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Barbed wire on the Slovenian-Croatian border, December 2015 (foto Zaklop) / Filo spinato al confine tra Slovenia e Croazia, dicembre 2015 (foto Zaklop)*

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DISPLACEMENT AND CULTURAL BORDERS IN THE GREAT WAR.  
BITTERNESS OF THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE IN THE NATIVE  
COUNTRY OR ABROAD

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ABSTRACT

*The article draws attention to the issue of experiencing displacement and alienation of refugees from the Littoral and deportees during and after the Great War. Both refugees accounts and wartime press indicate that the relations between the Littoral refugees and the local population were difficult, particularly in Ljubljana and Carniola. An appeal for more help to refugees from the Goriška region, to mothers with small children in particular, was made by Slovene educated women who were active in Trieste and engaged in public support for refugees from the Littoral; following the rise of fascism, they became refugees themselves and experienced first-hand the aversion of the environment to which they immigrated. Individual accounts suggest that the negative attitude towards Littoral refugees in the post-war period is a reflection of various cultural and political affiliations and practices*

*Key Words: Great War, Isonzo Front, refugees, migration*

LE MIGRAZIONI FORZATE E I CONFINI CULTURALI DURANTE LA  
GRANDE GUERRA. L'AMAREZZA DELL'ESPERIENZA DEI PROFUGHI  
ALL'INTERNO E AL DI FUORI DEI CONFINI DELLA PROPRIA PATRIA

SINTESI

*Nell'articolo che segue, viene affrontato il problema di come fu percepito l'esodo degli sfollati provenienti dai territori del fronte isontino durante la Prima guerra mondiale, così come dopo la sua conclusione. Sia dalle testimonianze dirette dei profughi che dalla stampa di guerra appare evidente quanto fossero tesi i rapporti tra la popolazione in fuga e gli abitanti delle terre in cui questi venivano insediati, tanto più nell'area di Lubiana e della Carniola. Le intellettuali slovene di Trieste avevano più volte sostenuto l'esigenza di un maggior impegno a favore degli sfollati dal Goriziano, soprattutto per le madri con figli ancora piccoli, prendendo una chiara posizione pubblica a favore dei profughi. A seguito della comparsa del fascismo queste stesse donne, dopo esser diventate loro stesse delle fuggiasche, avrebbero provato sulla propria pelle gli effetti dell'inimicizia*

*nei contesti dove erano state costrette a vivere. Le singole testimonianze ci suggeriscono che l'ostilità nei confronti dei profughi del Litorale, sia donne che uomini, maturata negli anni del dopoguerra, sia stata il frutto di diverse appartenenze politiche e culturali, nonché di pratiche sociali che da queste scaturivano.*

*Parole chiave: profughi, Grande Guerra, Isontino, migrazioni, spaesamento*

## INTRODUCTION

In the last twenty years, the First World War has become an important research topic of Slovene historiography. Besides official documents kept by Slovene, Austrian, Italian and other archives, Slovene historians have also examined autobiographical notes of soldiers and officers who had served in the Austro-Hungarian army and of those who joined the Russian, Serbian or Italian side as volunteers.

These research perspectives is what helped the Slovene studies on the Great War to reveal the social and cultural aspects of the war conflict. In addition to material, also non-material consequences of the war, either on the area, affected by the Isonzo Front, or in broader Slovene society, have become the subject of historiographical analysis. A review of the historiographical work done so far shows that Slovene historiography began to study the First World War with a certain delay, analysing firstly its political, diplomatic and military aspects (Svoljšak, 1993, 547–562), and only in the last two decades, it focused also on its cultural and social side (Lukan, 2014, 11–54). This means that it is gradually eliminating the lack, which could be seen in a comparative context, especially with Western European historiographies that started studying the Great War with a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary method from the 70s onwards (Svoljšak, 1991; Vodopivec (ed.), 2005).

Despite the gradual removal of historiographical gaps, the life of civilians in the First World War has remained poorly researched. Even the consequences of war on the civilian population, both on those that lived in the immediate proximity of the Isonzo Front and on those from the wider Slovene hinterland, have been neglected. This deficiency is even more obvious if we consider the female population. In connection with the exposure of women in the First World War, Marija Wakounig wrote that the latter are completely absent in historical studies of both the Slovene and wider European area, and that if they are mentioned, it is only fragmentarily, almost anecdotally (Wakounig, 2010, 45). A prolonged disregard of women in the warring European countries meant an actual suppression of the role that women had during the war as workers, farmers, nurses, clerks and servants. Many women felt first-hand the devastation and barbarism of the war as refugees, homeless persons, widows and mothers of fallen soldiers. Some were victims of the enemy's direct violence both on the battlefields and in their immediate vicinity (Thébaud, 2007, 35).

From the 80s onwards, in Great Britain and France, and similarly in Italy, Austria and Germany, individual studies began to illuminate the conditions in which the civilian po-

pulation had lived. In this context, the role that women had played in the field of charity and propaganda during wartime was shown. However, the study of specific aspects of wartime events in the hinterland was far from offering a comprehensive and systematic insight into the topic. Similarly, the history of refugee masses and the experience of exile, which had been lived through not only by women, but also by children, the elderly and the men unfit for war, remained unexplored.<sup>1</sup>

The pioneers of examining the topic of exile in the broader Soča Region context were Petra Svoljšak and Paolo Malni.<sup>2</sup> Despite their studies, there are still numerous poorly known aspects of forced evacuation and life in exile on both the Austrian and Italian side. In this article, we will focus on the issue of experiencing displacement and alienation of refugees from the Littoral, both during and after the First World War.

