

Oto Luthar
Possessing the Past:
The Problem of Historical Representation in the
Process of Reinventing Democracy in Eastern Europe
The Case of Slovenia

"Each of us promenades his thought, like a monkey on a leash. When you read, you always have two such monkeys: your own and one belonging to someone else. Or, even worse, a monkey and a hyena. Now, consider what you will feed them. For a hyena does not eat the same thing as a monkey ..."

Milorad Pavić
Dictionary of the Khazars

Introduction

During my recent perusal of the collection of articles, *Probing the Limits of Representation*, edited by Saul Friedlander and discovery of the forum "Representing the Holocaust"¹, I noticed with some surprise how many similarities can be drawn between the Holocaust debate on the one hand and discussions on "rewriting national history projects" which are unfolding in almost of all the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe.

The reinterpretation of the events of World War II, the renewed exploration of the relationship between resistance movements and collaboration units, along with the need to critically analyze post-war revolutionary changes; all these factors not only force us to reevaluate neo-Marxist and positivist conceptual models but also call for a new understanding of our attitude toward the historical truth.

¹ I would like to thank friends and colleagues for their advice and comments on this article; in particular Erica Johnson and Aleš Debeljak for their translation and detailed readings. I would also like to thank Tomaž Mastnak who has been constructively critical. *The Postmodern History Reader* (Routledge, London-New York 1997) edited by Keith Jenkins prompted me to compare the representation of the Holocaust with the reconstruction of national history in Eastern European countries after 1990. *The Reader*, together with other key texts in the contemporary theory of historiography drawn from *History and Theory* and *Past and Present*, offers a radical perspective not to be found elsewhere in historiographic writings. The study of the history of historiography after 1970 should become much easier from this vantage point.

On top of it, we are compelled to reflect on the development of local historiographies after a long period with no continuous discussion of this kind. This reflection is all the more urgent in light of the ever growing scope of theoretical debate in the West about the status of historical interpretation. This debate emerges from 'the linguistic turn' which challenged "the classical concept of mediation and...the ethical foundation for the practice of history by problematizing...the very notion of the past as a recuperable object of study"². If this reflection is not done in a certain time period by East European historiographers and philosophers, our colleagues from the West will move in to fill up the empty niche. The result is likely to be no different from what can be observed in the interpretations of recent political developments in this part of Europe dominated as they were by the one-dimensional Western objectification of these tumultuous events.

I presented the partial results of the analysis of the Yugoslav historiographical discussion at the international congress in Spain in 1993 while the revised version of my paper was published in 1995³. Given that I will be bringing a comprehensive research about historiographic debate taking place in Belgrade, Ljubljana and Zagreb to an end next year and given the enormous material and nuanced differences between the various national discussions, I shall refrain from addressing this topic in the present text. However, I would like to draw attention to three essential characteristics of neo-Marxist historiography which are encountered in the historiographies of all socialist countries: first, the Aesopian language of more ambitious reconstructions of twentieth century history; second, the adjustment of the terminology to conform to respective systemic theorists (in the case of Yugoslavia, the systemic theory was the theory of principles of self-management as developed by leading ideologist in late sixties and seventies, Edvard Kardelj), and; third, the ideological periodisation of human history (prehistoric communities, slave-ownership, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, communism) which was grounded in Marxist economic determinism. In Yugoslavia, historiographic questions were until the mid-sixties led by Bogo Grafenauer and Fran Zwitter in Ljubljana and by Mirjana Gross in Zagreb, while the beginnings of deconstructive history may be detected in

² Gabrielle Spiegel "History and Postmodernism", in: Keith Jenkins (ed.) *The Postmodern History Reader* (Routledge, London-New York 1997), pp. 262-263. Some of the other texts relevant for the present discussion may be found in the aforementioned Reader.

³ Carlos Barros (ed.), *Historia a Debate. Historie a Debat. History under Debate*. Coruna 1995, pp. 279-289.

Belgrade and Zagreb⁴. Sarajevo-based historian Branislav Djurdjev has, in the period between the late sixties and the mid-eighties, produced some of the most characteristic neo-Marxist definitions of “the beginnings of new Marxist conceptions of history”⁵. By the end of the eighties and in the early nineties this debate shifted toward the north of this former shared land and the differences between existing orbits of debate have deepened. On the other hand, we must also keep in mind surprising similarity in methodologies used to advance the reinvention of national myths. In the field of history, the discussion flourished the most in Slovenia and resulted in the introduction of two study courses (Theory of History and Philosophy of History) offered by the history departments at both Ljubljana and Maribor Universities. The question, however, should be framed in a comprehensive analysis of methodological streams within post-war Yugoslav historiography.

In the following paragraphs, I will address two main topics. Within a discussion of the power and powerlessness of historical representation and its objectivity, I will address: 1) recent discursive types of rewriting history specific to East European countries, and; 2) problems of representation of resistance versus collaboration which are, as noted above, similar to the problems of representation of Holocaust. Above all, I would like to emphasise that reinvention of tradition which may be traced in almost all historiographies of former socialist countries that supports the claim that “the representation of past ‘reality’ is closely connected to problems that lie outside the sphere of purely scholarly activity...”. It supports the argument that “...problems of historical representation are politically and socially significant in the individual and communal search for legitimation...” and that “...the past...is granted its own legitimation by the authority of the present.”⁶

It seems that the newly established nation-states have to go through an intensive period of reconstruction of past reality. It also appears that, not unlike the Holocaust, the reconstruction of national history which goes hand in hand with the reconstitution of national identity is such “a boundary event”

⁴ I borrowed the term “deconstructive” history from Alan Munslow, the UK editor of a new historical journal *Rethinking History*. Munslow discusses three methodological currents in contemporary writing about the past, including what he calls the constructionist approach.

⁵ The profile of Djurdjev’s construction of “Beginnings of a New Marxist Conception of history” which may be monitored between 1983 and 1993 was outlined in my “The Possibilities of a Theory of Modern Historiography in Changing (Eastern) Europe: The Case of Yugoslavia” published in *History under Debate* (Coruna 1995), pp. 282-286.

⁶ Robert Braun, “The Holocaust and the Problems of Representation”, in: Keith Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader* (Routledge, London-New York 1997), p. 421.

in which “lived reality” has to be “...mediated through an intense moral, political, and intellectual perception...” In this case, scholars are particularly concerned with “the public use of history” and “...with substituting the absent past with a historical text. “In the realm of politics”, as Robert Braun puts it, “...this means attending to questions of identity, communal and individual searches for legitimation, and culture understood as power.”⁷

In reconsidering certain events that occurred during World War II, particularly the episode of resistance versus collaboration, what is quickly revealed is the clear intention to secure an exclusive interpretation which in turn once again demonstrates the way historical representation can be instrumentalized. What is at issue is not merely the standard mode of operations like the one in language games in general. Instead, it is a mode of emplotment that leads to the one-dimensional political reconstruction of our understanding of identity, community, and culture. This attitude does not facilitate human solidarity. Rather, it gives birth to a construction of such political import that it no longer welcomes free and open encounters. This type of reconstruction is intimately linked to a creation of the kind of meaning and an audience which is emphatically not the result of negotiation between a number of different social forces.

