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THE ROLE OF IRONMAKING IN A PREMODERN RURAL COMMUNITY. THE EXAMPLE OF THE WEISSENFELS LORDSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Using the example of the Weissenfels lordship, attention is drawn to some social and economic processes that took place until the mid-seventeenth century and were a consequence of mining, especially of the production and processing of iron. After the end of the medieval colonisation process, in the sixteenth century, there was a social stratification of peasantry and the formation of the peasant proletariat. This class managed to ensure its existence by participating in ironmaking processes. The production of iron became in the first half of the seventeenth century the most important economic sector in the Weissenfels lordship. The more intensive activity also had a strong environmental impact, especially due to the increased need for wood and charcoal.

Keywords: ironmaking, lordship, Untersassen, Weissenfels, Bela Peč, Upper Sava Valley

IL RUOLO DELLA SIDERURGIA NELLA COMUNITÀ RURALE DI PREMODERNA. L'ESEMPIO DELLA SIGNORIA DI WEISSENFELS

SINTESI

Utilizzando l'esempio della signoria di Weissenfels, si richiama l'attenzione su alcuni processi sociali ed economici che si verificarono fino alla metà del XVII secolo e furono conseguenza dell'attività mineraria e in particolare della produzione e lavorazione del ferro. Dopo la fine del processo di colonizzazione, nel XVI secolo, si verificò una stratificazione sociale della classe contadina e la formazione del proletariato contadino. Questa classe riuscì a garantire la propria esistenza attraverso la partecipazione ai processi di lavorazione del ferro. La produzione di ferro divenne nella prima metà del XVII secolo il settore economico più importante della signoria di Weissenfels. L'attività più intensiva ebbe anche un forte impatto ambientale, soprattutto a causa della crescente necessità di legna o carbone vegetale.

Parole chiave: siderurgia, signoria, Untersassen, Weissenfels, Villa Bassa/Bela Peč, Valle del Alto Sava

Late medieval society was essentially a rural society. Its foundation was based on agricultural production, which dictated its social character and gave it its typical internal dynamics. The changing legal status of the peasant population did allow for certain social changes but did not significantly alter the character of society itself. Despite significant regional differences, the majority of the population still consisted of peasantry, for whom the land was the main source of livelihood (Rösener, 1993). Even in the late Middle Ages, the incomes of the nobility still came mainly from feudal rents. As the example of the Counts of Celje shows, monetary surpluses generated by other activities, such as mercenary entrepreneurship, were often reinvested in the accumulation of land holdings to increase income from rents (Mlinar, 2009, 118–119). From the mid-thirteenth century onwards, certain technical and technological innovations and the gradual transfer of royal prerogatives to the high nobility as well as to the certain bishoprics and monasteries enabled the gradual development of new economic sectors, which provided landowners with additional income. The Eastern Alps were no exception. There, individual landowners had been acquiring the right to exploit mineral resources and process ore from the twelfth century (Oitzl, 2018a; 2024, 67–72). In the wider Julian Alps region, ironmaking thus became the most important non-agricultural economic activity at that time (Oitzl, 2018b, 79–80). The increase in iron production was gradually reflected in increased trade of iron products and semi-finished products, which in the Eastern Alps can be traced back to the mid-thirteenth century (Oitzl, 2024, 73).

While recent systematic studies in the history of ironmaking in the Eastern Alps were made – particularly by Gašper Oitzl – the social consequences of the emergence of this then new economic sector are less well known. The purpose of this study is to analyse these consequences using the example of the Bela Peč¹ lordship and to highlight, at least in part, some of the social changes that ironmaking brought to rural areas during the transition from the Middle Ages to the early modern period. In doing so, we will rely primarily on two sources that provide us with a somewhat better insight into the economic and social picture of the lordship in question. The first source is the 1498 land register (*urbarium*) of the Weissenfels lordship. It was created as a result of the broader reforms of (future) Emperor Maximilian I, who sought to improve the transparency of the management of his lordships and to increase their yields (Umek, 1982, 312; Juričić Čargo, 2016, 74–75). The second source is of the same type and was created a little less than 150 years later, when Emperor Ferdinand II sold the Weissenfels lordship to Johann Ulrik Eggenberg in 1636 (Komić Marn, 2015, 15–19). An integral part of the purchase agreement was also a transcript of a land register that was probably a few years older. A comparison of the two land registers provides a good insight into the lordship's structure and the changing social conditions.²

1 Weissenfels (Fusine in Val Romana or Villa Bassa in Italian, Bela Peč in Slovenian) is the present-day settlement located at the border between Italy, Austria and Slovenia. Since the area is multilingual, I am using the name of the settlement in German form as found in sources dating from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries.

2 Both documents have been published in critical edition (Mlinar, 2018).

MEDIEVAL COLONISATION AND FORMATION OF THE LORDSHIP

The Weissenfels lordship covered a large area of the Upper Sava Valley. The eastern edge of the estate was marked by the Završnica stream valley. To the west, the estate stretched across the watershed at Rateče all the way to the Rio Bianco stream (today in Italy) west of the village of Weissenfels (today Fusine in Valromana). The lordship was divided into two parts by the estate of the Bishopric of Freising in Dovje in the middle, which was incorporated in the Škofja Loka lordship as an independent office (Mlinar, 2018, 22–23).

Weissenfels was developed into an independent lordship relatively late. It originally belonged to the larger Lordship of Radovljica, which was controlled by the Counts of Ortenburg. The Counts of Ortenburg are believed to have acquired their estates in the upper Upper Carniola (Gorenjska) region as heirs to the Counts of Ebersberg. They are mentioned relatively late in the sources, for the first time between 1140 and 1185, when Heinrich of Ortenburg donated a farmstead in Moste to the Provost Church of the Mother of God located on Bled Island (Mlinar, 2005, 337; Oitzl, 2016, 299). In his discussion of the first mention of Bled in written sources, Peter Štih was toying with the very attractive possibility that this legal act took place in 1142 during the consecration of a church in the Bled area, but unfortunately this appealing idea cannot be confirmed by other sources (Štih, 2004, 22–23). The Ortenburgs connected their estate, which stretched mainly along the left bank of the Sava River, into a lordship with its seat at Waldenberg Castle (Pusti grad) near Radovljica. The castle was presumably built in the last decades of the twelfth century and was administered by the Ortenburg ministerials (Sapač, 2016, 329). After a brief division between 1263 and 1271, Friedrich of Ortenburg reunited the estate. Waldenberg thus finally became the administrative centre of the lordship, while nearby Radovljica became the ecclesiastical centre of the Ortenburg estate in Upper Gorenjska (Lackner, 1991, 185).