## AWAY FROM THE ISONZO FRONT

With the beginning of the hostilities between Italy and Austro-Hungary, 150,000 people were forced to leave their homes from the entire front line, although the authorities had initially anticipated 100,000 departures. Austro-Hungarian authorities had commanded the withdrawal of civilians from the front, but many families resisted. However, after the grenades and shrapnel damaged their homes, their departure was inevitable. Very often, the first to leave were wives with children or grandparents with grandchildren. Adult, working family members remained at home as long as they were not forced to leave by gunfire. The first refugees from the Soča Region began to enter the interior of Slovene lands in a disorganized way, with different means of transport, by wagons or even on foot. They took only the most urgent: some food, dishes and clothes. They resorted to relatives, friends and places, where people were prepared to give them shelter. In the new area, they had to get used to new living conditions, which were determined by the general economic situation, the social dependence and the national, linguistic and cultural differences (Svoljšak, 2001, 123). Even though Austro-Hungarian authorities already had experiences with refugees from other battlefields, especially from Galicia, they could not fully cope with the mass movement of people. Gradually they stabilized the chaotic situation and organized the transfer of refugees into the interior of the country, mainly by livestock wagons. The care for refugees, who had been resettled into the interior of the Monarchy, was taken over by the central government, which established a number of special bodies and organizations to this end. An apparatus for the recording and maintenance of refugee camps and separate settlements was operating in Vienna, and at the beginning of June 1915, also an auxiliary Committee for Refugees from southern parts of the country was established. In July 1915, in Ljubljana, the Agency for Refugees from the *Goriška* Region began operating, which took care of records, housing and work for the emigrated

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1 About the refugee issue, see also Ermacora (ed.), 2006, 309–322; [http://www.unive.it/media/allegato/dep/Strumenti%20di%20ricerca/20\\_BiblProfughi.pdf](http://www.unive.it/media/allegato/dep/Strumenti%20di%20ricerca/20_BiblProfughi.pdf); Ceschin 2014

2 For refugees from the area of Grado and Cervignano, the study of Sara and Giorgio Milocco (2002) should be mentioned.

population. It helped refugees with the installation, job search, transport, communication with relatives, and with fundraising through the organization of events or the Red Cross. Municipalities supervised the operation of relevant refugee departments at the local level (Širok, 2006, 425).

The war banished around 80,000 Slovenes from villages of the Goriška, Soča and Karst Regions. They settled in the deeper hinterland of the front in the Littoral, Carniola, Lower Styria and Carinthia.<sup>3</sup> Some groups of refugees went to the Czech, Moravian and Hungarian Regions and even to Galicia. They were mostly settled in refugee camps, such as in Bruck an der Leitha, Gmünd at the Czech border, Steinklamm in Lower Austria, Wagner near Leibnitz in Styria, Katzenau near Linz, and the Czech Region. *“It is so lively here! Almost only women, children and old people – only a few men and boys because most of them are in the army. – And what a life! Here you realize how much a home is worth – as little as it is!”* (Slovenec (the Slovene), 30 November 1915, Skrb za begunce (The care for refugees), 1). In most camps, hunger and deprivation predominated, which, with the spread of diseases, caused a high mortality rate, especially among children. Refugee and political institutions were daily flooded with letters of refugees: *“Everyone complain about their sorrow and misfortune and ask for consolation, help and support. Almost all of them are hungry, in need of warm clothes, footwear, blankets – a mother cries because her children died, another is worried that they will become sick – here are complaints about barracks, flats, hospitals – there are complaints about a contentious and inquisitive neighbour – here are laments over women – men who sit all day in the barracks around the hearth and infect with their pipe and cough the entire apartment, and are a nuisance to everyone, especially women, who have enough to do with children and pots”* (Slovenec, 20 January 1916, Potrebe, želje in zadeve beguncev (The needs, wishes and matters of refugees), 1). The issue of refugees was often on the agenda of the Vienna parliament, and Slovene MPs were particularly active about it. MP Janez Evangelist Krek marked the issue of supply for refugees as *“one of the saddest chapters of the present war”* (Slovenec, 13 July 1917, Begunsko vprašanje v poslanski zbornici (The refugee question in the Chamber of Deputies), 1). Some of the refugees found a temporary home in the countryside and in towns of Carniola and Styria. The staff of the administrative units, the mayors and governors also moved together with the civilian population. The regional government, for example, moved to Vienna. The same fate was experienced by ecclesiastical authorities, regional institutions, hospitals and schools, which were based in Gorizia and in larger villages in the Goriška Region before the war.

On the right side of the Isonzo, which the Austrians left to the Italians without a fight, Italian authorities evacuated 50,668 people, of which 13,000 Slovene refugees from the Gorizia Hills, Kambreško and the Kobariško Region.<sup>4</sup> They were first moved

3 The refugee wave from the Goriško Region in May and June 1915 was followed by another two minor waves during the war – after the Italian occupation of Gorizia in August 1916 and of the Banjška Plateau a year later.

4 For a detailed overview of the area from which the Slovene population was banished into the hinterland of Italy, see: Svoljšak, 1991, 10–40.

to Veneto and Friuli, and later to various places on the Apennine Peninsula, including Sardinia and Sicily.<sup>5</sup> Unlike the Austrian, Italian authorities did not settle them in refugee camps, but in Italian towns and islands.<sup>6</sup> Refugees were lodged in apartments, hotels or on farms, and provided with financial support, like those under Austrian authorities. They were able to perform public works or assist the surrounding farmers in agricultural work. Especially girls and women provided additional earnings in refugee families (Svoljšak, 1991, 25).

## REFUGEES FROM THE GORIŠKA REGION AS *LAHS* AND PRO-AUSTRIANS

The interviews with former refugees that were conducted in the eighties and nineties by Gorizian journalist and publicist Dorica Makuc<sup>7</sup> and amateur historian and publicist Vili Prinčič, with so far very modest issued autobiographical and discovered archival material<sup>8</sup> (Prinčič, 1996, 5), offer precious memory fragments for historiographical analysis. The fragments speak about the bitterness of the refugee experience, regardless of the battlefield side – both Austrian and Italian individuals were forced into exile. Poverty, deprivation, diseases, death and homesickness are often mentioned. In many testimonies, the memory of the unfriendly and inhospitable environment, in which they have settled, stands out. Pleasant memories of the period of exile are rare, especially among those who had experienced it on the Austrian side.<sup>9</sup>

Rozalija Devetak Juren (born in 1897) maintained the memory of not only the deprivation and hunger, which she experienced as a refugee, but also the insults that she was shouted at by children in Bruck an der Leitha. They saw her as an Italian refugee and an Italian gypsy (Makuc, 1990, 257). The experience of Marija Blažič from Monfalcone (born in 1911) was less negative. She came from the small village of Seget with her mother, grandparents, brother and sister in Volovice in the Czech Region, where, together with a group of refugees from the Karst, they were settled on individual farms. She remembered that they had been well received by the locals and that they were suspicious only at the beginning, as they thought the authorities had sent them Italians: “*When they understand who we were, relations improved promptly. Related languages and a traditional friendship between our two nations undoubtedly helped*” (Prinčič, 1996, 28).

