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THE SLOVENES IN AUSTRIA*

In this paper I will discuss the present-day situation of a small ethnic group in Austria, the Slovenes in Carinthia, the southernmost Austrian province. I will refer to statistics in order to demonstrate certain tendencies in their development, and I will explain demographic data by making reference to historical and social processes. But I will also analyze the situation on the basis of research on questions of bilingualism and identity development which we are presently conducting at our department at Klagenfurt University. Finally, I will venture a prognosis about the future development of this ethnic group, which is based on the data and interpretations that will be presented in this paper.

The Politics of Identity Splitting - An Introduction

Let me quote statistics first. In the 1981 Report of the Austrian National Census (pp. 56-7), we may read about Carinthia:

Total population	536,179
German speaking	513,864
Croatian and German	200
Croatian	240
Hungarian and German	139
Hungarian	58
Slovene and German	9,398
Slovene	5,343
Czech and German	33
Czech	6
"Windisch" and German	1,939
"Windisch"	415
Other	4,544

The categories employed in these statistics are rather bewildering. They reflect a hard political fight over ethnic identity in general and Slovene identity in particular. The question: "Who exactly is a Slovene?" has been an issue for more than sixty years. One of the most cunning strategies used by the German nationalists in Carinthia was the splitting of the ethnic group into "Slovenes" and "Windisch". This was achieved by borrowing an old dialect word, the word "Windisch," which referred to persons and things of Slovene and/or Slavic origin. The old dialect word was then proposed as a common denominator of

* Original: English

all those Carinthians with Slovene background who were interested in assimilation, as compared with "Slovenes" who were said to be hostile towards the German-speaking majority of Carinthia. By and by, the pan-Germanic nationalists managed to make successful politics with the word "Windisch." They suggested that "Windisch" was synonymous with "good-willing," "patriotic," "loyal to Carinthia," whereas "Slovene," according to their strategic interpretation, was synonymous with "dissident," "treacherous," "hostile to Carinthia," "striving for political union with Yugoslavia." They managed to turn "Windisch" into the word referring to all those Carinthians who spoke Slovene but wanted to be German. The next step in this political strategy was to develop a theory that "Windisch" was a language in its own right that was more closely related to German than to Slovene. Although this theory has never found any support by any serious linguist, it has been accepted by a large number of people who from then on have preferred to call themselves and their language "Windisch" rather than Slovene," thus showing the politically powerful German nationalists their willingness to assimilate even though they could not speak German. By adopting the category "Windisch" they could be German without speaking German. When the Nazis made their census in 1939, they were the first to use this category in their official statistics. Since then, the word has not disappeared and still serves its purpose of confusing people, especially those of the Slovene background, who, over the years, have begun to believe in the reality of the ideological construct. Although a lot of people who go on using this word nowadays do not mean any political harm, and although the Austrian census definitely does not want to minimize the figures of the Slovene ethnic group, the consequence of employing this category is in fact harmful to Slovene identity and solidarity.

As may be seen from the statistics quoted above, the Austrian national Census does adopt the category, thus splitting the total number of the Slovene-speaking people. Only if one adds up all the sub-categories (Slovene and German, Slovene, "Windisch and German," "Windisch"), does one arrive at the total number of people using Slovene in their daily life. It amounts to 17,095 people.

However, the category "Windisch" is more than a gimmick to disguise the identity of an ethnic group. Over the years it has turned out to be a most useful device for the encouragement of people to give up their Slovene heritage altogether for the sake of German. People who declare themselves "Windisch" tend to provide for their children an education in German-language schools or in German classes of bilingual schools, so that the second generation of the people who have declared themselves "Windisch" have very little opportunity of learning Slovene properly and tend to forget all about their ethnic origin.

I do not suggest here that "Windisch" is the cause for large-scale assimilation of Carinthian Slovenes, but it is a very efficient tool for fostering such assimilation. The various causes for assimilation will be discussed later on in this paper.