The Ortenburgs soon realised the economic potential of the iron ore deposits located in the Karawanks and Julian Alps. They began to systematically consolidate their property rights over the Upper Sava Valley and colonise it. The Ortenburgers start to intervene in the valley at the beginning of the fourteenth century. In April 1326, Georg der Gutenberger, as he is given in the sources, appointed Count Albrecht of Ortenburg as protector of *sechs huoben gereutes*. Georg acquired the property from Bishop Emicho of Freising and donated it to the Church of the Assumption of Virgin Mary in Kranjska Gora (Mlinar, 2005, 339). Sources indicate that the Ortenburgs initiated intensive colonisation of the valley in the following decades. In November 1362, Lodovico della Torre, Patriarch of Aquileia, addressed a letter to Heinrich, the parish priest of Radovljica. He had received information that ‘within the boundaries of the parish of Radovljica, in the until now uninhabited and uncultivated forests near Kranjska Gora and Dovje, many new dwellings had been built’. The settlers had also built two new churches, one in Kranjska Gora and the other in Dovje. The Patriarch instructed the priest to appoint worthy vicars to take care of the spiritual welfare of the

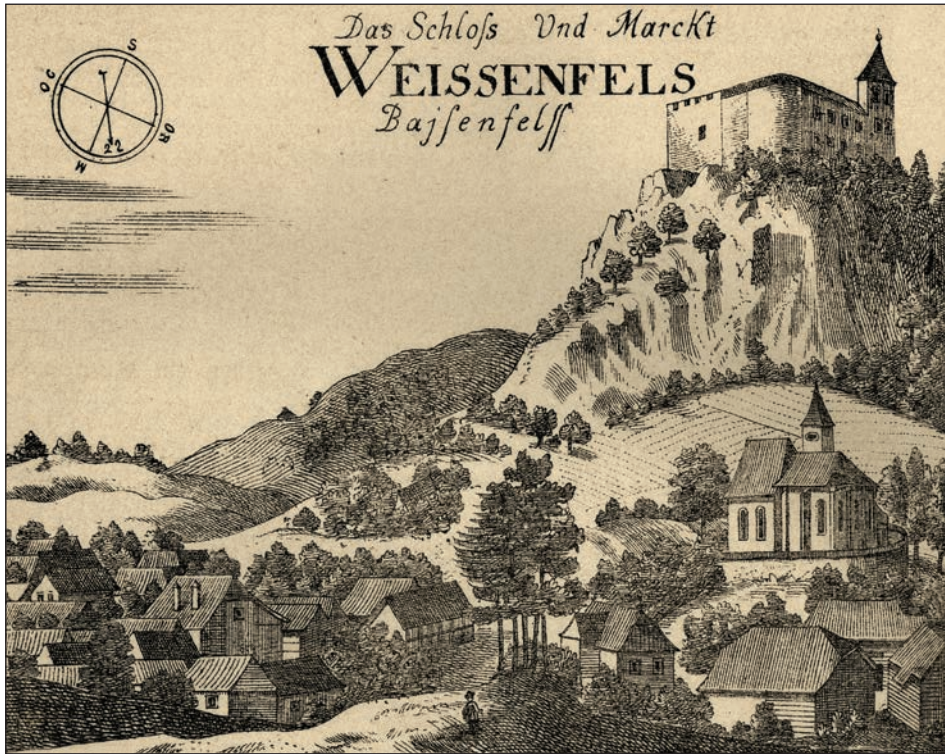


Fig. 1: *Weissenfels castle (Valvasor, 1689).*

settlers. A few months later, della Torre also wrote to Count Otto of Ortenburg. Similar to his letter to the parish priest of Radovljica, he stated that he had received information about Otto's colonisation activities in the Kočevje region (southeast of Ljubljana) and in Kranjska Gora. The Patriarch further mentioned that five new churches had been built in the Kočevje region and another in Kranjska Gora, and granted Otto and his heirs the right to present a priest (Mlinar, 2005, 338).

The second document in particular draws attention to a fact that has been overlooked in the scientific literature. The Ortenburgers did not focus their colonisation activities in Carniola, which reached their peak in the mid-fourteenth century, solely on the Kočevje region, but also on the Upper Sava area. The scope of the latter territory was, of course, much smaller than that in the Kočevje region, as it did not allow for more intensive settlement, but it does indicate Ortenburg intentions to control the Upper Sava area. The fact that the two colonisations were linked and that they were the product of the same systematic endeavour and policy of the house of Ortenburg is also indicated by the documents of Countess Agnes. Agnes of Ortenburg, who was married to Eberhart of Walsee, issued two documents on 29 October 1386. With the

first, she donated 30 marks of pfennigs for the salvation of her soul to the Church of Saint Bartholomew in Kočevje, and with the second, the same amount for the same purpose to the church in Kranjska Gora. In this way, Agnes also symbolically supported the efforts of her brother and the entire family to colonise a specific area. The identical sums and the fact that Agnes donated part of her property to the church in Kranjska Gora despite the small area of settlement indicate that the colonisation of the Upper Sava Valley was of equal importance to the Ortenburgs as that of the Kočevje region (Mlinar, 2005, 339).

Colonisation was quickly followed by the final consolidation of land ownership. In April 1385, an agreement was reached between the collegiate church in Maria Wörth (on Lake Wörthersee in Carinthia) and Friedrich of Ortenburg. The collegiate church handed over the entire village of Rateče to Friedrich in exchange for eight farmsteads in the vicinity of Sternberg/Strmec Castle in Carinthia. With this agreement, the Counts of Ortenburg gained control of the entire Upper Sava Valley, with the exception of the Dovje Office, which belonged to the Freising bishops (Mlinar, 2005, 337–339).