5 About the treatment of the Slovene population by Italian authorities in the area occupied by the Italian army, see: Svoljšak 1991, 8–14.

6 On the territory of the Kingdom of Italy, only the refugee camps in Legnano (Vittorio Veneto) and Cordeons (Friuli) were in operation.

7 Dorica Makuc is the author of the radio show series *Krvavo polje ter brezmejno gorje* (A bloody field and boundless woe) that was played in 1987 by Radio Trst A and which consisted of testimonies of people from Gorizia, who had experienced the Great War. In the Italian translation, some of her testimonies were published in Makuc, 1990, 235–263.

8 See Franco Cecotti (2001); Petra Svoljšak (1991, 2012).

9 Vilko Cotič (born in 1910) from Sovodnje spent two years in exile. He remembered that the locals were friendly towards refugees. In Središče in Slovenske gorice, where they lived for more than a year, they were the only refugee family. In 1917, another family arrived; they were their relatives (Prinčič, 1996, 74). See also: Lakovič Jarc, 2010, 45–56.

The family of Adela Rebolica (born in 1906) from Gorizia remained near the front at first, until the command to leave the Goriška Region arrived in the first days of August 1916. Austrian authorities settled them in Zistersdorf in Lower Austria, where they awaited the end of the war with other Gorizian refugees, mainly from Solkan, Kanal, Šempeter and Štmauer. Adela and her brother Mario (born in 1910) remembered that they were firstly insulted, like other refugees, with *Italienische Hunde* (Italian dogs) by the locals. When they told them they were not Italians, but Slovenes, they were renamed into *Slowenische Hunde* (Slovene dogs). “*Later, relationships became more pleasant, almost friendly. We even taught them how to cook polenta, which was new to them [...] The locals were crying at our departure. The representatives of the authorities came to the station to bid us farewell*” (Prinčič, 1996, 251).

Gabrijela Batistič (born in 1911) from Sovodnje was emigrated with her family in the autumn of 1916. Her five-year exile took place near Litija, where her father managed to find a stall and turn it into a living area for a six-member family: “*At first, the locals did not receive us well, they were looking at us with disdain. They saw us as intruders, and serious insults were not missing. For them, we were just bums and loafers. Such an attitude was, of course, very hurtful and we felt completely helpless. In the surrounding area, there were no other refugees, in whom we could have found solace and a friendly word in that hostile environment. However, people slowly began to understand our plight, and the relations were improving from month to month. Upon our departure, at the end of 1920, all the local people came to say goodbye and many of them had teary eyes*” (Prinčič, 1996, 22).

Danica Mikluž from Pevma (born in 1905), who spent her exile in Ljubljana, also remembered the dismissive attitude of the locals towards refugees. In Ljubljana, Gorizian exiles had the status of foreigners, cheats and thieves. Many locals treated them ruthlessly and looked at them with disdain: “*I will never forget the words that the teacher uttered hastily in the classroom: ‘It serves you right, God has punished you’*” (Prinčič, 1996, 178).

Being stigmatized as a *Lah*<sup>10</sup> or Italian and an enemy in their own country, was a particularly traumatic experience that left deep traces in the memories of many refugees from the Goriška and Soča Regions. For Roža Gergolet (born in 1909) from Doberdò, who found a cosy apartment in Domžale with her family, after being banished from home by the battles on the Doberdò Plateau in June 1915, the first months of life in exile were not easy “*because the environment did not accept us particularly well. We often had to listen to serious insults. For the locals, we were damned Lahs and we were taking their bread. Later, however, the situation slightly improved and people finally understood that it was the war that had banished us to Domžale*” (Prinčič, 1996, 98).

August Štekar (born in 1909) from Števerjan, who, after the opening of the Isonzo Front, together with his mother and brother moved on the outskirts of Ljubljana, even in his old age could not forget the insults that he had heard as a child refugee. He remembered the bad relationship with the locals, who often shouted at him offensively: “*Damned Lahs, you are eating our bread!*” (Prinčič, 1996, 274). The refugee experience also remained impressed, with all its drama, in the memory of Klement Jug (1898–1924), who wrote about it in his diary in 1920, after moving back to Ljubljana as a student:

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10 A Slovene pejorative term for Italians.

“I came here into the fifth school from Gorizia to Ljubljana since our secondary school had been closed due to the war with Italy. Every evening, I watched the sunset and asked the evening light to greet my homeland, the dear locals, who were still the only to give me so much love. At the sight of the bloody light, often tears came to my eyes. The heart wanted love, but it was surrounded by foreignness. On that day, my Greek professor M. told me that Gorizians are only for causing damage. If only they had stayed at home instead of fearing grenades and coming to Ljubljana to eat other people’s bread. These words remained so impressed in my memory that I could not forget them even if I had gone through a rumbling fire a hundred times. I was so sensitive that I could not endure such evil looks all around me. I would have gone into the River Ljubljanica, if only the water was not so dirty, so I wished for the River Soča, the love from home, and the whole Ljubljana did not seem worth of my sacrifice. I liked to work and I was the only one of the classmates that often studied even after midnight. However, with all my work, I could never satisfy professor M. He reprimanded me because I was Gorizian, and he posed lazier students as good examples. I could not endure tyranny at school. The landlady also criticized me, saying I pray too little. I also realized that the war was a punishment for the Goriška Region, for its ugly sins.”<sup>11</sup>

