards, an epidemic of typhus and dysentery broke out in Hrastovec, which led to the release of all the children in the camp at the request of the Lendava representatives (there are different estimates of the total number of children interned at Hrastovec, ranging from 160 to 250). Most of them traveled on foot from Hrastovec to Ptuj, from where they were taken by train to Čakovec and then to Murska Sobota. The sickest children were taken directly to Prekmurje by carts—six of them perished from disease. Of the 558 ethnic Hungarians interned, five died in Hrastovec and six in Strnišče, and two others died after their return due to the conditions in the camps. If the above-mentioned children are added, the total number of interned who died is 19.³⁰ We have some facsimiles of partial death lists which show that among the dead there were many women (some names and surnames indicate that among the dead there were also Slovenians—male and female),³¹ but it is difficult to determine the exact number, not least because, as one of the surviving children recalls, the camp leaders also put two women in the same coffin.³² These women died in deplorable conditions of captivity until the end of 1945. At that time, concentration

26 "Poročilo preiskovalne komisije," 7, 10, 51; cfr. Mikola, *Dokumenti in pričevanja o povojnih koncentracijskih taboriščih v Sloveniji* [Vol. 1], 189.

27 Darja Kerec, *Hlev je bil pod Nemci, hiša pod Madžari. Okupacijske meje v Prekmurju 1941–1945* (Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete, 2021), 73.

28 Mikola, *Dokumenti in pričevanja o povojnih koncentracijskih taboriščih v Sloveniji* [Vol. 1], 40–63.

29 Milko Mikola, *Rdeče nasilje: represija v Sloveniji po letu 1945* (Celje: Celjska Mohorjeva družba, 2012), 84–85; "Poročilo preiskovalne komisije," 52.

30 Kovacs, "Internacija prekmurskih Madžarov," 20–21; Mikola, *Dokumenti in pričevanja o povojnih koncentracijskih taboriščih v Sloveniji* [Vol. 1], 20.

31 Mikola, *Dokumenti in pričevanja o povojnih koncentracijskih taboriščih v Sloveniji* [Vol. 1], 103–105; cfr. Toš, "Zbirno taborišče Hrastovec," 440–442, 445–448.

32 "Poročilo preiskovalne komisije," 52; cfr. Toš, "Zbirno taborišče Hrastovec," 428.

camps were abolished in Slovenia (elsewhere in Yugoslavia some, mainly for ethnic Germans, continued to operate until 1948). It is worth noting that little information is available regarding the subsequent effects on the health (let alone the psyche) of women and other former prisoners.

Returning to the executions of women in Slovenia in the first postwar period, we also have some other sources and testimonies,³³ but, as mentioned above, we do not have precise data on the number of deaths. Only for Styria is more consistent data available. The *Pučnikova komisija* had already found that entire families with elderly people, women and children had been killed in Styria (and in Carinthia).³⁴ For the Lower Styria (*Spodnja Štajerska* region, in German *Untersteiermark*; which at that time comprised the Slovene part of Styria and part of Carniola) we now also have the following data. Here, from May 1945 to the end of January 1946, at least 2,400 people were executed, of whom about 700, or 29 percent, were women. In terms of nationality, the numbers were as follows: a good half, or about 1,260 were of Slovenian nationality, while about 1,140 persons were most likely members of the German ethnic minority.³⁵ The data partly correspond to an Austrian statistic from 1970, according to which 2,341 people lost their lives in the area of Slovenian Styria, Slovenian Carinthia and Prekmurje after May 9, 1945. In particular, for Maribor and its surroundings it is reported that 865 people died, of whom 288 were women and 577 men (the statistics took into account the following categories: missing; those who died or were murdered; those who died in prison or concentration camps; those who died of unknown causes).³⁶ Most probably these cases refer to the first months after the end of the war.

For the secret political police OZNA, and later from March 1946 for UDV or UDBA (*Uprava državne varnosti* or *Uprava državne bezbednosti*), were convinced that the main refuge of the enemy were religious orders, in particular convents, where they developed a widespread network. Nuns in

33 "Poročilo preiskovalne komisije," 26, 34–36, 44. A large amount of data and testimonies were collected by the Commission of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for the Implementation of the Law on the Reparation of Injustices. Some examples of murdered women or serious consequences for girls after losing their parents in Pučnik Rudl, "Nastaja dragoceno dokumentarno gradivo o terorju komunizma," 211–218.

34 "Poročilo preiskovalne komisije," 12.

35 Marta Rendla, "Nasilje revolucionarne oblasti po 2. svetovni vojni na spodnjem Štajerskem," in *Nasilje vojnih in povojnih dni*, ed. Nevenka Troha (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2014), 121. In this article (Rendla, "Nasilje revolucionarne oblasti," 123–132), 11 individual cases of executed women are highlighted; in one case, however, it is not entirely clear whether the woman was executed.

36 Jančar, *Temna stran meseca*, 420.

hospitals and boarding schools, where they exerted considerable influence over patients, were particularly targeted. There were also more forms of persecution of female Catholic orders. Often, nuns were cursed at in public, spit on, and even attacked. As authorities abolished numerous monasteries, many nuns were "left in the street." At the same time, private schools, including Catholic schools, were closed, and the female teachers were dismissed. Nuns were also dismissed from public social health institutions. Finally, several nuns were either put on trial or were in prison and labor camps.³⁷ The authorities considered the most hostile ecclesiastical structures, including those female orders, to be those from the Ljubljana diocese. Here the harsh conflict so typical of the war was repeated. The Catholic Church in Yugoslavia was generally under great pressure after the war, especially because of the collaboration of a high number of the clergy with the occupying regimes during the war, or because of its opposition to the partisan movement.

Regardless of the justified or unfounded reasons for death sentences and the execution of sentences, let us consider the following data regarding executed women in the trials in the first postwar period: a) of the 153 executed persons from verdicts of military tribunals between 1945 and 1952, six were women: five were executed in 1945 (Štefanija Bano, Marta Klinec Babinci, Marta Klinec Cezanjevci, Marija Lah and Vera Lipuš) and one the year after (Veronika Mesarič); b) following the verdicts of civil courts between 1945 and 1952, eight women were executed among 134 total victims: three in 1947 (Greta Ranzinger, Neža Uranič and Marija Bubak), two in 1948 (Angela Jakoš and Marija Mihaljevič), and three in 1949 (Rezika Barle, Marija Kobal and Marija Šmalcelj).³⁸

Regarding the first postwar period, we must recall one of the most infamous: the *Nagodetov proces* (Nagode Trial) which unfolded between July 29 and August 12, 1947, as a result of which three women were among the convicted, Angela Vode (sentenced to a prison term of 20 years' hard labor and a five year loss of political rights; on December 30, 1952 she was

37 Dornik Šubelj, *Ozna*, 203, 214, 216, 254, 261–262, 355, 363, 416, 421, 424; Jože Pučnik, ed., *Iz arhivov slovenske politične policije* (Ljubljana: Veda, 1996), 142–144, 146–147, 265–266; Tamara Griesser Pečar, *Cerkev na zatožni klopi. Sodni procesi, administrativne kazni, posegi "ljudske oblasti" v Sloveniji od 1943 do 1960* (Ljubljana: Družina, 2005).

38 Tadeja Tomiňsek Čehulič, "Usmrčeni po sodbah vojaških in civilnih sodišč v Sloveniji (1945–1952)," in *Nasilje vojnih in povojnih dni*, ed. Nevenka Troha (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2014), 289–324. The comparison with the published facsimile of the list of death sentences, 1945–1952 (Zavavlav, *Partizani*, 312–336), demonstrates that three executions of women were carried out in 1948. Milko Mikola (*Neoprostljivo*, 175–176) writes that only seven women were sentenced to death and executed.

pardoned); Pavla Hočevar (sentenced to 14 years hard labor, confiscation of all property and loss of political rights for three years; released on parole on May 9, 1952); and Elizabeta Hribar (sentenced to one year of hard labor). Vode and Hočevar were prominent figures, convinced supporters of women's rights within the partisan resistance during the war, even if they did not always agree with the leaders' choices. Vode was, among other things, one of the first pre-war Slovenian women communists, from 1922 until her expulsion in 1939 because she did not approve of the pact between the Soviet Union and Germany (the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, August 23, 1939); she was arrested by the Germans at the beginning of 1944 and sent to the Ravensbrück camp.³⁹ Regarding the three women convicted at the Nagode Trial, Mateja Jeraj states that the communist authorities did not consider them any less dangerous than the condemned men. In general, however, among the real political opponents of the regime, according to Yugoslav leaders and Tito himself, the number of women was low.⁴⁰

The OZNA played an important role in the "cleansing" by arresting and deciding the fate of those incarcerated.⁴¹ Among other things, it conducted interrogations and frequently used violent or intimidating methods against female prisoners. One such case is described by Zdenko Zavadlav, a former member of the OZNA and later accused by the regime of being an "enemy of the people": a young woman from Maribor was forced by him to spy for the OZNA under threat of prosecution.⁴² The repressive apparatus of the new authorities had gone too far. The fate of Leopoldina Mekina at the end of the war is paradigmatic in this regard. Active in the Slovenian partisan movement since 1941 and secretary of the Communist Party of Slovenia in Ljubljana, she was arrested by the collaborationist police in January 1945

39 Mateja Jeraj and Jelka Melik, eds., *Kazenski proces proti Črtomirju Nagodetu in soobtoženim. Študija in prikaz procesa* (Ljubljana: Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 2015). A trilogy was published on Angela Vode, with reprints of her most important works, in Mirjam Milharčič-Hladnik, ed., *Zbrana dela Angele Vode*, Vol. I–III (Ljubljana: Krtina, 1998–2000). The monograph on her and Boris Furlan is also notable: Peter Vodopivec, ed., *Usoda slovenskih demokratičnih izobražencev. Angela Vode in Boris Furlan, žrtvi Nagodetovega procesa* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 2001). Her memoirs are also of note: Angela Vode, *Skriti spomin*, ed. Alenka Puhar (Ljubljana: Nova revija, 2004). Regarding Pavla Hočevar, e.g., Metka Gombač, "Pavla Hočevar: učiteljica, publicistka, feministka," in *Splošno žensko društvo 1901–1945. Od dobrih deklet do feministk*, ed. Nataša Budna Kodrič and Aleksandra Serše (Ljubljana: Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 2003), 307–317.

40 Jeraj, *Slovenke na prehodu v socializem*, 190.

41 E.g., Jera Vodušek Starič, "Prevzem oblasti po vojni in vloga Ozne—obračun," in *Slovenija v letu 1945*, ed. Aleš Gabrič (Ljubljana: Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije, 1996), 93–110; Dornik Šubelj, *Ozna*.

42 Zdenko Zavadlav, *Pozna spoved: iz dnevnika slovenskega oznovca* (Klagenfurt: Mohorjeva, 2010), 49.

(many members of the partisan movement were arrested at that time) and immediately after liberation executed by the OZNA. She was accused of being “a traitor and a Gestapo agent.” Subsequent investigations disproved this accusation.⁴³

During or at the end of the war, the OZNA also arrested and interrogated some who were very active opponents of both Nazism and Fascism. Among them, Ela (Jela) Potočnik was very prominent in Slovenia and was also involved in the secret anti-fascist activities of in the Primorska region and Istria before the war (activities that are now often too simplistically referred to as the TIGR organization). She, like many others, was suspected by the communist regime of collaborating with British secret services. In fact, some of those under suspicion had indeed been working with the Special Operations Executive since the late 1930s,⁴⁴ but this did not mean that they were “spies” for the West, as they were discredited by postwar propaganda and paranoid rhetoric.⁴⁵ The case of Ela Potočnik should certainly be investigated further.

In the first period after WWII, convicted women served their sentences in various prisons. As we read in the Ministry of the Interior’s Annual Report for 1947, among these was the Penitentiary reformatory (*Kazensko poboljševalni dom*—KPD) in the nationalized castle of Rajhenburh (now Brestanica), then in prisons in Ljubljana, Novo Mesto, Maribor, Celje or in district prisons; pregnant inmates were held in a special facility. Most of the women were imprisoned in the Begunje reformatory in Gorenjska, where they took sewing courses as part of their re-education, as well as working in cattle breeding and agriculture. By the end of 1946, 393 women (2,094 men) were incarcerated. During 1947, their number rose to 1,573 women

43 Lojze Tršan, ed., *Razbitje OF in partije v Ljubljani v zadnjem obdobju nemške okupacije* (Ljubljana: Arhivsko društvo Slovenije, 1996); Vera Hutař, *Žrtvovana. Zamolčana resnica o Leopoldini Mekina* (Novo mesto: Tiskarna Novo mesto-Dolenjska založba, 1998); Ljuba Dornik Šubelj, *Oddelek za zaščito naroda za Slovenijo* (Ljubljana: Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 1999), 82, 92–95; Ljuba Dornik Šubelj, “Vloga žensk v obveščevalnih in varnostnih službah na Slovenskem pred, med in po drugi svetovni vojni,” in *Ženske skozi zgodovino*, ed. Aleksander Žižek (Ljubljana: Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije, 2004), 164–165.

44 More information in Arhiv Republike Slovenije, Ljubljana (Archives of the Republic of Slovenia, hereafter SI AS), SI AS 1931, t. u. 945, 951 and 952; Jerca Vodušek Starič, *Slovenski špijoni in SOE 1938–1942* (Ljubljana: self-published, 2002); Gorazd Bajc, “Collaboration Between Slovenes from the Primorska Region, the Special Operations Executive and the Inter-Services Liaison Department after the Occupation of Yugoslavia (6 April 1941),” *Annales, Series Historia et Sociologia* 12, no. 2 (2002): 363–384.

45 Gorazd Bajc, “‘Plačanci—agenti / špijoni zahoda’. Primer retorike povojnih jugoslovanskih oblasti glede pomena in vloge TIGR-a in ocene britanskih obveščevalnih služb,” *Acta Histriae* 15, no. 1 (2007): 261–276.

(7,493 men), but in the same year 599 women (2,376 men) had served their sentences, 35 women (79 men) were released on parole and 50 women (597 men) were pardoned. The statistics for 1947 also indicate that a total of 358 women (1,728 men) died or escaped or were transferred (this part of the information given in the document is not particularly clear). At the end of 1947, therefore, 531 women (2,713 men) were still imprisoned.⁴⁶ The aforementioned annual report does not specifically explain whether these included women convicted for ordinary crimes; in all likelihood, they were few in number.

To a lesser extent, postwar killings took place in the neighboring territories, namely in the Austrian provinces of Carinthia and Styria and in Venezia Giulia. In Carinthia and Steiermark, in early May, Yugoslav troops arrested and forcibly transported or deported people suspected of collaborating with the Nazis. According to some authors, more than 350 people were arrested, 96 of whom were reported missing (the so-called *Verschleppt*). Although some authors estimate higher numbers, the topic has often been the subject of speculation which has evidently led to exaggeration. Various data⁴⁷ show that many women were arrested here; we can say that among the various cases of violence after the war, their number was the highest percentage-wise compared to the number of men arrested. In particular, the Yugoslav authorities also suspected these women of having been linked to Nazism in one way or another. According to British sources, among those arrested were some Slovenian-speaking Carinthians and a number of women. With regard to the latter, the British believed that they were mostly girls who had ignored the curfew.⁴⁸

46 Facsimile of some pages of the Ministry of the Interior's Annual Report for 1947 in Zavadlav, *Partizani*, [262–278, cfr. 348]; Dornik Šubelj, *Ozna*, 239–243, 424.

47 E.g., Risto Stojanovič, "Prispevek k vprašanju odpeljanih ('odvlečenih') in izginulih oseb na Koroškem maja 1945," *Zgodovinski časopis* 50, no. 4 (1996): 589–594; August Walzl, "Maggio 1945 in Carinzia: le deportazioni in Jugoslavia," *Storia contemporanea in Friuli* 27, no. 28 (1997): 9–42; Alfred Elste, Michael Koschat and Pau Strohmaier, *Opfer, Täter, Denunzianten. "Partisanenjustiz" am Beispiel der Verschleppungen in Kärnten und der Steiermark im Mai/Juni 1945: Recht oder Rache?* (Klagenfurt, Ljubljana, Vienna: Hermagoras-Mohorjeva, 2007); Brigitte Entner, "Pozabljene žrtve? Koroški 'odvlečeni' iz majske dni 1945 v zrcalu regionalnega zgodovinskega in regionalne politike zgodovinskega," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 48, no. 1 (2008): 139–146; Marjan Linasi, *Koroški partizani. Protinacistični odpor na dvojezičnem Koroškem v okviru slovenske Osvobodilne fronte* (Klagenfurt: Mohorjeva, 2010), 655–677.

48 Thomas M. Barker, *Socialni revolucionarji in tajni agenti. Koroški slovenski partizani in britanska tajna služba* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1991), 247–249, cfr. 288–289.

Violence in the Northern Adriatic Area

Also, to a lesser extent, postwar killings also took place in the ethnically mixed area of the Venezia Giulia region, which was liberated and then occupied by Yugoslavs on May 1, 1945. It is a common misconception that they threw all the victims of their persecutions into the *foibe* (or *foibas*)—natural or excavated ditches. In the first days of May, the Yugoslav side arrested a number of people (mostly of Italian nationality, but also others, Germans, Slovenes, etc.), then released a good deal, while either murdering those who remained and disposing of their bodies in the *foibas*, or deporting them—as the process of transportation had already been known at the time—to camps for prisoners of war deeper into Yugoslavia. Some died while on the way, some in camps or prisons, and some returned; most of them returned after a few months, a handful after years.

The challenge in properly assessing these events is the considerable amount of unverified data, exaggerations (the Italian press daily reported with great emphasis on increasing acts of violence on the part of Yugoslavs against the Italian population in Trieste and Gorizia already in the first days of May 1945 and continued with this afterwards⁴⁹) and the political use of history. In this context, there were (and still are) allegations of brutal violence against Italians, solely because they were Italian, and this includes Italian women. Already then, for example, rumors were spreading among the local population that the “Yugoslav Occupier” had committed or intended to commit horrific crimes. Thus, in July 1945, the Allies recorded that a rumor had spread in Monfalcone (Tržič) that four girls had been mercilessly tortured and burnt alive.⁵⁰ There is no further information on this matter, and it can be said that the news was the result of very strong anti-Yugoslav propaganda at the time. Similar exaggerations can be found, for example, in a propaganda pamphlet first published in 1946, according to which in the most famous foiba of Basovizza (Bazovica) many of the victims were women and even children, in some cases entire families.⁵¹ This (and similar) misinformation was uncritically reported by some Italian newspapers,

49 E.g., TNA WO 106/4059, 313, from N. Charles, Rome, to Foreign Office (No. 795), May 12, 1945; TNA FO 371/48835 R 13047 and R 13096/24/92; TNA WO 204/12753, 13, 16 and 26B; TNA WO 106/4085, 153A.

50 TNA WO 170/4287, F, GBI(B) HQ 13 Corps *Security Intelligence Report* No. 51, July 7, 1945, Part III/12.

51 G. [Guglielmo] Holzer, *Fasti e nefasti della quarantena titina a Trieste* (Trieste: [s.n.], 1946), 40.

especially in the last 30 years and even more so since 2004,⁵² when Italy passed a law creating the Day of Remembrance (*Giorno del Ricordo*).

According to Nevenka Troha, who verified several accounts, for Trieste and the surrounding area a total of at least 601 people have been identified as having been either killed or died in captivity. Of those, 573 were adult males, 18 females, nine teenagers aged 17 to 19, and one very young girl (Miranda Deancovich) who was transported with her family to Split, where she died on December 7, 1945. Half of the women (nine) were Slovenian; the percentage of Slovenians among male victims is considerably lower. Two women were marked as fascists, one as a collaborator, and one as a member of the *Comitato di liberazione nazionale Giuliano* (CLNG), the pro-Italian resistance⁵³ which was rival to the Yugoslav partisans. According to the same author's research, 901 people were killed or died in captivity in the area of the former Gorizia Region, including 653 members of the armed groups (32 Slovene *domobranci*) and 248 civilians (among them 49 women).⁵⁴

As Nevenka Troha writes, the arrests were made for various reasons: there were also mistakes, personal vendettas, inconsistent instructions and arbitrariness.⁵⁵ This was the case of the arrest of five women (most of them mothers of small children) and three men on April 30, 1945 in the village of Lokev, near Trieste. They were taken by local partisan leaders to nearby Kozina and interrogated. After a few days they were released; before that, however, they were robbed.⁵⁶

With regard to the numerous arrests, we can also mention the following case. In Gorizia, on the night of June 5, 1945, members of the Yugoslav military forces invaded the convent of the School Sisters of *Notre Dame* and took away the Sister Provincial Gonzaga Rositi and five other nuns. The former

52 On uncritical newspaper writing cfr. Jože Pirjevec, *Foibe. Una storia d'Italia* (Turin: Einaudi, 2009), 122.

53 Nevenka Troha, *Komu Trst. Slovenci in Italijani med dvema državama* (Ljubljana: Modrijan, 1999), 69–70; Nevenka Troha, "La questione delle 'foibe' negli archivi sloveni e italiani," in *Foibe. Una storia d'Italia*, ed. Jože Pirjevec (Turin: Einaudi, 2009), 289; Nevenka Troha, "Pogrešani. Kdo so bili ljudje, ki so jih maja 1945 na območju Tržaške pokrajine aretirale jugoslovanske oblasti in so pogrešani," in *Nasilje vojnih in povojnih dni*, ed. Nevenka Troha (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2014), 161.

54 Troha, *Komu Trst*, 70; Troha, "La questione delle 'foibe'," 288; cfr. Nataša Nemec, "Maggio '45: arresti, deportazioni ed esecuzioni nel goriziano e nella Venezia Giulia," *Nuova iniziativa isontina* 12 (1996): 33.

55 Troha, "La questione delle 'foibe,'" 269.

56 Letter from Virgil Šček, October 25, 1945, in Marko Tavčar, Egon Pelikan, and Nevenka Troha, eds., *Korespondenca Virgila Ščeka 1918–1947* (Ljubljana: Arhivsko društvo Slovenije, 1997), 136; cfr. Troha, "La questione delle 'foibe,'" 269.

bishop of Trieste, Luigi Fogar, interceded on their behalf, claiming that they had always treated the Slovenes well. He asked that they be protected, that they not be tortured and that they be allowed to return to the convent.⁵⁷ In all likelihood, the matter was resolved, but it is interesting that in his letter, the bishop warned of the potential mistreatment of the nuns.

In the Anglo-American documents we get more (but not very exhaustive) data about other arrests of women in the first weeks after the war. In these cases, they do not seem to have suffered any serious consequences. In the first half of May in Trieste, for example, two Allied soldiers and two girls were arrested by the Yugoslavs. They were returning from a dance. The two soldiers were released while the two girls were detained.⁵⁸ It is likely that the two girls were also released shortly afterwards. Also in Trieste, on May 14, the Yugoslavs stopped three New Zealand soldiers who were accompanying three Italian girls home. The three soldiers were forced to return to their own headquarters, while the girls were taken to the Yugoslav headquarters and later escorted home by a Yugoslav escort.⁵⁹

Regarding personal vendettas we could mention the following case. Among the dead in the area of Trieste were Rosanda Kralj, aged 20, and her neighbor Vida Kralj, aged 23, from Slivia (Slivno), near Aurisina (Nabrežina). On May 7, they were forcibly taken away by two members of the OZNA. Rosanda's brother Ivo, who was in the ranks of the partisans during the war, immediately began investigating, but to no avail, and it was only two years later that the family learned that the two girls had been brutally tortured, murdered and the assassins tried to hide the bodies in a valley.⁶⁰ The real motive was never clarified, but in all likelihood it was revenge for reasons of passion.

The scarcest information concerns the *foibe* and the deportations from Istria and Fiume (Rijeka): from here, some 850 people were deported, of

57 Diplomatski arhiv Ministarstva spoljnih poslova Republike Srbije, Beograd (Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, hereafter DAMSP), MSP, PA, 1945, t. u. 13, dosje 5, pov. br. 1683, from Sloven Smodlaka to General Velebit, June 5, 1945; from Sloven Smodlaka, Jugoslavenska delegacija u Savetodavnom veću za Italiju—Rim, to Ministarstvo inostranih poslova (771/45): *Poseta bivšega tršćanskog nadbiskupa Fogara*, June 13, 1945.

58 TNA WO 170/4286, App. K (No. 6652), 2 NZ DIV, May 13, 1945.

59 TNA WO 170/4286, App. B, 13 Corps 2 BNZ DIV, May 15, 1945; App. F, Main 13 Corps (I 922), May 15, 1945.

60 Ivo Kralj, "Dnevi osvoboditve, a tudi revolucije," *Primorski dnevnik*, May 19, 2010, 7; re-published in Zadruga Primorski dnevnik, *Spomini na leto 1945. Pričevanja naših ljudi* (Trieste: Zadruga Primorski dnevnik, 2011), 49–52; cfr. Mikola, *Neoprostljivo*, 67. We also have some partially different information on this case (Troha, "Pogrešani," 198).

whom 670 never returned.⁶¹ In the municipality of Koper (thus in the Slovenian part of Istria), the remains of about 130 people were found in the early 1990s,⁶² but there is no information about women here; for this part of Istria we have some lists available, but they were compiled on a dubious basis. The exception is the data on Fiume included in a publication containing results of the joint Italian-Croatian study, which reports 395 deaths between May 3, 1945 and the end of the year, of which 362 were men and 33 women.⁶³

As far as Istria is concerned, we have some data on the deaths of a few women. On the island of Sveti Andrija (S. Andrea) near Rovinj (Rovigno), Baroness Enrica Augusta Maria Hütterott and her daughter Clara Ida Barbara were murdered on May 31. Their movable property was later confiscated.⁶⁴ Orietta Moscarda writes that in May 1945, five women who had worked in Pula (Pola) during the war (they were maids, seamstresses, typists, cooks, etc.) were arrested, namely immediately upon return to their villages in Istria. The partisans accused them of collaborationism. They were immediately handed over to the OZNA;⁶⁵ on their fate we have no further information. Roberto Spazzali, a great expert on the subject, on the other hand, writes that on May 19, 1945 in Pula four employees of the Hospital of the former Italian Navy were taken and among them was nurse Flego.⁶⁶ The author provides no other data, but from the context it seems that these (as well as others) were summarily executed.

There is also insufficient data concerning the fate of several girls mentioned in the testimony of Carlo Gritti—the latter, although in British uniform, was arrested at the end of July 1945 in Abazzia (Opatija), in northeastern Istria. After a few months he was released from captivity in Yugoslavia and told Captain John Kellett (the Anglo-American officer in Trieste responsible for releasing the deportees), that he had met some New

61 Troha, *Komu Trst*, 71.

62 Pirjevec, *Foibe*, 209. Some write that there were 100, e.g., Božo Repe, “Changes in Life Style and Social and National Structures in Slovenia After World War Two,” in 1945—*A Break with the Past: A History of Central European Countries at the End of World War II*, ed. Zdenko Čepič (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2008), 203.

63 Amleto Ballarini and Mihael Sobolevski, eds., *Le vittime di nazionalità italiana a Fiume e dintorni (1939–1947) / Žrtve talijanske nacionalnosti u Rijeci i okolici (1939–1947)* (Roma: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, Direzione generale per gli archivi, 2002), 201.