The consolidation of property was followed by ecclesiastical subordination. An extensive vidimus from the 1470s, which was apparently drawn up at the request of the newly appointed Bishop of Ljubljana, reveals the complexity of the legal act. In May 1390, after mediation by the Canon of Udine, Burkhard *de Weldeneck*, tripartite talks began between the parish of Maria Gail (south of Villach), the parish priest of Kranjska Gora, and Friedrich of Ortenburg about the future pastoral care in Rateče. An agreement was reached in November of the same year. The parish priest of Maria Gail transferred the parish rights in Rateče to the parish priest of Kranjska Gora, while Friedrich of Ortenburg assumed the resulting financial consequences. As a landowner, he undertook to contribute to the increased costs of care for the parish priest of Kranjska Gora, and to cover the loss of fourteen marks of pfennigs for the parish of Maria Gail out of his own pocket. On 8 December 1390, the Patriarch of Aquileia also gave his consent to the agreement (Mlinar, 2005, 339).

The ownership ties of Rateče and, likely, the rest of the valley west of the village of Belca to their Carinthian landlords left significant traces, especially in the colonisation of the valley. Traces in the dialect are so evident that Tine Logar wrote that the Rateče dialect is a Carinthian dialect – its elements can be traced throughout the valley to the village of Belca – and the fact that older innovations from Gorenjska did not reach Rateče indicate that this area was colonised from Carinthia and not from Carniola (Logar, 1954, 145–149). The result of the original attachment to Carinthia is also the creation of the Rateče manuscript, the second oldest preserved medieval Slovenian linguistic document after the Freising manuscripts (Grafenauer, 1958). The ties with Carinthia only began to break at the end of the fourteenth century, when the Ortenburgs finally gained control of the entire Upper Sava Valley and administratively incorporated it into their Waldenberg lordship, while ecclesiastically linking it more closely to their Radovljica parish through their right of presentation (Mlinar, 2005, 339; 2018, 20).

Although the sources do not mention this directly, the entire Ortenburg estate in the Upper Gorenjska region was initially administered from the Waldenberg castle. Changes in the administration of this extensive lordship did not occur until after the Ortenburgs died out in 1418. They were succeeded by the Counts of Celje. If we are to believe the historical note in the *Cillier Chronik*, which is also summarised by Hieronymus Megiser in his *Annales Carinthiae* and Johann Weikhard Valvasor in *Die Ehre des Herzogthums Krains*, a dispute arose between Hermann of Celje and his son Friedrich. After the reconciliation, Friedrich withdrew from public life and had a new castle built in 1431 on a cliff above the settlement of ironworkers (Megiser, 1612, 1091; Valvasor, 1689, III, 642; Krones, 1883, 81; Golia, 1972, 22).

Preserved sources indicate that a new lordship was formed relatively quickly around the castle. A new economic and administrative unit was created separate of the Radovljica lordship. In 1440, *Hannsen vonn Friesach*, the first castellan at Weissenfels Castle, is mentioned. Later castellans changed relatively often. Sources mention at least eleven individuals who held this position in just under seven decades until the end of the fifteenth century. As the lordship was recent, the owner of the estate no longer needed to rely on the ministerial nobility for its administration, but the castellans acted as officials who were paid for their work. At the end of the fifteenth century, when the oldest preserved manorial land register was created, the Weissenfels lordship was already a fully-fledged independent economic and administrative unit (Golec, 2016, 392; Mlinar, 2018, 22).

EXPLOITING THE ECONOMIC POTENTIAL

With the consolidation of their holdings, the Ortenburgs were able to begin systematically exploiting the natural resources and economic potential of the valley. Their efforts reached their peak in the last decades of the fourteenth century. Somewhat surprisingly, right at the beginning of the chronological list of sources indicating their deliberate efforts, their most important document stands out. A privilege to miners in the mountain pastures above Jesenice (the area around Planina nad Jesenicami) was issued in 1381 by Friedrich III of Ortenburg, which is known today in scientific literature as the Ortenburg or Jesenice Mining Ordinance (Benedičič, 2001; Oitzl, 2024, 83–88). According to Sergej Vilfan, the document, which has been preserved only in form of insert from 1452 and later transcripts, is one of the most important medieval legal documents in Slovenia (Vilfan, 1996, 191). Even in the wider European context, the Ordinance is one of the older text monuments of its kind (Sprandel 1968, 5; Oitzl, 2025, 12). The reasons for its early creation can be found primarily in Friedrich's interest in attracting a skilled workforce from abroad by establishing a regulated legal framework (Mlinar, 2016, 51; Oitzl, 2025, 14).

The document is relatively extensive, carefully structured and well-written. It specifies the obligations of mining masters (*pergmaister*) to the feudal lord, while also defining their rights. In legal terms, it grants a considerable degree of internal autonomy to the mining community. It allows them to elect their own mining judges (*pergrichter*),

defines the powers of the judges, determines the scope of punishments and even specifies procedural rules. It granted the mining community a number of privileges. Mining masters were exempt from all taxes, personal working services (*Rabot*) and other personal duties and obligations. Only permanently settled masters were allowed to mine and process ore. They were given the opportunity to use mountain pastures, and they could freely dispose of and inherit their property (Benedičič, 2001; Oitzl, 2024, 83–88).

At the turn of the century, the first signs of urbanisation began to appear in the lordship. Around 1400, a smelting settlement gradually was established on the western edge of the Weissenfels lordship. In the sources, it was initially referred by the name of the Chapel of Saint Leonard located there (*bey sannct Lienhart ob Ratschach*), and after 1440 by the hill on which the castle already stood at that time (*bey sannt Liennhart vnnder Weissenfels*). As sources show, some ironmaking masters came from nearby Malborghetto and Camporosso in Val Canale. Judging by their names, the origins of some can also be traced to Italy or Friuli (Golec, 2016, 390–392). The modest settlement with a mining judge, first mentioned in 1404, gradually acquired market attributes and finally developed into an independent market town in the 1540s. The first mentions of market traders are from 1499, while in judicial practice the term market judge became established a few decades later (Golec, 2016, 394–395). The growing importance of the settlement is also shown by the fact that in 1465, despite later opposition from the parish priest of Kranjska Gora, the neighbourhood got its own chaplain (Žnidaršič Golec, 2000, 49–50, 102; Höfler, 2013, 218).