Before entering the discussion of specific aspects of the Slovenian case, I would like to stress some theoretical foundations which helped me design my “objectifications” in reconstructing the discourse about projects whose aim is to rewrite history. To begin with, I must refer to White’s comment on Friedlander in which White also discusses epistemological and ethical questions “...raised by the rise of such representations like Nazism”. White is further wondering whether ethical modes of emplotment upon which this representation is based are really so unacceptable as it is believed. He concludes by saying: “

“Obviously, considered as accounts of events already established as facts, ‘competing narratives’ can be assessed, criticised, and ranked on the basis of their fidelity to the factual record, their comprehensiveness, and the coherence of whatever arguments they may contain. But narrative accounts do not consist only of factual statements (singular existential propositions) and arguments; they consist as well of poetic and rhetorical elements by which what would otherwise be a list of facts is transformed into a story.”⁸

⁷ Ibid, p. 423.

⁸ Hayden White, “Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth”, in: Keith Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader* (Routledge, London-New York 1997), p. 393.

Thus, White has, at least to some extent, softened the position which had confused Friedlander. Specifically, his position was that “language as such imposes on the historical narrative a limited choice of rhetorical forms, implying specific emplotments, explicative models, and ideological stances.” White, however, remains convinced that “these unavoidable choices determine the specificity of various interpretations of historical events”. We concur with White in this regard. After all, we do not know if “there is no ‘objective’ outside criterion to establish that one particular is more true than another...”⁹

The only claim lending itself to certainty in representing a given event is that the representation of such a boundary event like collaboration with the Axis Forces during World War II also becomes, to paraphrase Hans Kellner’s sceptical words, a representation of the process of “coming to know the collaboration”. As we understand this term, it refers first and foremost to the so-called “secondary referent...which historians employ to insert ...different events within general interpretations of the respective historical processes.” According to White, this level differs from “a primary referent” because of the truthfulness of its meanings “...conveyed by specific narrative structures depends on the interpretive tropological tastes which prevail in the scientific and social community.”¹⁰

In a general frame of “history and the post-modern debate”, I am inspired by Gabrielle Spiegel’s theoretical ‘middle ground’ and “‘mixed’ reading attentive to the differential linguistic practices and registers of past languages”¹¹. Equally convincing is Spiegel’s emphasis on the text’s social site which makes it possible to argue “...that the power and meaning of any given set of representations derives in large part from its social context and its relations to the social and political networks in which it is elaborated.”¹² In addition, I agree with her saying that “text, as material embodiments of situated language-use, reflect in their very materiality the inseparability of material and discursive practices and the need to preserve a sense of their

⁹ Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation: The Holocaust Debate*, in “Editors’ Introduction” to chapter “History and Theory”, *The Postmodern History Reader* (Routledge, London-New York 1997), p. 384.

¹⁰ Wulf Kansteiner “From Exception to Exemplum: New Approaches to Nazism and the ‘Final Solution’”, in: Keith Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader* (Routledge, London-New York 1997), p. 413.

¹¹ Gabrielle Spiegel, “History and Postmodernism”, in: Keith Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader* (Routledge, London-New York 1997), p. 268

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 266.

mutual implication and interdependence in the production of meaning.¹³ Spiegel is also very convincing in her elaboration of the use of deconstructive strategies which have proven "...to be powerful tools of analysis in uncovering and dismantling the ways in which texts perform or elaborate ideological mystification of which it is proper to be suspicious and which texts themselves inevitably betray through their fracturing of meaning, once we have learned to read them deconstructively.¹⁴ Indeed, deconstruction not only helps us to "heed the silences within language, to search out the unsaid..." but is also very good tool for searching out what has actually been said. This is especially true in the highly contaminated ideological discourse which was characteristic of neo-Marxist objectifications in the sixties and seventies as well as in the process of rewriting history in the nineties; namely, in the wake of the breakdown of the socialist order in which history has emerge anew as a basis for moral choice.

Again, we must face the traditional or reconstructionist slogan claiming that *historia magistra vitae*. Once again, we must face an ideological approach which is acutely aware that the reinterpretation of the past contains great power. Thus, in this framework, the question "What is History?" goes hand in hand with a question "Why is History?". History with a mission is again gaining credibility and so is a reconstructionist searching for and a description of arguments for the formation or destruction of empires, states, ethnic and political groups and individuals. It is therefore no surprise that the slogan of history as the teacher of life is frequently heard while only very rarely do we hear the claim that history may be liberating, reduce prejudices and help people to become and remain autonomous. Or, if we put it in Munslow's terms, there is almost no interest in history as a form of knowledge, almost no operationalisations of themes related to the connection between history and ideology, power and its social, institutional, and material manifestations. And there are almost no "...wider implications of the debate over history's epistemological status but a clear domination of modernist scientific humanist paradigm with its investment in rationality, objectivity, truth, proof, progress, the possibility of an ethical life, as well as certainty of representation."¹⁵

Therefore, the discussion needs to be started about "the nostalgic reassessment of modernity" or, as Jenkins would put it, we have to rethink all stages of upper case historiography which uses the past for "...a trajec-

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 267.

¹⁵ Alun Munslow, "Editorial", *Rethinking History*, p. 3.

tory into a different future.”¹⁶ We have to analyze historiography which seeks the ultimate frame of description. This is then a historiography which formally denies that it is a historian who tries to determine what the past “really” looks like but which is otherwise very much aware that “...normal history orders the past for the sake of authority and therefore power.”¹⁷ Finally, we need to expose those who attempt to establish “a single interpretive coding of the past (because) otherwise the arbitrary nature of the produced history becomes so evident that it loses its intended natural effect and thus its privileged position as having represented the past as it actually was.”¹⁸

In problematizing the relationship between the resistance movement and collaboration which is not unlike the debate on Holocaust, on the other hand, it is prudent to prevent when possible the development of a dilemma similar to the one raised by Norman Geras who in 1945 stated:

“If there is no truth, there is no injustice...if truth is wholly relativised or internalised to particular discourses or language games...final vocabulary, framework of instrumental success, culturally specific set of beliefs or practices of justification, there is no justice...The victims and protestors of any putative injustice are deprived of their last and often best weapon, that of telling what really happened. They can only tell their story, which is something else. Morally and politically, therefore, anything goes.”¹⁹

Applied to the case of Slovenia, this would seem to suggest that it is possible to advance even such a radical interpretation of the collaboration (at first neighbourhood militias, then homeguard units²⁰) with Italian (1941-43) and German (1943-45) occupation forces which argues that “the resistance to the revolutionary terror was...morally justified and did not, despite a liaison with the occupier, betray or jeopardize the vital interests of the Slovenian nation”²¹.