Difficult relations between refugees and the local population, especially in Ljubljana and Carniola, were also confirmed by Slovene newspapers of that time that did not actually go deep into the topic<sup>12</sup>, but reported on the incorrect behaviour of the locals, the riots and attacks that targeted refugees, also as victims of war profiteers.<sup>13</sup>

The newspaper that most carefully followed the developments related to the housing of Littoral refugees in the Slovene hinterland was *Edinost* (Unity) in Trieste. For example, on 21 July 1915, the correspondent in Ljubljana reported on cases: “of gatherings of people in Carniola, in towns and in the countryside, who want to profit from refugees. They charge them very expensively for everything and there are places where they look at them scornfully. Who is this? – Ah, a refugee ... Who is that lady? – Ah, another refugee. In a grocery shop in Ljubljana, they did not want to sell goods to a refugee, they accused her and other refugees of causing inflation. [...] We do not want to generalize, but we should say, however, that refugees do not have an easy life. – There has been so much written about Gorizia, the bombing of the town, the damage, the human casualties there, and every man should already be informed about that. Nevertheless, there are people in

11 Marušič, 2000, 5, 17. II. 1920. However, some testimonies mention cases where the teachers contributed to better relations between refugees and the locals. See, for example: Prinčič, 1996, 170.

12 It is significant that the publication *Koledar* (Calendar) of *Mohorjeva družba*, which, in all the years of war, dedicated a longer text to the topic of war, never even mentioned the refugee issue. See, for example, *Koledar Družbe sv. Mohorja* for 1917, 1916, *Svetovna vojska*, 33–80.

13 *Edinost* (Unity), 11 September 1915, from Ljubljana; *Dolenjske novice* (News from Dolenjska), 18 May 1918, *Begunci so krivi draginje v Novem mestu!!* (Refugees are the cause of inflation in Novo mesto!); *Slovenski gospodar* (Slovenian lord), 1 November 1917 *Ne zaničujte beguncev*. (Do not despise refugees). On the refugee support of municipal authorities see (Brodnik, 1989, 28–29), but also on the controversial note of Ljubljana’s municipal authorities on the participation of refugees in the demonstrations in 1918 (SI ZAL LJU 489 – Ljubljana, General town registry office, technical unit (t.e.) 1800, archival unit (a.e.) 1632, Minutes of the town council meeting of 25 April 1918).

*Ljubljana who supposedly have a grudge against refugees and say: Ah, it is not so bad in Gorizia! ...*” (*Edinost*, 21 July 1915, from Ljubljana, 2)

In the summer of 1915, the situation in Carniola was so unfavourable for refugees that the Bishop of Ljubljana, Anton Bonaventura Jeglič, urged the faithful to greater solidarity. Even in this case, *Edinost* reported on a pastoral letter, which sympathetically spoke about: “*the fate that hit the poor refugees because they had to leave their home, their roof, their work, and appeals to the faithful to help the unfortunate in everything they need, and to inform about their needs the Agency for Refugees from the Goriška Region in Ljubljana. It appeals to the population not to make life difficult for refugees by requiring exorbitant prices for food, to stigmatise usurers and speculators, as these are people without conscience and heart that exploit the plight of the poor refugees. As for flour and bread, the Carniolans say that it is for Carniola, so not even a bit should be given to Gorizian refugees.*” (*Edinost*, 25 September 1915, *Kako se godi beguncem!* (How are things for refugees!), 2)

In the continuation of war, the clergy and intelligentsia often addressed the locals to show piety and solidarity to refugees.<sup>14</sup> Slovene educated women, who were active in the women’s movement, especially those who acted in Trieste and were publicly engaged for the fate of Littoral refugees, also called for assistance to Gorizian refugees, particularly to mothers with small children.<sup>15</sup> In the articles and short stories published in the Slovene newspapers, they exposed the fate of mothers and wives, who had to leave their homes due to the war, and were forced to find a temporary home in the hinterland of the front. In the newspaper *Slovenski narod* (the Slovene Nation), teacher and writer Marija Kmet, for example, published a feuilleton on female refugees, who resisted the exploitation of unfriendly locals and decided to seek help from the authorities (Kmet, 1916). The hint, how refugees should react to the unfriendly environment, was clear. Even Josip Ribičič, a teacher and writer from Trieste, in his short stories with themes of war, which were published in 1917 in the book *Razvaline* (Ruins), processed the motive of a refugee and the hostile environment in the “*brotherly town*” (Ribičič, 1917, 65). The proceeds of the book sale were donated for the benefits of Gorizian refugees.<sup>16</sup>

Slovene refugees who were not exiled and deported to Italy also had to face numerous difficulties and adverse conditions. However, if we compare their testimonials to those of

14 In December 1915, *Slovenec* (the Slovene) appealed to readers to assist refugees and send gifts to the Agency for Refugees from the Goriška Region (*Slovenec*, 17 December 1915, *Pomoč ubogim beguncem iz Primorske* (Assistance to the poor refugees from the Littoral), 4). A similar appeal was also published in August 1916 in which it tried to persuade the people of Ljubljana to donate clothing to Littoral refugees; to women and girls, it proposed the establishment of village sections to help refugees. With a similar request, it turned to the religious organization Marijine družbe (*Slovenec*, 14 August 1916, *Na pomoč goriškim beguncem* (Assistance to Gorizian refugees), 5).

15 After the war and the rise of fascism, most of them had to leave the Venezia Giulia Region, which in 1918 came under Italian rule, and so experienced the fate of refugees on their own skin (Verginella, 2013).