Sources are scarcer for the lower part of the Weissenfels lordship, where urbanisation seems to have proceeded more slowly. No settlement is mentioned in the mining ordinance of 1381. It is only in the document of Ulrik of Celje from 1452, confirming the Ordinance, that the village of *Asnighk* – today's Jesenice – is mentioned (Benedičič, 2001, 14). The parish was established in 1526 (Žnidaršič Golec, 2000, 323). Despite the somewhat slower development in the lower part of the estate, the trend brought about by the introduction of ironmaking is evident. In addition to promoting colonisation, the exploitation of iron ore and iron processing were also the main factors in the formation of urban centres in the Upper Sava Valley and more broadly in the Julian Alps (Oitzl, 2018b, 96).

ECONOMIC CHANGES

With the administrative and ecclesiastical consolidation of their estates, the Ortenburgs were able to begin systematically exploiting the economic potential of the Upper Sava Valley. Sources for the first decades are very scarce. The Ortenburg ordinance mentions only a smithy in Jesenice, owned by a certain *Wisser* (Benedičič, 2001, 17). Individual ironmaking facilities and their owners are also mentioned in Weissenfels at the beginning of the fifteenth century (Golec, 2016, 390–392). Only the material from the end of the fifteenth century is more informative. The 1498 land register mentions seven furnaces (*Pleiofen*), six hammers for further processing of material obtained from the smelter, and six saws.

Table 1: Income share according to Weissenfels land registers from 1498 and 1636.³

	1498		1636	
	sum in β	%	sum in den	%
agricultural activities	9,826	63.21	43,652	48.58
non-agricultural activities	4,300	27.66	46,019	51.21
<i>Schreibgeld</i>	18	0.12	186	0.21
other incomes	1,400	9.01		
total	15,544	100	89,857	100

The economic changes brought about by ironmaking are most clearly reflected in the structure of land register income. In the 1498 land register, income from agricultural activities amounted to 9,826 solidi, representing 63.21 per cent of the estate's total income. In just over hundred years, their share decreased significantly, amounting to only 48.58 per cent in 1636. Consequently, the share of estate income derived from non-agricultural activities increased significantly. At the end of the fifteenth century, this type of income accounted for a good quarter of the estate's total income (27.66 per cent). In the 1636 land register, income from non-agricultural activities rose to 51.21 per cent of the estate's total income (Mlinar, 2018, 176). In just over a century, iron-making and related activities surpassed all other activities in terms of income generated and became the most important economic activity in the Weissenfels lordship.

Table 2: Income share by settlement in 1498.

	income 1498		share by settlement
	mr den	β	%
JESENICE	2	1,033	8.70%
POTOKI		432	2.78%
HRUŠICA		369	2.37%
PLANINA POD GOLICO		208	1.34%
RUDNIKI NAD JESENICAMI	15	400	18.01%
RATEČE	13	1,975	26.09%
PODKOREN		1,872	12.04%
KRANJSKA GORA		887	5.71%
ROVTI		1,260	8.11%
BELA PEČ	2	588	5.84%
other income (<i>Burghut</i>)	8	120	9.01%
total	97	24	100%

3 Abbreviations for money used in tables: gulden (f), mark (mr), kreutzer (xr), solidus (β), pfening (den).

The changed role of ironmaking is also indicated by the composition of income by single settlements in the estate. According to the land register from 1498, the largest share of income came from the settlement of Rateče. With eighteen farmsteads, they contributed more than a quarter (26.09 per cent) of all monetary income in the estate. The only income from non-agricultural activities was a negligible amount of fifty pfennigs, which *Gilg Potschige* paid from the sawmill on the Jezernica stream near Weissenfels. Rateče was followed by the mines above Jesenice with 18.01 per cent. The only two remaining settlements that still contributed levies from non-agricultural activities in 1498 were Jesenice with 8.70 per cent and Weissenfels with 5.84 per cent. While Weissenfels's income came exclusively from non-agricultural sources, agricultural income still accounted for the majority of the value generated in Jesenice (almost 66 per cent). In other settlements, the estate had virtually no non-agricultural income (Mlinar, 2018, 175).

The picture changed significantly in the 1636 land register. The mines above Jesenice retained almost the same share of generated income (17.62 per cent), but the ratios between other settlements changed significantly. Weissenfels and Jesenice together generated almost half of the estate's total income (47.37 per cent), with agricultural income in Jesenice falling below half, while in Weissenfels it was negligible (less than two per cent). Although the absolute amount of levies remained the same, the share of income from settlements that retained their agricultural character also decreased significantly. In Rateče, for example, the share of the estate's total income fell from a

Table 3: Income share by settlement in 1636.

	income 1636		
	f	xr	den
BELA PEČ	115	1,138	76
ROVTI V OKOLICI BELE PEČI	2	116	8
KOPRIVNIK	1	83	6
RATEČE	31	1,339	55
PODKOREN	26	842	32
KRANJSKA GORA	7	857	52
GOZD MARTULJEK		552	36
SREDNJI VRH		338	20
HRUŠICA		650	32
JESENICE	75	1,606	69
RUDNIKI NAD JESENICAMI	80	478	6
KLADIVA NA SAVI	2	496	20
PLANINA POD GOLICO	6	249	6
POTOKI	4	137	0
total	349	8,881	418

good quarter (26.09 per cent) in 1498 to a good 10 per cent in 1636. In real terms, the role of non-agricultural activities probably increased even more than the statistical data show, as in the 1636 land register some groups of the agricultural population, that were not considered in the 1498, were now also included (Mlinar, 2018, 175).

A comparison of data from both land registers clearly confirms the direction of development. In the seventeenth century, ironmaking became the most important economic activity in the estate. Although most settlements retained their predominantly agrarian character, it generated the largest share of income. The changes were concentrated mainly in two settlements, Weissenfels and Jesenice, which finally acquired a (pre-)industrial character.

SOCIAL CHANGES

Other social changes were also generated by the expanding economic role of ironmaking. According to the older land register, at the end of the fifteenth century, the population of the Weissenfels lordship was dominated by farmstead holders. This ensured their livelihood and that of their (extended) families, in exchange for which they paid taxes to the lordship. The 1498 land register lists a total number of sixty-one farmsteads. Most of them, eighteen, were located in Rateče, and only in Podkoren and Jesenice did their number exceed ten. In other settlements, their number ranged from two (Planina) to seven (Kranjska Gora). By 1636, their number remained basically the same. All sufficiently fertile land had therefore already been cultivated and occupied by 1498. It was no longer possible to establish new farmsteads. The process of colonisation in the Weissenfels lordship was thus completed before the end of the fifteenth century.