64 National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (hereafter NARA), RG 331, E British-US Zone, B 882, F 20; Orietta Moscarda Oblak, *Il ‘potere popolare’ in Istria 1945–1953* (Rijeka, Trieste: Unione italiana-Università popolare, 2016), 63.

65 Moscarda Oblak, *Il ‘potere popolare’*, 61.

66 Roberto Spazzali, *Pola città perduta. L’agonia, l’esodo (1943–47)* (Milan, Trieste: Ares-I.R.C.I., 2022), 81.

Zealand soldiers in Ogulin. According to him, they had likely crossed the border in a jeep accompanied by some girls in the first half of September. Their papers were not in order, and they were all arrested. They left Ogulin for an unknown destination around mid-October with another unidentified Briton from Liverpool. Gritti imagined that the girls were taken to the women's prison called Pozzo Littorio.⁶⁷ The story shows us the complexity that we find in documents relating to individual missing persons cases.

We do not have much information on the execution of women by the OZNA in other smaller towns of Primorska. Among the exceptions we can mention the case of Pavla Vončina (aged 22) who was shot in January 1946 in the locality of Cerkljansko and Idrija. The explanation for what happened is not entirely clear: she may have been involved in smuggling even after the war.⁶⁸

We also do not have accurate data on how many women there were among the deportees and how many returned. Again, the lack of clarity is due to exaggeration, controversy and lack of thorough research (some authors simply repeat what they find in other texts and do not notice errors or inconsistencies) and unverified lists (there are indeed many). Some documents of the time are very vague on this point. For example, in a pro-Italian report of June 7, 1945,⁶⁹ we read that 8,000 people had been arrested and deported in Trieste up to that time, and that among these were men and women.

The most detailed research on the deportees from Venezia Giulia to camps in Yugoslavia was published by Urška Lampe, who writes that the total number of deportees was 3,539, of whom 2,130 returned, 1,100 were repatriated but did not present themselves to the authorities, 178 definitely known to have died and the fate of 131 is unclear.⁷⁰ They were almost entirely men, with the exception of the following.

Valeria Cuscita was arrested by the Yugoslavs on June 7, 1945 and sent to prison in Postojna (Postumia), where she remained until August 16,

67 NARA, RG 331, E 88, B 881, F 15/8, from John Kellett, Captain, Headquarters Allied Military Government 13 Corps, to GSI(b) 13 Corps (130/AMG/WEL/15): *Deportees*, December 10, 1945.

68 Sandro Oblak, *Z udarno pestjo. Odnos ljudske oblasti do resničnih in namišljenih domačih nasprotnikov na Idrijskem in Cerkljanskem (1943–1950)* (Gorizia: Goriška Mohorjeva družba, 2020), 184–187.

69 TNA WO 204/6387, 199, *Rapporto* no. 5 (Riservato), June 6, 1945, [1].

70 Urška Lampe, *Deportacije iz Julijske krajine v Jugoslavijo, 1945–1954. Diplomatski in socialni vidiki* (Koper, Centur: Založba Annales-Zgodovinsko društvo za južno Primorsko-Inštitut IRRIS, 2022), 224–226.

1945.⁷¹ Evidently, she was then repatriated. The Anglo-American Allied Military Government (AMG) (which, after the withdrawal of the Yugoslav partisan troops on June 12, 1945, controlled and administered the western part of the Venezia Giulia territory, i.e., the area of Trieste and Gorizia) also interviewed a woman who had been repatriated from the largest camp for Italian prisoners, Borovnica (near Ljubljana), and was still waiting for her husband to be released. The woman did not say why she was in the camp.⁷² One of the returnees wrote, among other things, that two women, both the domestic partners of the men arrested, joined a group of prisoners on their way to Borovnica. One of them, he claimed, had remained among the prisoners of war of her own free will, so as not to leave her husband. Both women later left the camp on June 25, 1945 because they wanted to follow their partners, who were transferred to Petrovaradin (near Novi Sad in Serbia). One (and her fiancé, Lieutenant Salvatore Vices Vinci) was finally released after five months,⁷³ while Barral provides no further information on the other woman.

Regarding those who did not return in the first months there is little available information in the literature. Spazzali writes that in January 1946 there were still 23 Italians from Trieste in the OZNA prison, four of whom were women: Ida De Vecchi, Maria Tevere, Annamaria Tosoni and Rosalia Poznik (Rosetta). Spazzali adds only for Mrs. Poznik that she was transferred in the spring of 1946, however, it is not clear where.⁷⁴ Evidently, not everyone returned immediately. As for Ida de Vecchi, we know that she was released in July 1947—her longer period of incarceration is likely due to her known fascist activities. Already before the war she was very active in the fascist organizations in Trieste, which she continued between 1941 and 1943 as leader of the fascist women's organization in Ljubljana during the Italian occupation, and then, from autumn 1943 until the end of the war, she was very active again in Trieste under Nazi occupation in the *Adriatisches Küstenland*. In May 1945, she was immediately arrested by Yugoslav soldiers and taken to prison in Ljubljana. After her return from Yugoslavia on July 19, 1947,

71 TNA WO 204/431, J. H. Byrd, Investigation Committee—Venezia Giulia: *Report of Investigation (Part II)*, November 11, 1945 (the same in TNA FO 371/48953 R 21055/15263/92, 219, and NARA, RG 331, E British-US Zone, B 876, F 56).

72 Lampe, *Deportacije*, 55.

73 Gianni Barral, *Borovnica '45. Al confine orientale d'Italia. Memorie di un ufficiale italiano* (Milan: Paoline, 2007), 133, 188–189; cfr. Franco Giuseppe Gobbato, *Borovnica e gli altri campi per prigionieri di guerra nell'ex Jugoslavia 1945–...* (Pordenone: "Silentes Loquimur," 2005), 65.

74 Roberto Spazzali, ... *L'Italia chiamò. Resistenza politica e militare italiana a Trieste (1943–1947)* (Gorizia: Libreria editrice goriziana, 2003), 367.

she immediately joined the neo-fascist political party *Movimento Sociale Italiano*, for which she was twice elected. Among other things, she was very committed to the memory of the victims of Yugoslavian repression (the so-called *infoibati*) and in her rhetoric she liked to emphasize that they had been “barbarously killed” only for the “love of Italy,” ignoring all the crimes and responsibilities of Fascism.⁷⁵

Spazzali also published a partial list of 112 residents of Venezia Giulia who were sentenced and still imprisoned in Yugoslav jails in 1948. Among them were the following four women: Eufemia Basile, who was imprisoned in Pula until May 19, 1948, when she was released; Vera Bubic, who was imprisoned somewhere in Croatia; widow Lina Contento who was imprisoned in Ljubljana; Mafalda Codan (resident of Trieste), also imprisoned in Ljubljana.⁷⁶ Of her we know that she returned in June 1949.

Several Italian women were arrested in central Slovenia at the end of the war. It is most likely that very few of them remained here after the armistice of September 8, 1943, but some evidently stayed until the end of the war. We have no certain data, but it is probably that they were connected in one way or another to the Fascist or Nazi regime. This is the case of Anna Lossone who, together with Giuseppe Giusti, was at the Italian Cultural Institute in Ljubljana. In March 1946, the Italian Foreign Ministry explained the case to US diplomats as follows: “At the time of the liberation of Slovenia by troops of Marshal Tito, these persons were employed in the Italian Cultural Institute in Ljubljana. Without any specific accusation, they were interned in prisons of Ljubljana, where it seems they are still being detained in exceedingly precarious conditions.”⁷⁷ The Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs took action and asked the Slovenian authorities for clarification. The explanation was as follows: Giusti died of illness in December 1945 and Mrs. Lossone was in held in custody awaiting further investigation.⁷⁸ In November 1946, the secret political police UDBA explained that an Italian citizen, Anna Lossone, was under investigation for her fascist activities at the Italian Institute in Ljubljana and for the links she had maintained with fascist centers in Italy

75 Matteo Perissinotto, “L’attività politica di Ida De Vecchi nel Consiglio Comunale di Trieste (1956–1966),” *Maitardi* 1 (2025): 70–72, 78–80, 82–84, 86.

76 Roberto Spazzali, *Epurazione di frontiera. Le ambigue sanzioni contro il fascismo nella Venezia Giulia 1945–1948* (Gorizia: Libreria editrice goriziana, 2000), 387.

77 DAMSP, MSP, PA 1946, t. u. 35, dosje 7, Pov. Br. 15035, from US Embassy, Belgrade (No. 180), May 13, 1946.

78 DAMSP, MSP, PA 1946, t. u. 35, dosje 7, Pov. Br. 15035, from Hugo Skala, Vlada Ljudske republike Slovenije, to Ministrstvo zunanjih poslova (Št. 226/55-6), September 11, 1946.

during the occupation.⁷⁹ I have not been able to obtain any information about her later fate. The same applies to the case of Ada Schokelj. According to the report of her disappearance received by the Anglo-Americans, she was in Ljubljana in the first days of May 1945, after which there is no further word on her whereabouts. Her aunt was concerned about the woman's fate and described her niece as follows: an employee in the TODT organization⁸⁰ (the German wartime organization for forced labor). However, it is not entirely clear whether Ada Schokelj was part of the TODT administration or whether she was one of the many people forced to work for this Nazi apparatus. In any case, it is very likely that at the end of the war, the new authorities in Ljubljana viewed her with great suspicion.

Similar to the aforementioned efforts of relatives to help prisoners in the Filovci camp, we can also mention the attempts, especially by women, to visit the camps for Italian deportees. For instance, at the beginning of July 1945, the above-mentioned Captain John Kellett received information that Gina Celano (maiden name Alterisi) from Trieste wanted to visit her husband in Borovnica. The camp guards injured her leg, and she was taken to hospital in Ljubljana. Eventually, Mrs. Celano decided to return to Trieste as she had left her 13-year-old son at home with another woman.⁸¹ It is very likely that she was able to return. Lists of released persons indicate that her husband, Mario Celano, returned,⁸² although it is not clear when. The Anglo-Americans received several other requests or warnings from women trying to visit the camps, particularly the one in Borovnica.⁸³ They

79 DAMSP, MSP, PA 1946, t. u. 35, dosje 7, Pov. Br. 15035, from Mitja Ribičič, Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve FLRJ, Uprava državne varnosti za ljudsko republiko Slovenijo, November 22, 1946.

80 NARA, RG 331, E British-US Zone, B 872, F 59, request for information from Olga Milocco [s.a.].

81 NARA, RG 331, E British-US Zone, B 868, F 45–46, from Capt. John Kellett, Headquarters Allied Military Government 13 Corps, to Major Ballew: *Internees in Jugo Slavija*, July 10, 1945 (the same in TNA FO 170/1186); cfr. NARA, RG 331, E 88, B 880, F 15, from Italian Red Cross, No. 22030 [s. a., data concerning Ms Gina Celano]. Barral mentions that one of the guards shot a woman and wounded her in the ankle, accidentally hitting her when he only intended to scare her away; Gianni Barral, *Borovnica '45. Al confine orientale d'Italia. Memorie di un ufficiale italiano* (Milan: Paoline, 2007) 169; cfr. Franco Giuseppe Gobbato, *Borovnica e gli altri campi per prigionieri di guerra nell'ex Jugoslavia 1945–...* (Pordenone: "Silentes Loquimur," 2005), 110.

82 NARA, RG 331, E British-US Zone, B 876, F 52, Volume I, Containing names of persons from Trieste claimed to have been deported by the Yugoslav Authorities during the Yugoslav occupation of Venezia Giulia, [s. a.], 10.

83 E.g., TNA WO 204/430, Nubadir Nadir, J. H. Byrd, Investigation Committee—Venezia Giulia: *Report of Investigation (Part I)*, September 27, 1945 [e.g., testimony of Maria Perna] (the same in TNA FO 371/48953 R 18136/15263/92, and TNA WO 204/12494); NARA, RG 331, E British-US

tried to bring food and other supplies to the prisoners. In some cases the deliveries succeeded, in others the guards took advantage of the situation and stole.⁸⁴ These visits greatly irritated the Yugoslavs.⁸⁵ Some wives tried to visit their husbands or comrades who were imprisoned elsewhere. We have the testimony of one woman about the camp of St. Vid in Ljubljana where, according to her account, the situation was even worse than in Borovnica—here it was not even possible to approach and receive news about the prisoners; only rumors circulated that prisoners were living in very poor conditions.⁸⁶

I attempted to ascertain the number of women who died or suffered violence at the hands of the Yugoslavs in Venezia Giulia by comparing known data with Anglo-American documents. The latter also contain a large number of lists of missing persons, but their authenticity is not always reliable: many lists are repetitive, contain errors or exaggerations (it depends above all on who compiled them: if on the one hand the Yugoslavs minimized the issue, on the other hand the Italian side was inclined to amplify it). Last but not least, one should consider the chaotic situation at the end of the war. In any case, I am of the opinion, as far as Venezia Giulia was concerned, that the Anglo-Americans were very interested in investigating these cases of violence, because they had every interest in obtaining compromising evidence about Tito's Yugoslavia, then a dangerous communist country. The lists of returnees for Trieste, Gorizia and Pula⁸⁷ are particularly interesting, because in these cases it means that they were actually arrested. I can conclude that the analysis of these sources shows that many more women were arrested than are mentioned in the works published thus far. Many were detained "only" for a few days or a few weeks, but in any case this represented a new trauma, and also for their families, desperately seeking news of the disappeared.

A specific issue which I will mention briefly is the other forms of violence of the OZNA and then the UDBA. In Zone A of Venezia Giulia,

Zone, B 872, F 59, from Sig.a. Elisa Zita to Comado Militare Alleato di Trieste, [s.a.]; from Mary C. Dupee, ARC [American Red Cross], to Lt. Col. Smuts, Area Commission: *Information Concerning Deportees in Jugoslavia*, September 21, 1945; E 88, B 880, F 15, *Copia di biglietti inviati da internati a Borovnica alle proprie famiglie* [s.a.].

84 Barral, *Borovnica* '45, 168–169, 190, 207, 214; Lampe, *Deportacije*, 66, 78; cfr. Gobbato, *Borovnica e gli altri campi*, 110.

85 NARA, RG 331, E British-US Zone, B 868, F 8, from Komanda Taborišča Vojnih Ujetnikov Borovnica Načelstvu Narodne zaštite Trst, June 10, 1945 [copy of the original].

86 NARA, RG 331, E 88, B 880, F 15, No. 21843, from Amorina Blotta, Trieste, July 8, 1945.

87 NARA, RG 331, E British-US Zone, B 868, F 22 and F 30; B 870, F 41; B 871, F 48; B 876, F 1, F 50, F 51 and F 52; B 882, F 47.

under Anglo-American administration, the Yugoslav secret police covertly kidnapped individual political opponents (predominantly Slovenians) and transported them clandestinely to Yugoslavia. From October 1945 to September 1949, there were 11 such cases. In two cases, two women were also victims. Ivan Martelanc was kidnapped together with his wife Amalia on October 26, 1945.⁸⁸ One other woman was a hostage of the UDBA, and was used in the capture of her husband; on March 23, 1949, UDBA agents kidnapped Hrvoje Magazinović while he was attempting to help his wife Zora escape from Yugoslavia.⁸⁹

Conclusion

I agree with Lowe's assertion that the violence in Yugoslavia was not significantly worse than in other European countries; the real difference was that there were more cases in Yugoslavia.⁹⁰ If we try to make a quantitative assessment regarding the early postwar period in Slovenia and the neighboring territory, we can say that in there were many women (albeit civilian) who were victims of various forms of violence immediately after the end of WWII, in the form of mass executions or even just arrests; many were imprisoned or forcibly displaced; or even as mothers whose children were taken away (even temporarily); in most cases, it was found that the victors made no distinction between male and female victims when it came to perpetrating violence against the losers. There are probably several reasons why this happened. In order to understand and evaluate the violence described, one must bear in mind that the war in Slovenia (and thus in Yugoslavia) was one of the most violent and complex to date. The violence and the numerous deaths were caused by the various occupying powers, the collaborating groups and the resistance; in addition to the liberation struggle, there was also the simultaneous and parallel takeover of power by the communists and the desire of the anti-communists not to lose their monopoly; the strong antagonisms, dating back to the pre-war period, were not only ideological. Such a complex view obviously contrasts with the narrative and rhetoric concerning the victims of extrajudicial killings at the end of the war did

88 TNA WO 204/431, J. H. Byrd to G-2 (C.I.) AFHQ: *Report of Investigation (Part II)*, November 14, 1945; cfr. TNA FO 371/431/48953 R 18136/15263/92, 206–208; NARA, RG 331, E B.-US Zone, B 876, F 56; SI AS 1931, t. u. 419, [personal file of Ivan Martelanc]; Troha, *Komu Trst*, 134, 195.

89 SI AS 1931, t. u. 1379, a. u. OD-12884; Hrvoje Magazinović, *Kroz jedno mučno stoljeće: sjećanja* (Valjevo: Društvo Hilandar, 2009), 298–301.

90 Lowe, *Savage Continent*, 263–264.

and continued to insist that they were all innocent—and technically, it can be said that they were in fact innocent, as the fact remains that no legal proceedings were initiated against them before their executions (at the same time, in the case of the trials, it can be said that the justice of the time was clearly politically influenced, as it put some who were most likely not guilty on the same or a very similar level with others who had quite clearly committed crimes during the war). However, from a historical point of view, it would be interesting to further investigate whether they were responsible or not, so the study of biographies (of both, men and women) could be a solution.

About the Author

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PART IV

Postwar Wounds

9. On Forced Migration in the Regional Perspective: Focusing on Women

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Abstract: The chapter presents a synthesis of the phenomenon of forced displacement as it appears in the twentieth-century northeastern Adriatic region. It offers a transnationally structured contribution aiming to transcend the usual national frameworks of historical writing in the area. Stemming from the aggregated data, it outlines a complexity of migratory processes, stimulated by a variety of violent events and resulting in long-term, often trans-generationally transmitted trauma. By highlighting the distinct war and postwar experiences of women, the chapter sheds light on gender differences inherent in forced migrations. By joining the perspective from above and from below, it enables a historical close-up to understand the manifold displacements throughout the twentieth century.

Keywords: forced displacement, migrations, women, transnational history, twentieth-century, refugees

A Collection of Vantage Points

This chapter is based on the observation of a complex set of migratory processes as they appeared in the northeastern Adriatic region over the twentieth century. The space in question lies in the area which encompasses current-day Slovenia and its border regions, stretching deep into Italy, Austria and Croatia. Culturally, it is informed by the intersection of Romanic, Slavic, and Germanic spaces, yet also populated by Hungarians, Jews, and Roma. During the observed period, a high rate of political instability and conflicting relations impacted migratory routes in the region. Over the twentieth century, the area witnessed three devastating wars (both World

Wars and the Yugoslav War) which induced involuntary movements of massive proportions. Postwar periods also triggered waves of forced displacements, occurring in a politically, economically, legally, socially and morally unstable society. In this sense, the first years of postwar periods were not seen as times of peace but rather, a traumatic and violent wartime finale.¹ In migratory terms, these transitional periods took a decade or even more to settle down and to reestablish the migratory characteristics of peacetime.

The phenomenon of forced displacement could be perceived as intense demographic change triggered by violent social circumstances—yet cannot be clearly isolated from peacetime migratory processes. Namely, even refugees at times “combine political with economic motives”² to flee, whereas “voluntary” economic migrants also often face involuntary aspects which shape their migratory decision. Despite a clear international definition,³ a refugee often happens to be an arbitrary term, “defined by governments of the receiving countries on the basis of ideological and economic consideration.”⁴ However, understanding forced displacement comprises not only refugeeism, but also internment, deportation, expulsion

1 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London: Abacus, 1994); Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005); Keith Lowe, *Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II* (London: Viking, 2012).

2 Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, “Introduction,” in *Migration, Migration History, History: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives*, ed. Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen (Bern, New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 16.

3 In the aftermath of WWI, the international community assembled a set of guidelines, laws and conventions aimed at protecting the basic human rights and treatment of people forced to flee conflict and persecution. The process began under the League of Nations in 1921, culminated in the 1951 Convention elaborated by UNCHR, which has broadened international instruments relating to refugees, corresponding to the actual needs. Currently, the definition of the refugee refers to the 1951 Refugee Convention, which defines a refugee as a person who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of [their] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themselves] of the protection of that country.” Regional legal instruments in Africa and the Americas have broadened this definition by including people who are compelled to leave their country because of “external aggression, occupation, foreign domination, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or events seriously disturbing public order.” More at: <https://www.unhcr.org>.

4 Lucassen and Lucassen, “Introduction,” 14; Pamela Ballinger confirms this aspect by means of empirical sources in her study concerned with the border zone between current-day Italy, Slovenia and Croatia (Pamela Ballinger, *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003)). For similar conclusions see: Franca Iacovetta, *The Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006); Pamela Ballinger, *The World Refugees Made: Decolonization and the Foundation of Postwar Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020).

and other similar forms of unwanted relocation where voluntary aspects are nearly non-existent.⁵

In this chapter, all listed categories of forced displacement are addressed briefly with the aim of juxtaposing the variety of collective experiences. Namely, one of the aims of this transnationally structured contribution⁶ is to transcend the national framework by outlining the complexity of migratory processes, stimulated by a variety of violent events and resulting in long-term, even trans-generationally transmitted trauma.⁷ In so doing, I find it particularly useful to engage Rothberg's concept of *multidirectional memory*,⁸ which seems to be an inherent part of every space, even more so in such a culturally, ethnically, socially and politically diverse and variable one as the northeastern Adriatic region. Rothberg's study is particularly clear in explaining that the experiences of various social groups are not isolated but interconnected and influence the memorial substance and the meanings of the past of one another. On the contrary, the collective memory (as well as historicization) in the region has too often been nationally or ideologically framed. Consequently, the historical meaning of the traumatic experience of a certain social group—who identify in ethnic, ideological or some other sense—has usually remained blind to the suffering of the other(s).

Another aim of this chapter is to shed light on specific *gender differences* of the forced displacement processes in the region. Naturally, it is impossible to isolate female experiences from the male in absolute terms. Experiencing forced displacement brings about various forms of traumatization which seem universal regardless of gender. Traumatic experiences are caused by the unwanted abandonment of home, disintegration of (extended) family, the sudden break up of social networks, the alienation of property, and the

5 Silvia Salvatici, "Introduzione," *Profughe. Genesis: Rivista della Società italiana delle storiche* 3 (2004): 5; Alexander Betts, *Forced Migration and Global Politics* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

6 The transnational approach has been promoted by several notable researchers who have studied this very multicultural region. For instance: Rolf Wörsdörfer, Marta Verginella, Pamela Ballinger, Dominique Kirchner Reill, Borut Klabjan, Mila Orlić, Natka Badurina, etc.

7 Marija Jurić Pahor, "Neizgubljeni čas: travma fašizma in nacionalsocializma v luči nuje po 'obdobju latence' in transgeneracijske transmisije," *Razprave in gradivo* 44 (2004): 38–65; Daniel Wuttiti, "Transgeneracijski prenos v družinah koroških Slovencev," *Razprave in gradivo: Revija za narodnostna vprašanja* 70 (2013): 46; Nena Močnik, *Trauma Transmission and Sexual Violence: Reconciliation and Peacebuilding in Post Conflict Settings* (London: Routledge, 2020); Katja Hrobat Virloget, "What Does Silence Tell? Traumas and Memorial Conflicts in the Anthropological Research of Istrian Exodus and a National 'Hero'," *Acta Histriae* 31, no. 3 (2023): 433–452.

8 Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).

subsequent loss of social security and job/profession, all of which relate to forced displacements and demonstrate no specific gendered character. At least temporarily, these objectively traumatic losses as a rule result in the degradation of one's social status, disorientation in the cultural/linguistic sense, and the resulting abasement in terms of personal worth and self-esteem.⁹

However, there are certain features that could be emphasized in relation to *female experiences*. The first observation is that women represented the vast majority of fleeing populations during wartime, while men largely took part in warfare. Massive casualties among belligerent male populations enlarged the proportion of widows and single mothers. Also, due to the high number of physically disabled and psychologically traumatized men, the share of women as breadwinners increased. Given extreme demographic changes which gravely changed socio-economic gender roles not only during the war, but also in the postwar period, gender presents itself as a well-chosen social criterion.¹⁰

Such a consideration suggests that refugeeism should be dealt with as a *form of family* act. This can be confirmed by numerous personal narratives and is boldly underlined in crucial international documents addressing postwar refugee issues (the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol). Also, many iconic photographs presenting women war (and often also early postwar) refugees picture them accompanied by children and elderly people (of both sexes).¹¹ Thinking about refugees in the family context renders a more nuanced notion of refugeeism as it pertains to women. Although institutional archival sources usually present women refugees as subordinate or even invisible, the perspective from below presents the architecture of refugee family relations in a more concrete and dynamic manner, and with

9 More: Jurij Zalokar, *Psychological and Psychopathological Problems of Immigrants and Refugees* (Radovljica: Didakta, 1994); Peter Gatrell, *The Unsettling of Europe: How Migration Reshaped a Continent* (London: Penguin Books, 2020), 1–15; Jessica Stroja, *Displaced Persons, Resettlement and the Legacies of War: From War Zones to New Homes* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

10 Cf. Erika Kuhlman, *Of Little Comfort: War Widows, Fallen Soldiers and Remaking of the Nation after the Great War* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Virginia Nicholson, *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived Without Men After the First World War* (London: Penguin, 2007).

11 For northeastern Adriatic see: Marko Klavara and Ana Hawlina, eds., *Begunci: Slovenski begunci s soške fronte: Dokumentarna fotomonografija* (Nova Gorica: Goriški muzej Kromberk, 2015); Chiara Agliarolo, Gianpaolo Cuscunà, and Paolo Malni, eds., *Altrove: 1915–1918: Memorie dal campo di Wagna e altre storie di profughi* (Ronchi dei Legionari: Consorzio Culturale del Monfalconese, 2017); Marjan Kocmur, *Umik čez Ljubelj, maj 1945, skozi objektiv Marjana Kocmurja* (Klagenfurt: Mohorjeva založba, 2015); various visual materials on *esuli* available on the internet, etc.

an increased share of women among the breadwinners, challenges such a simplified image. Circumstances of displacement stimulated the capacity to impose changes in refugee family structures and roles.

A careful observation of these changes, however, demonstrates rather *ambivalent interpretations*, indicating both disadvantageous and advantageous aspects for forcibly displaced women. Namely, the experience of forced displacements among women did trigger profound traumas, even severe chain traumas as demonstrated from biographical perspectives, although there also existed certain possible emancipatory effects if observed over the course of their entire lives.

On one hand, various forms of gender-based social subordination, traditional social inequality and sexual violence come to the fore. Women, especially younger and/or unaccompanied, were often the targets of theft, outright robbery and other criminal acts. Although *Mädchenhandel* was amply reported already during the existence of the Monarchy,¹² the state of weakened legal and protective institutions during the war and postwar eras doubtlessly increased the amount of trafficking. Facing extreme social conditions, interned, deported and refugee women were also at times forced into prostitution in order to have access to food, thereby putting moral imperatives behind those of survival instinct.¹³ Today, it is estimated that every fifth displaced woman is exposed to a some form of sexual violence.¹⁴ Although historical research in the region indicated issues of sexual violence upon (female) refugees only as an exception, it is most probable that relevant historical accounts were silenced or simply disregarded. Namely, the perspectives of violence of German and Austrian troops toward Friuli women during WWI, Nazi atrocities committed against Polish and French women and female concentration camp internees, postwar Soviet soldier aggression against German women, and recent massive rape cases in Bosnia and Kosovo, to name a few better studied cases in Europe,¹⁵ suggest that

12 Tracie L. Wilson, "Migration, Empire, and Liminality: Sex Trade in the Borderlands of Europe," *Aspasia: The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History* 11 (2017): 71–96.