¹⁶ Keith Jenkins, “Introduction: On Being Open about our Closures”, in: Keith Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader* (Routledge, London-New York 1997), p. 15.

¹⁷ Robert Berkhofer, “The Challenge of Poetic to (Normal) Historical Practice”, *Poetics Today*, 9, 2, 1988, pp. 435-52. Quoted in Keith Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader* (Routledge, London-New York 1997). p. 20.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Norman Geras, “Language, Truth and Justice”, *New left Review*, No. 209, 1995, pp. 110-35. Quoted in Jenkins, loc. cit. p. 23.

²⁰ The homeguard (“domobranci” in the Slovenian language), established in 1944, was made up of different Slovenian combat groups which collaborated with the occupying forces rather than resisting them. Homeguard leaders claimed that they were fighting against “the communist revolution” even though it was, until 1943, impossible to speak of the communist takeover of the various resistance groups which as early as April 1941 formed an anti-fascist coalition named The Liberation Front.

²¹ Janez Zdešar, “Razmišljanje o nekaterih ključnih dogajanjih v letih 1941-1945” [Reflexions on Some Key Events in 1941-1945], *Dogajanja in dognanja* [Events and Findings], pp. 56-64.

This position is in many ways congruent with a professed politics of waiting and a concomitant loyalty to the occupying forces²² which was articulated in keeping with the instructions of the Yugoslav government-in-exile. This politics has hardly differed from the activities of many other political groups in then-occupied Europe. Perhaps the most important distinction and at the same time a problem for Slovenian anti-revolutionary camp may be viewed in that "...the centrist political leaders in Slovenia did not remain only passive, but have very early on begun to collaborate with the occupying forces in a political (for example, consulting councils) and in a military sense (Italian-sponsored Militia voluntaria anticommunista)".²³

This key argument was not acknowledged among the revisionist writers. They typically fail to take into account the combined Italian, German and Hungarian occupation of Slovenian lands as well as the fact that the ensuing conflict established a frontline between the aggressors and the defenders and that the existence of Slovenian nation was at stake in the conflict²⁴. To the contrary. The militant behaviour of the Catholic camp which has, to a large degree, made it possible for communist ideas to gain ground, has been interpreted by revisionists as an answer to "the communist terror... (and)... communist subversive activism."²⁵ Revisionist even speak of a latent civil war which was believed to have reached its "acute" phase during the occupation.²⁶

²² Bojan Godeša: *Slovenski izobraženci med okupatorji, OF in protirevolucionarnim taborom* [Slovenian Intellectuals between the Occupying Forces, the Liberation Front and the Anti-Revolutionary Camp], Cankarjeva založba, Ljubljana 1995, p. 200.

²³ Doroteja Lešnik & Gregor Tomc: *Rdeče in črno* [Red and Black], ZPS, Ljubljana 1955, p. 127.

²⁴ Draga Ahačič, *Osvobodilna ali državljanska vojna?* [The Liberation War or the Civil War?] Cankarjeva založba, Ljubljana 1992, pp. 15. This book is paradigmatic for the initial stages of the revisionist debate. Not unlike most responses to the revisionist rewriting of the critical stage in the Slovenian national history, this book was penned by a non-historian. Professional historians themselves have at first remained cautiously silent. Some of those historians that have possessed the most comprehensive knowledge about the said period have kept their distance largely because their past writings tended to over-emphasize certain aspects of the war, while cautiously remaining silent about the others. Here again a typical atavistic attitude characterised by a lack of self-reflexivity, can be detected. Particularly historians were known for this kind of symptomatic behaviour under the socialist regime.

²⁵ Draga Ahačič: *Osvobodilna ali državljanska vojna?* [The Liberation War or the Civil War?], Cankarjeva založba, Ljubljana 1992, p. 14.

²⁶ Contemporary revisionism also fails to acknowledge the diplomatic and ideological offensive conducted between 1924-1937 by Vatican whose politics was close to that of Slovenia. At least five circular letters by the Pope Pius XI. have during the said period called for a struggle against "godless communism and prohibited a collaboration with communists even for humanitarian purposes." (Ahačič, loc.cit., pp. 29). That

The advocates of this position are not concerned with the fact that the Catholic political right during the nineteen-thirties, in its fear of communism, promulgated the re-Catholisation of Slovenian public and private life. In addition, such writers are uneasy about the right-wing demands to establish a Christian schools and to pass a concordate before the World War II, just as they neglect right-wing claims to a larger influence in the Academy of Arts and Sciences, the university, and in the economic life.

It must be said, of course, that the communist movement was excessively doctrinaire in nature and extremely contaminated by the stalinist exclusivism of proletarian revolution. This is, however, hardly a reason for a contemporary revisionism to put the so-called "functional collaboration" on equal footing with the resistance movement and goes on to simply claim that the representatives of the latter are responsible for "the fratricidal civil war".

Ever growing visibility of these and similar interpretations one can witness in recent years overlooks a distinctly pro-Nazi character of Slovenian homeguard. Passivity of historians, alas, is a contributing factor in this regard. Pro-Nazi character is manifest in certain typical elements, including anti-Semitism and the cult of the leader. In addition, the homeguard's discourse is replete with slogans with key words such as "order", "work", "combat", "ancestry", "people", "fatherland", etc. These were used in Nazi discourse, too. There is a difference, though. Slovenian homeguard has, instead of glorifying the leader²⁷, emphasized the commitment to the Christian faith and belief in God. Where Nacism employed the word "fuehrer", Slovenian homeguard typically used "God" (for example, slogans like "For

the Pope's proclamations were taken seriously by Slovenian clerics is revealed in the discourse used by then-bishop Gregorij Rožman. He had in 1939 attempted to convince the Slovenian Catholic youth that it has to heed the Pope's words even in cases when they do not expressly refer to the Pope's infallibility (ibid, p. 30). Slovenian Catholicism has gone as far as propagating the ideas of *Ecclesia militans* and *Ecclesia triumphans* /military and triumphant Church/ which are exemplified by Christ-the Dominator. By doing so, the Catholic Church in Slovenia has lost support of its most creative and European-inspired group of intellectuals and cultural writers. Among them, the most prominent was Edvard Kocbek (1904-1981), a poet, essayist and fiction writer, the editor of "Dejanje" (The Action), one of the best Slovenian journals between the two wars. Kocbek was a member of the Liberation Front and after the World War II assumed a position of a minister in the Yugoslav government only to have later fallen out of favor with the authorities because of his critical attitude toward the regime. Kocbek was subsequently forced into "internal exile".