However, a comparison of the two land registers reveals certain social processes. During this period, there was a marked increase in the number of farmsteads managed by a larger number of individuals. Rateče stands out in particular. In 1498, there were eighteen farmsteads in the settlement. Five of them already had two or more beneficiaries, while the remaining were still managed by a single beneficiary. By 1636, there were no longer any farmsteads with a single beneficiary in Rateče. All of them had at least two, and some even three, all of whom seem to have been close relatives, judging by their surnames. A total of thirty-seven individuals managed eighteen farmsteads. A similar process can also be observed in Kranjska Gora (seven farmsteads and twelve

Table 4: Share of the Untersassen in 1636.

	Number of farmsteads	Number of farmstead holders	Number of Untersassen	Share of Untersassen (%)	Taxes paid by farmstead holders (den)	Taxes paid by Untersassen (den)	Share paid by Untersassen (%)
RATEČE	18	37	24	39.3%	8,424	1,194	12.41%
PODKOREN	13	20	17	45.9%	6,585	629	8.72%
KRANJSKA GORA	7	12	25	67.6%	2,182	1,685	43.57%
HRUŠICA	5	8	18	69.2%	990	982	49.80%
JESENICE	12	15	65	81.3%	6,021	2,384	28.36%
POTOKI	4	4	10	71.4%	903	228	20.16%

farmstead beneficiaries) and Podkoren (thirteen farmsteads and twenty farmstead holders). This process was slightly less pronounced in the lower part of the estate. In Hrušica, there were eight farmstead holders on five farmsteads and in Jesenice there were fifteen beneficiaries on twelve farmsteads, while in Potoki, there was still only one farmstead holder on each of four farmsteads (Mlinar, 2018, 176). It seems that in the Weissenfels lordship the division of farmsteads began in the sixteenth century, confirming the thesis that the colonisation potential of the valley had already been exhausted by the end of the fifteenth century. The legal relationships between individual farmstead holders on the same farmstead are not apparent from the land register.

At the same time as the division of the farmsteads, a new class of peasant population began to emerge more and more prominently. These were the so-called *Untersassen* (subordinates, or *podružniki* in Slovenian). According to Sergij Vilfan, the *Untersassen* represent a social group of peasantry. Their basic economic unit, the *kheüschel* or cottage (*kajža*), was created as the landowner or neighbourhood allowed them to fence off a part of the commons (*Gmain*). On this part of the land, which was usually of poorer quality, they set up an agricultural facility, which helped them to support themselves and their families (Vilfan, 1996, 291). In the 1498 land register, the *Untersassen* are mentioned only in connection with certain settlements. For example, in Potoki and Jesenice, they were obliged to participate with their share of service to lordship (*Rabot*). They were not yet listed by name in the land register. It is impossible to determine their number, but given their modest appearance in the sources, it can be assumed that at the end of the fifteenth century it was still low.

In the sixteenth century, the number of *Untersassen* increased significantly. At the same time they were forced to pay taxes from their modest possessions. According to the 1636 land register, in some settlements the *Untersassen* had already become or were very close to becoming the largest social group. Their share was the lowest in Rateče (39.3 per cent) and Podkoren (45.9 per cent), while Jesenice stood out with 81.3 per cent. Their number in the land register increased for two reasons. The main reason was the requirement of the landlords that taxes should be paid from the estate's entire used and cultivated land. This process seems to have reached its peak in the early seventeenth century. For example, in August 1602, Archduke Ferdinand issued a special patent imposing tithe on the subjects in Planina pod Golico, Gozd Martuljek and Srednji Vrh, which they claimed they had not been required to pay until then. Similarly, a few years later, the subjects of Weissenfels complained about the leaseholder of the lordship, Inocenc Moscon, who also demanded taxes from properties that the subjects had deforested and cultivated in recent years. The dispute was only settled by a special commission of the Inner Austrian Government, which in October 1616 worked out a compromise solution and set a new level of taxes. The size of the taxed property thus expanded significantly (Mlinar, 2018, 45).

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a new social class of *Untersassen* emerged in sources of the Weissenfels lordship. Due to limited opportunities to survive by agriculture, they were forced to secure their livelihood through other activities. The possibility of additional income was found in ironmaking. Their integration into

various phases of the production process (extraction and processing of ore, charcoal production, etc.) enabled their existence, and thus also influencing their numbers. It is therefore not surprising that in 1636, it was in Jesenice, where there were obviously the most opportunities for additional income, that the proportion of *Unterrassen* was the highest (81.3 per cent).

THE IMPACT OF IRONMAKING ON ENVIRONMENT

The relatively modest number of ironmaking facilities, and particularly the method of ore extraction had a limited direct impact on environment in the late Middle Ages. In the foothills of the Julian Alps, iron was mainly extracted from limonite, which contained between forty-five and sixty per cent iron. In contrast, in the Karawanks, ore was mined in the form of siderite, which lay like a wedge between layers of schist. Individual veins were relatively short (Müllner, 1909, 372–373). With this form of ore extraction, the direct impact on the environment was small. The indirect impact of ironmaking was significantly larger. The technological processes of ore processing and the manufacture of (semi-)finished products required multiple heat treatments of the material at extremely high temperatures. These could only be achieved by using charcoal. Until the introduction of coke at the end of the nineteenth century, wood or charcoal were the only energy sources for iron production. Therefore, the impact of iron production on the environment was the largest through the exploitation of the wood reserves (Mlinar, 2014, 187; Oitzl, 2023, 73–76).

Until the end of the Middle Ages, the wood reserves in the Weissenfels lordship were large enough to meet the needs of the existing ironmaking facilities. For example, despite its detailed content, the Ortenburg mining order does not address the issue of rational exploitation and protection of forests at any point. This was obviously not a problem at the time of its creation at the end of the fourteenth century. Only one provision of the order can be linked to the desire for an uninterrupted wood supply. The landlord assured the mining masters that neither he nor his subjects would cut down any additional forests on the slopes above Jesenice, thus preventing the natural regeneration of wood stocks through cultivation of the area. The exclusive right to exploit the forest in this area was left to the mining masters (Benedičič, 2001, 30).