13 Kamila Uzarczyk, "Dark Agents of Sex: Searching for the Sources of Prostitution in Early Twentieth Century Poland," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 114 (2016): 85–121; Christopher R. Browning, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), 190–191; Lowe, *Savage Continent*, 45, 75, 164–165.

14 Nadja Furlan Štante, "Begunka/begunec kot 'kužni drugi'—nasilje, religija, migracije in spol," in *Izzivi medreligijskih in medkulturnih stikov in možnosti vzpostavitve dialoga*, ed. Gašper Mithans and Nadja Furlan Štante (Koper: Annales ZRS, 2022), 41.

15 Bruna Bianchi, "'Militarismo versus femminismo': La violenza alle donne negli scritti e nei discorsi pubblici delle pacifiste durante la Prima guerra mondiale," *DEP: Deportate, esuli, profughe:*

sexual violence occurred when (para)military soldiers and members of other repressive organs met an unprotected female population.

On the other hand, (auto)biographical sources show that many, especially younger women were able to take advantage of their forced displacement in their own favor. Once away from home, many women eventually acquired various new professional skills, learned new languages and faced new prospects of life which they could not have achieved in their places of origin. Upon embracing a less politicized scale, by which forced displacement—especially refugeeism—was usually measured in historical studies, it is possible to observe the highly complex reasoning behind someone's decision to flee. Many women escaped home not only because of poor economic and rigid political environments, but also due to oppressive circumstances within their family or local environment. By witnessing masses of fleeing persons, they took initiative and escaped educational, labor, and other social limitations traditionally imposed on women, thus increasing their ability to cope with the impacts of war and postwar conflicts. In such cases, traumatic circumstances could be understood as a motive and not a consequence of flight.

These observations suggest that violent social circumstances and traumatic experiences have often brought about an opportunity for social and personal development. Contemporary studies on *post-traumatic growth* reveal that, in parallel to negative traumatic consequences, many people who faced extremely difficult social events during wars or postwar times, gradually demonstrate an increase in personal strength, better social orientation, appreciation of the available life possibilities, enhanced creativity, deepened emotional bonds with partners and family, an intensified sense of spirituality, etc.¹⁶ It would be unwise to omit these rarely anticipated transformative consequences of exposure to trauma and violence in considering a troublesome past, especially since recent studies demonstrate that women

La rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile 10 (2009): 94–109; Matteo Ermacora and Serena Tiepolato, "Stupri sovietici in Germania (1944–45): Schede bibliografiche," *DEP: Deportate, esuli, profughe: La rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile* 10 (2009): 129–163; Fabrice Virgili, "Rapes Committed by the German Army in France (1940–1944)," *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 130, no. 2 (2016): 103–120; Nena Močnik, *Sexuality After War Rape: From Narrative to Embodied Research* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018); Anna Di Lellio, "Authors of Their Own Transitional Justice: Survivors of Wartime Sexual Violence," in *Kosovo and Transitional Justice the Pursuit of Justice After Large Scale-Conflict*, ed. Aidan Hehir and Furtuna Sheremeti (New York: Routledge, 2021), 92–110.

16 Richard G. Tedeschi, Jane Shakespeare-Finch, Kanako Taku, and Lawrence G. Calhoun, *Posttraumatic Growth: Theory, Research and Applications* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

(particularly younger women), exhibit similar or greater post-traumatic growth than men.¹⁷

Personal narratives further suggest that aspects of forced displacements in the observed region were also defined by many aspects of transnational, cross-border cooperation. The region in question has traditionally contained a high share of people identifying in hybrid and fluid terms culturally (also linguistically).¹⁸ To a certain degree, transcultural synergies also become visible in the analysis of forced displacements. Interpersonal relations developed through work practices, marriage, kindred and other practices reflect cross-border (i.e., transnational, transideological) social patterns. Most obviously, they were recorded through humanitarian activities providing fleeing people with shelter, food, clothing, information, and solace, various material items and money. In other words, upon extending the research focus of forced displacements to the aspects of everyday life, women come to the forefront as active protagonists in responding to traumatic circumstances.

Massive Displacements of the Great War

After July 1914, many “enemy aliens” across Europe decided to return to their home countries.¹⁹ Given that the northeastern Adriatic area was a space of massive pre-war emigration,²⁰ the number of repatriates was quite high. These resettlements mainly occurred on national grounds, presenting the growing significance of national identification caused by the war.²¹ In the paranoid atmosphere of total war, foreign women were also increasingly regarded as potential spies and targeted for internment. Such a sharpened

17 Steve Powell, Rita Rosner, Willi Butollo, Richard G. Tedeschi, and Lawrence G. Calhoun, “Posttraumatic Growth After War: A Study with Former Refugees and Displaced People in Sarajevo,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 53, no. 1 (2003): 71–83.

18 Pamela Ballinger, “‘Authentic Hybrids’ in the Balkan Borderlands,” *Current Anthropology* 45, no. 1 (2004): 31–60; Anne Urbancic, “The Italo-Slovenes and the Friulians,” in *An Italian Region in Canada: The Case of Friuli-Venezia Giulia*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto: Multicultural Society of Ontario, 1998), 19–32.

19 Klaus Bade, *Evropa v gibanju: Migracije od poznega 18. stoletja do danes* (Ljubljana: Založba / *cf, 2005), 270.

20 Aleksej Kalc, Mirjam Milharčič-Hladnik, and Janja Žitnik Serafin, *Daring Dreams of the Future: Slovenian Mass Migrations: 1870–1945* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2024), 25–71; Francesco Frizzera and Marco Mondini, “Beyond the Borders: Displaced Persons in the Italian Linguistic Space during the First World War,” in *Europe on the Move: Refugees in the Era of the Great War*, ed. Peter Gatrell and Liubov Zhvanko (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 177–196.

21 Frizzera and Mondini, “Beyond the Borders,” 180.

climate could be traced in the autobiographical account of writer, world traveler and publisher from Celje, Styria, Alma Karlin, an “enemy alien” in London at the outbreak of WWI.

[...] the atmosphere in the newspapers has deteriorated considerably. It had been written time and again that women were more dangerous as spies than men, that it was extremely unwise to allow hostile female subjects to roam about London relatively free and unnoticed, and that it would be wise to intern these foreign women who surely had nothing but evil on their minds. I did not want to be exposed to that danger. So, I decided to leave London, but not with the intention of returning home and continuing to watch the madness of war, which I felt the most intense revulsion towards. I wanted to go to a neutral country. So, I chose Norway.²²

Not only foreigners, but also native citizens were regarded with the utmost suspicion with the outbreak of the war. A careful inspection of the population took place in the Habsburg monarchy and in Italy respectively. Both state authorities oppressed pro-Slavs, pacifists, socialists, trade unionists, anarchists, etc. However, the women's share of the so-called *internal war* was relatively low in the region.

The situation drastically changed in May 1915, upon the formation of the Italo-Austrian front. Italian authorities started to oppress pro-Austrians, while in the Habsburg Monarchy, pro-Italians were persecuted. Several thousands of *regnicole*—female Italians from the Italian kingdom or those who had married Italians, and who lived in the Western outskirts of the Habsburg monarchy (Trieste, Gorizia)—were forcibly resettled (exiled) to Switzerland and then to Italy.²³ Forced displacements massively affected the civil population, two-thirds of which were women. Approximately 100,000 Slovenian refugees, mainly women, children, elderly, and those unfit for conscription, were resettled across the Habsburg Empire, while one-tenth moved to Italy, and a few also to Switzerland.²⁴ From the multicultural

22 Alma M. Karlin, *Ein Mensch wird: auf dem Weg zur Weltreisenden* (Berlin: Aviva, 2018), 224.

23 Franco Cecotti, “Internamenti di civili durante la prima guerra mondiale. Friuli, Istria e Trieste,” in Cecotti, *“Un esilio che non ha pari”*, 73; Petra Svoljšak, “Between Two Fires: Austrian and Italian Political Violence in the Austrian Littoral 1914–1918,” *Acta Histriae* 26, no. 4 (2018): 1008.

24 Petra Svoljšak, “‘Wir sind wie scheue Vögel ohne Nest’, Alojz Gradnik, (Das Gebet der Flüchtlinge): slowenische Flüchtlinge in Italien und in Österreich-Ungarn,” in *Isonzofront 1915–1917: die Kultur des Erinnerns*, ed. Vincenc Rajšp (Vienna: Slovenski znanstveni inštitut = Slowenisches Wissenschaftsinstitut; Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU, 2010), 99–116; Marta

areas of Gorizia, Trieste and Istria, thousands of individuals of Italian and German origin also sought refuge in safer areas.²⁵ Trieste in particular was demographically affected, as around 80,000 people, or one-third of the city inhabitants, left the area during the war.²⁶ In 1917, following the battle of Kobarid (Caporetto), 250,000 civilians from the multicultural regions of Friuli and eastern Veneto fled westwards to escape the aggression of advancing German and Habsburg soldiers.²⁷ This episode was also historicized in the female context, chiefly by contextualizing numerous reports on a massive number of rape cases; used to denigrate the enemy, these rapes were politically instrumentalized at the time.²⁸

Although the Isonzo Front posed a direct threat to vast civilian areas along the frontlines, the fate of refugees varied greatly. Their experience largely depended on their place of origin, financial means (*mittellosen/bemittelten*), social status, family situation, and personal networks. Refugees on the Austrian side of the front could be resettled either in camps and other organized facilities, or in the hinterland.²⁹ The poorest, as well as those unable to support themselves economically, were mostly placed in refugee camps.³⁰ However, the camp authorities faced serious logistical problems, in addition, the incidence of disease and mortality among the camp population was high.³¹ Successively, many were approved to find shelter with the local population,

Verginella, "Displacement and Cultural Borders in the Great War: Bitterness of the Refugee Experience in the Native Country or Abroad," *Acta Histriae* 23, no. 3 (2015): 357–376.

25 Marta Verginella, "Profughe slovene tra Grande Guerra e ascesa del fascismo," *Storia delle donne* 9 (2013): 137–142.

26 Piero Purini, "Le metamorfosi etniche di Trieste nel periodo 1914–1919," *Annales. Series historia et sociologia* 12/2 (2002): 346; Borut Klabjan and Gorazd Bajc, *Ogenj, ki je zajel Evropo: Narodni dom v Trstu 1920–2020* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2021), 106.

27 Daniele Ceschin, "La fuga parallela: militari e civili dopo Caporetto," in *Maledetta l'ora e il momento. L'Isontino e la Grande guerra: comunità locali e conflitto mondiale. Prospettive degli studi, aspetti di metodo, risvolti didattici*, ed. Giulio Mellinato, Giovanni Toplikar, and Angelo Visintin (Ronchi dei Legionari: Consorzio Culturale Monfalconese, 2008), 115.

28 Bianchi, "Militarismo versus femminismo," 94–109. See also the chapter of Teresa Bertilotti.

29 Verginella, "Displacement and Cultural Borders," 359–361.

30 Aglialoro, Cuscunà and Malni, *Altrove*.

31 Walter Mentzel, "Welkriegsflüchtlinge in Cisleithanien 1914–1918," in *Asylland wider Willen. Flüchtlinge in Österreich im europäischer Kontext seit 1914*, ed. Gernot Heiss and Oliver Rathkolb (Vienna: Verlag Jugend und Volk, 1996), 17–44; Julie Thorpe, "Displacing Empire: Refugee Welfare, National Activism and State Legitimacy in Austria-Hungary in the First World War," in *Refugees and the End of Empire: Imperial Collapse and Forced Migration in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Panikos Panayi and Pippa Virdee (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 102–126; Vasja Klavora, "Obolenja in posledična smrtnost v begunskih taboriščih med prvo svetovno vojno," in *Begunci: Slovenski begunci s soške fronte*, ed. Ines Beguš and Marko Klavora (Nova Gorica: Goriški muzej, 2016), 90–97.

while provincial authorities tried to distribute the refugees as evenly as possible among municipalities and districts—as occurred in Italy. A significant number of elderly and physically disabled people refused to move away, choosing instead to remain close to their homes and wait for the hostilities to end.

Those who could guarantee they would not become a social burden to the accepting community had the possibility to live with their relatives and friends behind the frontlines. In the narration of Katarina Vižin from Kromberk near Gorizia, who was 14 at the time and had to leave her hometown due to military offensives in 1916, the meaning of personal networks clearly stands out: “We had relatives in Ljubljana who were ready to help us. In order to prevent us being taken to the refugee camp in Leibnitz (Lipnica), my aunt, my mother’s sister, signed a statement to accommodate us and care for us.”³²

Various personal narratives verify these genuine initiatives, improvised solutions and networking that refugee women utilized to protect their families from social risk, especially because refugee support in both Italy and Austria was insufficient and often reported to be slow due to excessive bureaucracy.³³ In the Habsburg Monarchy, the refugee daily allowance was given only to those in the camps; the first Refugee Act guaranteeing state aid for refugees was adopted only in 1917. In Italy, refugees received modest daily support from the very beginning, regardless of their accommodation. The strategy of finding their own source of income among refugees was thus central in lowering socio-economic dependence and increasing self-esteem of the displaced families, the heads of which often became mothers due to the absence of fathers. Frequently, women were often reported to have actively contributed to the micro-economy of the environment that hosted them.³⁴

Chaotic Mobilities of the Interwar Period

Systematic state control over the mobility of populations, initiated at the outbreak of WWI, further intensified in the postwar period.³⁵ In the new

32 Katarina Vižin, “Moji spomini,” *Na fronti: revija za vojaško zgodovino* 3 (2004): 6.

33 Matteo Ermacora, “Assistance and Surveillance: War Refugees in Italy, 1914–1918,” *Contemporary European History* 16, no. 4 (2007): 54–56.

34 Urška Strle, “Forced Migrations on the Isonzo Front: Women in Focus,” in *I disarmati: profunghi, prigionieri e donne del fronte italo-austriaco = The Disarmed: Refugees, Prisoners and Women of the Austro-Italian Front*, ed. Étienne Boisserie and Marco Mondini (Rovereto: Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra, 2020), 123–138.

35 John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Yugoslav kingdom which bordered on rather antagonistic neighbors, mobile people were regarded as particularly suspicious. Archives of border districts are full of warnings against suspicious individuals, among them women, labeled Austrian monarchists, and Italian, Hungarian, and German spies. Prisoners of war returning from Russia were also questionable, especially those who returned with Russian wives.³⁶ Being carefully monitored for possible connections with (Russian or Jewish) communists already during the war, they were even more undesirable in all the three states formed in the region after 1918: Austria, Yugoslavia and Italy. All three states introduced policies to strengthen the ethno-national composition in the borderlands—to fortify the ethnically “clean” border zones by resettling the population. In the rise of political nationalism, women in the region were also increasingly recognized as an important segment of the population, even though they were assigned a marginal role in the political arena.³⁷

Postwar displacements in the northeastern Adriatic region cannot be clearly separated from wartime resettlements and were similarly conditioned by a high rate of violence against civilians. Italian military occupation of the former *Adriatisches Küstenland* in November 1918 seemed to be particularly hostile to non-Italians.³⁸ Over 10,000 people of German and Slavic descent (officials, monopoly workers, railway workers, teachers, artists) left, many of whom were women. They were interned or deported, while their possessions were confiscated.³⁹ Many Slovenian refugees from the war-torn Isonzo Front decided not to return to their homes, now situated in Italy, and rather settled in Yugoslavia, considered to be their Slavic motherland.⁴⁰ In turn, Italian authorities stimulated the return of former *regnicoli* and invited other subjects intrinsic to the Italian national cause

36 SI AS 137, Okrajno glavarstvo Radovljica, t. u. 686, 687, 696, 727, 751, 783, 814, 814; SI AS 134, Okrajno glavarstvo Logatec, t. u. 411, 419.

37 Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, *Woman, Nation, State* (London: The MacMillan Press, 1989); Patrizia Albanese, *Mothers of the Nation: Women, Families, and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Europe* (London: University of Toronto Press, 2006); Marta Verginella, “Introduction,” in *Women, Nationalism, and Social Networks in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1848–1918*, ed. Marta Verginella (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2023), 1–31.

38 Pieter Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2016), 442–443.

39 Piero Purini, *Metamorfosi etniche: i cambiamenti di popolazione a Trieste, Gorizia, Fiume e in Istria: 1914–1975* (Udine: Kappa Vu, 2010), 34–49, 54–56.

40 Urška Strle, “Begunke v slovenskem delu Kraljevine (1918–1941),” in *Dolga pot pravic žensk: pravna in politična zgodovina žensk na Slovenskem*, ed. Marta Verginella (Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba FF, 2013), 167–168.

to settle the border region of the Julian March (s. c. *bonifica etnica*).⁴¹ The rise of fascism in Italy imposed growing cultural, political, and economic violence upon the Slavic population, who formed an overwhelming mass of refugees. It is estimated that approximately 100,000 refugees of Slovenian and Croatian origin escaped Italy before WWII and 70 percent of them settled in Yugoslavia.⁴² Women-refugees were not only regarded in a family context, as wives, mothers, daughters, and widows of unwanted subjects, but also as individuals, especially as teachers, students, and white-collar workers.

My father, who had to return to Ljubljana for work as soon as possible after my husband's funeral, invited me to come back "home". But I could not make the decision to return to my parents. Isn't my home where my husband's grave is? I stayed in Trieste for another three months in difficult circumstances. The Italians occupied the city. We waited in vain for schools to open. They threw out all the inventory of our school at Acquedotto and burned it. They refused to pay me a death grant or a pension after my husband died. I had to live with two children on my meager salary. I worked hard, but I persevered as long as I could. "Come, Trieste is no longer ours!" my father wrote.⁴³

Also, in the documents of the new-born "Deutschösterreich," the concept of *feindlicher Ausländer* (enemy alien) did not vanish in the postwar and those so-labeled were bound for exile.⁴⁴ After the definite demarcation in 1920, the authorities of the Austrian lands of Carinthia and Styria mistreated the Slovenian minority, causing around 10,000 Slovene men and women to seek new homes in Yugoslavia.⁴⁵ The Dollfuß government in 1932, but even more the *Anschluss* of Austria to the Third Reich in March 1938, turned Austria

41 Stefano Bartolini, *Fascismo antisloveno: il tentativo di "bonifica etnica" al confine nord orientale* (Pistoia: ISRPt Editore, 2008); Purini, *Metamorfosi etniche*, 54–56.

42 Marta Verginella, *Il confine degli altri: La questione giuliana e la memoria slovena* (Rome: Donzelli, 2008), 63; Kalc, Hladnik-Milharčič, Žitnik-Serafin, *Daring Dreams*, 208.

43 Ilka Vašte, *Podobe iz mojega življenja* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1964), 131.

44 OESTA, 4537 Bundeskanzleramt (Staatsamt und Bundesministerium für Inneres, 1918–1919, signatur 20/1, Maßnahmen gegen Wohnungsort, 14. 5. 1919.

45 Danijel Grafenauer, "Koroški Slovenci—begunci in njihova družbena integracija v osrednji Sloveniji," in *Migracije in slovenski prostor od antike do danes*, ed. Peter Štih and Bojan Balkovec (Ljubljana: Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije, 2010), 476–479; Danijel Grafenauer, ed., *Koroški plebiscit—100 let kasneje* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, INV, 2021).

all the more hostile towards the political left as well as Slavic, Jewish and Romani minorities in general.⁴⁶

Many, however, put economic benefits before patriotic considerations. Most probably, a considerable share of around 30,000 emigres who identified as pro-Habsburg/German/Hungarian also feared the poorer socio-economic possibilities in the new Yugoslav Kingdom (which from the establishment of the state slovenianized the public administration).⁴⁷ Heading to urban areas in Austria, they faced a lack of supplies, unemployment and housing shortages.⁴⁸ The prolonged economic crisis in Yugoslavia gradually drove over 15,000 Yugoslav (predominantly Slovene) men and women to seek work in Austrian Carinthia and Styria.⁴⁹ Many state officials, teachers, police officers, medical doctors, workers and others were replaced with refugees from the Julian March, Styria and Carinthia.⁵⁰

While many male refugees from Carinthia successfully positioned themselves in Slovenian society, there are almost no (auto)biographical sources available for the female part of the refugee population. Similarly, the experience of those women who left the Kingdom for Austria, Germany, Hungary or Italy remained without a distinct voice. Personal narratives by those women who left the Julian March, however, are much more numerous.⁵¹ Many of them were forced to emigrate to Yugoslavia because of their Slavic identity or pro-Yugoslav stance (Marica Nadlišek Bartol, Maša Grom, Milka Martelanc, Erna Muser, Leopoldina Kos, Pavla Hočevcar, Mara Samsa, etc.). Once in Yugoslavia, many of these women worked as teachers,

46 Christian Promitzer, "O represiji nacističnega režima nad slovensko govorečimi prebivalci na avstrijskem Štajerskem (1938–1945)," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 53, no. 1 (2013): 65–86.

47 Dragan Matić, "Nemci na Kranjskem od druge polovice 19. stoletja do prehoda v jugoslovansko državo," in *Migracije in slovenski prostor*, ed. Peter Štih and Bojan Balkovec (Ljubljana: Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije, 2010), 551–567; Janez Cvirn, "Nemška manjšina na Spodnjem Štajerskem v času med obema vojnama (1918–1941)," in *Migracije in slovenski prostor, Migracije in slovenski prostor*, ed. Peter Štih and Bojan Balkovec (Ljubljana: Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije, 2010); Atilla Kovács, "Jezikovno-etnična podoba Prekmurja v luči ogrskega popisa prebivalstva leta 1910 in jugoslovanskega/slovenskega ljudskega štetja leta 1921," in *Raznolikost v raziskovanju etničnosti: izbrani pogledi II*, ed. Mojca Medvešek and Sonja Novak-Lukanovič (Ljubljana: Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, 2020), 109–137.

48 OESTA, 4537, 4538 Bundeskanzleramt (Staatsamt und Bundesministerium für Inneres, 1918–1919, signatur 20/1, various documents.

49 Promitzer, "O represiji," 68.

50 Kovács, "Jezikovno-etnična podoba," 122–123; Janko Kleibencetl, *Primorci in Istrani v Prekmurju: Pričevanja* (Koper: Fontana, 2006).

51 Verginella, "Profughe slovene," 137–142.

officials, and domestic servants. Those who came from more socially vibrant urban centers (Trieste, Gorizia, Idrija), often became engaged in the public sphere as feminists and/or socialists. Given that the Yugoslavian Kingdom presented a step back regarding women's and worker's rights compared to the Habsburg Empire, these daring (young) newcomers often found themselves marginalized on three levels—as women, refugees and political opponents. As teachers and clerks, they were often resettled to peripheral locations despite exhibiting outstanding competence in the workplace.⁵²

Many refugee women transgressed social frameworks that had been established for women at the time by engaging in income-generating activities, but left only fragmentary historical traces. Available (auto)biographic accounts of refugee women confirm that their survival strategies were not overly male-dependent but were shaped in mutual interdependence with complex social networks, both formal and informal. Archival material demonstrates that refugee support requests were often written by women. This is not surprising, as many *patres familias* had died in war, were disabled or missing.⁵³ Refugee allowances were preferably given to single, morally impeccable mothers, especially those with young children. The documents underline morality as the most significant aspect dividing refugees according to gender. A handful of documents reflect the double moral standards which tended to penalize women over men in cases when they lived together unmarried, suffered from sexually transmitted diseases, had illegitimate children, were alcoholics or evaded employment.⁵⁴ Archival documents hint that refugee women who were labeled as morally depraved were often exiled from the municipality upon arrival, or went without social support.

The available documentation also shows that women refugees presented a substantial share of the socially endangered population. The case of Frančiška Križnič (b. 1906), a single Slovene housemaid from the village of Morsko in the Soča Valley, seems particularly exemplary.⁵⁵ She fled her home in 1923, following her brother to Logatec in Yugoslavia. The available documentation reported her as moving between Logatec, Maribor, Javornik and Ljubljana in the span of five years. She most probably followed precarious work opportunities provided by her personal network, especially those related to her brother. She first settled in smaller localities and then moved

52 Strle, "Begunke," 67–71; Marta Verginella, "Female Teachers—The Ferrywomen of Transitional Education," in *Women and Work in the North Adriatic: Post-War Transitions*, ed. Marta Verginella and Urška Strle (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2025), 33–59.

53 SI AS 667, Urad za zaščito beguncev (various documents).

54 SI AS 137, Okrajno glavarstvo Radovljica, t. u. 645, 658, 668, 671, 686.

55 SI AS 137, Okrajno glavarstvo Radovljica, t. u. 724.

to urban areas, which gave her increased opportunities to find proper employment. Mobility for work hindered her communication with a series of hierarchically organized authorities. This obstructed her process of naturalization considerably. She had been an illegal resident in Yugoslavia for at least five years until 1928, when her personal file ends, meaning she went without the possibility of working legally for her living in addition to other social amenities that hinged upon permanent residence.

Forced Displacements Shaped by Another Total War

During WWII, the share of civilian victims is estimated to have greatly outnumbered military ones. Many civilian casualties occurred due to forced displacements, predominantly internments and deportations, framed by ethno-national and ideological logic. The German, Italian, Hungarian, and Croatian fascists who divided the northeastern Adriatic region during WWII all established concentration camps for civilians within the occupied territories regardless of their sex or age; it is estimated that women made up between 20 and 30 percent of those interned and deported.⁵⁶ Ethnically, they aimed predominantly at Slavic, Jewish, and Roma populations, while national minorities by the state border were also at risk. German, Italian and Hungarian occupiers particularly persecuted those who settled in Yugoslavia during or after WWI⁵⁷—chiefly post-WWI refugees from the Italian Julian March, Austrian Carinthia and Styria. As the occupational war gradually interlaced with an ideologically based civil war, this aspect also appeared in internments and deportations: those who slipped into open collaboration with the occupiers often denounced their compatriots, who were then executed or deported.⁵⁸

56 The existence of Nazi concentration camps is well known and is represented in literature extensively. For some notable works on Italian, Hungarian, and Croatian (*ustasha*) fascist camps, see: Carlo Spartaco Capogreco, *Mussolini's Camps: Civilian Internment in Fascist Italy* (1940–1943) (New York: Routledge, 2019); Marta Verginella, Oto Luthar, and Urška Strle, *La memoria dimezzata: i campi fascisti nelle testimonianze Slovene* (Rome: Donzelli, 2025); Raphael Israeli, *The Death Camps of Croatia: Visions and Revisions, 1941–1945* (New Brunswick, London: Transaction Publishers, 2013); Slavko Valenčič, *Internacijsko taborišče Sárvár* (Lendava: Združenje borcev NOV, Občinski odbor Lendava, 1992). The bibliography, accessible in English, predominantly underlines the Jewish experience of the Holocaust, although it must be stressed that the Jews in the northeastern Adriatic did present a relatively modest community.