16 *Razvaline* (Ruins) was published by Zdravko Katnik. The work experienced negative assessment from Fran Erjavec (*Ljubljanski zvon* (the Ljubljana Bell), 1918), who established that the collection of short stories is a contribution to the so far “*scarce war literature*”, but that it “*shows a bitter emotion, but a rather superficial observation*”. (Erjavec, 1918, 75).

the refugees on the Austrian side of the Isonzo battlefield, we find that the experience of exile in the Kingdom of Italy was less dramatic, also due to higher material support that refugee families received from the Italian State.<sup>17</sup> The latter even gave some families the opportunity to have a carefree life (Prinčič, 1996, 156). As I. Gregorčič reported from Diano Marina in March 1916: *“We are really near the sea, there is no cold; only olives, lemons, oranges and grape vines grow here. /.../ We do not have work, we are given food for free. Here, we are more free than in Borjana, we can go everywhere, just as locals.”* (Slovenec, 6 March 1916, *Od francoske meje je pisal* (He wrote about the French border), 4)

The Gerbec family (it consisted of the parents and two sisters, while the sons remained on the Austrian side) from Kambreško, who, after five months of living in Venetian Slovenia, was led by the exile, together with other Slovenes and Friulans, in Diano Marina, initially suffered as they did not know Italian and did not have the possibility of worship in Slovene. The preserved correspondence shows that they were not *“treated badly”* (Korespondenca družine Gerbec (Correspondence of the Gerbec family) 1915–1921. Nova Gorica, Goriška regional museum; Svoljšak, 2012, 18; Svoljšak, 1991, 29–33).

Matilda Kumar (born in 1903) from Gornji Cerov, who survived the war as a refugee in a village near Cuneo, also remembered the difficulties with the Italian language. However, the small gestures of solidarity, which she had received by the locals, were more important to her. *“In the houses, where we had been settled, we found ready-made beds and all that was necessary for an independent life of a family. For the first three months, they kept bringing us food from a nearby hotel, but later we started cooking ourselves. In fact, we received 1 lira of refugee support per day and with this money, we bought everything that was necessary. Besides, my father always found casual work, and I started working in a silk factory. It was not that bad for us, only at the beginning we had considerable difficulties because we did not speak Italian [...]. In the spring of 1919, we decided to return home. The decision was difficult, because we knew what awaited us there. We even thought about remaining in Piedmont, but in the end, homesickness won”* (Prinčič, 1996, 147).

According to Petra Svoljšak, better material conditions in which Slovene refugees in Italy lived, reflected a better economic situation, but also the political decisions of central authorities. In Italy, food was not scarce and the material support for refugees was *“an important political act in the preparation of Italian authorities for the post-war annexation of the occupied territories to the Kingdom of Italy”* (Svoljšak, 2012, 18), while in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, especially after 1916, refugees felt the impact of the economic crisis, the general inflation, the lack of food and the basis for life.

Jožefa Brajnik (born in 1908) from Štandrež went through the refugee experience on the Italian side. Her family, who comprised six children, was sent to Marche, where it found refuge in the countryside, in Montalto: *“It was, of course, very difficult during the first few weeks, especially because of our poor knowledge of Italian, but later we settled well into the environment and, generally speaking, it was not that bad. In return for food,*

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17 Petra Svoljšak cites the example of Campania residents protesting against refugees and blaming them for the food price rises (Svoljšak, 1991, 31).

*we helped on the surrounding farms. My father's main occupation was mowing and the locals were amazed how this refugee managed to mow so well. I also helped on the field and when I was returning home, the farmers always gave me something. "This is for your grandmother," they said. Although we were refugees from a country that was in war with Italy, the locals were respectful and no one treated us badly. Just once, it was in a barber's shop, somebody was talking badly about refugees, but the others silenced him immediately"* (Prinčič, 1996, 42).

The friendly locals, who understood the plight of refugees, remained impressed in the memory of Romana Colja (born in 1906) from Oslavje: *"They immediately noticed that we were almost naked and barefoot, and that every piece of clothing came in handy. I like to remember the heartfelt event that happened to my brother and me on the street. We were passing by the shoe shop and the shopkeeper saw us through the shop window. We were both barefoot. He ran on the street and invited us into the shop. He gave us each a pair of new shoes. At that time, I probably did not know yet how to express gratitude in Italian, but I am sure the shopkeeper saw it in my eyes that were surely beaming with joy. Although we did not ask for charity, the locals sometimes dropped a coin in our pocket"* (Prinčič, 1996, 72). The experience of Marija Peršolja (born in 1910) from Pevma was less pleasant as near Salerno the refugees from the Gorizia Region were treated as pro-Austrians (Svoljšak, 1991, 31). The authorities ill-treated refugees also in Sicily, in Nicosia, where the family of Milka Šosterčič (born in 1906) from Oslovje had been settled. They were regarded as internees and not given the support that belonged to them as refugees: *"The authorities did not treat us well, but the locals were respectful and offered us help when we needed it"* (Prinčič, 1996, 271). According to Alojz Prinčič (born in 1910) from Oslavje, the biggest problem during their exile in Sicily, in Cimininno, was the knowledge of Italian, which was poor even among the locals (Prinčič, 1996, 232).

Going back to the experience of exile on the Austrian side, more precisely, in the Slovene speaking area, we find that the attitude towards the refugee issue changed at the end of the war. Judging from the Slovene press, the Slovene public in central Slovenia became more favourable towards Littoral refugees after the Italian occupation of the former Austrian Littoral. When former Gorizian refugees, who in 1918 were still on the territory of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, were joined by new ones, who had left mainly Trieste and Gorizia, the situation started becoming tense again.<sup>18</sup> The new crowd of refugees, which consisted mainly of middle class members, was the concern of the Office for the occupied territory, with the particular Department of exile. Until 1920, an important role was also played by the Refugee advisory board, which collected data and led a list of refugees, took care of their accommodation and supported them financially. In addition, *"it collected data on their attitude towards the locals"* (Nečak, Vovko, 1981, 114). As Urška Strle established, the care of the state towards refugees was reflected in the protection and representation of *"the benefits of the expatriate population,*

18 In the interwar period, around 100,000 Slovenes and Croats left Venezia Giulia, of which 70,000 allegedly went to Yugoslavia (Kalc, 2001, 163). In Ljubljana, in 1919, around 5,000 refugees were registered (Purini, 2010, 53–54).