²⁷ The formal leader of Slovenian homeguard units, general Leon Rupnik, made efforts to fill this role by having imitated fuehrer's public performance, attributed great importance to propaganda and supported mass rallies of his sympathisers.

the faith-God-home and ancestry” and “Mother-Country-God”, etc.) God figured even in an official greeting of the homeguard!

As far as “damned Jews” are concerned, classic patterns were manifest: “Jews are out to enslave the world”²⁸. Following the establishment of Slovenian homeguard, its leader Leon Rupnik also spoke according to this precept. He liked to tell his listeners that “the partisans were drugged and bought by Jews in order to make partisans destroy the Slovenian nation while on the side of the Slovenian homeguard stands a German soldier fighting against world-wide Jewry.”²⁹ Rupnik’s collaborators have as late as 1945 claimed that they “honestly fight side by side with Germany against the greatest enemy of humanity – communism”, or, “Jewish communism”.³⁰

In shaping their arguments, the defenders of collaboration of course fail to acknowledge this anti-Semite current in Slovenian homeguard units, and time and again invoke the anti-revolutionary, i.e. anti-communist nature of the movement while they interpret the post-World War II killings of homeguard members more as a moral than a legal precedent³¹. Above all, they intentionally omit the fact that homeguard units in 1944 in the heart of Ljubljana publicly swore to fight side by side with Germans against partisans as well as against any common enemy, that is, against the allied forces. The collaboration is repeatedly presented as a marginal segment of “civil war”. They meticulously avoid the use of the term “resistance”, replacing it instead with “revolutionary terror” which forced the collaborators to accept weapons from the occupiers³². Responsibility for the victims of World War

²⁸ Consider the following example: “...most committed executors of Jews orders are communism and liberal democracy. Both ideas were created by Jews for the non-Jewish nations. Jewry attempts to bring Slovenian nation, too, to its knees by fostering moral decay and impoverishment...” (quoted in Tomc & Lešnik, loc.cit., pp. 123-4)

²⁹ Tomc & Lešnik, loc. cit., p. 124.

³⁰ See, for example, Ljerko Urbančič in “Na okope” [To the Barricades], published in the journal “Slovensko domobranstvo” [Slovenian Homeguard], No. 15. Quoted in Tomc & Lešnik, loc. cit.

³¹ The estimated number of homeguard members and their sympathizers who were, in various parts of Slovenia, killed by the victors without or on the basis of deeply flawed due process immediately following the end of the World War II, is placed between 10,000 and 15,000. Regardless of differences in the estimated number of victims, contemporary Slovenian historians are of one mind: this was a case of unjustifiable physical destruction of political opponents. Revisionist interpretation, on the other hand, continues to either ignore or dismiss the victims of Nazism and Fascism as well as those of the homeguard’s terror. The same dismissally or ignorance is extended to the 60,000 Slovenian inmates of concentration camps, 10,000 of whom perished in the crematoriums of Buchenwald, Dachau, etc.

³² Janez Zdešar, loc.cit., p. 62

II on Slovenian, and, indirectly, on Yugoslavian soil as well must thus be borne not by the Axis Forces and their collaborators but by the communists who have “split” and “divided” Slovenians, Croats, Bosnians, Serbs, etc. “The total armed resistance” was, according to the revisionist writers, meaningless and incommensurable with the final accomplishment. One of the most baffling arguments used by revisionists to demonstrate the totalitarian character of the resistance movement was the frequency of elections in various representative bodies of the Liberation Front which was established on April 27, 1941, three weeks after the Axis’s attack on Yugoslavia³³.

Like the majority of revisionists, Slovenian writers in this vein believe in objectified historical truth. Yet they condemn the call for historical interpretation and debate as historical and moral relativism³⁴.

Here, I would like to explain the above-mentioned problems in a larger context. First, I will attempt to discuss the rewriting of the collaboration through certain crucial methodological questions which have also occurred in the Holocaust debate. Second, I will analyze this process in a larger Yugoslav frame.

In order to introduce a factual reconstruction, I will make use of the language of partisan movies. I will try to refer to the most typical pop textuality in former Yugoslavia³⁵ in order to reveal the entire process of contextualisation. Or, to use Kellner’s terms again, I will try to represent the way of

³³ First elections were conducted in 1942 and then each subsequent year.

³⁴ Janez Zdešar, loc.cit, p. 63.

³⁵ I do not use the descriptions of some scenes from this film only as a metaphorical material. Instead, I consider them to be an additional type of objectification of the past. I support the argument that the literary works of art (in this regard the script is understood as a literary genre, literature in pictures, as it were) may also introduce modes of objectification of the past. Let me demonstrate this by drawing on two books I happened upon by accident: Saul Bellow’s *More Die of Heartbreak* and Paul Theroux’s *The Great Railway Bazaar*. I found out how Bellow has suffered on his visit to Kyoto in the early seventies when his Japanese hosts took him to a local strip-tease show. He described his feelings through the feelings of his main character (“Dr. Ben Crader, the well-known botanist”) in his *More Die of Heartbreaks* published a decade following his visit. The book is, of course, a work of fiction yet it reveals more about Bellow’s emotional state than Theroux’s travel writing, a declared work of non-fiction, in which he tries to convince us how Bellow was supposed to have been enthusiastic about Kyoto only after having visited “girlie show”. Bellow gives us an account of the visit in his book’s Penguin edition of 1987, pages 106-111 while Theroux offers “real information” in the 28th chapter of his book entitled “Hikari (Sunshine) supper train to Kyoto.” Quoted in the Slovenian translation of the book, Ljubljana 1997, p. 338.

“coming to know” the resistance and collaboration in a broader cultural context.

I chose to discuss the most symbolically loaded scenes drawn from the film, *Battle on the River Neretva*, the most ambitious project of its kind conceived in the entire history of Yugoslav cinematography. Its ambitions are well-evidenced by both the fact that the cost for its production was never an issue and that it featured a number of internationally famous actors and other creative minds: Yul Bruner, Orson Welles, Franco Nero, Hardy Krueger³⁶, etc. The production of this film consumed enormous sums of money as well as the lives of several extras who did not manage to avoid the pyro-technical effects used on the set or drowned in the half-frozen river Neretva.

One of the most typical and dramatic scene shows us the Italian captain, captain Riva was his name, who was – like all the characters in this specific genre – taken aback when he got shot. He had had a hunch that he would be shot and perhaps he even saw it coming. Yet, nevertheless, he looked overwhelmed by surprise when it happened as if he was trying to say: “Not now...”. That emotion lasted only an instant. The next moment, we could perceive a new horror in his watery eyes, watery for tears of self-pity and regret ran down his cheeks, regret that at that moment the partisans were just barely hanging on. But presently we realize the real reason for his tears. He sees fire consuming his lover who has tossed a molotov cocktail at a nearby tank. Yet because the tank was so close, she is blinded by the flames of burning metal and runs screaming around the battlefield... The end.