57 Tone Ferenc, *Okupacijski sistemi na Slovenskem 1941–1945* (Ljubljana: Modrijan, 1997), 13, 18.

58 Nevenka Troha and Zdenko Čepič, eds., *Represija med 2. svetovno vojno in v povojnem obdobju* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2013).

Forced displacements initiated by the occupying Axis powers in the region took place on an unprecedented scale. Following Hitler's demand to make *dieses Land wieder Deutsch*, Nazi occupiers already in 1941 expelled more than 60,000 Slovenes from Lower Styria, Southern Carinthia and Upper Carniola, which together made up 10 percent of the entire population in the German occupied area of today's Slovenia.⁵⁹ Moreover, over 700 children were forcefully taken away from their parents and included into the Nazi adoption program of the Third Reich (*Lebenborn*).⁶⁰ Given that the German and Hungarian occupational authorities enforced extremely repressive measures upon the locals, more than 17,000 people escaped to the Italian occupational zone. Following the Rome Agreement to ethnically unify the new political map, 95 percent of the autochthonous German (Gottschee) minority in the Kočevje district, regarded as *Auslandsdeutsche/Volksdeutsche* voluntarily resettled to the German occupational zone, to the Third Reich.⁶¹ Many settled on the empty estates of the Slovenian deportees from areas along the border Sava and Sotla Rivers.

Following the same logic, more than 200 Slovene families in Austrian Carinthia were deported in 1942 to make space for German families from the Italian Val Canale.⁶² Massive deportations incited a wide-spread armed resistance among the Slovenian minority, which led to reprisals and further deportations of partisans and their relatives.⁶³ Those men and women suspected of collaborating with the resistance movement were sentenced to death or sent to Nazi concentration camps.⁶⁴ Facing the growth of the national liberation movement, Italian fascists started with mass deportations that mostly targeted the Slovene, but also Croat and Roma population in

59 Ferenc, *Okupacijski sistemi*, 13–14.

60 Urška Strle, "Childhood in Exile," *Dve domovini / Two Homelands* 32 (2010): 113–114.

61 Mitja Ferenc and Joachim Höslér, *Spurensuche in der Gottschee: deutschsprachige Siedler in Slowenien* (Potsdam: Deutsches Kulturforum östliches Europa, 2011).

62 Brigitte Entner and Auguštín Malle, eds., *Die Vertreibung der Kärntner Slowenen 1942 / Pregon koroških Slovencev* (Klagenfurt: Drava, 2012); Sabine Zwitter-Grilc, *Schatten der Scham: über transgenerationalen Traumaweitergabe unter den Kärntner Slowen*innen, Rom*nja, Jüd*innen in Text und Film* (Klagenfurt/Laibach/Wien: Hermagoras/Mohorjeva založba, 2022). More on this phenomenon: Rainer Schulze, "Forgotten Victims or Beneficiaries of Plunder and Genocide? The Mass Resettlement of Ethnic Germans 'Heim Ins Reich,'" *Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento* 27 (2001): 533–564.

63 Valentin Sima, "Kärnten Slowenen," in *NS-Herrschaft in Österreich, 1938–1945*, ed. Emmerich Tálos, Ernst Hanisch, and Wolfgang Neugebauer (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1988), 361–379.

64 For women in the resistance movement: Maria Cäsar and Heimo Halbrainer, eds., *Die im Dunkeln sieht man doch'. Frauen im Widerstand—Verfolgung von Frauen in der Steiermark* (Graz: CLIO, 2007).

1942; they deported at least 30,000 men, women and children to improvised concentration camps.⁶⁵ The Hungarian occupiers deported nearly 700 members of interwar refugee families who had settled in Prekmurje after 1919 to the Sarvar concentration camp for potentially being antifascists.⁶⁶

The share of especially young women, who either sympathized or were actively engaged in the resistance movement was historically unparalleled in World War II, therefore many within these territories were deported and interned.⁶⁷ In addition, the occupying regimes not only repressed antifascists, outspoken intellectuals, and other critical individuals, but also persecuted their families and their wider social network. WWII gave rise to the enhanced politicization of women, but also to intensified politically based violence against women, a practice that stretched deep into the postwar period.

The Axis powers established several notorious camps for women such as Ravensbrück or Fraschette di Alatri. More commonly though, special sectors for women (and children) were organized within existing places of internment. Apart from common human distress in the camp microcosmos such as severe hunger and thirst, homesickness and loss of freedom, some differences along gender lines appear in the available personal accounts.⁶⁸ Whereas men's narratives often contain the "first person" perspective, reflecting on the political situation and historical context by emphasizing notable events and (the acts of stealing food and other items, suspicion of co-internees, planning an escape, rebellion and strikes), women more often recounted their experiences in the first person plural. They spoke in terms of relationships referring to comforting each other, taking group exercise, forming friendships and sisterly bonds, emphasizing faith, hope

65 Capogreco, *Mussolini's Camps*; Verginella, Luthar, and Strle, *La memoria dimezzata*.

66 Attila Kovács, "Seznam interniranih Primorcev in Istranov v internacijsko taborišče Šarvar," *Zbornik soboškega muzeja* 28 (2023): 205–230.

67 Ernst Logar, ed., *Das Ende der Erinnerung—Kärntner PartisanInnen = Konec spomina—koroški partizani in partizanke = The End of Remembering—Carinthian partisans* (Klagenfurt: Drava, 2011); Vida Deželak Barič, "Vloga in položaj žensk na Slovenskem v narodnoosvobodilnem boju in revoluciji 1941–1945," in *Naše žene volijo*, ed. Milica G. Antić (Ljubljana: Urad za žensko politiko, 1999), 21–42; Jelena Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans: A History of World War II Resistance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Franco Cecotti, ed., *Memorie di partigiane e di partigiani della Provincia di Trieste* (Trieste: Istituto regionale per la storia del movimento di liberazione nel Friuli-Venezia Giulia, 2013).

68 Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 7–8.

and closeness to others as crucial for survival.⁶⁹ Interned women were politically not as active as men, however, presupposing that women's behavior in the camps contained no political inclinations or rebellious attitudes is misleading. Women's subversion appeared in more latent forms such as singing patriotic or rebellious songs, which also functioned as a means of comfort amidst traumatic conditions.

We tolerated those conditions with such willpower. We sang so much! We even cried at times, but in general we didn't give in. Dr. Vratuša was right the other day when he said that death in the camps had come particularly for those who were sad and depressed. For it is courage that gives you strength. And we encouraged each other.⁷⁰

Marija Mahnič, quoted above, was imprisoned in Frascette di Alatri in the Province of Frosinone as a 17-year-old girl. Her narration addresses the details of everyday life in the camp and underlines the benefits of traditional women's roles as homemakers and caregivers. Improvised cooking, sewing, hygiene standards, dealing with wounds and diseases, experience in family arbitration, and emotional support made everyday life in impossible living conditions often more tolerable.⁷¹ Marija's as well as other such narratives support the findings of Tzvetan Todorov, who finds women more likely to survive the adverse circumstances of interments.⁷² In comparison to men, women were generally less exposed to physical violence in the camps. Some women's accounts, however, contain a form of violence with a particularly gendered charge related to the coerced sexual sphere. Although accounts of sexual violence are rare, women often address the experience of forced nudity during the procedure of disinfection or bathing. Most of the narrators consider such practices as highly degrading and humiliating, sometimes they even indicate sexual harassment and derision that filled them with long-lasting feelings of shame and guilt.

69 Stana Gerk, Ivka Križnar, and Štefanija Ravnikar-Podbevšek, eds., *Slovenke v narodnoosvobodilnem boju. Zbornik dokumentov, člankov in spominov* (Ljubljana: Borec, 1970).

70 Urška Strle, "Revealing Italian Fascist Camps: Some Gendered Perspectives," in *Gender and Generations: Spaces, Times, Identity*, ed. Gabriella Valera, Ecaterina Lung, and Christopher Heath, *Chronica Mundi* 13, no. 1 (2018): 343.

71 Strle, "Revealing Italian Fascist Camps," 340–348.

72 Tzvetan Todorov, *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps* (New York: Henry Holt and Company LLC, 2000).

The Turbulent Postwar Decade

Like in many European countries, postwar fanaticism in Yugoslavia took the form of severe revenge against the defeated Italian, German and Hungarian occupiers.⁷³ The war crimes inflicted upon members of the liberation movement, the symbolic foundation of the new Yugoslav state, were avenged harshly, as were those committed against those military forces (and very often their relatives) who collaborated with the occupiers. Like during wartime, national and ideological reasons defined the character of early postwar displacements, which were to a great extent involuntary. In many aspects, postwar violence is clearly linked to the violence of wartime itself.⁷⁴ The deaths resulting from these postwar repressions were overwhelmingly male and mostly soldiers.

In the heated sociopolitical climate of the postwar period, many Italian, German and Hungarian civilians chose to flee Yugoslavia; the proportion of these displacements was much more balanced in terms of gender. Whereas in the northeastern Adriatic context, Germans and Hungarians presented up to 10,000 refugees altogether,⁷⁵ the emigration from Istria and Dalmatia was made up of between 230,000 and 300,000 people, mainly those opting for Italy and holding anti-Communist convictions.⁷⁶ The *esodo* was generally presented as Italian ethnic emigration, but in addition to Istrian and Dalmatian Italians, the fleeing masses also included ethnic Slovenes, Croats, and Istro-Romanians. After leaving Yugoslavia, some integrated into Italian society, while many emigrated further towards the Americas, Australia and South Africa. Their empty houses and work positions were gradually filled up with people from other Yugoslavian and partly also Italian places.⁷⁷ Namely,

73 Lowe, *Savage Continent*; Judt, *Postwar*; Troha and Čepič, *Represija*.

74 Troha and Čepič, *Represija*.

75 Dušan Nećak, ed., *"Nemci" na Slovenskem 1941–1955: izsledki projekta* (Ljubljana: Znanstveni inštitut Filozofske fakultete, 1998); Attila Kovács, *A Muravidéki Magyarok a statisztikák tükrében 1869–2011 között* (Ljubljana: Ministrstvo za izobraževanje, znanost in šport, 2013), 36–47.

76 Cristiana Colummi, Liliana Ferrari, Gianna Nassisi, and Germano Trani, *Storia di un esodo: Istria 1945–1956* (Trieste: IRSML-FVG, 1980); Carlo Donato, *Il Friuli e Venezia Giulia nelle migrazioni di oggi e di un recente passato* (Trieste: Università degli Studi di Trieste, 2001), 21; Sandi Volk, *Esuli a Trieste: Bonifica nazionale e rafforzamento dell'italianità sul confine orientale* (Udine: Kappa Vu, 2004); Pamela Ballinger, "Borders of the Nation, Borders of Citizenship: Italian Repatriation and the Redefinition of National Identity after World War II," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 3 (2007): 713–741; Raoul Pupo, *Il lungo esodo: Istria; le persecuzioni, le foibe, l'esilio* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2017).

77 Aleksej Kalc, "The Other Side of the 'Istrian Exodus': Immigration and Social Restoration in Slovenian Coastal Towns in the 1950s," *Dve domovini / Two Homelands* 49 (2019): 145–162.

the so called *controesodo* embraced the Italian antifascist working class with socialist affinities, who faced economic, social and political difficulties in postwar Italy. No less than 10,000 people from Italy are estimated to have moved to Istrian towns and Yugoslav industrial centers.⁷⁸

The internal sociopolitical upheaval in Yugoslavia was extensive as well. In May 1945 alone, more than 20,000 anti-Communist soldiers and civilians escaped to Austria and Italy in fear of the recently established Communist regime.⁷⁹ Former political and economic structures were indeed largely deposed and replaced with the advocates of the socialist cause. In 1948, the Tito-Stalin rift caused "a small civil war" in Yugoslavia, resulting in the deportation of around 17,000 political suspects.⁸⁰ Until the late 1940s, harsh suspicions were aimed at the internal enemies of the state (many of them pre-war communists), resulting in a few notorious show trials.⁸¹ The socio-political climate calmed down by the early 1960s. By then, illegal emigration had numbered up to an additional 10,000 people of both sexes.⁸²

Widespread postwar forced displacements in the area again affected a significant share of women. In part, this aspect highlights the increased understanding of women as political beings, already noticeable during the war. Apart from Austria, which granted women suffrage in 1918, Yugoslav and Italian women were given basic political rights only after 1945, justified by the massive level of engagement of women in the resistance movement. Postwar social development, which officially aligned women with men in the political arena, obviously had its dark side as well. Several women became

78 Luke Gramith, "Liberation by Emigration: Italian Communists, the Cold War, and West-East Migration from Venezia Giulia, 1945–1949" (PhD diss., Morgantown: West Virginia University, 2019); Marco Abram, "Internationalism and Cominformist Dissidence in Socialist Yugoslavia: The Case of the Italian Immigrant Workers in Rijeka," *Journal of Cold War Studies* (forthcoming).

79 The Allied authorities sent a significant number of soldiers back to Yugoslavia, where most were extrajudicially executed. More on civilian refugees: Rozina Švent, *Slovenski begunci v Avstriji 1945–1950* (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU, 2007); Helena Jaklitsch, *Slovenski begunci v taboriščih v Italiji: 1945–1949* (Ljubljana: INZ, 2018).

80 Renata Jambrešić Kirin, "Yugoslav Women Intellectuals: From a Party Cell to a Prison Cell," in *Disrupting Historicity, Reclaiming the Future*, ed. Silvana Carotenuto, Francesca Gabrielli, and Renata Jambrešić Kirin (Naples/Zagreb: UniorPress/Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku—IEF, 2019), 185.

81 Martin Ivanič, ed., *Dachauski procesi* (Ljubljana: Komunist, 1990); Mateja Jeraj and Jelka Melik, eds., *Kazenski proces proti Črtomirju Nagodetu in soobtoženim. Študija in prikaz procesa* (Ljubljana: Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 2015); Mateja Jeraj and Jelka Melik, eds., *Kazenski proces proti Črtomirju Nagodetu in soobtoženim. Epilog* (Ljubljana: Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 2017).

82 Nevenka Troha, "Odseljivanje in prebegi Slovencev z območja, ki je bilo z mirovno pogodbo z Italijo leta 1947 priključeno Ljudski republiki Sloveniji," in *Migracije in slovenski prostor*, ed. Peter Štih and Bojan Balkovec (Ljubljana: Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije, 2010), 432–446.

protagonists of politically staged postwar trials. Around 800 “politically suspicious” women from Slovenia were deported to forced labor camps in Ferdreng, Škofja Loka, and Rajhenburg soon after the war’s end.⁸³ After the Tito-Stalin split in 1948, more than 860 Yugoslav (among them Slovene and Croatian) women were interned at Goli Otok in Sv. Grgur, where penal and re-education camps for women were established. Historically contextualized personal narratives insinuate that deportation and internment did not so much target opponents of the regime, but mainly the educated, ambitious, and talented women who were seen as rivals for various social positions, and in the distribution of power.⁸⁴

After serving their sentences, these women suffered from trauma due to the severe circumstances during their internment and the social stigma endured. In this sense, the postwar experience of Angela Vode (1892–1985), who worked as a teacher, publicist, defectologist, campaigner for women’s rights, pre-war communist, co-founder of the OF, dissident, and one of the most remarkable Slovenian intellectuals, is quite representative.

I always hoped that our socialism would have a human face. And that fairness and justice would prevail. There may have been many among us who hoped for that—but they adapted. I could not. I was imprisoned. It was a monster trial in the Stalinist mold. It was a difficult time, but I was enriched by many experiences. [...] After the Cominform affair, hope came alive in me again: our own path to socialism. That is what I always said, even when it was forbidden. But they kept me in prison until 1953. But when I was free, I got neither a pension nor a job. I tried to get a job with newspapers—how I was accepted and refused is a chapter in itself. I am still only a contributor to the “Obzornik”. And I visit some acquaintances who have even less than me.⁸⁵

83 Peter Jambreč, ed., *Ženska taborišča, ženska kazenska taborišča za prisilno delo v Sloveniji 1949–1950* (Kranj/Nova Gorica: Fakulteta za državne in evropske študije/Evropska pravna fakulteta, 2014), 84.

84 Renata Jambrešić Kirin, “Yugoslav Women Intellectuals: From a Party Cell to a Prison Cell,” in *Disrupting Historicity, Reclaiming the Future*, ed. Silvana Carotenuto, Francesca Gabrielli, and Renata Jambrešić Kirin (Naples/Zagreb: UniorPress/Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku—IEF, 2019), 179–198.

85 Angela Vode (55 at the time) was one of three women accused of anti-state activities and espionage at the Nagode show trial in 1947. The quoted text was written in Ljubljana in 1974. Angela Vode, *Spomin in pozaba* (Ljubljana: Krtina, 2000), 205–206.

From WWII onward, to civil society in general a political agency, underscored by massive war crimes against civilians, was ascribed. In the last moments of the war, this notion created substantial masses of refugees in politically inactive layers of society. People were deeply scared because of traumatic war events or because they feared reprisals for not supporting the liberation movements led by the Communist Party. Many decided it was better to leave their homes, marred by war-related violence and trauma, behind. The majority of women who took part in these flights came from more conservative layers of society, being politically indifferent, naive or ignorant—a fact that comes as no surprise given that women's political identification was not welcome in the interwar Yugoslavia. In particular, those of markedly traditional backgrounds followed their male relatives or local priests, who presented themselves as crucial authorities in the chaotic climate of the postwar period. This aspect is well illustrated in the narration of Frenk Urbanija, in recalling the postwar flight of his family. According to his words, this story was often retold by his mother Minka in their new Argentinian home and could also serve as an example of transgenerationally mediated trauma.

Uncle Vencelj (a member of the Home Guard) comes home ... He says, Minka, take the children!—But where should we go?—Austria would be the best ... She says, Martin (Minka's husband) is not at home ... He says, I'll find him, he'll come later ... Mom's picked up the kids, well, the kids ... the three of us ... /longer pause/ Sometimes I think how hard that must have been!⁸⁶

In the first postwar decade, many families from the region escaped war-torn Europe and headed towards the Americas and Australia, which reported steady economic growth. These flights were more sporadic and their motives to flee appeared to be prevalently economic. The biographical perspective of Stanka Perkon, who escaped westwards to Italy in 1951—labeled a refugee was sent to refugee camps (Fraschette di Alatri, Farfa Sabina and Bagnoli)—and finally settled in Canada, reveals the multilayered nature of the reasons for her flight. The quote below should be read not only in socio-political terms, but more in the context of family relations and the opportunities available in her domestic environment.

86 Urška Strle, "Slovenci v Kanadi: izseljevanje skozi prizmo življenjskih zgodb" (PhD diss., University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, 2010), 270.

I wanted a better life. I wanted the freedom to buy better clothes, shoes, groceries. I did not like the place where I was living, living conditions were poor. I wanted the freedom to make choices as to where to live, where to travel. I wanted choices in the ability to find a job and did not like restrictions on my lifestyle.⁸⁷

Knowing her father would not approve of her decision, Stanka left her home in secret. In contrast to previous periods, the growing social and psychological emancipation of women underlined the composition of refugees. Aside from the traditional makeup of refugee groups which mainly included women in the family environment, there was also a growing share of younger women who took their fates into their own hands without (even the knowledge of) their relatives and traveled alone or in a group of peers. Many such flights were also planned together by young lovers, thinking of a better future life abroad.

The Echo of the Yugoslav Wars

Another tragic episode of forced displacements followed several decades later. From 1991 to 2001, the splintered territory of the former Yugoslavia played host to a series of bloody wars initiated by exclusivist ethno-politics in the newly emerged national states. The wars imposed a division across ethnic, but also religious and ideological lines, heavily targeting civilian populations. Masses of people residing in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo fled their homes. A significant share of the fleeing population was displaced internally as a part of ethnic homogenization policy (also known as ethnic cleansing), while many took flight abroad. This especially held true for those who possessed sufficient financial and social capital.⁸⁸

87 Urška Strle, "Go West! Illegal Postwar Migrations from the Soča Region in the Light of a Case Study," in *Qualestoria. Rivista di storia contemporanea. Anno XLIV, N.ro 1, Giugno 2016. Sconfinamenti storiografici e attraversamenti di confini* (Trieste: EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2016), 27–46; 35.

88 I would like to stress insightful autobiographic narratives contextualizing an experience of displacement by several women from intellectual and artistic field: Slavenka Drakulić (*How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed* and *'Cafe Europa'*), Dubravka Ugrešić (*The Culture of Lies*), and Mira Furlan (*Love Me More Than Anything in the World: Stories About Belonging*). Here, the work of internationally less renowned Sarajevo-born artist Diana Bošnjak Monai should be highlighted, as she lived as a refugee in the northeastern Adriatic before she settled in Trieste. Her latest work contextualizes her observations regarding experiences of seeking a

Among the refugees of the Yugoslav wars, women and children made up the majority.

In contrast to Kosovar, Albanian refugees in Slovenia, who altogether counted around 2500 persons,⁸⁹ fleeing Croatian and Bosnian civilians reached the northeastern Adriatic area in droves.⁹⁰ Apart from living in various refugee centers, many refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina found a shelter at their compatriots (relatives, friends, acquaintances) living in Croatia and Slovenia. This phenomenon is to a certain degree connected to migration patterns in Yugoslavia which had (legally) started in the early 1960s and extended into the 1970s and 1980s. As a result of bilateral recruitment agreements Yugoslavia signed with France (1965), Austria (1966), and West Germany (1968), people decided to move there for work, extensively.⁹¹ The Yugoslav Labor Office stimulated migration from underdeveloped agricultural areas then substituted the lack of domestic workforce due to the *Gastarbeiterprogramme*—also to Slovenia and Croatia.⁹² Consequently, before the break-up of Yugoslavia, there were at least 30,000 Bosnian Muslims, 40,000 Serbs, 50,000 Croatians, 4,000 Macedonians, 4,000 Montenegrins, and 3,500 Albanians living in Slovenia. Chiefly, they were economic migrants and their families,⁹³ who at least initially provided a significant network of help for the refugees of the Yugoslav wars.

new home in Croatia, Slovenia and Italy. Diana Bošnjak Monai, *Senza lasciapassare: Trent'anni lungo I confine orientali* (Formigine: Infinito edizioni, 2024).

89 Natalija Vrečer, *Integracija kot človekova pravica: Prisilni priseljenci iz Bosne in Hercegovine v Sloveniji* (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2007), 64.

90 According to the data in Valenta and Strabac, Slovenia (43,100), Austria (86,500), Croatia (170,000) and Italy (12,100) accepted many refugees between 1992–1995. More in: Marko Valenta and Zan Strabac, "The Dynamics of Bosnian Refugee Migrations in the 1990s, Current Migration Trends and Future Prospects," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2013): 10.

91 Milan Mesić, "External Migration in the Context of the Post-War Development of Yugoslavia," in John B. Allcock, ed., *Yugoslavia in Transition: Choices and Constraints* (New York and Oxford: Berg, 1992), 171–198; Karolina Novinščak, "The Recruiting and Sending of Yugoslav 'Gastarbeiter' to Germany: Between Socialist Demands and Economic Needs," in *Transnational Societies, Transterritorial Politics: Migrations in the (Post-)Yugoslav Region 19th–21st Century*, ed. Ulf Brunnbauer (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009), 121–144; Ulf Brunnbauer, "Yugoslav Gastarbeiter and the Ambivalence of Socialism: Framing Out-Migration as a Social Critique," *Journal of Migration History* 5, no. 3 (2019): 413–437.

92 Danilo Dolenc, "Priseljevanje v Slovenijo z območja nekdanje Jugoslavije po drugi svetovni vojni," in *Priseljenci: Študije o priseljevanju in vključevanju v slovensko družbo*, ed. Miran Komac (Ljubljana: Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, 2007), 78–88; Silva Mežnarić, *Bosanci: A kuda idu Slovenci nedeljom?* (Ljubljana: Republiška konferenca ZSMS, Univerzitetna konferenca ZSMS, 1986).

93 Vera Kržišnik-Bukić, ed., *Kdo so narodne manjšine v Sloveniji: zbornik skupine avtorjev* (Ljubljana: Zveza zvez kulturnih društev narodov in narodnosti nekdanje SFRJ v Sloveniji, 2014),

In late summer 1991, the first Croatian refugees started arriving in Slovenia. They were estimated to have reached 30,000 persons, although they largely returned to Croatia after a few months. In spring 1992, when Bosnian refugees also started coming, Slovenia hosted approximately 70,000 refugees.⁹⁴ In August 1992, Slovenia officially closed its borders to the refugees of Yugoslav wars, claiming that “the burden that the large number of *temporary refugees* (italics used by the author for emphasis) places on this young country has long since exceeded the limits of its objective capacity.”⁹⁵ A large proportion of refugees were taken in by families of pre-war immigrants and various other individuals who housed the refugees in their homes, but there were also quite a few refugee centers established throughout the country. It is estimated, however, that roughly one-third of the refugee population lacked legal status and official registration.⁹⁶ Slovenia in many cases turned out to be a transitory state for refugees on their way to other European states (Germany, Austria, Italy, Sweden, France, Denmark, etc.) and overseas (to the USA, Canada, Australia). Although refugee numbers shifted constantly, adult women accounted for more than 60 percent.⁹⁷

Slovenian authorities have consistently emphasized the temporary nature of refugee status. This is also evident from the fact that they did not provide refugees with the opportunity for economic integration, a prerequisite for the spontaneous integration process in the receiving society. According to the law, refugees were allowed to work only eight hours weekly. If refugees were granted a temporary work permit allowing them to work full-time, they irreversibly lost their status as a person in temporary shelter. Despite the risks, men chose this option and took jobs in construction and other forms of manual labor, while formal applications from women were only

7. This number, provided by the Slovenian census in 1991, could be insufficient, as more than 170,000 long-term residents from the former Yugoslavia were granted Slovenian citizenship in 1992.

94 SI AS 2113, Urad Vlade Republike Slovenije za priseljevanje in begunce, t. u. 48, a. u. 93 Statistika, begunci, 1992–2001.

95 Marjeta Dupona Horvat, Jef Verschueren, and Igor Ž. Žagar, *Problematika legitimacije: Retorika begunske politike v Sloveniji* (Ljubljana: Open Society Institute, 1998), 22.

96 Gašper Šmid, “Žarko Štrumbli, “Otroci iz Bosne in Hercegovine v begunskih šolah v Republiki Sloveniji,” *Arhivi 2* (2004): 248.

97 SI AS 2113, Urad Vlade Republike Slovenije za priseljevanje in begunce, t. u. 48, a. u. 93 Statistika, begunci, 1992–2001. The share of women fleeing Yugoslav war zones and settling in Serbia is comparable: “83 percent of the adult refugee population were women, and 65 percent of refugee families were headed by women.” More: Maja Korac, “Women’s Groups in the Former Yugoslavia: Working with Refugees,” *Refuge: Canada’s Journal on Refugees / Refuge: Revue canadienne sur les réfugiés* 14, no. 8 (1995): 19.

rarely reported.⁹⁸ Given that refugees were not able to work regularly, many sought illegal work, which automatically excluded them from social and pension security and did not guarantee a (proper) salary. Women took jobs as domestic servants and service sector assistants, and quite a few cases were reported where they were paid a pittance for their labor, or were not paid at all.⁹⁹ A decade later in August 2002, the remaining 2,000 Bosnian refugees received permanent residency, enabling them to work as well—in practice, however, they only rarely found regular employment.