Some more statistical data:

Percentage of Slovenes out of the total population of Carinthia from 1846 to 1981

Year	Number	Percentage
1846	103,000	30.0%
1880	85,051	26.6%
1890	84,667	25.5%
1900	75,136	22.3%
1910	66,463	18.3%
1923	34,650	10.0%
1934	24,292	6.6%
1939	43,179	10.4%
1951	42,095	8.9%
1961	24,911	5.1%
1971	20,972	4.0%
1981	17,095	3.2%

Source: *Slownische Jahrbücher* 1985, hrsg. von Valentin SIMA, Vladimir WAKOUNIG and Peter WIESER, Drava Verlag, Klagenfurt/Celovec, 1984, p. 196

These figures show the steadily diminishing number of Carinthian Slovenes. Since there has never been any mass exodus nor major disease nor any giant catastrophe that has stamped out large numbers of Carinthian Slovenes (I do not ignore the deportation of more than one thousand Slovenes by the Hitler-regime, which I will refer to later on in this paper), and since, as far as I know, Slovene couples have not refrained from the pleasures of married - or unmarried - life, there must be some other explanation for the dwindling away of this ethnic group. It has already been suggested that assimilation has, for more than a century, diminished the number of the Carinthian Slovenes. Their total number would have remained fairly stable or would even have increased if it had not been for this strong pressure forcing them to assimilate among the German-speaking majority. With this pressure, their tendency to remain faithful to their native ethnic group, their native culture and their native language has dramatically decreased: from 30% of the total population to only 3%. Statistics do not tell us why such a change has occurred. Therefore, it will be necessary to consult a discipline that aims at laying bare the cause for such a change. It is historical research which has thrown some light on the social background of this phenomenon of assimilation.

From Solidarity Towards Hierarchy - The Changing Relations of the Two Ethnic Groups in Carinthia

Let me briefly summarize the historical research done on the question of Carinthian Slovenes. I will focus only on the events that help to explain this tendency of assimilation among Slovenes.

The chief cause of assimilation is the low position of Slovenes in the class system and the low social prestige of their group. The Slovenes had settled in Carinthia long before any German settler turned up in that area. However, their country - present-

day Carinthia - was integrated into Bavaria. Christian missionaries and German settlers were called into the country to manifest its links with Bavaria. In this Medieval time, Slovenes lived peacefully with their German neighbours. As a matter of fact, when the feudal lords struggled for survival of their system towards the end of the Middle Ages, Slovene and German peasants fought side by side against their overlords. However, the restoration of the feudal system and the enforced reintroduction of Catholicism reduced Slovene to the status of a language for agricultural labourers, while German - being the language of administration - was linked with the power structure of the system and spoken in administrative centers, that is, in the urban areas.

Nothing much has changed since then. The rural population, being Catholic and conservative, has continued using Slovene as their chief means of communication while the upper class and the middle class have preferred German, thus demonstrating their identification with the ruling system.

The Revolution of 1848 brought about a dramatic change when the German-speaking population began to emphasize their domination politically. Ironically, they did this at the moment when the equality of national groups had officially been established.

As long as German- and Slovene-speaking Carinthians had suffered from feudal exploitation, they had fought their overlords in solidarity. But with the lack of a common enemy, the German-Speaking part of the population tried to establish a new social hierarchy with themselves at the top and the Slovene-speaking population at the bottom of the social pyramid. Belonging to the upper class or the middle class was not only tied up with property, income and education but with language use. You could only be part of it when you spoke German. Your original ethnic background was not so important as long as you decided on German as the language to be used in public.

From that time on, social mobility for members of the Slovene community was a matter of language shift. They could climb the ladder of social progress and enter the petite bourgeoisie if they were willing to abandon the culture and language of their origin.

For the very top of the Carinthian society, the power elite and the big landowners, any attempt of the Slovene community at ethnic emancipation was a welcome opportunity to divert the political ambitions of the German-speaking petite bourgeoisie: their propaganda blamed Slovene emancipation for breaking the rules of the "natural order;" the "natural order" being, according to their propaganda, the social superiority of the German-speaking community. They explained that any attempt to overthrow this order was a threat to the petite bourgeoisie's privileges. Thus they succeeded in blinding the petite bourgeoisie to their real privileges and made them believe that they themselves were members of the ruling class. The invention of the "dangerous Slovene" and of the "Slovene threat" was a most useful ideology to stabilize the existing inequalities and social injustices. People began to believe in one single cause for their social problems: this cause, they were led to believe, was the

self-conscious and socially ambitious Slovene population. Instead of realizing the real causes for their social disadvantages they now turned against Slovene emancipation.