The documentary evidence indicates that the right to exploit and process ore included not only the management of economic facilities but also the disposal of natural resources necessary for the technological process. The wording that the feudal lord granted the recipient not only the economic facility but also ‘the forest and water needed for his smithy’ was an integral part of the grant documents. The individual was left to organise and carry out the entire production process, from the preparation of raw materials to the final manufacture of the product (Mlinar, 2014, 188).

The wood situation only began to change in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There were several reasons for this. The first lies in technological changes in the iron extraction process. The old so-called *Windischen* furnaces began to be gradually replaced by more efficient Breschia type furnaces, which enabled higher production

but also required an extended amount of energy (Müllner, 1909, 393; Oitzl, 2023, 73). The second reason lies in the increase in the number of ironmaking facilities in the sixteenth century. For 1569, Müllner counted twenty facilities in Carniola, eleven of which were located in Upper Gorenjska. The three ironmaking facilities mentioned in the Weissenfels lordship were situated in Planina, Jesenice, and Javornik. Two years later, three new facilities were added. A new hammer mill was built in Mojstrana, and new smelting facilities in Jesenice and in the Radovna River Valley (Müllner, 1909, 475–476; Mlinar 2014, 188).

From the mid-sixteenth century onwards, disputes related to the exploitation of forests begin to appear more and more frequently in sources. Initially, disputes arose mainly between individual landowners who encroached on the territory of others by cutting down trees (Mlinar, 2014, 189). These disputes were soon joined by disputes over the unplanned exploitation of woodlands. Judicial practice in the second half of the sixteenth century indicates the further direction of development. Measures were aimed primarily at preserving young forests to limit uncontrolled logging and enable their natural regeneration. In the first decades of the seventeenth century, this practice became the norm. The 1636 land register already emphasises, when listing the obligations and rights of individual villages, that the exploitation of the forest is only permitted for personal needs, whereby young forests had to be preserved.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The example of the Weissenfels lordship demonstrates that the impact of ironmaking on the socio-economic development of local communities was already substantial and multifaceted in pre-industrial society. Administrative and political changes were mainly linked to the landowners' – in case of the Weissenfels lordship to those of the Counts of Ortenburg's – interest in making better use of natural resources and, as a result, increasing the economic yield from their estates. Similar motives were also behind the planned colonisation in the fourteenth century. When the colonisation potential offered by the natural conditions of the estate was exhausted at the end of the fifteenth century, significant social changes started to take place. A class of so-called *Untersassen* began to emerge in the sources. Due to their poor economic situation, this class of subjects sought opportunities for survival in non-agricultural activities.

In addition to society, ironmaking also had an impact on the environment. This is particularly evident in the use of wood and its products. With the increase in iron production and processing, and especially with innovations in technological processes that required larger amounts of energy, the exploitation of forests also intensified. In the sixteenth century, this increased to such an extent that natural growth could no longer compensate for the logging, leading to the first measures for a more sustainable exploitation.

VLOGA ŽELEZARSTVA V PREDMODERNI RURALNI SKUPNOSTI.
PRIMER GOSPOSTVA WEISSENFELS

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POVZETEK

Rudarjenje, zlasti pa pridobivanje in predelava železa, je že v predmoderni dobi imelo znaten vpliv na družbeno in socialno podobo posameznih skupnosti. Gospostvo Bela Peč, na katerega je osredotočena pričujoča razprava, ni bilo izjema. Upravnopolitične spremembe so bile povezane zlasti z interesom zemljiškega gospoda do boljše izrabe naravnih danosti in, posledično, povečanja ekonomskega donosa. Podobni motivi so stali tudi za načrtno kolonizacijo v 14. stoletju. Ko je bil konec 15. stoletja kolonizacijski potencial, ki so ga omogočale naravne danosti v gospostvu, izčrpan, je začelo prihajati do izrazitih družbenih sprememb. Pojavil se je sloj t. i. podružnikov ali Untersassen. Zaradi slabšega ekonomskega položaja je ta sloj podložnega prebivalstva pospešeno iskal možnost preživetja v neagrarnih dejavnostih. Poleg družbenih vplivov je železarstvo vplivalo tudi okolje, zlasti z uporabo lesa in njegovih produktov. S povečevanjem proizvodnje in predelave železa, zlasti pa z novostmi v tehnoloških postopkih, ki so zahtevali večjo količino energenta, se je intenzivirala tudi izraba lesa. V 16. stoletju se je povečala do te mere, da naravni prirast ni več zmožal nadomestiti posekanega. Posledično je to pripeljalo do prvih ukrepov za trajnostno izrabo gozdov.

Ključne besede: železarstvo, gospostvo, podružniki, Bela Peč, Zgornjesavska dolina

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MIGRATIONS AND IDENTITIES IN IRONMAKING IN THE SLOVENIAN TERRITORY DURING THE LATE MIDDLE AGES AND EARLY MODERN PERIOD

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ABSTRACT

Migrations were of crucial importance for the development of ironmaking in the Slovenian territory during the Late Middle Ages and the transition to a professional industry, as they facilitated the transfer of new technologies. The main direction of migration came from the northern Italian area. Migrations had a significant impact on the social structure in the vicinity of the emerging ironmaking centres. They also influenced identity processes. In addition to linguistic and ethnic identities, a professional identity also emerged.

Keywords: ironmaking, migrations, identities, mining magistrates, technological transfer, preindustrial period, Slovenia

MIGRAZIONI E IDENTITÀ NELLA SIDERURGIA IN SLOVENIA TRA TARDO MEDIOEVO E PRIMA ETÀ MODERNA

SINTESI

Le migrazioni ebbero un'importanza fondamentale per lo sviluppo della siderurgia nel territorio sloveno durante il tardo medioevo e per la sua trasformazione in un'industria professionale, perché facilitarono il trasferimento di nuove tecnologie. La principale direttrice migratoria proveniva dall'Italia settentrionale. Le migrazioni ebbero un impatto significativo sulla struttura sociale nelle vicinanze dei nascenti centri siderurgici e influenzarono anche i processi di costruzione dell'identità. Accanto alle identità linguistiche ed etniche, emerse anche un'identità professionale.