Mevlija, born 1971 in Bosnian Bijeljina by the River Drina bordering Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, explained her (family's) frustration due to the lack of work:

The biggest problem with refugees in Slovenia is that there is no work. My grandfather is in the hospital because he has nothing to do. He got sick in the nerves. He has always done something at home. Just like all of us. Not working has completely changed my mother, she is not the same as she was. For a few months, I worked illegally in a gardening company in Ljubljana. They were very nice to me and taught me how to work. But it was seasonal work, now it is gone. I finished secondary trade school, but I am not allowed to get a job.¹⁰⁰

Slovene ethno-nationalist attitudes negatively inclined towards “people from the south” were both reflected and generated in the mass media of the 1990s and were found at the core of state policies and practices.¹⁰¹ Citizens of former Yugoslav republics residing in Slovenia for decades were entitled to apply for citizenship within a six-month period based on the Slovenian Law on Citizenship, adopted upon independence. An application for Slovenian citizenship seemed to function as evidence of the loyalty to the new state. For those who did not obtain citizenship, the Aliens Act entered into force on February 26, 1992. But as aliens, they were also removed from the register of permanent residents and lost the economic and social rights attached

98 Vrečer, *Integracija kot človekova pravica*, 91.

99 Vrečer, *Integracija kot človekova pravica*, 119–121.

100 Vrečer, *Integracija kot človekova pravica*, 104.

101 According to the Slovenian Opinion survey, this share amounted to 53 percent. More: Jelka Zorn, “Registered as Workers, Erased as Non-Slovenes: The Transition Period from the Perspective of Erased People,” in *The Scars of the Erasure: A Contribution to the Critical Understanding of the Erasure of People from the Register of Permanent Residents of the Republic of Slovenia*, ed. Neža Kogovšek Šalamon, Brankica Petković, Jelka Zorn, Sara Pistotnik, Uršula Lipovec Čebtron, Veronika Bajt, and Lana Zdravković (Ljubljana: Peace Institute, 2010), 27–29.

to permanent resident status. For various reasons, some people did not apply for citizenship and could not regularize their civic status after the adoption of the Alien Act. Of 25,671 such stateless persons, later referred to as *the Erased*, around 15,000 left Slovenia (also by means of state-led deportations!). Around 10,000 remained in Slovenia, where they attempted to linger illegally for over a decade—without basic civil and social rights.¹⁰²

An example of how traumatic the consequences of the implementation of the Aliens Act (recognized as unjust by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg in 2010) were evident on a personal level from the recollection of Indira, a 48-year-old single mother of two, who came to Slovenia as an industrial textile worker in 1981:

Then I was left without status, I had nothing, I was left with nothing ... I had to ... 23 to 30 hours ... 34, I worked like that! Without a break! One job after another. [...] I did cleaning. I also did spring cleaning jobs [...] This time doesn't count towards my pension. And they said [at the Employment Service] that I had to obtain a work permit. They didn't want ... So, it went on like that and I worked illegally [...] It was hard on the children. I worked all day long; their father left, so I'd come home and he [her older son] was agitated. I'd come in tired, wanting only to lie down, and he was upset. He'd say he was not like other children, he had nothing and couldn't do anything with his friends, so it really hurt me.¹⁰³

The story of the Erased does not directly address forced displacement, but rather the “displacement” of state borders, which, reinforced by political decisions, created new categories of non-citizens, often regarded as “half-people.” It is a story that can be considered the leitmotif of those displaced in the twentieth-century northeastern Adriatic. Also, it brings about an indirect aspect of forced displacement—social exclusion. Without legal

102 More: Jasminka Dedić, Vlasta Jalušić, and Jelka Zorn, *The Erased: Organized Innocence and the Politics of Exclusion* (Ljubljana: Peace Institute, 2003); Jelka Zorn and Uršula Lipovec Čebren, eds., *Once Upon an Erasure: From Citizens to Illegal Residents in Republic of Slovenia* (Ljubljana: Študentska založba, 2008); Neža Kogovšek Šalamon et al., eds., *The Scars of the Erasure: A Contribution to the Critical Understanding of the Erasure of People from the Register of Permanent Residents of the Republic of Slovenia* (Ljubljana: Peace Institute, 2010); Jelka Zorn, “Non-Citizens in Slovenia: Erasure from the Register of Permanent Residents,” in *Statelessness in the European Union: Displaced, Undocumented, Unwanted*, ed. Caroline Sawyer and Brad K. Blitz (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 195–229; Neža Kogovšek Šalamon, *Erased: Citizenship, Residence Rights and the Constitution in Slovenia* (Frankfurt am Main: PL Academic Research, 2016).

103 Zorn, “Registered as Workers,” 31.

status, the Erased were barred from earning a living and moving legally. Therefore, they had to rely on their personal networks and the few institutions with humanitarian agendas. To avoid deportation and to receive minimum social protection, some even falsely claimed to be refugees from the Yugoslav warzone.¹⁰⁴ Does the experience of the Erased demonstrate a division line across the concept of gender? One such division applies in particular regarding employment possibilities. The Erased women had to take advantage of the various spheres of “invisible,” i.e., unregulated, illegal, precarious, and poorly paid work activities at the meeting point of the private and public spheres: domestic service, care service, cleaning service, prostitution and a variety of undocumented assistance work. Indira’s story clearly shows how degrading and exhausting this position must have felt, leaving a traumatic imprint on her and her family. In terms of impact, she faced a similar fate as Frančiška Križnič, a post-WWI refugee, or Angela Vode, a post-WWII internee, both referred to above. This points to the fact that every thorough political turn in the twentieth century in the region created its own “erased” layers of the population.

Wide-Shot Conclusion

Traumatic experiences arising from the violent nature of forced displacements have been documented in a plethora of biographies. Moreover, many traumas have transcended generations and permeated the collective memory of communities and nations. In the twentieth century, representations of forced migrations in the multicultural northeastern Adriatic were predominantly shaped by ethno-national frameworks. Political authorities exploited traumas that were functional to their political genealogy. Consequently, the complex realities of forced displacements were often reduced to simplified and politically instrumentalized episodes. Historical explanations, however, lose much of their interpretative power if they relate solely to individual incidents without regard to the broader historical context. A transnational and longitudinal perspective on forced migrations in this region is therefore indispensable, notwithstanding the considerable methodological challenges and socio-political complexities it entails.

The central aim of this chapter is to move beyond national frameworks by indicating the intricacy of migratory processes driven by various forms of war- and postwar-related violence. Rothberg’s concept of *multidirectional*

104 Katarina Keček, *Okupatorjeva hči* (Ljubljana: samozaložba, 2024), 218–223.

memory is particularly pertinent in this context, as the northeastern Adriatic constitutes a culturally, ethnically, socially, and politically heterogeneous and dynamic region. Rothberg demonstrates that the experiences of distinct social groups sharing a common space are not isolated but interwoven, mutually shaping the substance and meaning of each other's pasts.

Within this synthetic framework, particular attention is devoted to women in the multicultural and politically volatile northeastern Adriatic. A centennial perspective reveals the increasing recognition of women as political actors, a development also reflected in the domain of forced displacement. Throughout the twentieth century, women were increasingly targeted as internees, deportees, and exiles under ideological regimes that shaped regional political processes. As in earlier centuries, women played a decisive role in structuring and sustaining refugee communities. Although the scope of this chapter precludes a comprehensive treatment, it must be underscored that women did not represent a homogeneous social category. Their experiences were differentiated along multiple lines that exceeded the dominant political markers of gender, ethnicity, and ideology.

Drawing on selected quotations, the chapter seeks to illuminate further dimensions of social typology. (Auto)biographical accounts and life-course narratives are especially instructive in demonstrating how legal status, social and familial position, education, religion, age, physical and psychological condition, and, crucially, personal networks, influenced the circumstances under which women became forcibly displaced. These factors not only determined the modalities of their endurance in adverse contexts, but also shaped the ways in which traumatic displacement reconfigured their social, cultural, and personal identities.

About the Author

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10. Female Suicides in Trieste (1918–1949): Statistical Trends and Narratives

Matteo Perissinotto

Abstract: In the aftermath of the two world wars, Trieste experienced a notable increase in female suicides. The suicide rate can be viewed as a “social thermometer,” reflecting the psychological state of society, including levels of stress, anxiety, grief, and trauma. The essay undertakes a quantitative analysis of this phenomenon during two postwar transitional periods (1918–1922 and 1945–1949), and it examines how the phenomenon was portrayed in the local contemporary press, with particular attention to the stereotypes and language used, as well as the role of physicians in this discourse. The final section of the essay explores the similarities and differences between the two postwar transitions, comparing the data from Trieste with that of other European cities and countries.

Keywords: suicide, Trieste, women, transition, Julian March, Venezia Giulia

Introduction

During conflicts, there is generally a marked reduction in suicides due to what Émile Durkheim, in his pioneering work *Le Suicide*, defined as the “growth of social integration.”¹ This is understood as the need for individuals to react to common danger, leading people to identify an external enemy as the cause of their distress.² Clearly, these aspects alone are not enough to explain the complexity of such a multifaceted phenomenon, which

1 Émile Durkheim, *Il suicidio* (Varese: Utet, 2008).

2 Marzio Barbagli, *Congedarsi dal mondo. Il suicidio in Occidente e in Oriente* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009), 188–198, English edition *Farewell to the World: A History of Suicide* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015). Please refer to this last study for the wide and detailed bibliography on the

depends on numerous factors including psychosocial, cultural, political, and biological issues.

What happens instead during postwar transitional phases? According to Durkheim, suicide rates increase in conjunction with rapid social change and during phases of economic crisis or expansion, which are times when social norms weaken. This theory was challenged as early as 1930 by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who argued that suicides increase only during phases of economic depression, during transitions where there is no hope for a better future.³ In studies of postwar transitions by historians, data on suicides have often been omitted from analyses, particularly female suicide rates, which, being on average two to three times lower than those of men, are not analyzed in their specificity.

Building on these considerations, this chapter aims to address some questions: How did suicide rates in Trieste vary in the two postwar periods? Do we witness an increase in suicides in both cases? Were there similarities or substantial differences? Were there also specificities from a gender perspective?

The goal of this contribution is to analyze the phenomenon by highlighting the complexity of the postwar transitional phases in Venezia Giulia,⁴ especially how they affected the female population. Through statistical analysis and the narrative horizon provided by the press, we can analyze the issue not only quantitatively but also study the representations and gender stereotypes that emerge from the articles. The press allows us to capture the different interpretations given to the phenomenon, to explore discursive practices, and associated medical knowledge.⁵

topic and to Róisín Healy, "Suicide in Early Modern and Modern Europe," *The Historical Journal* 49, no. 3 (2006): 903–919.

3 Maurice Halbwachs, *Les causes du suicide* (Paris: Alcan, 1930), 355–374; Barbagli, *Congedarsi dal mondo*, 216–217.

4 Venezia Giulia refers to the region annexed by the Kingdom of Italy at the end of World War I, which largely corresponds to what was Österreichisches Küstenland during the Austro-Hungarian administration. Elio Apih, *Italia, Fascismo e Antifascismo nella Venezia Giulia (1918–1943)* (Bari: Laterza, 1966); Ester Capuzzo, *Dal nesso asburgico alla sovranità italiana. Legislazione e amministrazione a Trento e a Trieste (1918–1928)* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1992); Angelo Visintin, *L'Italia a Trieste. L'operato del governo militare italiano nella Venezia Giulia (1918–19)* (Gorizia: LEG—Istituto regionale per la storia del movimento di liberazione nel Friuli-Venezia Giulia, 2000); Almerigo Apollonio, *Dagli Asburgo a Mussolini. Venezia Giulia 1918–1922* (Gorizia: Istituto Regionale per la Cultura Istriana—LEG, 2001).

5 Howard I. Kushner, "Women and Suicide in Historical Perspective," *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 10, no. 3 (1985): 537–552; Howard I. Kushner, "Suicide, Gender, and the Fear of Modernity," in *Histories of Suicide: International Perspectives on Self-Destruction in the Modern World*, ed. John Weaver and David Wright (Toronto–Buffalo–London: University of Toronto

The choice to focus the analysis on the city of Trieste is due to its political, administrative, and economic centrality in the region. Additionally, we have comprehensive data sets which allow for an analysis from a gender perspective. We can already anticipate that our case study confirms Halbwachs' thesis that trends are different in the two postwar periods. In the period from the end of the conflict in November 1918 to the final annexation of Venezia Giulia to the Kingdom of Italy at the end of 1922, suicide rates tended to explode during the transition phase, particularly among women, reaching unprecedented levels.⁶ Whereas for the period from May 1945 to the end of 1949, from the Liberation of Trieste from Nazi occupation until the first democratic elections for the municipality of Trieste in 1949 and the arrival of Marshall Plan investments,⁷ there is an increase in the suicide phenomenon in the city. However, the rates are contained compared to the years before the conflict and significantly lower than those of the early postwar period.

Methodological Premise

Since 1873, the city of Trieste has systematically collected various statistical data, including data on suicides. All of this information is published in the *Bollettino dell'Ufficio del Lavoro e della Statistica del Comune di Trieste* ("Bulletin of the Office of Labor and Statistics of the City of Trieste"), a journal that provides crucial information on multiple aspects of the phenomenon: the methods used, age groups, gender distinctions, areas of the city, and even the supposed motivations behind the act.

Press, 2009), 19–52; Margaret Higonnet, "Speaking Silences: Women's Suicide," in *The Female Body in Western Culture*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 68–83; Silvia Sara Canetto, "She Died for Love and He for Glory: Gender Myths of Suicidal Behavior," *Omega* 26, no. 1 (1992–1993): 1–17.

6 Matteo Perissinotto, "Perché le donne si uccidono? Analisi dei suicidi femminili a Trieste nel primo dopoguerra (1918–1922)," *Deportate, Esuli e Profughe (DEP)* 50 (2023): 1–26.

7 Tullia Catalan, Giulio Mellinato, Pio Nodari, Raoul Pupo, and Marta Verginella., eds., *Dopoguerra di confine. Progetto Interreg 3A/Phare CBC Italia—Slovenia* (Trieste: Istituto regionale per la storia del movimento di liberazione nel Friuli-Venezia Giulia—Università di Trieste-Dipartimento di scienze geografiche e storiche, 2007); Giampaolo Valdevit, "1945–1954 (e un po' oltre). Bilancio storiografico e prospettive di ricerca," in *Trieste, Austria, Italia tra Settecento e Novecento. Studi in onore di Elio Aphi*, ed. Marina Cataruzza (Udine: Del Bianco, 1996); Glenda Sluga, *The Problem of Trieste and the Italo-Yugoslav Border: Difference, Identity, and Sovereignty in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Roberta Nunin and Elisabetta Vezzosi, eds., *Donne e famiglie nei sistemi di welfare. Esperienze nazionali e regionali a confronto* (Rome: Carocci, 2007).

As several studies have pointed out, official suicide statistics, while an indispensable tool, are subject to issues related to the method of collection and recording, which varies over time.⁸ Thus, within the same city, there can be variations in the collection method over a short period of time and also in the contemporary definition of “suicide,” a notion that changes across space and time. Data collection itself is influenced by the decisions of personnel in the municipal statistics office. For example, there are cases in which the official decided to include the incident as a suicide despite the traffic police reporting it as an accident. It is also believed that there are cases in which pity or fear of repercussions due to civil and/or religious sentiment caused relatives (or employers) to conceal the true nature of the death by attributing it to another cause (usually “accidental”). As a result, statistics do not report the actual number of suicides with a lethal outcome.

One important aspect to point out is the impossibility of understanding the causes behind every episode of suicide, and even when provided by contemporary sources, these causes cannot be considered reliable except to reconstruct the outlook and morals of the time. Studies by sociologists can help us understand certain aspects and trends, sometimes helping to place our data in macro-categories. Data and statistics provide very important quantitative information and reveal trends, but these must be interpreted in light of the social, political, and cultural context of the time.⁹

Finally, it is important to define the term “suicide attempts.” From a methodological point of view, it is unclear what falls under this definition, which includes different case histories: from those who intend to take their own life to those whose gestures are a plea for help or attempt to escape a situation.¹⁰ In Western countries, it is estimated that for every suicide there are at least 10 attempted ones.¹¹ Despite press analysis and official data, we do not find this ratio of one suicide to every 10 attempted suicides, as these often remain private, kept within the sphere of family, or friends, thus not coming to the attention of authorities and the media.¹² Additionally, both

8 Jack D. Douglas, *Social Meanings of Suicide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 163–231.

9 Olive Anderson, *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 13–14.

10 Ad J. F. M. Kerkhof, “Attempted Suicide: Patterns and Trends,” in *The International Handbook of Suicide and Attempted Suicide*, ed. Keith Hawton and Kees van Heeringen (Chichester: Wiley & Sons, 2000), 51.

11 George E. Murphy, “Why Women Are Less Likely Than Men to Commit Suicide,” *Comprehensive Psychiatry* 39, no. 4 (1998): 165–175.

12 Perissinotto, “Perché le donne si uccidono?”

authorities and journalists make choices in reporting or not reporting news which may vary with the social and political context, and in the case of newspapers, also depending on legislation and readers' interest. The right to privacy is valued differently over time and depends on societal morality. Judgments and investigations, as well as the way data is collected, are the result of the morality of the time and thus subject to variation.¹³ Authorities decide based on various factors whether or not to investigate the incident and the personal life of the deceased, but also whether to report the news to journalists, who in turn decide whether to publish it. Even from a political perspective, data are used instrumentally depending on the goals to be achieved, for example, to attribute the exacerbation of the phenomenon to factors outside the national body.

Transitions after World Wars

In 1923, the statistician Pierpaolo Luzzatto-Fegiz noted that from the beginning of suicide surveys in Trieste, the rates had increased steadily and more than proportionally to the city's population growth, with the exception of the war period.¹⁴ During World War I, there was a sharp reduction in suicides, and as shown in Figure 1,¹⁵ in absolute terms, more women than men committed suicide between 1916 and 1918, the hardest years in the city from a health and food standpoint.¹⁶

In the four-year period following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1919–1922), 220 men and 200 women took their own lives.¹⁷ A significant figure emerges when comparing the average from 1873–1875 with that of 1919–1922: the frequency of suicides increased by 112 percent among men and

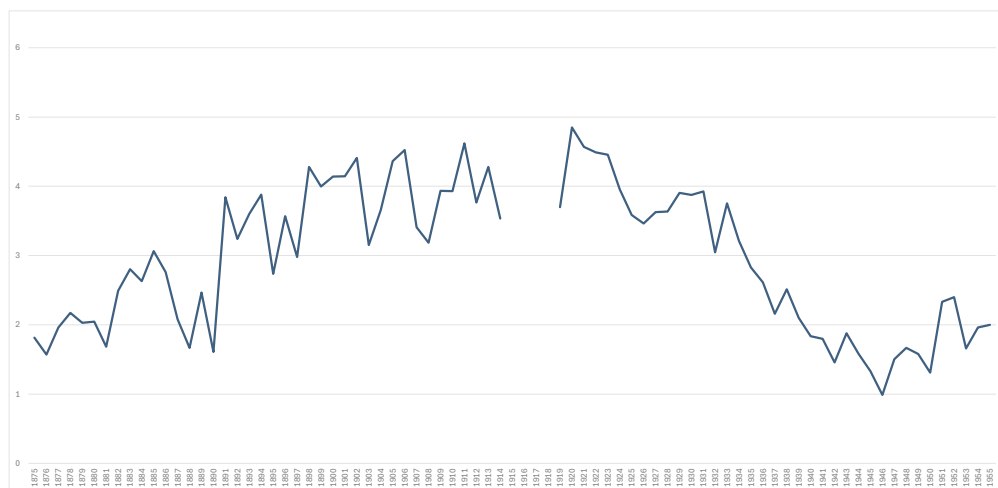
13 Maria Teresa Brancaccio, Eric J. Engstrom, and David Lederer, "The Politics of Suicide: Historical Perspectives on Suicidology before Durkheim: An Introduction," *Journal of Social History* 46, no. 3 (2013): 607–619; Paolo L. Bernardini and Anita Virga, eds., *Voglio morire! Suicide in Italian Literature, Culture, and Society 1789–1919* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2013).

14 Pierpaolo Luzzatto-Fegiz, "Osservazioni Statistiche sul fenomeno del suicidio nella città di Trieste," *Bollettino* 47, no. 4 (1923): 7–11; Livia Linda Rondini, "Luzzatto-Fegiz Pierpaolo," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 66 (2006), accessed June 6, 2024, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pierpaolo-luzzatto-fegiz_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pierpaolo-luzzatto-fegiz_(Dizionario-Biografico)).

15 All data are taken from the BSCT. The population is that calculated by the office as of December 31 of the year under review, except for the years when the population census was taken. For the years 1915–1918 there are no surveys or estimates of the population in the city.

16 Lucio Fabi, *Trieste 1914–1918. Una città in guerra* (Trieste: MGS Press, 1996).

17 Perissinotto, "Perché le donne si uccidono?"

Figure 1: Trieste, suicides per 10.000 inhabitants 1873–1955.

475 percent among women. In 1921, for the first and only time in peacetime, the number of female suicides exceeded that of men in absolute terms, with a very similar frequency: 4.63 suicides per 10,000 men and 4.61 among women. At the European level, only Budapest, Brno, and Bucharest, with 4.38, 4.31, and 4.00 suicides per 10,000 inhabitants, respectively, approached the rates seen in Trieste.¹⁸ In the same year, in the Kingdom of Italy, the figure was about six times lower, with the greatest difference among women, with a ratio of as many as 11 times higher in Trieste.¹⁹

The figures for Trieste also contrast sharply with those of Austria,²⁰ where men in 1921 killed themselves 2.1 times more than women, and with

18 *Il Piccolo*, "I suicidi e la mortalità in genere a Trieste durante il 1923," May 24, 1924. However, for these cities we do not have the ratio between male and female suicides. Cfr. Stefano Samogiy, *Il suicidio in Italia (1864–1962)* (Rome: Olimpica, 1967); Barbagli, *Congedarsi dal mondo*.

19 For the Kingdom of Italy see: Ty Geltmaker, *Tired of Living: Suicide in Italy from National Unification to World War I, 1860–1915* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002); Samogiy, *Il suicidio in Italia (1864–1962)*; Centro nazionale di prevenzione e difesa sociale, *Suicidio e tentato suicidio in Italia. Rapporto della Commissione del Centro nazionale di prevenzione e difesa sociale* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1967). See also the work of Ivo Mišur, "A Review of Suicides in Dalmatia Reported in the Daily Press Between Two World Wars," *Acta Medico-Historica Adriatica* 20, no. 1 (2022): 101–126.

20 On Austria: Michaela Maria Hintermayr, *Suizid und Geschlecht in der Moderne. Wissenschaft, Medien und Individuum (Österreich 1870–1970)* (Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter, 2022); Florian Arendt, "Reporting on Suicide Between 1819 and 1944: Suicide Rates, the Press, and Possible Long-Term Werther Effects in Austria," *Crisis: The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention* 39, no. 5 (2018): 344–352, <https://doi.org/10.1027/0227-5910/a000507>; Carlos Wartza, "Modernisierung und Suizid in Österreich: einige Daten zur Sozialgeschichte und Thesen zur Sozialtheorie des

those of Germany (2.3 times more). In these analyses, it is necessary to point out that there are considerable differences between urban and rural realities, just as remarkably different are the suicide rates in northern Italy, particularly in the Northeast,²¹ compared to the south of the Peninsula, as well as between the Mediterranean and Central European areas. However, these data provide important references for understanding the specificity and exceptionality of the Trieste case.

As mentioned, it is necessary to place this phenomenon in the political, economic, and social context that characterized the first postwar period in Trieste, which was a period of abrupt changes following the dissolution of the imperial structure, bringing with it the dissolution of a world of belonging and identity. The transition from Austro-Hungarian to Italian administration was marked by a significant economic depression, high rates of unemployment, rising cost of living, inflation, and for women, the gradual expulsion from various sectors of the labor market. The region was also characterized by profound changes in the social and ethnic structure: Austro-Hungarian imperial officials left the city, there were massive emigrations of Slovenes and Croats who, after waiting for the results of the peace treaties, left the region to join the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and throughout the first postwar period, there was also strong immigration of Italians from the Kingdom.²² This situation, coupled with the aftermath and mourning of the conflict, exacerbated a health and housing crisis in the city, heightened by the spread of Spanish flu. These factors were compounded by political violence, with Trieste being the epicenter, marked by the rise of “border fascism,” characterized by episodes of intense violence against both “the Slavs” and political opponents.²³ In response to the squadrist actions and the economic crisis affecting the region, socialists and communists reacted

Suizids,” *VIRUS. Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der Medizin* 7 (2020): 147–167, <https://doi.org/10.15533/virus07s147>; Dagmar Wernitznig, “The Madwoman in the Cellar: Trauma and Gender After Both World Wars—A Field Study of Psychiatric Files,” *On Culture: The Open Journal for the Study of Culture* 11 (2021): 1–23

21 By Northeast we mean the Italian regions Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Veneto and Trentino Alto Adige.

22 Piero Purini, *Metamorfosi etniche: i cambiamenti di popolazione a Trieste, Gorizia, Fiume e in Istria: 1914–1975* (Udine: Kappa Vu, 2010).

23 Borut Klabjan and Gorazd Bajc, *Battesimo di fuoco. L'incendio del Narodni dom di Trieste e l'Europa adriatica nel XX secolo. Storia e memoria* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2023); Aldo Oberdorfer, *Il socialismo del dopoguerra a Trieste* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1922); Giuseppe Piemontese, *Il movimento operaio a Trieste. Dalle origini all'avvento del fascismo* (Rome: Editori riuniti, 1974).

with strikes and sabotage at construction sites and factories, leading to harsh and violent clashes with the Italian authorities.

After record suicide rates during the postwar transition, the figures began to fall in 1923–1924, coinciding with the city's economic recovery and the arrival of substantial government funding.²⁴ During the two decades of Fascism, at least until the beginning of the imperialist war against Ethiopia in 1936, suicide figures were in line with prewar figures, and with the exception of a few peaks we can see a steady decline from the 1930s onward.

During World War II, unlike during World War I, it was predominantly men who committed suicide in Trieste. In the postwar period, the lowest suicide rate since data collection began in Trieste was recorded in 1946, with fewer than one suicide per 10,000 inhabitants. However, from the following year, suicides increased again, reaching 2.4 suicides per 10,000 inhabitants in 1952, but never returning to pre-1935 levels.²⁵ In 1950, Trieste's suicide rate was 1.31 per 10,000 inhabitants, while Austria's rate was 2.38, Germany's was 1.52, and Italy's was 0.65. As we can see, the data from Trieste are much more aligned with those of Central Europe than with those of the Mediterranean area.²⁶

Trieste after World War II served as a critical test case for the entire structure of Allied planning on the Italian peninsula and became a disputed city between Yugoslavia and Italy.²⁷ Triestine society was deeply fractured following the trauma and devastation of World War II. After liberation by the Yugoslav People's Army between May 1 and June 12, 1945, marked by purges, arrests, and deportations of "enemies of the people," the city was occupied by Anglo-American troops who immediately sought to end vendettas and settle scores. This is not to say that violence suddenly disappeared; rather,²⁸ the transition was slow and gradual, but there was a notable change with international institutions positioning themselves as guarantors of the new order.²⁹

24 Apih, *Italia, Fascismo e Antifascismo*, 200. For Istria between the two wars see Milan Radošević, "Umorni od života: samoubojstva u Istarskoj provinciji za talijanske uprave između dva svjetska rata," *Problemi sjevernog Jadrana* 16 (2017): 79–102.