In this paper there is little room for a detailed description of this conflict. Therefore we can only shed light on the most prominent turning-points in the constant struggle between the two ethnic, or rather, language groups. One of them was the end of the First World War and the Peace Treaty of St. Germain, when the American President Wilson tried to reorganize Europe according to his concept of clear and distinct ethnic borders. The old Austro-Hungarian Empire was broken up into a number of small states, present-day Austria being one of them. The southern part of Carinthia, the very territory where most of the Slovene-speaking community had settled, was, of course, a particularly delicate matter to negotiate on. Although the war had ended in 1918, there were still battles going on in that part of the country as late as 1919: a self-recruited private army of war veterans, loyal to Austria, fought the regular South Slavic army (later the Yugoslav army) in order to defend the southernmost part of Carinthia against being taken away from the new Austrian State. This private army was defeated by the South Slavic army. But their fight had created a national mythology which is still celebrated today, despite the fact that historical research has found that it played a very small role in the St. Germain negotiations. The only reason why, after all, the southernmost part of Carinthia with its Slovene community remained Austrian was the result of a plebiscite under international auspices. It ended in a 60% : 40% victory for Austria, which means that the majority of Slovenes voted for Austria.

Nevertheless, although Southern Carinthia had remained Austrian thanks to the vote of Slovenes, the politically powerful German nationalists now favoured a political strategy of scape-goatism and revenge. The Slovene community, they said, was a constant threat to the integrity of the Carinthian territory. Only if they could be Germanized, the Pan-Germans proclaimed, would the frontier between Austria and Yugoslavia become stabilized. As long as they remained faithful to their Slovene traditions and language, there would be a constant threat of losing this territory to Yugoslavia, they proclaimed.

In fact, from that time on it became even more difficult for Carinthian Slovenes to keep up their cultural and linguistic identity. One of the chief mechanisms forcing them to a minority position was the introduction of the confession principle. In order to obtain basic rights such as schooling in their language they had to declare publicly their Slovene identity. (This confession principle - let me say this now - has ever since been a most efficient tool in the hands of the German-speaking majority for discouraging people from Slovene loyalties.

When the Nazis gained power in Germany in 1933 they developed strategic plans for the occupation of the Balkan peninsula. Carinthia, especially the southern part along the Yugoslav border, played a vital part in these plans although at that time the Nazi regime had not yet occupied Austria. The *Deutsche Grezlandbank* began to buy land in Southern Carinthia in order to settle in the area reliable people from Northern Germany. It was

their job to provide stable and reliable bridge-heads for future military operations of the German army.

Soon after the Nazis had annexed Austria in 1938 and had made it part of the Third Reich, they openly declared they wanted to turn Southern Carinthia into a German country. This strategy was not worked out by the Berlin Government, but by the local authorities of Carinthian origin. For the Germanization of Carinthia they had several strategies at hand: offensive propaganda ("Kärntner, sprich deutsch!"), German schooling, open discrimination, deportation of stubborn Slovenes unwilling to change their national identity, mass evacuation of Slovenes and resettlement of this area by people of German origin, and the concentration camp for anybody who resisted this policy of ethnic extermination. In 1942 there were 1,217 Carinthian Slovenes in German camps.

No wonder the Carinthian Slovenes were among the first Austrians to realize that the Nazi regime had to be fought with all possible means. A comparatively large number joined the Yugoslav partisans in order to fight the German army on their home territory.

This partisan activity was quite successful on a local scale. However, the German army retaliated upon their every successful stroke with drastic measures against all those civilians who were suspected of having given the least support to the partisans. Among those most severely punished by the German army again were the Slovene families. In some cases all the members of a family were shot dead with machine guns. However, when, as a consequence of such measures, people were reluctant to go on supporting the partisans, they had to fear partisan revenge.