For both of them. They never saw the battle charge or heard the songs of the wounded cheering the fighters along the mountain pass. They missed the real action. Danica, Ivan and Novak, along side other brave fighters of both sexes, advancing up the pass, making mince mint of the German and *ustasha* units and, in tears (yes, tears again), listening to the echo of their songs. The songs and Martin’s battle orders: “Fire! Fuoco!”. And again: “Fire” and “Fuoco!”, the orders shouted this time to his fellow soldier who would

³⁶ The movie was shot in 1973 and represents the pinnacle of Yugoslav production of war movies dealing with the resistance, i.e. the partisan movement. It is a movie of spectacle which was supported by the entire Yugoslav leadership with Tito at its head. The project which gobbled up unheard of amounts of money, was a huge hit in all socialist countries, particularly in China. The project was not overshadowed even by a subsequent movie with Richard Burton as Tito. To the contrary, this homage to Josip Broz was one of the biggest flops in the history of national cinematography that not even names such as Irene Papas and Nikos Theodorakis could save from its doomed fate.

be killed in the next instant. In his mind's eye, Martin held the image of the dying Capitan Riva, the new artillery man, who had, following the battle of the previous day, deserted his Italian compatriots and joined the partisans. On top of it, just before his death Riva had given Martin a letter for his wife... aaah!... and now he was overcome with emotions. The Slovenian, had, up to this very moment, represented the idealized image which southerners have about Slovenians, the embodiment of understatement. Yet now he had revealed his heart.

What perfectly executed stereotypes! Simple and effective. The Italian remains Italian – a sentimental charmer, always on the lookout for an attractive woman, and an idealist to boot; the Montenegrin – stubborn and madly courageous; the Croat – a sceptic, yet loyal to his best friend, a Serb, who leads him in an almost paternal fashion... This relationship was particularly well conceived.

The film, taking each of the Yugoslav nationalities as reflected in the specific attitude of each and frequently even as reflected in that which each nationality lacks, carries the message of the post-World War II period. Time and again, the emphasis on particularities and differences is complemented with the solution in the form of general notions of humanity and brotherhood. In a characteristic manner, the opposite side is equally well-drawn. Germans are destructively principled. Italians boastfully display their inefficiency while the most pernicious representation focuses on the *ustasha* and *chetniks*. The demonization is accomplished entirely through the manipulation of emotions. It is enough to recall the grand scene of Danica's and Novak's demise. In itself, it guaranteed that the Neretva River would remain famous not only because of the fourth German offensive in the Balkans but also because of the film "The Battle of the Neretva" from which, as it may be surmised, the above references are drawn.

For the present essay, these stereotypes and references are more valid than the actual history of the event. Our perceptions of the history of World War II are rooted in such interpretations. The film affects us powerfully regardless of the fact that we are keenly aware of the ideologically contaminated character of the work. Nevertheless, the basic facts are immediately recognizable. All the aspects of the historical events – the resistance, the collaboration, the infighting – appear to be possible. Moreover, historians needn't answer to the relativism of sceptics or respond to the interpretation of the other side which, in any case, was not articulated with any frequency nor was it radically different from our own. This is, however, an altogether different problem and one which holds our interest only tangentially. The struggle for survival which raged intensely within the partisan resistance

movement, the behind-the-scene events which guided its political development has been and will remain the principal subject of empirical research projects addressing the history of World War II in the Balkans.

Our interest here, however, focuses on the question of whether the past interpretation, regardless of its ideological character, actually enabled the real historical existence of the resistance movement: in other words, whether it was, despite this perceptive bias, objectively plausible. Conversely, we must also ask whether its interpretive negation will, by way of relativizing the resistance movement to the point of impossibility, rob it of its specific existence. Having recently seen the film "The Battle of the Neretva", I was reminded, as I often have been in recent times, of the law prevailing in France today which penalises the negation of the Holocaust. I was also reminded of the comments the French philosopher Jacques Rancière wrote on this law³⁷. Among other things, I thought of this law because it is to a large degree related to historiography and its helplessness in the face of the revisionist babbling of those attempting to relativise each and every responsibility and guilt emerging from World War II, including those which do not adhere to the Germans in the least.

I thought of the intuition of Habermas. In the mid-eighties he had used the pages of the German newspaper, "Die Zeit", to attack historians and Russophobes like Ernst Nolte and Andreas Hillgruber for their attempted relativisation of the nationalist period. Many readers believed that Habermas's rebuke was an exaggeration in keeping with his characteristic *engage* positions. Such readers opined that the apology for national socialism is nothing more than an exaggerated expression for certain marginal reflections on the period. They went on to argue that at issue is merely a peculiar historical argumentation and not a political manifestation, even less so a possible turn in the politics of Bonn. Less than a decade later those voices have grown quiet and historians see in the work of Nolte, and even more so in that of Hillgruber, the beginnings of the revisionism of Nazism.

This revisionist movement became evident in the wake of the disintegration of the Soviet Union with the growing credence of Nolte's claim that national socialism represented only an extremely radicalised imitation of the Soviet politics of destruction. Telling references to the Christian ethos, the repeated recounting of the number of Holocaust victims³⁸ and dubious

³⁷ Jacques Rancière, *Über den Nihilismus in der Politik*, Turia & Kant, Vienna, 1997, pp. 123-146.

³⁸ Relativisation and the denial of the victims' numbers are dishonourable while those that carry them out do not make use of any valid arguments. Above all, this kind of enterprise is absurd. A revealing illustration may be found in the fact that the Old

geopolitical concepts became ever more frequent. The unbelievable report, which emerged from a Spiegel poll in 1994, that one out of every eight Germans between the age of eighteen and twenty-nine is an avowed anti-Semite made the picture only too clear. It has become evident that German “de-Nazification” has not proceeded in the same methodical manner as “de-Stasification” i.e. the revelations as to who, in what capacity and to what extent, was working for the former East German secret service. From this angle, it seems truly bizarre that the strongest anti-Semitism in contemporary Europe would be most deeply rooted in the country with the least number of Jews³⁹.

Instead of “de-Nazification”, what has occurred is the repression of memory. Indeed, the Austrian rejection of anti-Nazism and the shift toward including former NSDAP members is even more cynical than the German formalist recognition of culpability. The latter bears witness to the fact that the process of forgetting arguably goes hand in hand with the actual development of events. It is unlikely that Hannah Arendt was mistaken when she stated that people must almost immediately forget the crimes they have committed; she felt that it was not possible that they could go on living with the burden of what they had done.