25 The calculation is based on the population over 21 years of age. See *Giornale di Trieste*, "217mila elettori nel TLT," January 15, 1949. It should be noted that women outnumbered men even after World War II: in 1949 there were 106,257 women and 91,060 men (about 1.17 women for every man).

26 Barbagli, *Congedarsi dal mondo*, 402.

27 Giulio Mellinato, "Il governo delle risorse (1943–1947)," in *Trieste tra ricostruzione e ritorno all'Italia (1945–1954)*, ed. Ariella Verrocchio (Trieste: IRSML FVG—Comune di Trieste, 2004), 38–49.

28 Enrico Acciai, Guido Panvini, Camilla Poesio, and Toni Rovatti, eds., *Oltre il 1945. Violenza, conflitto sociale, ordine pubblico nel dopoguerra europeo* (Rome: Viella, 2017); Guido Formigoni and Daniela Saresella, eds., 1945. *La transizione del dopoguerra* (Rome: Viella, 2017).

29 Maria Porzio, *Arrivano gli Alleati! Amori e violenze nell'Italia liberata* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2011).

Following the Yugoslav and Anglo-American agreements, Venezia Giulia was divided into two zones: one under Allied control and the other under Yugoslav administration. As Aleksander Panjek pointed out, this situation resulted not only in a separation between two alternative social, political, and economic systems but also in the economic disintegration of the Adriatic Littoral region, particularly between Trieste and its surroundings.³⁰ This process was accelerated by emigrations that severed social and economic networks in the area, both from Zone A and Zone B, albeit for different reasons. The Yugoslav authorities attempted, especially after 1948, to limit the flow of workers and products between Zone B and Zone A, which had serious repercussions for the daily lives of inhabitants, particularly those living near the new border. For example, some women who sold eggs, having been prevented from crossing into Zone A, even threatened suicide.³¹

In Trieste, the postwar period was marked by a new economic and industrial crisis, particularly in the shipyard sector, where thousands were employed. Initially, roughly from June 1945 to the 1947 peace treaty, there was an emergency-type economic policy aimed at “keeping the population calm” by avoiding unrest and preventing disease.³² However, it was only with the massive structural investments of the ERP (Marshall Plan) that there was a significant turnaround, pulling the Triestine economy out of a prolonged crisis that had begun during the conflict.

In the Anglo-American restructuring of the city economy in 1947, the labor force most affected by the crisis were white-collar workers and women.³³ By June 1948, there were 13,000 unemployed women, 80 percent of whom were

30 Aleksander Panjek, “La disintegrazione fra Trieste e Capodistria. Processi disgregativi nell’area economica del Territorio Libero di Trieste,” in *Dopoguerra di confine. Progetto Interreg IIIA/Phare CBC Italia—Slovenia*, ed. Tullia Catalan, Giulio Mellinato, Pio Nodari, Raoul Pupo, and Marta Verginella (Trieste: Istituto regionale per la storia del movimento di liberazione nel Friuli Venezia Giulia—Università di Trieste-Dipartimento di scienze geografiche e storiche, 2007), 455–476.

31 Marta Verginella, “La campagna istriana nel vortice della rivoluzione,” in *Trieste tra ricostruzione e ritorno all’Italia*, 113.

32 Giampaolo Valdevit, “Dalla crisi del dopoguerra alla stabilizzazione politica e istituzionale (1945–1964),” in *Storia d’Italia. Il Friuli-Venezia Giulia*, ed. Roberto Finzi, Claudio Magris, and Giovanni Miccoli (Turin: Einaudi, 2002), 581–661; 633; Monica Rebeschini, “Organigrammi e carriere nel GMA della Venezia Giulia,” in *Dopoguerra di confine. Progetto Interreg IIIA/Phare CBC Italia—Slovenia*, ed. Tullia Catalan, Giulio Mellinato, Pio Nodari, Raoul Pupo, and Marta Verginella (Trieste: Istituto regionale per la storia del movimento di liberazione nel Friuli Venezia Giulia—Università di Trieste-Dipartimento di scienze geografiche e storiche, 2007), 113–136.

33 Giampaolo Valdevit, “La labour policy del governo militare alleato (1945–1954),” in *Anche l’uomo doveva essere di ferro ... Classe e movimento operaio a Trieste nel secondo dopoguerra*, ed. Luigi Ganapini (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1986), 264–265; Lucio Fabi, “Donne, padroni, telai,” in

heads of households. Additionally, women's wages were about 30 percent lower than men's.³⁴ Simultaneously, more than 9,000 sex workers were active in the city, and thousands of children were abandoned.³⁵ This tragic situation improved only from 1948 when the second phase of the AMG in the welfare field began: the Americans created the Department of Social Welfare and fostered a democratic welfare model managed by Italian officials trained abroad.³⁶ The city's economic recovery was further aided by Marshall Plan investments and the integration of Zone A into the European Organization for Economic Cooperation. This new situation was undoubtedly facilitated by the break between Tito and Stalin in June 1948 and the gradual normalization of relations between Italy and Yugoslavia.

The years between 1949 and 1954 marked a turning point in Allied policies on welfare. The welfare system underwent extensive reorganization, and in 1949 the Department of Social Welfare was established to restructure local welfare.³⁷ Additionally, numerous women were employed in the administration of various agencies. As we have seen, this change of pace between 1948 and 1949 coincided with a sharp decline in suicides by women, especially compared to those by men.

Some Observations and Comparisons

Compared to other cities in the region for which data are available, the case of Vienna is particularly noteworthy when contrasted with Trieste [Figure 2]. There are two especially striking data points: the impact of the two world wars on women's suicide rates in the two cities and the differences between the two postwar transition phases.

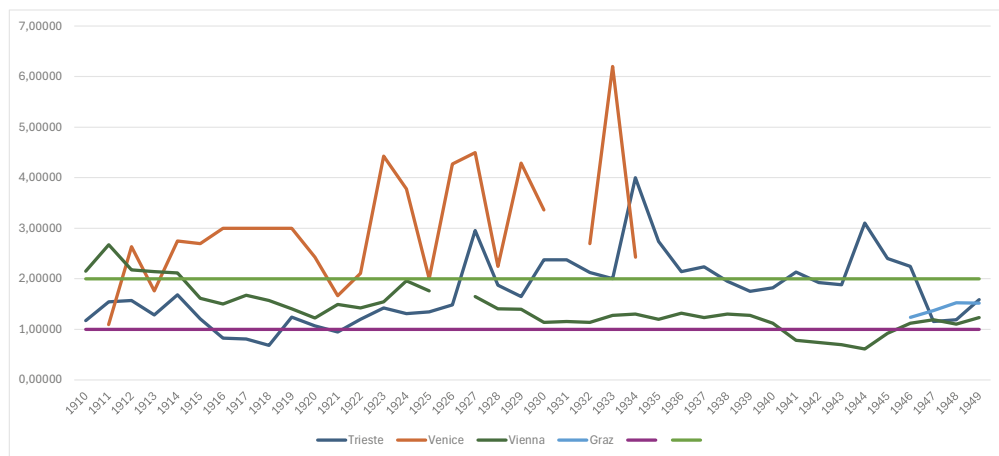
Anche l'uomo doveva essere di ferro ... Classe e movimento operaio a Trieste nel secondo dopoguerra, ed. Luigi Ganapini (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1986), 201–242.

34 Glenda Sluga, "Terra di nessuno: I confini di genere nella Trieste del dopoguerra," *Qualestoria* 21, no. 2/3 (1993): 184.

35 Gloria Nemec, "Dall'emergenza diffusa alle famiglie come soggetto di welfare," in *Donne e famiglie nei sistemi di welfare*, ed. Roberta Nunin and Elisabetta Vezzosi (Roma: Carocci, 2007), 124.

36 Valdevit, "Dalla crisi del dopoguerra," 633; Tullia Catalan, "Governo Militare Alleato e Stato italiano di fronte all'emergenza dei profughi. Politiche assistenziali nella Trieste del secondo dopoguerra," in *Carità pubblica, assistenza sociale e politiche di welfare. Il caso di Trieste*, ed. Annamaria Vinci (Trieste: EUT, 2012), 109–123.

37 Tullia Catalan, "Assistenza, funzionari e ruoli di genere nella Trieste dei primi anni Cinquanta," in *Donne e famiglie nei sistemi di welfare*, ed. Roberta Nunin and Elisabetta Vezzosi (Roma: Carocci, 2007), 131.

Figure 2: Male/female suicide ratios in absolute numbers 1910–1949.

In Vienna, the trends were opposite to those in Trieste: more men died during World War I, and there was a record high in female suicides after World War II. This peak occurred in 1945, with 1,979 women committing suicide, at least 1,029 of whom were victims of the mass rapes following the Soviet occupation of the city.³⁸ This wave of suicides was largely ignored by contemporary Austrian media, often regarded as a taboo subject or attributed to the political, ethical, and moral failures of the 1930s and 1940s. In 1948, psychiatrist Erwin Ringel founded the Center for Suicide Prevention in Vienna, while Trieste lacked similar institutions.³⁹ Michaela Maria Hintermayer has noted that the trauma of sexual violence must be considered alongside the failure to process it, as well as the traumas of conflict and imprisonment by camp survivors. Many couples found themselves estranged and traumatized by

38 Gernot Sonneck, Hans Hirnsperger and Reinhard Mundschtütz, "Suizid und Suizidprävention 1938–1945 in Wien," in *Neuropsychiatr* 26 (2012): 111–120, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40211-012-0032-8>; Hintermayer, *Suizid und Geschlecht*, 292. Similar was the situation in Berlin, see Christian Goeschel, *Suicide in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 149–166. In 1945, 3,996 women and 3,091 men committed suicide in Berlin. It is interesting to note that in an article published in Trieste (*Giornale Alleato*, "Nel solo circondario di Berlino," January 10, 1947) it was pointed out that of the 2,742 suicides in Berlin since the end of hostilities, 60 percent involved the female sex, and among the main reasons were given "the lack of food and intolerable living conditions," thus making no mention of the sexual violence suffered by the German population.

39 Hintermayer, *Suizid und Geschlecht*, 319–328. The center had multiple purposes, not only to prevent the act, but also to medicalize treatment and collect data for that purpose. Suicides of women took place with illuminant gas and secondarily with barbiturates, particularly veronal. Through these studies Vienna acted as a leader in changing the type of gas provided in the homes and reducing the use of barbiturates for the purpose of removing the primary means of death.

the war; returning men encountered not only a devastated society but also family units shattered by the conflict.⁴⁰ Additionally, emotional relationships with Allied soldiers, especially those from French overseas territories or African American soldiers, were condemned by society. This condemnation reflected a racism embedded in societal judgments about the loss of these women's sexual integrity and a perceived reduction of their femininity.⁴¹

Unlike Vienna or Berlin, rape was not used as a weapon of war in Trieste by the National Liberation Army and Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia, as the Yugoslav side intended to annex the region and protect the local population, aiming to demonstrate their ethical and moral superiority.⁴²

Another difference between the postwar periods was the medicalization of suicide survivors. After World War II, all were admitted to hospital or psychiatric facilities, unlike after World War I when they were often left at home following first aid, especially in cases of poisoning.

There was also a discrepancy in the means used for suicide by women. After World War I, poisons were the primary method, whereas, during 1947–1948, “precipitation from above” (jumping from heights) was more prevalent, with 15 cases in two years compared to 13 poisonings and eight firearm-related suicides (out of a total of 40 female suicides).⁴³ After World War I, most female suicides were single women, but after World War II, the majority were married with families. In Trieste, despite significant differences between the two postwar transition phases, there was a convergence in the male-to-female suicide ratio during 1921–1922 and 1947–1948. The 1947–1948 period recorded, for the first time since 1920–1921, a male-to-female suicide ratio below 1.2. However, this statistic can be misleading: in 1920–1921, there were 227 suicides (114 men and 113 women), while in 1947–1948, there were “only” 87 suicides (47 men and 40 women) in a city with 20–25,000 more inhabitants than in the early 1920s.

One factor that may partially explain this convergence is the cost of living. Taking July 1920 as a baseline of 100, prices rose significantly during the winter of 1920–1921 and the spring-summer of 1921, peaking in March and April 1921 with a cost of living index over 119.⁴⁴ The index began to fall steadily from December 1921 onwards, coinciding with the signing of the

40 Hintermayr, *Suizid und Geschlecht*, 307.

41 Hintermayr, *Suizid und Geschlecht*, 347.

42 Marcello Flores, ed., *Stupri di guerra. La violenza di massa contro le donne nel Novecento* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2010).

43 Perissinotto, “Perché le donne si uccidono,” 12.

44 Luzzatto-Fegiz, “Osservazioni Statistiche.”

peace treaty and the annexation of the “New Provinces” to the Kingdom of Italy, leading to massive state investments in Trieste’s economy.⁴⁵

After World War II, there was an even greater increase in prices. Using January 1946 as a baseline of 100, the cost of living index rose above 143 points in February 1947, with significant increases in rent (up 70 percent) and food (up 40 percent), which accounted for two-thirds of household expenditures.⁴⁶ The index peaked at 180.6 in June 1947 but improved markedly between late 1948 and early 1949 with the arrival of Marshall Plan aid,⁴⁷ the AMG’s new policies, and investments in welfare and housing.⁴⁸

In both postwar periods, it can be assumed that “breadwinner anxiety” and resulting mental and physical exhaustion may have driven many women to suicide. Women were more exposed to changes in the workforce, access to care, citizenship issues, and other areas, where their status, such as citizenship, was often dependent on their fathers.⁴⁹

After World War II, there was an increase in suicides compared to the war period, but it was not comparable to the surge after World War I. This suggests that, despite the post-World War II turmoil, the local population experienced greater hope and confidence in the future. Further investigation into how population shifts, such as the arrival of migrants from southern Italy (where suicide rates are historically lower than in Trieste), impacted suicide rates in the Julian city would be valuable.

Local Newspaper Narratives and Interpretation of Suicides

The periodical press, especially local newspapers, paid close attention to crime events, which captivated many readers.⁵⁰ Reports on suicides not only expressed moral judgments but also reflected contemporary medical

45 Giulio Sapelli, *Trieste italiana. Mito e destino economico* (Miland: Franco Angeli, 1990).

46 *Il Giornale di Trieste*, “Il costo della vita in aumento,” March 18, 1947.

47 *Il Giornale di Trieste*, “Il costo della vita,” August 13, 1947.

48 Giulio Mellinato, “La lunga ricostruzione. Opulenza e debolezza del Piano Marshall nel Territorio Libero di Trieste,” in *Dopoguerra di confine. Progetto Interreg IIIA/Phare CBC Italia—Slovenia*, ed. Tullia Catalan, Giulio Mellinato, Pio Nodari, Raoul Pupo, and Marta Verginella (Trieste: Istituto regionale per la storia del movimento di liberazione nel Friuli Venezia Giulia—Università di Trieste-Dipartimento di scienze geografiche e storiche, 2007), 371–379.

49 Maura Hametz, “Anxious ‘Italians’: Security and Welfare in the Upper Adriatic, 1918–1924,” *Annales. Series historia et sociologia* 32, no. 4 (2022): 591–602.

50 Tullia Catalan, “L’Affaire Mangachi. Ricostruzione ed echi mediatici di un delitto nella Trieste asburgica di fine secolo,” *Memoria e Ricerca* 68, no. 3 (2021): 407–422. On the local press see Cesare Pagnini, *I giornali di Trieste dalle origini al 1959* (Milan: Centro Studi, 1959).

ideas and a range of prejudices, offering insights into the era's perceptions of the phenomenon.

Based on judgments made in the coeval press, I have identified three categories into which we can classify women's suicides in the early postwar period: those that were socially acceptable, or at any rate could be understood even if one did not agree with the gesture (i.e., those linked to economic reasons, incurable diseases, the impossibility of being able to support oneself or family bereavements such as the loss of husbands and sons in the war); those deemed linked to "futile motives" and condemned by bourgeois morality (i.e., linked to amorous motives and family quarrels); and finally those of sex workers, in which the life of the woman was condemned and suicide was in fact considered a natural consequence of life in brothels.⁵¹ In contrast, almost all male suicides were categorized as either honor-related or economic, with the press attributing a sense of nobility to their motives. Only young men committing suicide for sentimental reasons faced criticism from the press.

News reports—as well as the medicine of the time—stereotyped women as susceptible to "neurasthenia" and other nervous system degenerations, leading to suicides for insufficient reasons. Women who worked in certain professions such as "dressmaker" or "maid" were stereotyped and portrayed as embodying weaknesses such as naiveté, emotional fragility, and, in the case of sex workers, moral degeneration leading to delinquency.

An illustrative example is a 1921 article from *Il Piccolo*, Trieste's leading newspaper, titled "Why do women kill themselves?" The article attributed women's "restlessness" to love, analyzing young women facing their first love and identifying sentimentality, choice of reading material, and family upbringing as factors behind female suicides.⁵² The socialist periodical *Il Lavoratore* saw suicides as a result of the capitalist system exploiting proletarians, making death seem like the only escape from suffering.⁵³ Conversely, the fascist periodical *Il Popolo di Trieste* mocked women who committed suicide, often using witty quips and undermining the legitimacy of their motives, contrasting with their respectful treatment of men's suicides. In articles published in fascist newspapers there were witty quips such as "Bathing at the Molo Audace," "How weary life is!," "Blessed youth," and "she

51 Matteo Perissinotto, "In a Moment of Supreme Discomfort': An Analysis of Female Suicides Through the Press in Trieste in the Postwar Transition (1918–1922)," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 64, no. 2 (2024): 119–136.

52 Perissinotto, "Perché le donne si uccidono?"

53 Perissinotto, "Perché le donne si uccidono?"

wanted to wash her guts.” In other cases, Lysol—the poison most commonly used in suicides, especially those attributed to sentimental motives—was referred to as a “purgative of pains.” The fascist periodical also often quoted the motives for suicides in order to delegitimize the choice, making the suicidal woman’s intentions less credible and truthful. A demonstration of this tendency to condemn only women is the lack of jokes and mockery in the articles dealing with men’s suicides, in which the motives are never questioned, thus lending an aura of nobility to the gesture, which was thus believed to be motivated by deep feeling.

From 1925, Mussolini’s government, aware of public opinion, repeatedly forbade publishing news about suicides, especially those related to love affairs, to maintain a facade of security and stability:⁵⁴ “We must urge the big newspapers to reduce more and more to the point of disappearance the column of so-called ‘tired of life’ because the clamorous and romantic publicity is a dangerous suggestion for weak or weakened spirits [...] We must, in short, also demobilize the crime column.”⁵⁵

As historian Mauro Forno has noted, Fascism greatly feared the crime chronicle “both because of its predominantly ‘localist’ character, its ‘morally undesirable’ content, and the perverse pleasure it could engender in the reader by diverting his attention from the political pages. [...] Finally, he detested of crime reporting that connotation of ‘material daily exploitable by the international press hostile to the Regime’.”⁵⁶

After World War II, the Prefecture of Trieste also urged moderation in crime reporting to avoid upsetting public opinion during reconstruction.⁵⁷

Substantial differences emerge between the two transitions from the analysis of the location of the news in the newspapers: while in both cases we find them in the section devoted to the city chronicle, after WWI the phenomenon is given entire columns with headlines such as “Tired of Life,” placed at the top of the page and easily visible. These articles are full of details and sensitive data (such as first name, last name, job, address) and the means used to commit suicide is always indicated.

54 Philip V. Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso. Fascismo e mass media* (Bari: Laterza, 1975), 87–88; Nicola Tranfaglia, Paolo Murialdi, and Massimo Legnani, *La stampa italiana nell’età fascista* (Rome, Bari: Laterza, 1980).

55 Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Segreteria Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Riservato, Autografo telegrammi del Duce, b. 1, f. 1, sf. 13; cited in Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso*, 360, n. 43.

56 Mauro Forno, *La stampa del ventennio: strutture e trasformazioni nello stato totalitario* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2005), 126–127.

57 Archivio di Stato di Trieste, Prefettura di Trieste, Gabinetto (1922–1954), box 563, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Servizi Stampa, Spettacolo e Turismo ai Prefetti, August 21, 1946.

After World War II, on the other hand, the news is reported in small blurbs, very sparse and with little information, often not even stating the reasons for the act. Disappearing were reports of suicide attempts, and in several cases it was pointed out that the authorities were still investigating whether it was accidental or a voluntary act. That was until October 1947, when we again find the mixture of news and commentary that had also characterized the early postwar period, albeit in less morbid tones.

After World War II, a major difference was the participation in this debate of a number of physicians who, in the pages of the city's main daily newspaper, began to intervene in the public debate on suicides. In 1948 Professor Renato Semizzi, director of the Anti-Tubercular Consortium and professor of Social Medicine, published a series of articles with the aim of providing an overview of medical studies on suicides,⁵⁸ analyzing the situation in Trieste and focusing in particular on male suicides.⁵⁹ According to the doctor, the majority of suicides were related to economic factors. The blame for this situation was placed on society, which did not help or care about these "pitiful cases." Semizzi also proposed solutions in line with social medicine, which based its effectiveness primarily on the prevention of the phenomena through the educational work of teachers and general practitioners. Also of interest is the professor's request to the press not to report news that might incentivize other people to commit suicide. Interestingly, Semizzi focused his attention on male suicides because they were numerically more numerous, unlike in the early postwar period when it was female suicides that were the focus of press analysis.

In response to this inquiry, three articles appeared the following year signed by Dr. Omero, who proposed a prophylaxis against suicide. Omero argued that the cause of suicides lay entirely in the individual's propensity to commit suicide, which was stimulated or not by the external environment.⁶⁰ The press, again according to the doctor, should not be silent about suicides but should report the news crudely, emphasizing the irrationality and futility of the act.

58 Renato Semizzi, "Un doloroso fenomeno di ogni tempo. Perché si uccidono," *Giornale di Trieste*, July 17, 1948.

59 Renato Semizzi, "I casi di suicidio nella nostra città. Triste primato," *Giornale di Trieste*, July 20, 1948.

60 Omero, "Il motivo è l'individuo," *Giornale di Trieste*, April 9, 1949; Omero, "Genesi dello stimolo," *Giornale di Trieste*, April 30, 1949; Omero, "L'atto nella sua misera realtà," *Giornale di Trieste*, May 12, 1949.

In the communist newspaper *Il Lavoratore*, articles concerning suicides are very sparse until 1948. This trend changes in the spring of 1949, when in as many as three cases of suicides by women it is pointed out that these are related to the housing crisis.⁶¹ The periodical thus commented on one such news item:

The constant roads to travel, offices to visit, applications to file, bureaucratic fees to be subjected to, yielding no results, the city chronicle continues to record frequent cases of attempted suicide if not suicide. The homeless can't take it anymore and often decide to end it tragically, as tragically as they have lived since their home was bombed and made uninhabitable.⁶²

Il Lavoratore saw these suicides as a symptom that “manifests itself in periods of larval, daily class struggle, not, on the other hand, in periods of open, violent class struggle, because in the latter case the weaker elements wait, hope, and do not indulge in despondency, while the more combative elements participate directly in the struggle.”⁶³ The suicides were thus a demonstration of a society in crisis, pervaded by a creeping class struggle just waiting for the detonator to go off. Again according to the Communist newspaper, the postwar period, which had initially been a harbinger of hope, had instead turned out to be yet another “disappointment [...] for so many vanished hopes, the frightening current crisis (more than precarious economic conditions, lack of housing, unemployment and general moral depression) are the ultimate reasons that drive one to despair and the desire to end an existence that for so many, for too many, is very difficult to continue.”⁶⁴ Obviously, such an analysis of the Worker, in addition to reconnecting with the Marxist vision, was also a tool for attacking AMG policies, which were deemed insufficient to meet the needs of the population and thus plead the socialist cause.

In late July 1949, the Catholic periodical of the Diocese of Trieste and Koper *Vita Nuova* also intervened on the phenomenon of suicides.⁶⁵ The article did

61 *Il Lavoratore*, “Perché priva di casa tenta di uccidersi in Prefettura,” March 15, 1949.

62 *Il Lavoratore*, “Il tentato suicidio di una senza tetto,” June 4, 1949.

63 *Il Lavoratore*, “Il suicidio arma dei deboli,” July 8, 1949.

64 *Il Lavoratore*, “Il suicidio arma dei deboli,” July 8, 1949.

65 Mario Guidotti, “Il suicidio. Un morbo sociale da combattere duramente,” *Vita Nuova* no. 1502, July 30, 1949; Andrea Dessardo, *Vita nuova (1945–1965). Trieste nelle pagine del settimanale diocesano* (Trieste: IRSML FVG, 2011); Liliana Ferrari, “Il giornale cattolico triestino Vita Nuova (1920–1943),” *Storia e problemi contemporanei* 33 (2003): 21–52.

not focus on Trieste but analyzed the Italian context, highlighting the role of newspapers in expanding and spreading the phenomenon. In September 1949 commenting on the suicide of actress Daniela Palmer in Rome, the Catholic periodical argued that faith helps overcome difficulties “it can give us back hope when all seems lost,” while without faith “there is only desert, despair, death in us.”⁶⁶ In November, in a front-page editorial on the phenomenon of suicides in Trieste,⁶⁷ the role of the press in spreading the methods and patterns of suicide was emphasized. According to the weekly newspaper what all the suicides had in common was “just the lack of faith, despair.” It pointed out that the responsibility for such acts lay with society “whose configuration—in the name very often of a technicality that takes into account everything but man—allows that there are still people forced to sleep in doorways and live on street corners.” Catholics, again according to *Vita Nuova*, should therefore have been the first to work to save these people through Christian help and charity.

From the analysis of the articles, we can assume that it was the police authorities who provided the data and information to journalists, but while in the early post-WWI period the data were very detailed, after WWII instead we find only minimal information. This difference is due, in my opinion, to the role of neighbors and relatives in the practice of *gossip*, that is, providing personal and life information of the suicide’s last days and hours to the press and authorities.⁶⁸ In the cases that were deemed most interesting or had widely engaged public opinion, strong and engaging terms were used, suggestive fictional accounts were constructed, and journalists even came up with direct dialogues to give more pathos to the news. It almost seems as if newspapers wanted to satisfy the morbid curiosity of readers. What we do not find after WWII, however, when even news stories pertaining to failed suicides are rare. Between the two wars, therefore, the narrative horizon of the press also changes; in particular, the causes are no longer identified in women’s alleged weakness, but it is highlighted how social and economic dynamics influence the phenomenon.

As we have seen, one of the still hotly debated aspects around the suicide phenomenon, the so-called “Werther effect,” or whether or not the press influences the copycat effect, also emerges in the public debate after World

66 P.d.R., “Un suicidio,” *Vita Nuova* no. 1507, September 10, 1949.

67 *Vita Nuova*, “La catena dei suicidi non ancora spezzata,” *Vita Nuova* no. 1517, November 19, 1949.