When the war was over and the German army defeated, the Yugoslav army marched into Southern Carinthia and into Klagenfurt. An unknown number of Carinthians who had collaborated with the Nazis and inflicted harm on the Slovene population or refused support to the partisans were deported to Yugoslavia. Some were executed on the spot. Two weeks later the British army took over the Yugoslav-occupied zone of Southern Carinthia and remained in military charge of this area until 1955, the Year of Austria's State Treaty.

The years of Nazi terror, partisan war and postwar deportations have not yet been completely analyzed by historical research. There is still insufficient knowledge about what exactly happened to whom and why and with what consequences. However, these years have left deep marks on the collective memory of all Carinthians, no matter which side they took. For the Slovenes the deportations were a manifestation of what they had always been afraid of: the pan-Germanic wish to exterminate the Slovenes altogether. They have ever since feared that this wish has not disappeared with the end of the Hitler regime, but is still present in the hidden political plans of the "new right" politics of our day. For many German-speaking Carinthians it was a shock that the partisans wanted to unite Southern Carinthia with Yugoslavia, thus correcting the results of the 1920 plebiscite. They were, and some still are, unable to see that any victory over fascism, be it in the name of Austria or Yugoslavia, would be all for the good of the resurrection of Austria. These people have been panic-

stricken ever since by the fear of losing Southern Carinthia to Yugoslavia. On the one hand, this has developed into an irrational phobia with many people in Carinthia, despite all state treaties and international guarantees for the present-day borders of Carinthia. On the other hand, it has become a demagogic tool in the hands of some neo-nationalist politicians of the right used to manipulate people by elaborating irrational fears and promising simple solutions and protective measures by a policy of Slovene discrimination. The chief of the Carinthian right-wing FPO, Jörg Haider, and the leaders of the right-wing organization Kärntner Heimatdienst are experts at exploiting this irrational fear of people for their politics, for example when they insist on separating Slovene and German children at school.

Altogether, this fear of losing Southern Carinthia is an ever-present nightmare for many Carinthians, just as the fear of being expelled from one's beloved native country is for those Carinthians who still insist on their Slovene heritage. These nightmares are ever-present in the subconscious without ever being critically analyzed in public. They are banned from rational discourse by defense-mechanisms. According to the logic of the unconscious, this is the reason why they become more and more powerful in the irrational fantasies of either group, thus preventing fruitful encounters and intercultural understanding.

However, let us return to complete our historical flashback. Modern Austria, that is, the Second Austrian Republic, has restored the rights of the Slovene-speaking population. One of the most important decisions was to make bilingual schools obligatory for any child living in the area of Southern Carinthia. However, when the Austrian State Treaty was signed in 1955, this territorial principle was given up and the principle of confessing ethnicity was introduced. Instead of giving all the inhabitants of an area the protection of bilingual and bicultural areas, the law grants these rights only to those people who confess to Slovene identity.

As I have mentioned above, this has turned out to be the greatest problem for the Slovene ethnic policy. More than a hundred years of hidden and open discrimination against the Slovene community by German nationalists in Carinthia, but especially the traumatic experience during the years of Nazi terror, have gradually undermined the Slovene self-consciousness and self-respect. More and more members of this ethnic group have changed sides and declared themselves German for understandable reasons. Some did so because they wanted to succeed in urban society; others, because they were afraid of group pressure in small rural communities dominated by the German-speaking intelligentsia; others were pressed by their employers; and still others did it for the sake of their children who in this way might have better chances in life than they themselves had had; and quite a number of those who found no jobs in their native places and became commuters gradually lost the links with their traditions. Anyway, when forced to confess national identity, most of these people would say German rather than Slovene for fear of losing status, income, job, property or respect in their community.

Often enough these fears may be sheer fantasy, but for some they are quite real. At any rate, whether fantasy or real, they have

proven to be a powerful obstacle for people to own up to their Slovene identity.

The Austrian State Treaty's article 7 defines Austria's obligations towards her ethnic minorities. According to it, Slovene-speaking Austrians (and members of other ethnic minority groups) enjoy the same rights as all other Austrians, including the right to organisations, meetings and media in their own language. They are also entitled to elementary and secondary schools in their own language and to the use of their own language at court in their residential districts. In these districts bilingual topographic names are to be used on official signposts.