*with special emphasis on the youth. Among these tasks, there was also the prevention of emigration from the Littoral and Carinthia, as far as it was possible, since for a chaotic young country, refugees represented an additional financial and administrative burden*” (Strle, 2013, 168). In December 1918, a special aid for unemployed teachers and teachers from the area of Goriška and Gradiška was approved with a special decree, but it is not clear to what extent it was effective (Strle, 2013, 168).

In the post-war changing process of the national composition, especially of Styrian towns, when the departure of the German population was followed by the arrival of the Slovene Littoral population, the image of a female refugee on the imaginary level merged with the image of a strong Slovene woman, who remained or took refuge in the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, because she was not ready to be Italianized (*Sokolich*, 1919, I, 5–6, *Begunka*, 80–81). However, even if the first post-war period was favourable in the political and institutional context towards Littoral refugees in Carniola and Styria, in everyday life, problems soon began to appear in their integration and settling in the new environment.

#### CULTURAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF REFUGEE DISPLACEMENT AND DIVERSITY

If the so far cited testimonies suggest that the war, with its shortages and inflation, in many cases contributed to the difficult relationship between Littoral refugees and the locals, autobiographical sources that talk about the refugee experience in the “homeland” after the end of the First World War, show a more complex picture. They mainly direct us towards regarding different cultural and political affiliations, which were so controversially discussed by Klement Jug in his diary. In Ljubljana, where he started studying philosophy and science in 1919, up to his departure for Padua in 1922, he was accompanied by a strong sense of alienation. He saw Ljubljana as a provincial town, as a place that was unmerciful to free spirits, because it could not bear intellectual breadth, and it oppressed the will to live. In the town, where he experienced a radical disappointment, he felt robbed of his youth and dreams. He found solace in nature. From the world of bourgeois politeness and sociability, which he proclaimed hypocritical, he retreated into the mountains, where he searched for his inner peace in increasingly daring mountaineering adventures. As an opponent of compromising, he could not find a justification for those Gorizian compatriots, who easily integrated into the new environment and renounced, as Jug states, their principles and wishes<sup>19</sup>: “*Whoever is not bleary-eyed, is a stranger here, as if he came from the other world and has nothing to do here. His efforts to be understood by a Slovene are in vain. They call him ‘eccentric’, ‘an exception’, ‘a freak’, and then they no longer care about him.*”<sup>20</sup>

Jug’s anti-Ljubljana hostility can to some extent be attributed to his Nietzschean infatuation, the attitude of a student of philosophy, who did not care for the intellectual

19 See the entry *Jug Klement* in *Primorski slovenski bibliografski leksikon* (Slovenian Littoral Bibliographic Lexicon) (Goriška Mohorjeva družba, Gorizia 1974–1981, I. book, 596–597).

20 Marušič, 2000, 28, 19. III. 1920.

average and who could not tolerate Ljubljana's bourgeois everyday life. However, since the topic of displacement occurs also in other memoirs of Littoral refugees, we cannot eliminate his feelings as purely exceptional. On the contrary, it raises questions that call for a response.

According to Lavo Čermelj (1889–1980), a professor of physics, an educational and political worker, organizer of the Littoral emigration in the Yugoslav area, who, in November 1929, due to a threat of arrest that was being prepared by Italian fascist authorities, crossed the Italian-Yugoslav border and fled into Yugoslavia, the first Littoral refugees in the Yugoslav area after the First World War were welcome. The new authorities employed them in positions that remained unoccupied after the coup and the departure of the Germans: *“At the beginning, there were no signs of aversion for refugees, especially because there were many former Carniolans and Styrians among them, who had been living in the Littoral for a longer or shorter period and had already felt part of the Littoral population. However, they had to leave the territory that had been given to Italy since they did not have the Italian citizenship, or the Italian authorities opposed to it”* (Čermelj, 1972, 38).

According to him, the averseness to Littoral refugees increased on the arrival of *“real Littoral refugees”*; either of those who had been fired from their jobs by the Italian authorities because of their political beliefs, or of those who fled to Yugoslavia in order to avoid an impending internment or imprisonment (Purini, 2010, 42–59). These were mostly high school teachers, civil servants, doctors, lawyers, professionally educated and trained people, who, after crossing the border, represented a competition to the domestic bureaucracy and intelligentsia on the labour market. He was one of them. With the help of acquaintances from Trieste, he found an apartment in Ljubljana and started preparing the necessary documents for obtaining the Yugoslav citizenship, being deeply convinced of the temporary nature of his emigrant status. This proved to be harder than he had imagined; he was hampered by municipal authorities, which feared that they would have to assume the costs of the sick and infirm newcomers in the future.<sup>21</sup>

The most common complaint about Littoral immigrants was about them enjoying special privileges and depriving the locals of work. It often happened that, after a long search for a job, Littoral immigrants had to listen to complaints of the locals at their workplace: why didn't you stay in your homeland? Why didn't you adapt to the new political situation? Why do you take the work of the locals? Lavo Čermelj, with his great knowledge of the Littoral, but also the experiences as a refugee in Carniola, did not attribute only the fear of competition to the aversion to newcomers. He believed it had deeper roots (Čermelj, 1972, 38).

As Čermelj stated, the ones to suffer the most dismissive attitude were the people in Trieste, and only with the deterioration of the economic situation and the increasingly numerous emigration flow, the negative stigma clung to all Slovenes that came from the King-

21 For more on Čermelj's professional and political activities, see the entry Čermelj Lavo, *Primorski slovenski bibliografski leksikon* (Slovenian Littoral Bibliographic Lexicon), Goriška Mohorjeva družba, Gorizia 1974–1981, I. book, 225–229.

dom of Italy, and also from Postojna and Idrija, who came from more central areas which were part of Carniola until 1918 (ibid). In the Slovene imagery, at the transition from the 19th to the 20th century, Trieste was a godless and destructive town that demographically and nationally extorted the Slovene hinterland. This stigma also clung to the people from Trieste, who moved into central Slovenia between the two wars. In fact, in Ljubljana and its surroundings, they were often reproached with religious indifference or even godlessness.