Parole chiave: siderurgia, migrazioni, identità, magistrati minerari, trasferimento tecnologico, periodo preindustriale, Slovenia

INTRODUCTION¹

The migrations of skilled craftsmen and workers within and across mining regions and countries represent one of the most significant aspects of mining-related activities. They are key to the dissemination of technological innovations, legal practices, and specialised terminologies. In the European context, such migrations can be traced back to the High Middle Ages and occurred initially through monastic orders, particularly the Cistercians. The large-scale migration of miners from German-speaking regions to various parts of Europe, particularly Central and Southeastern Europe, contributed not only to the process of colonisation but also to the widespread adoption of German mining terminology. Numerous instances of mining-related migration are documented in the Eastern Alpine region. For example, miners from Saxony and Bohemia relocated to mines in the Austrian lands; miners and ironworkers from Upper Austria were active in Transylvania at least in the first half of the thirteenth century; and Tyrolean miners were employed in copper mines in northern England during the second half of the sixteenth century (Mitterauer, 1974, 244–245; Gimpel, 1993, 67, 70–72; Ludwig & Vergani, 1994, 593–622; Stöger, 2006, 170–182; Štih, 2010, 66–67; Hemker & Lobinger, 2020, 17–30).

Migrations were also connected, at least indirectly, to the various identities that emerged or existed within mining and ironmaking communities. Individual identity was multi-dimensional, shaped primarily by a combination of factors including gender, territorial origin, social or occupational status, religion, and ethnic background (Kočevar, 2019a, 99–101).

MIGRATIONS IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

The migration of foreign ironworkers into the Slovenian territory can be traced back to the mid-fourteenth century. Among the earliest recorded was Franciscus (*Franscische*), likely an ironmaking master, whose name and geographical proximity to northern Italy suggest he originated from that region. Shortly before the mid-fourteenth century, he was granted permission by the Villach seigniorship to establish a forge near the village of Laglesie San Leopoldo (Lipalja vas/Leopoldskirchen) in the Canal Valley (Wiessner, 1968, no. 410). Within the present-day borders of Slovenia, the first known foreign ironmaking masters operated in the Selška Valley, specifically around present-day Železniki.² One surviving record lists eight names (*Jakomo Barthlomee Zaschs*

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2 The name of the settlement originates from the Slovenian word for iron (*železo*). The German name (*Eisnern*) also has the same origin (*Eisen* – iron).

Murron Silvester Monfiodin Mathew und Jacob sein pruder). Aside from the brothers Mathew and Jacob, these individuals appear to have had no connections. Some of them also appear in other sources; for instance, four years later, Zass and Murron were recorded as stakeholders in local forges (BayHStA, HL 4, Hochstift Freising, 135, 1379, 4/29). Murron may have been a descendant of Nicholas (*Nyclino*) Murron, documented in the Škofja Loka seignior as early as 1318 when he was listed among the creditors of the Bishop of Freising (Zahn, 1871, 131).

The northern Italian origins of these ironworkers are supported by their names, geographical proximity, and established trade routes.³ By this period, ironmaking was already well developed in the Alpine valleys of northern Italy. Lombardy, in particular, was notable as a source of some of the earliest European references to the use of water power in ironmaking. Ironworks also operated in the Carnic Alps of Friuli during the first half of the fourteenth century, with such operations later spreading to other parts of the region (Sprandel, 1968, 111–112, 222–226, 372–373; Degrassi, 2014, 80–82).

Earlier literature in this field, influenced by folklore, claimed that the first named ironmasters in the Selška Valley originated from Friuli (Globočnik, 1867, 2; Blaznik, 1973, 83), though this cannot be corroborated by coeval sources. Alternatively, it is possible that these masters came from the County of Cadore, which, like the Selška Valley, was under the control of the Bishopric of Freising from the second half of the tenth century (Stahleder, 1974, 7–8). The iron industry in Cadore dates to at least the first half of the fourteenth century, with local iron (*ferrum de Cadubrio*) mentioned alongside iron from Carnia in 1332 as a material supplied for Venetian shipbuilding. In subsequent years, Cadore's iron exports continued to be primarily directed to Venice (Sprandel, 1968, 112; Degrassi, 2014, 80).

The advanced ironmaking technology of northern Italian regions suggests that master craftsmen from these areas likely introduced new techniques to the Slovenian territory. This had a transformative effect on local ironmaking, as the adoption of these innovations enabled greater production volumes, elevating ironmaking from a secondary agricultural activity to a specialised economic sector. From the second half of the fourteenth century onward, written references to ironworks along watercourses became increasingly frequent. While not direct evidence of water-powered operations, these references strongly imply the adoption of the new technology (Blaznik, 1973, 83–85; Mlinar, 2014, 185–188; Oitzl, 2022a, 209–211).

3 The transport route between the Škofja Loka area and the Soča Valley and on to Friuli was established as early as the High Middle Ages, with trade contacts documented as early as the end of the thirteenth century. The main route ran from Škofja Loka through the Poljanska Valley and across the Stara Oselica (or Kladje) pass, while the route through the Selška Valley and Petrovo Brdo was less important (Blaznik, 1966, 37–38; Kosi, 1995, 247–253).

Foreign masters, primarily from northern Italy, continued to appear in records into the following decades, particularly around the turn of the fourteenth century in the Canal Valley and Fusine in Valromana (Bela Peč/Weissenfels). A prominent local ironworks owner during this period was Bartolus Consurano of the nearby Malborghetto (Naborjet/Malborgeth). Early fifteenth-century records mention Nicolo and the brothers Michael and Schuann (ARS 1, 117, 45–46; Wiessner, 1968, no. 1043; Mlinar, 2014, 185–186; Golec, 2016, 390–391). In the early fifteenth century, Marco from Venzona in Friuli purchased a forge in Moste near Žirovnica (ZIMK SAZU, CKSL, 1414, 8/5). By the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, masters with Italian-sounding names continued to be active in Železniki, among them Laure and Florian Amota, Peter Pyrin, Mathia Piro, Hanse Casparin, and Anton Gompa (*Thoni Gampa*). A certain Sann was the most prominent stakeholder in Kropa, while his possible relative, Hans Sänn, owned a smelting furnace near Radovljica (ARS 1, 97, 124; ARS 174, Urbar gospodstva Radovljica 1498, 246, 104; Blaznik, 1963, 322).