The official Austrian policy has been to secure all these rights for Carinthian Slovenes. Formally, this policy has been successful. However, close inspection reveals that although Austria is trying to be faithful to its international obligations and is striving seriously to protect minority rights, the number of Slovenes is still diminishing. The present-day situation of the Slovene community is still hazardous despite government protection and good will. I will try to explain why this is so in the next chapter of this paper.

Identification with the Aggressor and Public Silence

The problems of the Slovene community in present-day Carinthia stem from the unresolved conflicts of the past; these conflicts, as we have seen, were socio-economic and socio-cultural. The way these conflicts have been dealt with by the majority - suppression rather than fair discourse - makes the solution of present-day problems so difficult. One of the consequences of suppression is the fact that for the majority of Carinthian Slovenes it is hard to develop much of a collective and personal identity. As a matter of fact, their long experience of intolerance and open hostility on the part of a powerful pan-Germanic lobby has made lots of them change their identity. As I have demonstrated with the help of statistics and pointed out by portraying their historical social role as underdogs, they have only had one possibility for better life chances: assimilation.

Those who chose assimilation as a way out of social deprivation had to pay a high price for their social advancement. They had to come to terms with this break in their biography. This may sound rather harmless, but in fact, changing one's collective identity is one of the most dramatic experiences of a person's life when the social setting in which such an identity-shifting takes place is controversial. Leaving one's community for personal benefit and taking sides with the former opponent involves deep feelings of wrong-doing and moral evil. You are considered a traitor and, what is even worse, you consider yourself a traitor. Entering the other community is also precarious since you come from the opponent's side. You are looked down upon with suspicion at the first sign that gives you away as not being exactly the same as all the others in your new community. If you have problems adopting the life-style and language of your new community you are not likely to be accepted at all. So you have to be careful not to give yourself away as a former member of the other

community. You do not want to be hated and despised by the members of your new community, you want to be accepted as one of them. Therefore, you suppress everything that might give away your former identity and try to be one of them. Even more so, you begin to share their hate and disgust of the other ethnic group, and consequently, you begin to hate all of your own deep-rooted habits of behaviour and speech dating back to your childhood and youth in the other community. You want to erase even the slightest memory of the time before the change. But childhood is something you cannot get rid of. Therefore it becomes your lifetime business to suppress all traces of this childhood identity. Yet all your efforts are in vain. Over and over again the old memories disturb you and must be warded off. They keep you busy fighting the old self. But you fight not only the old self within yourself. You fight also others who remind you of your old self. By fighting others you fight your own childhood. This perpetual defence against the old identity consumes a lot of your psychic energy and leaves little of it for communicative life.

This is the very Carinthian tragedy. The Slovene community has not been strong enough to resist the dynamic challenge of German claims towards economic and social supremacy. It has accepted the role of the socially inferior group. Many individuals from the Slovene community who were not satisfied with this role did not act politically; instead of joining a Slovene organization to fight for collective emancipation of the whole ethnic group they tried to find an individual solution for a structural problem by identifying with the aggressor and becoming aggressors themselves. It is not surprising that some of the leaders of anti-Slovene organizations have been Slovenes themselves.

I am not now trying to whitewash German nationalism in Carinthia. On the contrary, I am laying bare a mechanism which was put into force by German nationalists and has been exploited by them ever since. This mechanism is called "identification with the aggressor" and is considered one of the most important defence mechanisms by psychoanalysis. Political psychology points out that this mechanism of identification with the aggressor is most probably responsible for the strange phenomenon that aggressive politics of mass destruction such as fascism or nuclear armament find mass support: when people are confronted with an overwhelmingly powerful and dangerous enemy that threatens to kill them, they panic and identify with what is going to destroy them.

This strange mechanism of identification with the aggressor also accounts for what is happening with the Slovene language in Carinthia. People who shift their identity have to give up their first language in order to make the shift perfect. As a matter of fact, it is very hard to get rid of one's childhood language. People who give up speaking Slovene in favour of German are branded on the tongue. Their accent and intonation and often enough their grammar give them away. Slovene as a first language has usually left a deep mark on the basis of articulation that does not disappear simply because you want it to disappear. So when you speak German everybody will notice that German is not your mother tongue, but that Slovene is. The only chance you have to hide your linguistic origin is not to speak at all, at least not in public.