Newcomers had a mirrored perception. The people from Trieste saw Ljubljana as a conservative and clerical town.<sup>22</sup> Finally, also the antifascism of liberal and social democratic circles in Trieste, which moved to Ljubljana or other Slovene towns, often appeared as too radical or barely understandable (Pelikan, 2010). In addition, the locals reproached those from Trieste and, more generally, from the Littoral, with excessive liveliness (Vojskovič, 1986, 123); the Mediterranean temperament was not familiar to their continental mentality.

Even the testimony of Jože Vilfan (1908–1987), who was affected by the emigrant experience, explains the background of the alienation of Littoral immigrants, even of those who were included in the Slovene political and academic environment.<sup>23</sup> In the lecture, which was dedicated to his years in Trieste, he pointed to the mental seal that Trieste left on him. His *Weltanschauung* (world view) had developed through the contact with the conservative and nationalist-oriented Trieste, but the most decisive for him was the cosmopolitan and latitudinarian environment of a modern, developing town that “*considering its urban development and material power*” was far ahead of other Slovene towns. Vilfan claimed about himself that he had chosen the Theresian world of Trieste, which was based on rational values, “*for a rational and democratic Trieste, for a Trieste, which is not only a tradition, but also and especially a formation of living people, which searches and finds its justification every day to meet the people’s needs.(...). In this sense, Trieste has always stimulated me to find a rational basis for my decision, or at least a rational argument.*” (Vilfan, 1978, 20).

The “*rational Trieste*” affected considerably also educated and politically and culturally active women, which is particularly evident from their memories, in which they described their period in Trieste (Nadlišek Bartol, Hočevar, Vašte, Kmet, Kos). Even those who were not originally from Trieste adapted to its environment so much that the departure, into which they were forced by Italian fascist authorities, was difficult, for some of them even painful. In Carniola, Styria and Prekmurje, where they moved to, they

22 Once, when Čermelj asked Rudolf Golouh, a former leader of the Trieste socialists, how he feels in the new environment, the latter replied: “*Everything is monotonous here. Clericals are clericals, liberals are clericals, socialists are clericals. Everyone are clericals.*” (Čermelj, 1972, 39).

23 Joža Vilfan was born in Trieste in 1908. He studied law in Rome and later in Vienna. During the Second World War, he joined the Liberation Front and became President of the Slovene National Liberation Committee for the Littoral. After the war, he took over important political and state functions, particularly in the Yugoslav diplomacy. From May 1947 to January 1950, he headed the Yugoslav delegation in the United Nations in New York. The lecture *Trst moje mladosti* (The Trieste of my youth) was published in abbreviated form in a book (Vilfan, 1978, 19–23). See *Vilfan dr. Joža, Primorski slovenski biografski leksikon* (the Slovene Littoral Biographical Lexicon), Goriška Mohorjeva družba, Gorizia, 1991, 17th part, 217–219.

felt displaced. Leopoldina Kos, who left Trieste as a Slovene teacher at the escalation of fascist violence in 1926, was assigned a teaching position in Murska Sobota by Slovene authorities, in the remote, barely connected and economically undeveloped Prekmurje. The jump from the vibrant urban environment, where she had been active in feminist circles (she advocated the women's right to vote), to a remote province was shocking (RZ NUK, Ms 1432, Zbirka Leopoldine Kos (The collection of Leopoldina Kos)).

The departure from Trieste in May 1919 was very traumatic also for the teacher Marija Kmet: *"I was cold-bloodedly packing my things into boxes, destroying memories, burning notes, letters; together with my companion we were giving away furniture and clothes just like that, as if to say everything will be new in Yugoslavia. I left that lovely house, my home, which before meant everything to me, as a dead person, without sorrow; I did not even look back, I closed the carriage and squeezed into a corner. The carriages of the Orient-Express were running smoothly, it smelled of Foreign, of the magnificence of gold and the freedom of the rich. I senselessly stepped off the train in Ljubljana. This was my fourth home that had been ruined"* (Kmet, 1933, 87). The feelings of alienation and displacement increased even more after the decision of scholastic authorities to transfer her to Upper Carniola:

*"Although I should not have been teaching according to the doctor's advice, I wrote a normal request, because I did not want to start with a leave in the new country. I did not care any further for the job. I frequented companies and behaved in a way, even though only apparently, which accumulated much gossip about me and was not honouring me at all. In this tumultuous bohemian life, I was strongly hit by the news that I had been appointed the bourgeois teacher in Tržič in Upper Carniola. Something so outrageous seemed impossible to me. "In Tržič! I — in Tržič!" the pride in me was screaming. "Never! Not even for five minutes!" I was running around and asking people. Really! And I had to start immediately or otherwise I would have lost my job. Since I had previously been thinking about sick leave, I decided to use it then, without getting over the blow of the official authorities. The begging for the leave and for a job in Ljubljana at the same time knocked me down completely"* (Kmet, 1933, 87–88).

The feelings of displacement and alienation are also mentioned by female authors, who did not leave the Littoral due to political or ideological reasons, but as daughters.<sup>24</sup>

24 About the stigmatization of refugee, immigrant children, the testimony of L.[judmila] B.[izjak] is particularly informative: *"In Maribor, it was very difficult for us from the Littoral because we were insulted with "verdampen Čičen" (damned Čičs). Čič was an insult in the Littoral. Those people were terribly hostile. I repeat, being a Littoral refugee in Maribor in the interwar period was extremely hard. This is why I do not like Styrians. I know how often my mother was upset and said: "Those stupid Styrians ... They do not even know what is chicory or kale or this or that. And then they call us Čičs, but they do not even know what artichokes are. They do not have a clue and they call us Čičs!" ... If you are at home, you have completely different possibilities. It is different, you feel secure, you are at home. Emigrants still have to adapt to all of this. Thus, after the war, there was a problem in the Littoral with such exposed jobs. We, for example, and our parents, our people from the Littoral, they were all trying exceedingly hard to school their children. And in general, in our midst, they were all more or less educated, highly educated. This generation started with the education immediately, but these boys, who came, were not educated, did not have professions or anything. Their position was, of course, difficult. It was hard to find such a job. And what did they mostly*

Their narratives are mainly focused on the family everyday life, in which new and old private experiences were interwoven, old and new worlds. In the new environment, they missed the sea, the town streets, the smells, hometown nooks. They were longing for familiar faces, for their home language, and the feeling of eradication became a form of adaptation: *“To us, migration had become something similar to spring cleaning. The apartment was either damp or cold or far, the rent was too high, or our parents could not get used to it. (...) And then we were again carrying things out and loading them. My father always found the wagon and the driver. It was like going to the Promised Land for us. It seemed as if our parents were always relieved when they were moving to a new place. As if they had left all the bad in the old house”* (Vojskovič, 1986, 74).