One of the theories of modes of forgetting was articulated by Nietzsche in his description of the victory of pride over memory (“I have done this, says my memory. I could not have done this, says my pride.... In the course of time, memory gives in...”). However, it should be emphasised that this does not hold true for the Germans only. Among recent victims of such amnesia are not only “neo-Nazis” but also university professors, poets and writers, leading politicians, etc. This reveals how pointless and myopic was the effort made two decades ago to marginalise the reinterpretation of Nazism

Church Slavic language the number “ten” had the same name as the word for “darkness”, demonstrating that the figure was incomprehensible. Small wonder, then, that nowadays many people have difficulties comprehending the magnitude of six million. It makes it even more odd that this historical fact is being relativized since it cannot be comprehended in the first place.

³⁹ Similar phenomena may be witnessed in Austria and Slovenia. According to the representative public opinion poll (Slovensko javno mnenje, 1994), more than 20% of Slovenians do not want to have Jews as neighbours regardless of the fact that only 4% of those polled ever had any contact with Jews. An almost identical picture can be found in a slighter older Austrian case, analyzed by Helmut Gruber in his work “Antisemitismus im Mediendisk urz. Dia Aeffere ‘Waldheim’ in der Tagespresse” (Wiesbaden 1991). The case is also clarified in Simon Wiesenthal’s “Justice, Not Revenge” (Slovenian translation published by Enotnost, Ljubljana 1994), particularly in chapter 36 (“This is the punishment for Warsaw’s children”, pp. 286-291) and in chapter 39 (“The brown victim of Kreisky”, pp. 296-301).

and how dangerous may be the oversight of the present-day attempts to rehabilitate the concept of collaboration. As demonstrated by Nietzsche, the procedure is quite simple: what is incredible is impossible, and what is impossible does not exist.

Rancière in the above-mentioned text reasons along similar lines. He links his meditation with the “dehistoricised historiography” of French historians who write of history yet are unable to pin down the reality of a certain event (namely, the Holocaust). He substantiates this claim by referring to the argument put forth by Lucien Febvre in his work *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVI: La religion de Rabelais*. He goes on to ask a famous question: Is the subjective vision of non-belief congruent with the man of the sixteenth century? Since Febvre discussed Rabelais the question should be rephrased: Is it possible that the celebrated author from the dawn of the modern era could possibly be a non-believer? Such questions are, according to Rancière, most enlightening. They help us to understand why the science of historical facts is unable to attain the central core of revisionist interpretation. Even more relevant is Rancière's claim that the revisionist provocation radicalises the categories of plausibility; that is, the categories upon which the contemporary scientific history of the present is based.

The above paragraphs serve as an expanded introduction into the theory of historiography and is necessary to the extent that it enables us to refute Rancière while at the same time agreeing with his claim that history, with the emergence of revisionism, finds itself in a predicament.

One cannot deny the definition of the impossibility of history insofar as one deals with the situation in which law and science interchangeably attribute to each other the task of uncovering the evidence of a crime. The impression of impossibility is illustrated by this example of a former deportee. Rancière employs a set of questions and answers which, through the interpretation of the victim, prove time and again that even when we see all the elements of a situation, the totality of it can never be fully reconstructed. And neither can its subjective meaning.

The example is drawn from the book *“The Lie of Odysseus”* (1950). The author, former camp prisoner, Paul Rassinier, strings together a series of questions and answers:

“First question: Did the Nazis provide explanations for the destruction of all Jews? Answer: Yes, but explanations themselves never killed anybody. To wit, the untarnished humanists on the opposite side of the fence also claimed that the entire German nation must be destroyed and this attitude has had no consequences. Second question: Were there actual blueprints for the gas chambers? Answer: Yes, but the blueprint for the gas chamber and the gas chamber itself are two separate things

just like one-hundred counterfeit toalars does not make one-hundred real toalars. *Third question:* Were there actual gas chambers in the concentrations camps? *Answer:* Yes, but the gas chamber is nothing more than a gas factory, the output of which can be used in any number of ways and therefore cannot alone be seen as evidence of murder. *Fourth question:* Did the regular selection of inmates occur in the camps and did those selected later disappear without a trace. *Answer:* Yes, but nothing can prove that the disappeared have actually been gassed. Perhaps they were sent to a different camp, beaten to death or simply died of starvation. *Fifth question:* Were there victims of the gas chambers? *Answer:* Yes, but there is no evidence that these people were murdered systematically, following orders from above. They could have been killed by an individual sadistic officer...”

And on and on, ad nauseam. One may order the sequence of questions and answers in such a way that they bear witness only to the powerlessness of law and historiography and reveal the mode of negativist argument employed by the revisionists. Something so incredible, so extreme, simply could have not happened.

Here, I am reminded of a certain illustration Slavoj Žižek utilised in order to demonstrate the method of human imagination. The story, elaborated in a newspaper article (1993)⁴⁰, relates an anthropological expedition during which researchers attempt to make contact with indigenous tribes in the jungles of New Zealand. According to certain information, the members of one of the tribes perform a fearful dance while wearing death masks. The researchers ask them to perform the dance. The tribe performs the dance and thus satisfies the anthropologists' expectations. The satisfied researchers return home to write reports about the wild customs of this primitive tribe. After some time passes, another expedition makes its way into the jungle to find the tribe. Having learned its language, the new researchers discover that the indigenous people who were in contact with the first group of researchers guessed what was expected of them and then delivered the dance based on the researchers' descriptions. In short, the researchers received from the tribe precisely what they expected. Žižek uses this example to illustrate the “evil gaze” of the West upon the South and the Balkan crisis of recent years. The West, in other words, only responds to what it wants to see. Likewise, the denial of the Holocaust reveals a conscious cultivation of a certain imagery of the possible. For some, this imagery then becomes the truth about the event.

This operation not only discredits countless projects, including numerous documentation centers for the research of the Holocaust as well as

⁴⁰ Slavoj Žižek, “Der Stoff, aus dem die freunde Traume sind”, *Du*, No. 5, May 1993, p. 27.

several national Holocaust studies but the focus also shifts towards the mere validation of the status of the event itself, its plausibility, that is the definition of whether or not it belongs to the images of the real. On the other hand, revisionism with its "rational" belief in the non-existence of the impossible actually represents the core of the prevailing "realist" attitude. This is the attitude against which the French Parliament passed the above-mentioned law that more than anything else reveals the nature of jurisprudence under current political conditions. In this case, according to Rancière, what is at issue is the example of a law which is a witness to changing roles: depoliticised jurisprudence and dehistoricized historiography attribute to each other the responsibility for the definition of reality robbed of its essence, i.e. reality without real political and historical meaning. According to Rancière, this is how we can measure the stand-off between two types of scandal: the scandal of a legal system which prohibits scholars to lie about a given event, and the scandal of the lawyers who would have to transform themselves into historiographers in order to prove the existence of a given event about which they are either unable or unwilling to assume an articulated position.