A lot of people do not speak in public for this very reason. They keep their mouths shut for fear of giving themselves away as Slovenes, no matter what they say. As a compensation they develop the ideology that speaking is private. In public you should listen rather than talk. Often enough this goes so far that people develop a split identity of private speakers of Slovene and public listeners of German with a private Slovene (or "Windisch") and a public German identity. Let me remind you again that this is not due to private pathology of individuals but an outcome of a hundred years of anti-Slovene ideology.

Sparks of Hope

The most significant factor in changing this situation for the better is an improvement of the socio-economic situation of the Slovene ethnic group. As long as they are dependent on employers who insist on their political obedience, which usually means that they are expected not to participate in Slovene politics nor to enroll their children in Slovene classes, they have no chance of emancipation. However, there are some new industrial plants and companies in Slovene hands that do business in Southern Carinthia and provide ample opportunity for their employees to engage in Slovene public life without the fear of getting the sack. Quite naturally, these companies are the target of German nationalist propaganda, although they bring work to a traditionally poor area. The nationalists seem to fear that once Carinthian Slovenes cannot be threatened with unemployment they will become unruly.

Second, the Austrian policy of providing better Slovene education for the young generation - against violent protests of German nationalists, a Slovene grammar school was opened in Klagenfurt/Celovec - has brought about very promising results: a new generation of Slovene intellectuals with political consciousness and commitment to the cause of Slovene emancipation is now better prepared than any of their ancestors to stand their ground in the conflict with a diehard conservative German nationalist lobby.

Third, regionalism, a new political movement in Europe that counters the idea of national states is backing up the resurrection of ethnic identities that for a long time have been submerged by the priority of the State. Nowadays there is a growing tendency among ethnic groups to look beyond state borders and to rediscover ethnic and linguistic affinities with people who live in the same region but are citizens of another state. This is not quite easy in the case of Slovenes in Carinthia and Yugoslavia because the respective states subscribe to very different political systems. However, in spite of ideological differences of their respective systems, there is a growing cultural exchange in the Slovene region across the borders.

Finally, I think it is worth mentioning that large-scale social change is rather in favour of multiculturalism, thus giving the incipient movement of Slovene emancipation in Carinthia a fair chance. As long as the capitalist society had a strong interest in improving production and distribution by streamlining the communication system there was an economic reason for the abolition of minority languages. But with the high technology

revolution this interest has become obsolete, although it still exists as an ideology in the hearts and minds of people. The new means of high technology communication rely on man-machine communication and allow a lot of diversity in personal communication. So even in terms of a profit-oriented economy the demand for language unification is no longer functional for the system.

Final Remarks

So far this paper has taken great pains to underline the dangerous role of German nationalism. However, it would be wrong to infer from this analysis an overall domination of this outdated ideology. Austria's historical mission since the days of the old Empire has consisted of a multicultural and multilingual concept of State. The Austrian socialists, who have been the major political force in the country for the last fifteen years, were the first political party to formulate this multicultural concept as early as 1899. It has guided their politics ever since. Even in such difficult times as the year 1918, when nationalism was at its climax in Carinthia, the representatives of the Carinthian Socialist Party publicly declared that they opposed any national suppression and persecution. Although nowadays there are differences of opinion over how certain issues concerning Slovene-speaking Carinthians should be settled, they feel obliged to the traditions of Austria and of their party which means that they try to negotiate difficult questions rather than dictate a national solution which favours one group.

Summing up the main arguments of my paper, I would like to emphasize the danger for the Slovene-speaking community in Carinthia which stems from the historical conflicts with German nationalism and public lethargy to open discussion of the remaining sentiments. The ideology of anti-Slovenism has poisoned people's minds for a long time. It will take a lot of patient discussion and education to free people's minds from prejudice. Mere recitations of the errors and disasters of past history will not be enough for the Carinthian Slovenes to regain their identity. It will be of more importance for Slovene emancipation to secure them better economic chances. But only if these material improvements go hand in hand with a liberal treatment of issues such as bilingual schooling will there be a good chance for this ethnic group not only to survive but to grow in self-consciousness and strength.