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

War II.⁶⁹ The copycat phenomenon, although not universally supported by scholars, is still considered a danger by the World Health Organization (WHO).⁷⁰

Conclusions

The suicide rate can be considered a “social thermometer” of a society’s psychological state, of stress, anxiety, grief and trauma at a given historical moment.⁷¹ It is therefore plausible to argue that the period following World War I was more psychologically taxing for the population of Trieste than the period following World War II. This heightened stress in the post-World War I era can be attributed to the anxiety and uncertainty prevalent during the transitional phase after the dissolution of the Empire, a transition that marked the end of a centuries-old reality and imposed a significant psychological and emotional toll on contemporaries

As demonstrated by the data, suicide rates in Trieste after World War I were exceptionally high and unprecedented compared to statistics collected since 1873. The complexities of the postwar transition exerted an enormous impact on suicide rates, a phenomenon not observed to the same extent following World War II. While nationalist and belligerent policies dominated the region after World War I, the post-World War II era was characterized by the prevalence of social-democratic policies that respected the plurality of local actors.⁷² This shift in policy approach likely mitigated some of the postwar stress and uncertainty. Nevertheless, private and political violence did not completely disappear. As Marcello Flores notes, “Violence is the strongest and most traumatic legacy that war has left, a connotation at

69 David P. Philipps, “The Influence of Suggestion on Suicide: Substantive and Theoretical Implications of the Werther Effect,” *American Sociological Review* 39 (1974): 340–354; Carlo Bartoli, *L'ultimo tabù. Giornalisti, blogger e utenti dei social media alle prese con il suicidio* (Pisa: Pacini, 2019).

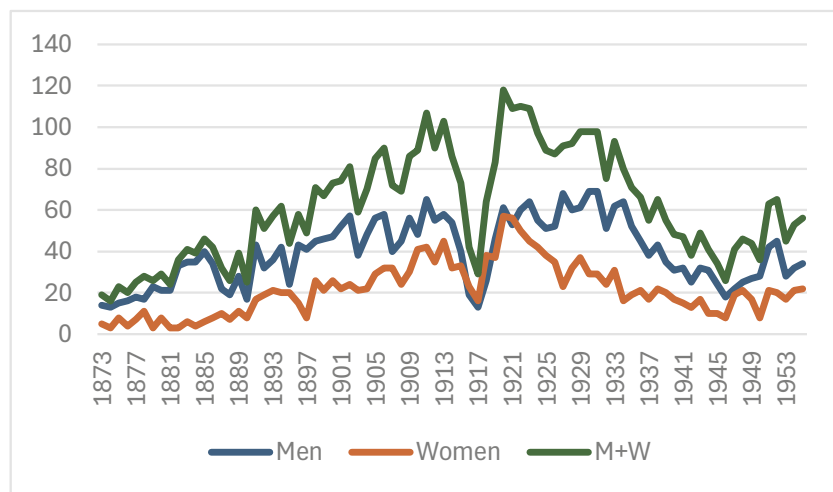
70 World Health Organization & International Association for Suicide Prevention, *Preventing Suicide: A Resource for Media Professionals, 2017 Update*, accessed August 6, 2024, <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/258814>. In the WHO guidelines, it is advised not to provide scandalous or personal information about those involved, as well as not to describe the manner in detail, as well as to avoid speculating about the causes of the act.

71 Danutė Gailienė, “Suicide Rates as a ‘Social Thermometer’: Reading the Traumatized History of Lithuania,” in *Trauma, Experience and Narrative in Europe After World War II*, ed. Ville Kivimäki and Peter Leese (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 299–318.

72 Simone Neri Serneri, ed., *1914–1945. L'Italia nella guerra europea dei trent'anni* (Rome: Viella, 2016); Acciai et al., eds., *Oltre il 1945*.

once cultural and behavioral, which is increasingly experienced as natural and necessary.”⁷³

Figure 3: Suicide in Trieste 1873-1955. Absolute numbers.



Institutional responses to the postwar periods differed significantly. In the aftermath of World War I, investments were largely restricted to supporting industry and local finance. In contrast, the post-World War II era saw additional initiatives aimed at expanding the labor market, developing social housing, and implementing new welfare systems. Despite these substantial differences, a convergence in suicide rates for both genders is evident two years after each conflict, specifically in 1920–1921 and 1947–1948. During these periods, the cost of living—particularly of food and housing—was at its highest since the wars, creating financial strain that was somewhat alleviated by subsequent public investments boosting the city’s economy.

Press reports from these times reveal significant contrasts between the two postwar periods, particularly regarding how contemporary medicine and public opinion addressed the issue of suicide. In the immediate aftermath of World War I, public discourse often involved judgmental attitudes, especially towards women. Conversely, in the post-World War II period, the press focused more on identifying the underlying causes of suicides and exploring preventive measures, reflecting a shift towards a more analytical and empathetic approach.

73 Marcello Flores, “Culture e pratiche della violenza,” in *1914–1945. L’Italia nella guerra europea dei trent’anni*, ed. Simone Neri Serneri (Rome: Viella, 2016), 17–26; 24.

About the Author

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11. Working Through Post (War)Trauma: The Perspective of Widows of Croatian Homeland War Veterans

Ana Ljubojević and Jelena Seferović

Abstract: This chapter focuses on the way postwar transitions have influenced social and family life of war widows in Croatia. Following theoretical framework of memory studies, this research sheds light to both external/social and internal/intimate struggles and challenges of the war widows. It is based on the presentation and interpretation of data collected by the method of semi-structured interviews, analysing periods before, during and after the 1991–1995 wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Firstly, we conducted an analysis of the grieving process of widows and their children. Of particular interest is widows' negotiation of family roles and social capital and influence. Finally, an analysis of friendships and connections in general within the social network(s) is performed.

Keywords: war widows, Croatian Homeland War, gender roles, social adaptation, trauma

“Qui su l'arida schiena / del formidabil monte / sterminator Vesevo, / la qual
null'altro allegra arbor né fiore, / tuoi cespi solitari intorno spargi, / odorata
ginestra, / contenta dei deserti”¹

1 “Here, on the arid ridge, Of dead Vesuvius, Exterminator terrible, That by no other tree or flower is cheered, Thou scatterest thy lonely leaves around, O fragrant flower, With desert wastes content” (Giacomo Leopardi, “La Ginestra”); Giacomo Leopardi, *The Poems of Giacomo Leopardi*, translated by Frederick Townsend (New York, London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1887).

Introduction

In the first days of January 2018, Croatian state television (HRT) scheduled a 2016 film “Ministry of Love” in its prime-time slot. The comedy told the story of war widows whose social benefits had been revoked by the fictional Ministry of Love after remarrying.

The intention to show the film, previously presented in cinemas across the country, spurred a protest on the part of some war widows’ associations who alleged that it offended the widows of the Homeland War defenders.²

This episode was the sole occasion since the end of the 1991–1995 Croatian war for independence where the attitudes and feelings of war widows were discussed in the public sphere. On the other hand, the population of war veterans is not only present in historical discourses about the war, but also wields significant political power, both during the state building and the post-transition period.

What is the reason for such a discrepancy in visibility and, consequently, in the framing of war widows and veterans? What is their social impact almost 30 years after the end of the war? How did they negotiate their gender roles before, during and after the conflict?

This chapter focuses on the way postwar transitions have influenced the social and family life of war widows in Croatia. Following the theoretical framework of memory studies while applying an oral history methodological approach, this research sheds light on both the external/social and internal/intimate struggles and the challenges faced by the war widows. It is based on the presentation and interpretation of data collected by the method of semi-structured interviews, analyzing periods before, during and after the 1991–1995 wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This work builds as a comparative study of regions that had differing levels of exposure to the War: while towns like Vukovar, Sisak or Dubrovnik were under heavy attack and/or in the immediate vicinity of the pro-Serb para-state Republic of Serbian Krajina, other locations like Zagreb or Rijeka were not directly exposed to the conflict, but nevertheless hosted a large number of refugees.

2 The Homeland War, as the 1991–1995 war is called in Croatia, carries a strong link with the struggle for the independence that Croatia obtained during the war, but also implies the defensive nature of the conflict, led in order to safeguard the homeland. Consequently, the war veterans are officially called defenders (*branitelji*).

Here widows are understood as “memory entrepreneurs” who have particular agency. They are represented as producers of knowledge and narratives. The first part of the study is reserved for an analysis of the circumstances of the loss of their husbands and the grieving process of widows and children. Second, of particular interest is the widows’ negotiation of family roles and social capital and influence. Moreover, the figure of the widow is compared to that of a mother. In order to collect data on the social inclusion of the children of killed Croatian war veterans,³ an analysis of friendships and connections in general within the social network(s) is performed.

Theoretical Framework

Emotional loss and the alteration of one’s personal life are embedded in widowhood and in the process of mourning a loved one. However, in the case of war widows, social status and a change of identity also assume a political dimension related to symbolic nation building, causing their grief to be in the spotlight.

While war is a public matter, war trauma is not, as Sekulic rightly pointed out.⁴ On the institutional level, the visibility and social role of war widows varies greatly in different geographical contexts. Some political regimes “weave political ideology into their compensatory programs,”⁵ by raising widows’ financial self-sufficiency, but at the same time imposing ideological control and a hegemonic historical narrative. State policies addressing the social group of war widows can “simultaneously empower women and sustain gender inequality.”⁶ Said mechanisms strongly impact the role of war widows as “carriers of memory” as those

3 Fallen soldier, although semantically precise, is a term reminiscent of the WWII narrative (and Partisan movement), hence carrying not only historical but also an ideological weight. This term was not in use in either judicial, historical, media discourse for describing the de facto fallen soldiers from the 1991–1995 war in Croatia. Moreover, the legislation calls both the living (i.e., soldiers that are veterans in semantic terms/survivors) and the dead soldiers “*branitelji*” (defenders). Widows are recognized as both widows of “fallen and dead defenders” (*poginuli i umrli*), meaning that the status could be obtained because of the death during the wartime, but also upon the death of the veteran in the peacetime (in both cases the benefits are the same for widows).

4 Nada Sekulić, *Skriveni rat* (Belgrade: Udruženje ratnih i mirnodopskih vojnih invalida, 2013).

5 Ashraf Zahedi, “State Ideology and the Status of Iranian War Widows,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8, no. 2 (2006): 267–286.

6 Nada Sekulić, *Skriveni rat* (Belgrade: Udruženje ratnih i mirnodopskih vojnih invalida, 2013).

women are subject to specific social expectations and advised on how to behave socially. Moreover, they can be frontrunners and hold agency at official commemorative practices. Both the defeated and victorious nations seek to control the memories and historical narrative in which the remembrance of fallen soldiers and the interpretation of warriors' deaths plays a particular role.⁷

Memories of defeat, as much as memories of victory, have not only shaped postwar commemorations and national identities, but also permeated vast spheres of cultural, social and everyday life. Interaction between individual and collective memory⁸ is established and manifested symbolically through a "body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image."⁹ Through this media and related ritual practices, the stories and myths that congeal as collective memory should serve as a foundation upon which collective identity rests.

This research observes the interaction between war widows' personal, public and official memories and the impact said contacts have on contributing to and/or challenging postwar official narratives. In particular, personal memories of loss and grief often collide with the hegemonic narrative of the war and are pushed into the private sphere of life.

We begin this research by analyzing personal memories and how they relate to collective memories and historical master narratives about the 1991–1995 war in Croatia. Olick and Robbins¹⁰ argue that collective memory is processual: it is not a static category that we own, but a dynamic process in which members of the community are involved. This is why, almost 30 years after the end of the war, we wanted to see how war widows are making the sense of the past, what their relation to the collective memories is and how they position themselves in current society.

7 Erika Kuhlman, *Of Little Comfort: War Widows, Fallen Soldiers and Remaking of the Nation after the Great War* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

8 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

9 Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 65 (1995), 125–133.

10 Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 105–140.

So far, scholars have researched extensively on state welfare systems dedicated to women's pensions,¹¹ changes in widows' identity and social roles.¹²

However, the topic of widowhood as a result of armed conflicts was seldom taken into account outside psychological studies dealing with civilian victims, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, where it has been proven that bereaved individuals experience enduring psychological distress.¹³ Historical studies about widowhood coming as a consequence of WWI and WWII provide an interesting historical context to the social and cultural conditions faced by bereaved women.¹⁴ Patterns of grief and loss and memorialization after the Great War in Australia are the subject of research that analyzes the relationship between public cultures of memorialization and private expressions of mourning.¹⁵

The newest addition to a still limited body of literature on war widows represents works on the region of former Yugoslavia. While gender studies dealing with the topics of war violence, masculinities, but also changes and developments of societal and gender roles in postwar transition is quite

11 Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992); S. Jay Kleinberg, "6. Widows' Welfare in the Great Depression," in *The Roosevelt Years: EPAH Vol. 7, New Perspectives on American History, 1933–1945*, ed. Robert Garson and Stuart Kidd (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 72–90; Zahedi, "State Ideology and the Status of Iranian War Widows"; Annmarie Hughes and Jeff Meek, "State Regulation, Family Breakdown and Lone Motherhood: The Hidden of World War I in Scotland," *Journal of Family History* 39, no. 4 (2014): 364–387; Mirjana Bobić and Slađana Dragišić Labaš, *O udovicama ili o jednoj društvenoj nepravdi* (Belgrade: Univerzitet u Beogradu—Filozofski fakultet, Institut za sociološka istraživanja, 2020).

12 Marina Hughson, *Mnogo odgovornosti, premalo podrške: Sami roditelji na Zapadnom Balkanu* (Belgrade: Institut za kriminološka i sociološka istraživanja, 2015); Carolyn Walter Ambler, *The Loss of a Life Partner: Narratives of the Bereaved* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

13 Nexhmedin Morina, "Rumination and Avoidance as Predictors of Prolonged Grief, Depression, and Posttraumatic Stress in Female Widowed Survivors of War," *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 199, no. 12 (2011): 950–955; Nexhmedin Morina, Kimberly Stam, Thomas V. Pollet, and Stefan Priebe, "Prevalence of Depression and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Adult Civilian Survivors of War Who Stay in War-Afflicted Regions: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Epidemiological Studies," *Journal of Affective Disorders* 225 (2018): 328–338.

14 Lucy Noakes, "Gender, Grief, and Bereavement in Second World War Britain," *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 8, no. 1 (2015): 72–85; Angela Esco Elder, *Love and Duty: Confederate Widows and the Emotional Politics of Loss* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022); Marina Larsson, "A Disenfranchised Grief: Postwar Death and Memorialisation in Australia after the First World War," *Australian Historical Studies* 40, no. 1 (2009): 79–95.

15 Marie Cooke, "Australian War Widows: A Case Study to Challenge Public Policy," *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 38, no. 4 (2003): 465–475.

abundant, this is not the case with the social category of war widows.¹⁶ Similar to international scholarship, the primary perspective is that of post-traumatic stress disorder and the general impact of widowhood on mental health. In addition to the already quoted works of Nexhmedin Morina focusing on war widows from Kosovo, scholars researching the mental health of Bosnian refugees have proven that female widowhood is “associated with a statistically significant higher burden of psychological and physical health outcomes.”¹⁷ In addition, social environment proved to be a decisive factor for both mental and physical health outcomes, support from friends and family being the most important.¹⁸

However, as anthropologist Hariz Halilovich observed in his works about genocide survivors from Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is an alarming “lack of qualitative research approach on essence, character and consequences of war events on different demographic and gender groups.”¹⁹ Social identities of the survivors, their families and local communities were greatly impacted by the war, but women were also burdened by “forced migrations, direct and indirect violence against them and their families.”²⁰ As Halilovich pointed out, the destruction of local communities was achieved through the destruction of family units and consequently, the breaking of social ties. The Muslim war widows, as “wives of martyrs—*šehidi*,” were also under public scrutiny because (religious) communities expected them to serve as moral and religious role models who would publicly mourn during religious rituals and commemorative events. Such a position underlines the widows’ identity in function of the loss of their partner, both symbolically but also economically as their social benefits, and often survival, depend on family pensions allocated by the state.

Ambiguities of the state—widow relationship are much more present in the case of Serbia, where the political and legal status of widows of individuals participating in war outside of the Yugoslav People’s Army formations is

16 See for example the works of E. Helms, D. Žarković, H. Touquet, R. Jambrešić-Kirin, M. Hughson, A. Miškovska Kajevska, S. Jansen.

17 Iris Sarajlić Vuković, Giuseppe Valeriani, Dolores Britvic, Nikolina Jovanovic and Richard Mollica, “Marital Loss, Gender and Their Association with Mental Health and Physical Health Outcomes in Bosnian Refugees: Lesson Reminder in a Time of War,” *Rivista di psichiatria* 59 (2024): 127–137.

18 Miro Klarić, Tanja Francisković, Branka Klarić, Martina Kresić, Jasna Grković, Ines Diminić Lisica, and Aleksandra Stevanović, “Social Support and PTSD Symptoms in War-Traumatized Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” *Psychiatria Danubina* 20, no. 4 (2008): 466–473.

19 Hariz Halilovich, “Sveprisutna odsutnost nestalih u genocidu: ratne udovice i obitelji bez očeva u bosanskohercegovačkoj dijaspori,” *Migracijske i etnicke teme* 35, no. 3 (2019): 277–295.

20 Halilovich, “Sveprisutna odsutnost nestalih u genocidu.”

not recognized in the local jurisdiction. Moreover, the negative role Serbia had in wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with the fact that it was defeated, rendered the presence of war widows undesirable in the public sphere. The social struggles of war widows in Serbia, especially of those who were also refugees on top of losing their partners, are thoroughly analyzed in Bobić and Dragišić Labaš' book *On Widows or on a Social Injustice*.²¹ Care for family members, coupled with an inability to access the job market because of a lack of societal support consequently led to their increased "social vulnerability, poverty and social exclusion."²²

Our research relies on the same perspective of gender studies, as we also analyze the "special form of social inequality, originating from feminization of widowhood."²³ Moreover, as "the articulation and management of grief [in wartime] [i]s gendered,"²⁴ supposing major self-control and stoicism as a patriotic response to bereavement, how did that behavioral matrix change in the postwar period?

Widowhood per se carries emotional, social and economic challenges; however, war widows are generally in a rather different situation, not only because of their possible ideological exploitation or financial support from the state, but also because of their much younger age. Therefore, their social capital and cultural standing can provide significant impact on the collective memory and official commemorative practices, and consequently on other spheres of public life.

There are three levels of analysis that we have observed: the relationship between a widow and the nation in which she lives/d, the dynamics within the widows' immediate social groups such as family, friends and the local community and finally, the alterations in the widows' own identity and behavior. We have tried to grasp the plurality of voices and responses to war, possible disillusionment with the political regime(s) and, in particular, the transnational dimension of war widowhood and attitudes toward the war.

Methodology

Establishing contact with the research participants, specifically the widows of Croatian veterans from the Homeland War (WCVHW further in the text),

21 Bobić and Dragišić Labaš, *O udovicama*.

22 Bobić and Dragišić Labaš, *O udovicama*.

23 Bobić and Dragišić Labaš, *O udovicama*.

24 Noakes, "Gender, Grief, and Bereavement."

would be extremely challenging without the assistance of individuals who have previously interacted with them directly. Initially, we attempted to reach out to them through official email addresses associated with various WCVHW associations, as well as their official Facebook pages. While we did receive some initial responses, further communication either did not progress or we received no responses. Subsequently, we made the decision to seek the help of experts who have been involved in their daily lives to facilitate contact.

To address the issue of establishing contact with the WCVHW in a more professional and clear manner, we enlisted the assistance of Igor Salopek. Salopek, a psychiatry specialist at the General Hospital in Karlovac, is also the head of therapy groups organized for the WCVHW population as part of a project focused on providing psychosocial support and assistance. With Salopek's guidance, we were able to connect with members of the WCVHW association from Karlovac and conduct interviews with them.

During these interviews, it became evident that one of the main reasons for our previous unsuccessful attempts to establish contact without the intervention of someone they trusted was the significant loss of trust in their environment over the past few decades. Additionally, the widows expressed dissatisfaction with the research approach thus far, which primarily involved impersonal email surveys that did not prioritize direct communication.

This depersonalized approach to their experience of trauma and life circumstances was deemed unfavorable and off-putting to them. It was during the course of our ongoing research that we discovered these two factors to be the primary barriers to establishing effective communication with the WCVHW.

Therefore, it was crucial for us to acknowledge and address these concerns in order to foster successful and meaningful engagement with the research participants. By taking the initiative to have personal conversations with the WCVHW, rather than solely relying on impersonal surveys, we aim to create a more empathetic and supportive environment that respects their experiences and perspectives.

Moving forward, we recognize the importance of building a foundation of trust and rapport with the WCVHW to ensure that their voices are heard. Through our collaboration with Salopek and other experts involved in their daily lives, we are committed to establishing a respectful and meaningful dialogue with the widows of Croatian veterans of the Homeland War.

Due to the limited number of participants from the WCVHW who were willing to participate in interviews, we sought assistance from a sector within the Ministry of Croatian Veterans. However, unfortunately, we

did not receive a response to our request for aid from this sector. In the meantime, we were successful in establishing contact with the WCVHW association based in Rijeka.

In our ongoing efforts to secure an adequate number of research participants, we reached out to Ante Nazor, the director of the Croatian Memorial and Documentation Center of the Homeland War, who is actively involved in the study of Homeland War-related issues. Recognizing the importance of our research, Nazor facilitated our connection with Nedjeljka Balog, a representative of the Union of Widows' Associations of Croatia.

With Balog's assistance, we were able to establish effective communication with members of multiple WCVHW associations. Balog first personally contacted them via email, introducing our research and including us in their mailing list. Subsequently, we maintained direct communication with the widows through this approach. This method has proven to be successful in facilitating ongoing engagement and participation from the widows in our research.

With Balog's mediation, we successfully conducted interviews with members of the WCVHW associations from Gospić and Đakovo, who willingly provided written consent to participate in our research. Additionally, WCVHW from Nova Gradište expressed interest in collaborating, but as we had already gathered a satisfactory number of research participants, we did not pursue further cooperation with them. It is important to note that we did not include members of the WCVHW associations from Dalmatia in our research. We strongly suggest including them in the interview process for further investigation on the selected topic.

Context

According to the data of the then Ministry of Family, Veterans' Affairs and Intergenerational Solidarity, 502,678 war veterans participated in the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, 7,609 veterans were killed,²⁵ 1,013 died from causes related to war activities, 1,698 were filed as missing and 57,212 individuals obtained the status of disabled Croatian Homeland War veteran (*Hrvatski ratni vojni invalidi*).²⁶ Another 1,045 veterans who died after the

25 Nada Begić, Mirjana Sanader, and Ozren Žunec, "Ratni veterani u starom Rimu i u današnjoj Hrvatskoj," *Polemos* 10, no. 2 (2007): 11–30.

26 Vlada Republike Hrvatske—Ministarstvo obitelji, branitelja i međugeneracijske solidarnosti, *Nacionalni program psihosocijalne i zdravstvene pomoći sudionicima i stradalnicima*

end of the war obtained the status of a fallen soldier of the Homeland War. Hence, the 2013 report on “National program of psychosocial and health care for the participants and victims of the Homeland War, WWII and returnees from peace missions” established that 9,660 Croatian defenders died as a consequence of war activity.²⁷

A 2003 comparative study by Nataša Ferenčak, Kruno Kardov and Petra Rodik, *Booklet on War Veterans' Entitlements and Welfare Systems* (unpublished, 2003), commissioned by the Ministry of Defenders itself, confirmed that veterans' rights in the country are already quite extensive, putting Croatia ahead of South Korea, Israel, the United Kingdom and Spain. And yet, the process of the reintegration of veterans into society still faces considerable difficulties. Government policies towards the veteran population in the 1990s created dangerous preconditions for their poor integration into Croatian society. Stubbs and Zrinščak argue that the existing aid programs lack evaluation, and that the “system is based on a passive, ‘compensational’ approach” while other scholars have suggested that the welfare system for veterans should shift from mainly remunerative to more integrative ones.²⁸

Thus, even though the protesting veterans refuse to be pinned down as supporters of any particular political party, their organizations do function—in the words of Stubbs and Zrinscak—as “powerful networks exercising political agency on a wide range of political issues,” often expressing their loyalty to conservative right-wing political actors, such as the (central) right-wing HDZ party, which has been the ruling party in Croatia since the proclamation of independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, with the exception of two mandates (totaling eight years). The policies of the 1990s, so beneficial to the veteran population, de facto created a new segment of society whose actions have since frequently coincided with those of the HDZ, regardless of the government in charge.

On the other hand, widows of Croatian war veterans were given little support and, except for financial compensation, much less institutional support. First of all, their legal recognition was prescribed in the 1996 Act on the Rights of Croatian Homeland War Veterans and Their Family Members, in which Article 3 defines family members of the Croatian veteran as “spouse,

iz Domovinskog rata (Zagreb: Vlada Republike Hrvatske—Ministarstvo obitelji, branitelja i međugeneracijske solidarnosti, 2005).

27 Report available at: <https://branitelji.gov.hr/nacionalni-program-psihosocijalne-i-zdravstvene-pomoci/863>.

28 Paul Stubbs and Siniša Zrinščak, “Citizenship and Social Welfare in Croatia: Clientelism and the Limits of ‘Europeanisation,’” *European Politics and Society* 16, no. 3 (2015): 395–410.

children born in and out of wedlock, adopted and stepchildren (direct family members), parents, stepparents and adoptive parents.”²⁹ In addition, they were given the right to health insurance, pension insurance (including family pension), the right to child support, unemployment insurance, the right to work, the right to an apartment, etc. Due to the widows’ relatively young age (much younger compared to peace-time widows) the right to a pension was possible after the age of 40 (for mothers of fallen veterans as well), while for widowed husbands that age was 50 (also for fathers). Here, this difference can be understood from the gender perspective as a sort of “invitation” to widows to leave the labor force (in case they were working) and take care of the children and household, while there is the presumption that the widowed husband would receive (female) help for childcare and continue to work. However, a later law put into force in 2017 adjusted the age of the widowed of both sexes (to 40 years of age) and that of parents (to 50 years of age) as prerequisites for a family pension, although that change was de facto irrelevant in practice because the amendment took place so many years after the end of the war.³⁰

According to the data from the Croatian Pension Insurance Institute (*Hrvatski zavod za mirovinsko osiguranje*) in 2022 15,096 individuals were receiving a family pension (the number does not include only widows), 13 times less than the general population of family pensioners.³¹ On the other hand, 130,996 pensions were issued to the population described in the Act on the Rights of Croatian Homeland War Veterans and Their Family Members, thus making war veterans every tenth pensioner in the Republic of Croatia.³²

Financial benefits provided by the Croatian legislation constitute part of “the social negotiation process about the rights of those who participated

29 *Official Gazette*, NN 108/96.

30 *Narodne novine* [*Official Gazette*], NN 121/2017, https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2017_12_121_2758.html.