It is of course even more problematic when similar things happen to historiographers: that is, when troubles arise proving the truth of a given event. They are, as Rancière would have it, unable to refute the claim that something did not happen simply because it is impossible or unimaginable. Rancière goes on to say that this kind of claim cannot be refuted precisely because it is part and parcel of the dominant historiographical discourse, a segment of anti-event rationality. This position seems to be fundamentally correct though it cannot be attributed only to the redistribution of priorities within contemporary (and not only French) historiography as Rancière attempts to do. The study of longitudinal processes (that is, the study of history in its *longue duree*) is not the same as the equalisation of events with the infinitesimal quantity. Equally problematic is the claim that the historiographical rationality of the *Annales* tradition requires the subservience of processes to the conditions of their value. The supporters of *nouvelle histoire* find this position sacrilegious. Among defenders of *nouvelle histoire*, a position diametrically opposed to this one has gained prominence: namely, the argument that it is precisely this new historiographical mode which captures events through the lens of *longue duree* which makes possible the common rationalist reconstruction of the past.

This may hold true more for that segment of historiography which discusses the end of history, a concept which is, alas, about as real as the belief that history might be an appropriate site for the validation of reality

within the political. It is from this interpretive model that an unusually forceful negative interpretation of democratic periods has emerged, an interpretation which has labelled itself revisionism. Revisionism directed most of its energies, prior to its transformation into a predominantly negativistic enterprise, toward the transvaluation of revolutionary democracy. In other words, it focused on claims that political subjects are not social groups and that political struggle is not a conflict of interests between such groups. Thus, it is no wonder that revisionism ended in generalizations and futile metaphysics, committing itself to the unending task of erasing all that does not exist and escaping the rational calculation of the segmentation and interests of society. Even worse, revisionism disintegrated into the well-known realism of "the politics of the possible" which, according to Rancière, must be taken seriously precisely because it is not an expression of the real. Rather, it is the expression of the possible. In other words, it is realism which has launched a hunt for "non-existing entities". What is possible is, in this interpretation, put on a par with that which is *exclusively possible* which, in turn, equals that which is *necessary*. Such a viewpoint has difficulties with the real. As Rancière says, it is sick with the real.

This sickness manifests itself through two symptoms. The first may be seen as a return to the excluded real, the real which cannot be symbolised, the real which assumes forms of racism and xenophobia. The second symptom is nothing but revisionism itself. Both are politically intertwined. However, to the extent that the symptom of attacking foreigners is also a harbinger of negativist claims, it is more than the simple consequence of mutually enforcing racisms of all kinds. Instead, it provides evidence to support the thesis that both dimensions belong to the same problem, i.e. the problem with the real which is the problem with realist politics. Both display the nihilist logic characteristic of the dominant realism. The hunt for "non-existing entities" of political subjectification gets honed into a demand that words fit things squarely, while the things themselves are permitted to exist only as a totality or as a condition of their possibilities. According to Rancière, the racist symptom is a symptom of words glued to things, the symptom of identity glued to skin. The revisionist symptom, on the other hand, is a symptom of events which are "impossible" because the totality of their conditions can never be developed to the point where the sequence of beliefs about the impossibility of the impossible can be refuted.

The working of this logic was and still is possible to monitor in Slovenian life. One of the typical positions of Slovenian revisionism, which has attempted to prove the impossibility of error on the part of the Nazi collaborators, simply maintains that "it is impossible that fifty percent of the

Slovenian nation could have lived in error". Rather, it sought refuge under the wings of the occupying Nazi's in order to fend off the dangers of communism. The last chapter of this narrative may be seen in extreme revisionist voices which in recent years attempted to proclaim the activities of MVAC (Milizia volontaria anticomunista) as "national-liberating and heroic".⁴¹ The same interpreters equalize the resistance movement across the board with communism despite the fact that less than one tenth of the resistance fighters were actually card-carrying members of the Communist Party.

According to this logic, almost anything can be argued including the sophistic claim that fascism and Nazism were never as deeply rooted among Slovenians as communism and the claim that the commissars of the resistance movement killed hundreds of Slovenian families at the outset of World War II. In this context, what is actually said ceases to be relevant. What is important is only the claim which people are prepared to accept as plausible, as part of the real. The facts alone are of little assistance and thus it is difficult to agree with Rancière's otherwise excellent argument. One must take into account a series of interpretative processes derived from examples drawn from the most diverse environments. The most stubborn problem effecting any arguably objective historical presentation has always been local character. French historians studied French conditions while Slovenian historians naturally focused on Slovenian conditions.

The only element which can lend itself a conceptually distinct status – albeit in an interdependent way – is the difference between events which take place at the center versus those which take place on the periphery. As a rule, the periphery has adapted individual phenomena (e.g. racism) to their extreme form. Racism, of course, is not unique in this context. At issue is anti-liberalism in the most general sense. Nineteenth century Europe has seen the rise of numerous racist and anti-Semitic theories, those of Renan⁴², Gobineau, Lapouge, Wagner, Wahrmund⁴³, Winiger and

⁴¹ Draga Ahačič, loc.cit., p. 10.

⁴² Max Muller (1823-1900) has, without any malicious intent, chosen an Indian word "aryan" to designate Indo-European languages groups. The word has subsequently been used to name groups speaking "proto-aryan" language. A similar process was at work in the term "Semitic language", a phrase coined in 1787 by J.C.Eichorn in order to enrich the then-common term "Oriental language". The problem occurred the moment Ernst Renan (1823-1892) in his work *Historie Generale et Systeme compare des langues Semitiques* (Paris 1847) introduced a principled distinction between "Teutons" (or Aryans) and "Semites".

⁴³ The image of the "perennial Jew", the representative of those against whom the state should defend itself in an organised way, was outlined in the works of Robert

Rohling⁴⁴. This wave of thematisation of racial inequality was, in part, triggered by post-Darwinist confusion (Spencer, Haeckel⁴⁵) while, in a larger context, it can only be viewed as part of general xenophobia that emerged at the end of nineteenth century with the onset of contemporary migration patterns.⁴⁶ Women and men not only crossed oceans, migrating from one country to another, but they also moved from the provinces to the city, from one part of the country to another. In short, people left “home” behind and set off to the land of “foreigners”. Or more precisely, as foreigners they entered the homes of others. Nearly fifty out of every hundred Poles, according to Hobsbawm, left their country permanently and another half million sought seasonal jobs abroad, joining foreign work forces. Thus, turn-of-the-century attitudes were marked by the routine practice of xenophobia in the form of racism (read: the protection of poor domestic workers against the contamination and even subversion brought by the invasion of sub-human hordes). The power of this process can be inferred from the fact that even the great liberal sociologist Max Weber, among others, feared Polish immigration and found refuge against such in the Pan-Germanic League.