The family of Marija Vojskovič (1915–1997), like many others from the Littoral, never really adapted to the new environment. In their experience, the longing for a lost home remained, for the place that they *“carried in our blood”*, but to which they returned as foreigners (Vojskovič, 1986, 70), but also other values and experiences. For the people from Maribor, who were raised in German spirit, was difficult to understand, for example, the enthusiastic Slovenism of Littoral immigrants, as the following autobiographical paragraph picturesquely recounts: *“The first thing that our father did, after the formation of the new State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs in 1918, was to paint a room in Slovene national colours. The ceiling was white, the rounded stripe under it was light blue and the walls were light red. Some people in the house, who had entered the Yugoslav brotherhood with a touch of distrust, were perplexed by this. Some of them claimed that it was my father, with his enthusiasm, that chose his own surname. I am sure that is not his real surname. He is from Trieste. Aren't Lahs there? Sure, Lahs, Lahs! And one of our neighbours, whose husband died at the Isonzo Front, could not help but glance at him with scorn from time to time.”*

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*do? They worked on railways or in factories, where unqualified workers were needed, or they started working for the police or gendarmerie. These are not popular professions. They are repressive and, of course, this was also one of the reasons, why they did not accept us.”* (Sajovic, 78–79.) See also: Kalc, 2002, 48–49.

## RAZSELJENOST IN KULTURNE MEJE V VELIKI VOJNI. TRPKOST BEGUNSKIH IZKUŠENJ V LASTNI DOMOVINI IN NA TUJEM

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*V slovenskem zgodovinopisju je življenje civilnega prebivalstva v prvi svetovni vojni skromno raziskano, kar velja še posebej za žensko prebivalstvo. Čeprav sta v goriškem in širše posoškem kontekstu tematiko begunstva pionirsko raziskala Petra Svoljšak in Paolo Malni, ostajajo še vedno slabo poznani številni aspekti prisilne evakuacije in življenja v begunstvu tako na avstrijski kot na italijanski strani. V pričujočem članku je pozornost usmerjena na vprašanje doživljanja razseljenosti in odtujenosti primorskih beguncev in pregnancev tako v času prve svetovne vojne kot po njenem koncu.*

*Intervjuji, ki sta jih z nekdanjimi begunci in begunkami v osemdesetih in devetdesetih letih opravila goriška novinarka in publicistka Dorica Makuc ter ljubiteljski zgodovinar in publicist Vili Prinčič, se ob skromni razpoložljivosti begunskega avtobiografskega gradiva ponujajo v zgodovinopisno analizo predvsem zaradi spominskih fragmentov, ki spregovorijo o trpkosti begunske izkušnje. V mnogih pričevanjih izstopa spomin na neprijaznost in negostoljubnost okolja. Prijetni spomini na obdobje begunstva so pravzaprav redki, še posebej med tistimi, ki so ga doživeli na avstrijski strani. Biti ožigosani kot Lah in sovražnik v lastni domovini, je bila še posebej travmatična izkušnja, ki je zapustila globlje sledi v spominih mnogih goriških in posoških beguncih in begunkah slovenske narodnosti. Da so bili odnosi med begunci in krajevnim prebivalstvom težavni, še posebej v Ljubljani in na Kranjskem, potrjuje tudi takratno slovensko časopisje, ki je poročalo o nekorektnem vedenju domačinov, o izgredih in napadih, ki so jih bili deležni begunci, tudi kot žrtve vojnih dobičkarjev.*

*Slovenska duhovščina in inteligenca sta pogosto nagovarjali domačine k izkazovanju pietet in solidarnosti s pregnanci. K izkazovanju večje pomoči goriškim beguncem, zlasti materam z malimi otroki, so pozivale tudi slovenske izobraženke, aktivne v ženskem gibanju, še posebej tiste, ki so delovale v Trstu in so se javno angažirale za usodo primorskega begunstva. V člankih in črticah, ki so jih objavljale v slovenskem časopisju so izpostavljale usode mater in žena, ki so zaradi vojne morale zapustiti svoje domove in so bile prisiljene poiskati začasno domovanje v zaledju fronte.*

*S številnimi težavami in neugodnimi okoliščinami so se morali soočiti tudi slovenski begunci oz. begunke, ki so bili izgnani in izseljeni v Italijo. Toda če primerjamo njihova spominska pričevanja s tistimi, ki so nam jih zapustili begunci na avstrijski strani soškega bojišča, ugotovimo, da je bila izkušnja zdomstva v Kraljevini Italiji manj dramatična, tudi zaradi večje materialne podpore, ki so jo begunske družine prejemale s strani italijanske države.*

*Po slovenskem tisku sodeč je slovenska javnost v osrednji Sloveniji primorskim beguncem postala bolj naklonjena po italijanski zasedbi nekdanjega avstrijskega Primorja. Ko so se goriškim beguncem in begunkam, ki so se leta 1918 še zadrževali na ozemlju države SHS, pridružili novi, ki so zapustili predvsem Trst in Gorico, pa se je odnos začel*

*ponovno zaostrovati. Posamezna pričevanja sugerirajo, da je bil odklonilen odnos do primorskih beguncev v povojnem času odraz različnih kulturnih in političnih pripadnosti in praks.*

*Ključne besede: begunci, prva svetovna vojna, Posočje, razseljenost*

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