31 Milan Dalmacija, “Branitelji su mala, ali imućna skupina umirovljenika: Usporedili smo njihove i ‘obične’ mirovine, razlike su ogromne,” *Mirovina*, November 18, 2023, accessed November 3, 2025, <https://www.mirovina.hr/mirovine/brantelji-su-mala-ali-imucna-skupina-umirovljenika-usporedili-smo-njihove-i-obicne-mirovine-razlike-su-ogromne>; Hrvatski zavod za mirovinsko osiguranje, *Korisnici mirovina prema vrstama i svotama mirovina koji su pravo na mirovinu ostvarili prema zakonu o pravima iz mirovinskog osiguranja djelatnih vojnih osoba, policijskih službenika i ovlaštenih službenih osoba* (Zagreb: Statističke informacije Hrvatskog zavoda za mirovinsko osiguranje, 2023), <https://www.mirovinsko.hr/UserDocsImages/listalice/mediji/2023/02/index.html#106-107/z>.

32 Hrvatski zavod za mirovinsko osiguranje, *Pregled osnovnih podataka o stanju u sustavu mirovinskog osiguranja za studeni 2023* (Zagreb: Statističke informacije Hrvatskog zavoda za mirovinsko osiguranje, 2023), <https://www.mirovinsko.hr/UserDocsImages/statistika/Osnovni-podatci-2023/osnovni-podatci-2023-12-HR.pdf?vel=1155882>.

in war” between the state and various associations of war veterans, parents and widows (ratni veterani). Moreover, a family pension was granted to all widows over 50, regardless of their age at the time of their husband’s death.

While the legislation has changed several times, what stands out is the treatment of the widows who remarried. From the 2012 law reform they were granted a pension even in the event of remarriage;³³ in addition, the Constitutional Court also granted a pension to those who remarried before 2012 (which was *de jure* proscribed by the previous law on veterans). Although such a right was not granted for peace-time widowed partners, the lawmakers asserted that:

There is no sense in forcing women to hide their relationship. If they want to remarry or live in an extramarital relationship, they should do it without fear of losing the pension. We live in twenty-first century, there is supposed to be some civilized progress (emphasis added).³⁴

In addition, policymakers recognized the serious and long-term consequences of war trauma on mental health. The law from 2017 granted the possibility of obtaining the status of veteran fallen in the Homeland War for individuals who, *inter alia*, committed suicide as a “consequence of mental health due to participation in defense of the sovereignty of the Republic of Croatia.”³⁵ The addressed article however set the timeframe of such death

33 C.f. Zakon o pravima hrvatskih branitelja iz Domovinskog rata i članova njihovih obitelji [Act on the Rights of Croatian Homeland War Veterans and Their Family Members], *Narodne novine* [Official Gazette] 108/1996, Članak [Article] 178, https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/1996_12_108_2090.html: (1) Bračni ili izvanbračni drug smrtno stradalog hrvatskog branitelja iz Domovinskog rata, umrloga hrvatskog ratnog vojnog invalida iz Domovinskog rata ili umrlog hrvatskog branitelja iz Domovinskog rata stupanjem u brak ili izvanbračnu zajednicu ne gubi prava iz ovoga Zakona koja su ostvarena priznavanjem statusa člana obitelji smrtno stradalog hrvatskog branitelja iz Domovinskog rata, umrloga hrvatskog ratnog vojnog invalida iz Domovinskog rata ili umrlog hrvatskog branitelja iz Domovinskog rata.

34 Statement by former Minister of veteran affairs Fred Matic; Suzana Barilar, “Nema smisla tjerati žene da taje vezu i boje se opet udati,” *Jutarnji*, May 6, 2012, accessed November 3, 2025, <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/clanak1026532.html-1522200>.

35 Zakon o hrvatskim braniteljima iz Domovinskog rata i članovima njihovih obitelji [Act on Croatian Homeland War Veterans and Their Family Members], *Narodne novine* [Official Gazette] 121/2017, Članak [Article] 6, https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2017_12_121_2758.html.

“until entering into force of legislation”³⁶, while the 2021 law erased the time component among requirements for the status of deceased war veteran.³⁷

The Veterans' Act offers additional medical services in the domain of mental health through the “Program of psychosocial and health support for veteran and victim population,” which is primarily tailored for the veteran population content-wise or when it comes to group therapy. Since 1995, 21 Centers for Psychosocial Help (Centar za psihosocijalnu pomoc) were created in every Croatian region (zupanija) with the aim of organizing psychosocial help as an integrative part of social care for participants and victims of the war. In addition, the National Center for Psychotrauma (Nacionalni centar za psihotraumu) concentrates its work on family counseling; however, it is based and operates in Zagreb only. As the number of war widows is considerably lower than that of war veterans (roughly 50 times smaller), programs aiming to address the bereaved population are rare and there is no follow-up.

Within the program for improving the quality of life in the families of war veterans, implemented from 2008 to 2012, surveys and focus groups were organized with children, widows, spouses and experts dealing with postwar trauma in order to address their needs and problems.³⁸ The study results reflect a temporal distance from the events of the war as the main concern of the focus group of war widows and their children is the issue of children's employment and housing benefits. On the other hand, the interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with how their psychosocial needs were met in general.³⁹

As early as 1993, the Croatian Employment Service (Hrvatski zavod za zaposljavanje) promoted measures for the employment of 1,327 disabled war veterans, spouses and children of killed and missing soldiers and the war veteran population.⁴⁰ In 1998 the Croatian Parliament adopted a national policy of employment and subventions for employment because of the “high unemployment rate, high share of individuals under 30 without any work

36 *Official Gazette*, NN 121/2017.

37 Zakon o izmjenama i dopunama Zakona o hrvatskim braniteljima iz Domovinskog rata i članovima njihovih obitelji [Act on Amendments of the Act on Croatian Homeland War Veterans and Their Family Members], *Narodne novine* [Official Gazette] 84/2021, Članak [Article] 3, https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2021_07_84_1556.html.

38 Anela Nikčević-Milković and Dario Vučenović, *Analiza stanja u sustavu pružanja psihosocijalne pomoći hrvatskih branitelja iz Domovinskog rata i članova njihovih obitelji* (Zagreb: Ministarstvo hrvatskih branitelja, 2017).

39 Nikčević-Milković and Vučenović, *Analiza stanja u sustavu pružanja psihosocijalne pomoći*.

40 Zdenko Babić, “Uloga aktivne politike na tržište rada u Hrvatskoj,” *Financijska teorija i praksa* 27, no. 4 (2003), 547–566.

experience, the high number of demilitarized Croatian defenders.” The first program explicitly addressed spouses of the killed veterans and such policy remained in force until the end of 2007.⁴¹ Subsequent programs in force from 2008 to the present day are implemented, *inter alia*, only for unemployed veterans and children of fallen soldiers, thus indirectly encouraging widows to exercise their rights to obtain a family pension.⁴²

War Widows and the State

The most intense institutionalized practices that concerned war widows were developed during and in the immediate aftermath of the 1991–1995 wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. That included the administrative tasks of status regulations, but also solving housing problems for many of the women, especially those from the most eastern parts of Croatia, which was only fully integrated back to the state in 1998.

Obtaining the status of a war widow for those displaced from their place of origin was not only stressful, but also complicated from the bureaucratic point of view:

I have received a death certificate from the Vukovar municipality in Zagreb [in exile], but then those Vukovarian **** asked me for 3,000 Deutsch marks for a citizenship certificate ... then I went directly to the Chief Army Staff offices where Tolj and Bobetko were. “Do you want some coffee?” “No, just to get it done” ... and then, from that printer came out everything, who made you and why they made you ...⁴³

The housing management was not a systematic campaign but depended on the availability of the former state-owned military flats. Such a situation often “ghettoized” former soldiers and their families, concentrating them in the same building or in purposely built new housing units, where their

41 Full text of decision is published in the *Official Gazette*: NN 112/2007 (October 31, 2007): Odluka o stavljanju izvan snage Prvog programa mjera aktivne politike u zapošljavanju i dopuna i razrada istog Programa te Dodatnih i novih mjera aktivne politike zapošljavanja.

42 The beneficiaries in focus were children of perished veterans, former detainees or missing veterans of the Homeland War, unemployed disabled veterans, unemployed volunteers and members of the Croatian army.

43 U3, interviewed in 2023.

socialization was greatly marked by constantly retelling war events “and talking about negative things.”⁴⁴

Many bereaved families spent years in accommodations for refugees before settling their housing issues and consequently continued to re-live their war experiences with other members of displaced communities. Not only did the war experience shape their social group, but also highlighted the local and regional identities that differentiated them from their new social reality.

In addition, acquiring the status of a war widow was not always straightforward but quite a tortuous road for many widows. Some deaths happened in unclear circumstances and although the status and the pension was granted, “I kept looking for days, months, years to find out, and still I don’t know. I have heard many stories. My husband was for Croatia, but refused to fight in Bosnia, that was not his country”⁴⁵

Similarly, changes in legislation regarding the status of war veterans, and consequently of war widows, impacted the interpretation of rights to social benefits. Particularly striking was the case of a widow whose husband died almost immediately after starting to work for the Croatian Army forces: “instead of condolences that one would expect to receive, I was welcomed with words: ‘If I were in charge, you would have no business being here’.”⁴⁶ Struggles obtaining a pension and other social benefits continued for her over the next nine years, and the case was brought to the Constitutional Court. In that case, the traumatic experience of loss was deepened by the lack of material support. Financial benefits often meant the cessation of state care in other segments and social pressure to be thankful and grateful to the political regime and its institutions: “To give money to a person and let her rot at home at the age of 19, without any psychological support or asking where is that girl [...] I am not blaming anybody in particular, I am blaming the system.”⁴⁷ However, when it comes to commemorating losses and participating in state sponsored anniversaries of the war events, the widows’ associations regularly attend and participate. They collaborate with other associations dealing with the war legacy like veterans’ associations or parents’ associations in paying respect to victims and laying wreaths on those particular occasions. These activities represent central events in the associations’ calendar and in addition to providing continuity to their

44 U7’s child remark, interviewed in 2023.

45 U4, interviewed in 2023.

46 U10, interviewed in 2023.

47 U7, personal interview.

work, also put war widows on the map of memory entrepreneurs. Hence, through the gendered role of mourners, the widows' associations manage to impose their agency and remind the broader society of their particular situation and importance.

War Widows and the Community

While researching the postwar transitions and changes in the gender roles of the war widows in Croatia, it was the *meso*, i.e., community level that stood out as the most important factor in life changes, decision making and the identity processes the widows went through.

All the widows we have interviewed had children under the age of 18 at the time of the death of their husbands and explained that caring for their children became the main motivation of their lives. The trauma affected both the children and their mothers, although they were not always dealing with it together or simultaneously: "Only in 1992 when we moved to Rijeka [my children's fear] surfaced. They slept fully dressed. 'Mum, what if we have to escape again?'"⁴⁸ The children had responsibilities to bear and grew up prematurely: "Unfortunately, my child was never a child. I would have loved it, now I can say it, if he had done some adolescent prank."⁴⁹ Dealing with trauma often reflected in everyday details that they were able to recognize only years after: "In the hotel we were placed with other refugees, we were getting their local food, *minestra* soup and so ... we were not accustomed to it [...] and spaghetti ... In 1997 we moved to the apartment and since then, I have never prepared spaghetti in my life."⁵⁰

In particular, regional differences and whether the widows were displaced or stayed in their previous places of residence proved to be decisive factors in their postwar life experience. Moreover, the relationships between those who came and those who stayed remained complex and diversified: ranging from piety and solidarity to a sense of competition for resources given by the state. Even 30 years after the end of war, regional labels like "Vukovarian" and "Fiuman" women (*Vukovarke*, *Rijecanke*) persisted despite them "being in a way satisfied with this [other] life as well, as I was satisfied with the one in Vukovar."⁵¹

48 U3, personal interview.

49 U10, personal interview.

50 U3, personal interview.

51 U1, interviewed in 2023.

Weaving social networks after the loss of their husbands often went through making contact with other war widows. This perhaps should not be taken as a rule for most of the widows but depends heavily on the sample we have access to.⁵²

Even when women were residing in the same (often rather small) towns they did not know each other from before, due to generational differences, employment situation or other life interests. Many started “frequenting churches more often [in groups], also had some events organized for us and so we met each other ... and also joined the association. We lit candles together, lay wreaths and participated in bowling tournaments all across Croatia.”⁵³ Most of our interviewees underline the importance of sporting events as something that strengthened their social ties and made them feel better. It should be noted that activities not related to the war legacy were also those that our interlocutors spoke about most.

However, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the cancellation of most inter-city gatherings, combined with the (in many cases) advanced age of war widows, put a hold on bowling activities, to the disappointment of previous participants.

The lack of initiatives and the abundance of time caught many widows by surprise and could have negative consequences on their mental health: “they need help today. Those women are 60 [years old] now, their children have moved out, they are alone and cannot cope with that situation. Life has changed, the roles have changed, and they are alone and in denial.”⁵⁴

The issue of mental health was not tackled without difficulties: as explained before, the widows were reluctant to seek help actively and other forms of organization such as mobile stations and group work in safe spaces were not offered on a systematic basis. In Rijeka, nevertheless, a self-help group was formed on the initiative of one of the widows having expertise in psychology and social work. The organizer herself confessed that she “faced the fact of how miserable those widows were ... I say those and it seems as if I was out of it, but I have tried to explain and explained somehow to myself what happened to me ... many of them did not [...] When I got to know them better, I became very sensitive. Until then I was judging them maybe.”⁵⁵

52 All the widows we have interviewed were members of widows' associations at the time of interview.

53 U11, interviewed in 2023.

54 U7, personal interview.

55 U7, personal interview.

The war also greatly affected many members of the war widows' families, in particular their children. We have heard about cases of widows' children still dealing with war traumas, to the extent of having a PTSD diagnosis triggered well after the end of the war and "being obliged to take a handful of pills daily."⁵⁶ Some children also experienced episodes of violent behavior or had serious health problems uncommon for their age.

It was the awareness of different life trajectories, ways of dealing with trauma, family situations and work opportunities that actually became a unifying factor of the war widow community. Moreover, external factors such as the constant observation of their behavior and the judgment of the local community, was a limitation factor for some of the widows to try to overcome the sole identity of "bereaved and grieving wife": "Everybody is watching you, you're always under the scrutiny and lens of the others (pod povecalom)."⁵⁷ Consequently, group solidarity is not only a safe space for communication, but also for the continuation of everyday life interactions with the external social milieu: "We are paying visits to those that are ill, we socialize and go as friends for a coffee or a drink."⁵⁸ Friendship extends to attending weddings or birthdays together, helping out with household tasks in case of need, going on excursions together: "Unfortunately, a common disgrace put us together, but it turned out better than expected, as we do not belong anywhere."⁵⁹

Within the complex emotional states, cultural constraints, and socio-economic circumstances experienced by war widows, a singular testimony emerged as a notable example of courage and resistance to imposed societal norms. Confronted by numerous challenges and societal pressures, one widow made the decision to forge her own path and remarry. At the age of 21, her husband perished during Operation Storm, leaving her alone with their two-year-old daughter. Reflecting on that moment, she describes how she lost her sense of reality. During her most difficult times, her family provided her with support; however, she simultaneously felt the pressure of societal expectations which were particularly pronounced in the small community where she continues to reside today. In a conversation, she remarked, "The problem is the small environment. You go out for coffee, and everyone thinks, 'She has gotten over it.'"⁶⁰ She added, "I remember in 1995, I went shopping, and all eyes were on me. I wore black mourning for a year and a half, and when

56 U12, interviewed in 2023.

57 U9, interviewed in 2023.

58 U11, personal interview.

59 U10, personal interview.

60 U13, interviewed in 2023.

I first put on dark blue jeans, I looked odd to myself.” As the years passed, a growing desire for change began to emerge within her life. She started working in 1998, which brought financial stability. In the same year, she met her current husband at her workplace, with whom she subsequently had children. They married in 2005, although that period was fraught with challenges, partially due to the conservative environment and partially due to the legal system at the time, which regulated the rights of widows of war veterans from the Homeland War. As she noted, “When I got married, I lost all my rights, but I still wanted to marry.” However, following changes in the law, widows who remarried regained their rights. At the conclusion of the interview, she emphasized, “They only invite you to sad events.” This statement suggests that her experiences and pain are recognized solely through the lens of tragedy, while concurrently highlighting her frustration over the lack of support and understanding during happier moments, underscoring the tendency of society to focus on sorrow rather than on life and the process of recovery.

War Widows Individually

We have analyzed the impact of state policies on the lives of widows in postwar transitions, as well as their socialization within the local community and in family surroundings. But how do they feel? What are their wishes and thoughts about the future? We have tried to speak about widows’ physical and mental health, their aspirations and emotions.

Many women do not recall the immediate period after the death of their husband: “After two years when I recovered a bit, I had a feeling that I overslept, lived in a dream, in an ugly dream from which I have woken up ... My life seems shorter because I cannot say I lived during those two years, because it wasn’t a life, but survival.”⁶¹

What made their experience particularly traumatic was the lack of argument or a fight that separated them from their loved one: “when it is a first love, it lasts and lasts and now I already have [...] years and I am not [emotionally] settled. It is our big problem, because we did not separate voluntarily, we did not have time to argue and fight.”⁶² Widows often go to the cemetery to “inform” their husbands about the important events in their lives, but also to release stress: “When I feel low, I used to go to his grave.

61 U4, personal interview.

62 U7, personal interview.

I just say, I have to fight with Z* [...] then a woman approached me asking if I was feeling OK, saying, 'You shouted also last time at the cemetery'."⁶³

As already demonstrated in a myriad of scholarly studies, the incidence of oncological diseases is significantly higher than in the general population, and our interviewees were no exception: "We suffer from all that—the thyroid stops working properly, and I also say a stupidoid (*ode stitnjaca, ja kazem ode i glupnjaca*)."⁶⁴

There is a strong impression that many women would have chosen to act differently if given a chance, but no one expressed remorse about their life choices: "Sometimes I just need to be at peace with myself, with no one else around. When my family leaves the house, I clean everything and feel nice alone."⁶⁵

Still their dreams and future plans are mostly related to reuniting with their husbands and daydreaming about another life that never became a reality.

Conclusion

The research has shown that the emotional experiences of loss among the widows of Croatian veterans of the Homeland War were profoundly influenced by the political and social changes that occurred after the war. The circumstances surrounding the war, along with shifts in societal and political frameworks post-conflict, significantly affected how these widows perceive their emotional traumas. Through an analysis of personal and collective memories, a conflict was identified between personal emotions and public expectations, further complicating their social integration. Specifically, there exists a dissonance between what the widows feel as individuals (personal emotional experience) and what society has expected and continues to expect from them (public expectations). This conflict has hindered their process of reintegration into society and the formation of social bonds. It was observed that faced with numerous challenges following their loss, the widows have lost trust in the state system and the broader community, which in turn has impacted their ability to access necessary resources. Our initial efforts to connect with the widows through official channels did not yield the anticipated results. Instead, it became necessary to find a trusted intermediary—an individual who could serve as a bridge between them and us. A personal recommendation from

63 U9, personal interview.

64 U9, personal interview.

65 U11, personal interview.

this intermediary facilitated the establishment of contact and fostered a more open line of communication. Although legislative changes have somewhat contributed to improving their status, traditional gender expectations associated with the roles of mothers and wives have continued to restrict their active participation in everyday life. These limitations often led to feelings of guilt and social isolation as the widows struggled to simultaneously cope with the loss of a loved one and assume familial responsibilities. Nonetheless, through participation in commemorative events and collaboration with other organizations, war widows have managed to maintain their visibility and highlight the significance of their experiences within a broader social context. By analyzing the relevant literature concerning the issue of war widows from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, it has been determined that local communities and certain non-governmental organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina provide some psychosocial support in overcoming trauma. However, the primary role in this process is still played by family members and friends. On the other hand, the position of war widows in Serbia is primarily determined by the political stigmatization of the country, as well as the lack of a legal framework, which significantly complicates their daily lives and access to resources. Despite the different living circumstances of war widows in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia, there is a common connection: the lack of qualitative research on their life circumstances that would allow for a deeper understanding of their subjective perceptions of widowhood. Such research is crucial for gaining insight into the specificities of war widows' everyday lives and would facilitate the identification of their needs, contributing to the improvement of existing support systems.

About the Authors

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Conclusion

Marta Verginella

This book offers a historiographical examination of war and postwar trauma, interwoven with an analysis of the violence that afflicted the northeast Adriatic during the twentieth century—shaped by two world wars and the conflicts following the dissolution of Yugoslavia. As its area of research, the book takes a region that is only marginally present in European historical syntheses, and often in a flawed manner; this applies even to those specifically focused on postwar periods. The total nature of the military conflicts related in this book is determined by the extension of the violence that affected the civil populace alongside the military one, and thus the female population. The latter is herein the subject of study, one that is often left out or treated marginally within historical studies on postwar Europe.

Using various sources—first and foremost, psychiatric and ego documents, but also oral accounts, newspaper articles, archival sources, literary and audiovisual sources—the book shines a light on the psychological consequences of both World Wars and during the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, the emotional price of wartime devastation and violence, and the fear of the latter from a gendered perspective. In this, the first three chapters lean especially on the conceptualization and epistemological approaches that have taken hold in the last two decades in the ever-expanding field of trauma studies. Taking into account the psychological consequences of the recurring experiences of violence or the fear of it from the perspective of individuals and communities is the authors' way of identifying violent practices, as well as wartime and postwar trauma, as experienced by women in northeastern Italy, Slovenia, Austria, Croatia and Bosnia in the twentieth century, regardless of their national, ethnic or religious identities. In a similar manner, this also means finding out how these identities were verbalized and found their way into various narratives, both collective and individual, private and institutional, and in the literary and media landscapes. Furthermore, it is about how the treatment of wartime and postwar trauma changed over

time, or rather how social-historical changes influenced their definition and added to their political and usage in the media.

The book consists of chapters that rely on psychiatric sources to present and analyze wartime and postwar trauma. Some of these sources have thus for the first time been subjected to systemic historiographical study. From them, the value of clinical material for the historiography of psychological consequences of wartime and postwar violence is evident; the same holds true for the difficult nature of their historiographic usage. This difficulty arises primarily from the whitewashing and control exhibited by the psychiatrists in recounting their patients' psychological issues, as well as from actual medical diagnostics and the way they define and categorize emotional turmoil and anxiety caused by wartime and postwar periods.

The psychiatric culture of all the areas analyzed by Marta Verginella, Ana Cergol Paradiž and Francesco Toncich—be they Trieste and Gorizia, former parts of the Habsburg Empire later annexed to Italy, or Ljubljana as part of the Yugoslav state—is rooted in the physiological understanding of psychological issues. As such, this specific psychiatric culture was not ready to accept wartime and postwar traumatism until the end of WWII. The neuroses of war were indeed recognized in veterans and soldiers following WWI. This was not widespread in the women who named wartime and postwar violence, fear of dying or the estrangement of loved ones as the reasons for their psychological illness. An in-depth and comparative analysis of psychiatric files in the researched area shows that individual diagnoses were strongly conditioned by the concepts of male and female identity, but also influenced by the sociopolitical context and the expectations imposed on social/gender roles by postwar society.

Jelena Seferović and Ana Ljubojević dive into the latter in their analysis of the emotional experiences and trauma experienced by the widows of Croatian veterans. Their research points at the conflict between personal emotions and public expectations, at the discrepancy between what widows feel as individuals and what is expected of them by society, in particular in the political arena. Traditional expectations of female roles as mothers and wives did not just exert a restrictive pull on the autonomous functioning of women, but also conditioned the verbalization of trauma.

Manca G. Renko points at the variety of ways trauma was registered. She accomplishes this based on the analysis of autobiographical narrations and shines a light on how analyzing testimony regarding traumatic experiences requires different skills, such as contextualization, discourse analysis and historiographic caution. Even environments that saw the rise of revolutionary tendencies following WWII, such as Slovenia, understood the world

thoroughly through a Christian lens, be it in cities or the countryside. This supported a misogynistic understanding of the human body and showed little understanding towards recognizing and understanding psychological trauma as experienced by women in the wartime and postwar periods.

In all the military conflicts and postwar periods treated in this book, women were also postwar “bounties” and victims of sexual violence as practiced by every side involved in the wars. Rapes experienced by women were a source of individual and collective trauma; the authorities understood them as the collateral damage of defeat, to be forgotten as soon as possible. Wartime and postwar rapes long remained taboo, be it due to the fear the affected women had of stigmatization and alienation, or due to the decision of postwar authorities that examining and sanctioning rape was not a political priority. The cases documented in this book from Friuli after 1918, and Austria following 1945, are telling. The shame experienced by raped women prevented them from testifying. In the rare events where they did speak out with courage, they were silenced. It bears mentioning that the raped women were ready to speak about the rapes in greater number only after the Yugoslav wars had ended, where between 20,000 and 50,000 women had endured sexual assault in Bosnia alone. Their voices were raised after a favorable international legal-political framework for sanctioning rape had been established. Teresa Bertilotti and Dagmar Wernitznig posit that doing away with “civilizational forgetfulness” contributed to the late historicization of sexual assault even when taking into account both World Wars and their aftermaths.

The research present in this book confirms that mapping out wartime and postwar violence in relation to gender presents a challenge, but one that is far from impossible. This challenge is due to missing documentation or perhaps the alleged ambivalence of statistics towards gender, as confirmed by the panoramic research conducted by Urška Strle on the topic of forced displacement in the northeastern Adriatic region. Her contribution shines a light on the meaning of the transnational treatises on mass forced displacements. The latter had, until now, only entered the national memory framework as isolated traumatic episodes of single ethno-national communities. Not only the transnational, but also the longitudinal view on forced displacements, which featured a greater number of women, allows for a higher level of understanding of the traumatic demographic consequences inside a region than would otherwise be possible in a nationally segmented historiography.

Gorazd Bajc employs a quantitative treatise on postwar violence aimed at women, seeking to ascertain its percentage in the global violence tally. This also means capturing the long-lasting nature of violence caused by

both total conflicts, violence that continued after their respective ends. “Transitional uncertainty,” as evident from several chapters in this book, was not just a consequence of the extended frame of physical violence, arrests and extrajudicial executions, but also of the tense economic and social relations that contributed to the loss of identity anchor points.

Geopolitical changes after both World Wars, especially in the Julian March and Carinthia, provided a reason for existential uncertainty on an individual and community level. Matteo Perissinotto posits that the rising suicide rate among females following WWI in Trieste threads back to the aforementioned factors, or rather the precarious political, social and economic situation the city shared with several other former Habsburg cities even though it had been included in a new, Italian framework. The treatise at hand, much like the other chapters of the book, confirms the necessity of employing a transnational approach in researching multiethnic and border areas in the northeastern Adriatic. The approach is a useful one, even when focusing on the consequences of nationalist-leaning film narratives. These films promote the propaganda of the victimization of one side and the brutalization of the other by utilizing female wartime and postwar suffering, as posited by Dunja Jelenković, making violence exclusive to one ethnic or political group, and granting victim status to the other. Another one of the aims of this book worth mentioning is to show that all communities living in the region subjected to research were entwined in the wartime and postwar events, be it as victims of violence or its perpetrators. As such, they were the carriers of trauma, and oftentimes transferred this to younger generations. Their historiography aims not merely to offer an innovative and, in some aspects, pioneering historiographic contribution to the history of women, border and transitional studies, but to provide a move away from the political utilization of the history of violence and trauma in the northeastern Adriatic.

About the Author

Marta Verginella is a Full Professor of History of the Nineteenth Century and Theory of History at the University of Ljubljana. Her research interests include border and national studies, gender studies, transnational history, memories studies and the political use of history in the North Adriatic area.

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