The universal “glue”, as Hobsbawm put it, of this and similar movements was the reaction of the common man in society who was “pushed against the wall of big business on one hand and pressured by the harsh occurrence of the emerging movement of mass workers on the other”. That is, society has robbed him of the privileged position which he has occupied and which he believes belongs to him in spite of dynamic development. Later, disillusioned sentiments found their voice in anti-Semitism which, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, began to inform specific political movements. Jews were indeed present everywhere and, as such, conveniently symbolized everything which represented an unfair world. In addition, the commitment of Jews to the ideas of the Enlightenment and the French revolution made them all the more suspect. They also served as a symbol of the

Wahrmund (1827-1913) including *Das Gesetz des Nomadentums und heutige Judenherenschaft*, 1887.

⁴⁴ August Rohling (1839-1931), a Prague-based professor of theology, characterized the Talmud as a brevarium of injustice since it allows Jews to do anything including fighting against Christianity and taking control of the world. The only solution in his view was the expulsion of Jews from Europe.

⁴⁵ Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) was the most powerful social Darwinist in Germany committed to the idea of class struggle leading to domination. His essay is entitled *Die Weltraetsl* (1899).

⁴⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, London 1994, pp. 116-124.

hated capitalists-plutocrats, of revolutionary agitators, of rootless intellectuals and competitors who, of course, could not be "fair".

That Slovenians, with a help from the Catholic Church, have adapted well to this kind of public image of "perennial Jew" is revealed in recent research into the ideology of political catholicism in the Slovenian lands at the turn of the century and in the first four decades of twentieth century⁴⁷. Most fundamental features of this public image are akin to the "spirit of liberalism". It is thus no wonder that Jews were typically painted in the company of liberals, freemasons, and Protestants. The adaptation to modern antisemitism was therefore an adaptation to "individualistic, materialistic, egotistic" nature of "Jewish spirit" which Jews cannot shed even with after the conversion.⁴⁸ This image has been in 1860s and 1870 complemented with a national aspect as well, as demonstrated by Vasilij Melik, one of the best experts on the Slovenian national history of nineteenth century⁴⁹. When Jews began taking up membership in the Austrian-German Liberal Party, Slovenian public opinion viewed this as a Jewish antagonism toward the Slovenian national movement. Thus, Slovenian newspapers of the time "...constantly wrote of German-Jewish journalism"⁵⁰. The implications of the term "German-Jewish journalism" were clearly illustrated by the following smearing song which was popular at the turn of the century:

"Die Presse führt das Publikum
gemütlich and die Nas herum,
die Loge führt hinwiederum
die Presse und das Publikum.
Und Presse, Loge, Publikum
wird rumgeführt vom Judentum."⁵¹

Given this constellation, Jews in the Slovenian lands, besides having played the role of the perennial foreigner, assumed the role of the first national enemy, too. The Slovenian public sphere was also familiar with the notorious slogan claiming that in case Jews did not exist, they would have to be invented.⁵² This

⁴⁷ Egon Pelikan, *Akomodacija ideologije političnega katolicizma na Slovenskem* [The Accomodation of the Ideology of Political Catholicism in Slovenia], Založba Obzorja, Maribor 1997.

⁴⁸ "Not even a converted Jew is really trustworthy", Pelikan, loc.cit., p. 97.

⁴⁹ Vasilij Melik "Slovenci o Germanih, Slovanih in Romanih pred 120 leti" [Slovenians about Germans, Slavs, and Romans 120 years ago], in: *Zgodovinski časopis* [Historical Journal] Vol LI, No. 1, 1997, p. 17.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Peter G. Pulzer, *Die Entstehung des politischen Antisemitismus in Deutschland und Oesterreich 1867 bis 1914*, Guterschloch 1966, pp. 145. Quoted in Pelikan, loc.cit., p. 97.

⁵² Hermann Rauschnig, *Conversations with Hitler*, sine loco, no publisher, 1940, pp. 121. Quoted in Pelikan, loc.cit., p. 98.

“nationalist” anti-Semitism in Central Europe was in a way more pernicious than the “industrial” anti-Semitism. Since then, Jews remained codified as an unredeemable cause of national danger regardless of actual processes of national emancipation at the end of nineteenth century in Central Europe. As such, Jews were seen as co-responsible for all the later national calamities from communism to the German occupation of this territory. The latter assumed in radical interpretations but a reaction to “Asiatic bolshevism”.⁵³

Conclusion

In using the Slovenian case of rewriting the history of collaboration, this paper attempts to demonstrate that (at least here) recent revisionism is based on an archaic reconstructionist approach which claims that it is possible to reestablish the truth about a past reality. On the other hand, we also see the modernist constructionist method (both examples are a clear case of “upper case historiography”⁵⁴) which, with its seemingly benign tolerance, allows different modes of interpretation though it never ceases to emphasise that those falling outside the modernist frame no longer belong to historiography. This pell-mell of interpretive modes have has their main shared feature, to use Jenkins’s terms, their effort to find meanings, purposes, teleologies, etc. in the past because they put them there...for present-centered and/or future programs which shape generally radical (mostly right-wing) political agendas. All this is, as said above, taking place in the shadow of an attempt to create “objective” or “true account of the past”. What we can see, however, when it is put in practice is its utter lack of flexibility, openness, willingness to reflect, and tolerance of the unconventional. In respect to its methodological strategy, this is a typical “normal historical practice” whose goal is, as Berkhofer would have it, “...to make its representations appear to present information as if it were a matter of simple referentiality, indicating that the premises of realisms are basic to the paradigm. Realism enters (this) historical practice to the extent that historians try to make their structure of factuality seem to be its own organizing structure and therefore conceal that it is structured by interpretation represented as (f)actuality.”⁵⁵

⁵³ Lešnik & Tomc, loc.cit., p. 19.

⁵⁴ It was in Robert Young’s *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (Routledge, London-New York 1990) that I came across the distinction between *upper* and *lower case* versions of expressing certain segments of the recent past in the West. Latter, I found this kind of distinction in Keith Jenkins’s “Introduction” to his *Postmodern History Reader*.

⁵⁵ Robert Berkhofer, “The Challenge of Poetic to (Normal) Historical Practice”, *Poetics Today*, 9,2, 1988. Quoted in Jenkins, loc.cit., p.20.

Without entering into a deep analysis of the ideological background of revisionist attempts, it is possible to perceive that this kind of interpretation comes close to be "the present and future oriented" history which uses the past to reconstruct "the true future". As such, historical representation has, during this period of transition, become a battlefield where political power may be gained. In Slovenia, as elsewhere, efforts are made to conquer the past since those who possess the past control the future.

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