The other direction of ironmaking migration to the Slovenian area was from other Habsburg lands, and particularly also from southern German regions. The earliest recorded ironworking master in Fusine in Valromana was Nickl Hintenaus, who, according to Boris Golec, may have originated from Carinthia (ARS 1, 117, 68; Golec, 2016, 390). In the Jesenice ironmaking area, which by the late fifteenth century was the largest in the Slovenian territory, local ironworks owners included Wolf Peyr and Simon Peyrl, whose surnames suggest origins in the Bavarian territory. The most prominent ironworks owner in the area, Nicklas Rasinger, was also likely of German origin (Fräss-Ehrfeld, 1984, 450; Mlinar, 2018, 72).

MIGRATIONS IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

Migration continued to play a significant role in the technological advancements of the iron industry during the sixteenth century. Entrepreneurs and master craftsmen, who introduced the technology of indirect iron production using blast furnaces to the Slovenian territory, came from the Alpine valleys above Brescia and Bergamo in Lombardy. This method, which employed continuous smelting processes in larger installations, enabled significantly higher production volumes. Lombard craftsmen also contributed to the dissemination of this technology to other European ironmaking centres. Another source of this innovation was west German lands, from where it likely spread to northern Carinthia, initially to the Lieser Valley near Gmünd (Sprandel, 1968, 226–232, 238–241; Dinklage, 1974, 327; Gestrin, 1981, 234–235; Šorn, 1984, 137–140; Ludwig & Vergani, 1994, 636; Oitzl, 2022a, 211–214).

Among the families that originated from northern Italian territory and left the greatest imprint on the history of ironmaking in Slovenian area were the Bucellenis, Locatellis, and Senuss. The Bucellenis and Locatellis originated from

Lombardy, while the Senuss family is believed to have come from Friuli. The Senuss initially settled in Fusine in Valromana before focusing their activities in what is today the tri-border region of Slovenia, Austria, and Italy. The earliest documented member of the Bucelleni family in Slovenian territory was Bernard, who is thought to have acquired ironmaking facilities in the Jesenice area during the late 1520s. Over the next decade, Bernard expanded his operations in the Upper Sava Valley and built the first blast furnaces in the Slovenian territory (Müllner, 1909, 382; Gestrin, 1981, 235; Mugerli, 2016, 464). In the decades that followed, members of the Bucelleni and Senuss families left a lasting legacy in the area. The Bucellenis, which split into two branches, were primarily active in the Jesenice area, where they controlled most of the ironmaking plants in Sava throughout the seventeenth century and until 1764. The Sava branch attained noble status in the 1630s, was elevated to baronial rank in the mid-seventeenth century, and became counts in 1683. Their legacy endures in today's landmarks such as the sixteenth-century Ruard-Bucelleni Manor, the Church of the Virgin Mary in Sava, commissioned by the brothers Julius and Octavio Bucelleni in the early seventeenth century, and the Church of the Holy Cross in present-day Planina pod Golico, funded by the Bucelleni family in the second half of the seventeenth century (Mugerli, 2016, 466–470; 2019, 54–64).

The first documented member of the Locatelli family in Slovenian area was Anton, who, in the 1540s, traded in partnership with Hieronim Schwarz, a burgher of Ljubljana (Žontar, 1968, 36). Initially active in Jesenice, the Locatellis expanded to the Tolmin area by the late sixteenth century. However, their most lasting legacy is in Bohinj, where they were majority stakeholders in local ironmaking plants during the second half of the seventeenth century⁴ (Valvasor, 1689, IX, 395–396; Müllner, 1909, 383–384, 631–634).

In addition to these prominent families, numerous other entrepreneurs and merchants from northern Italian lands were active in the Slovenian iron industry during the second half of the sixteenth century, contributing to what could be described as a significant migration wave. Among them were the brothers Hanibal and Hieronim Gnecco, merchants from Brescia, who operated facilities, some on the Hubelj Stream, one near Idrija, and others in western Carniola (ARS 1, 235, 3; Zala, 1579, 1/23); Ludovico Bartholai from Trieste (Trst), active in the Jesenice area; Francesco Malvasia from Venice (AS 1, 237, 7, 415); and Santi Marchesi, one of the most prominent ironworks owners in the Jesenice area during the 1570s and 1580s (ARS 1, 234, 8, 225). Piero Fillaferro from the Friulian part of Pontebba (Tablja/Pontafel) worked in Malborghetto, where over half the residents involved in ironworking bore Italian-sounding surnames⁵ (Wiessner,

4 An early eighteenth century tombstone commemorating the Locatelli brothers – Georg, Octavio and Alexander – is preserved on the floor of the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary in Bitnje, Bohinj (Müllner, 1909, 349; Mohorič, 1969, 71).

5 E.g. de Cella, de Lex, Candit, Delops, Franzeskin, Rachoy, Maczurion, de la Grotta, Zennegg, Peccol, Botan.

1953, 256). In the early seventeenth century, Giovanni Coronini controlled both trip-hammers in Bohinjska Bistrica (ZIMK, ZMK, 5, 253).

Italian ironworkers also held stakes in the ironmaking and nail-making centres below the Jelovica Plateau. Some were likely descendants of fifteenth-century masters, including Phillip Sänn and members of the Casparini, Pierini, and Gompa families. Others, such as Steffan Mazoll (*Muzell*) in Kropa and Laure Kappus (*Capus*) and other members of the Kappus family in Kamna Gorica, were likely more recent settlers (ARS 173, Urbar gospostva Radovljica 1579, 246–271; ARS 783, Knjiga 7, Urbar 1560).

By the late sixteenth century, stakeholders of Italian origin were active in at least half of the Slovenian ironmaking centres, particularly in larger ones. In Jesenice and Bohinj, they were often the dominant stakeholders. While records mainly document stakeholding entrepreneurs and masters, the latter often brought workers from their home regions, facilitating the transfer of knowledge and technology. The Carniolan provincial *vicedominus* (*Landesvizedom*) Niclas Bonhomo noted in the late sixteenth century that most of the ironmaking masters and workers employed by Italian owners were also Italian. Ljubljana burghers Veit Khisl and Hans Weilhamer hired fifteen Italian masters and workers for their metallurgical complex on the Ljubljanica River in today's Fužine district in Ljubljana (Müllner, 1909, 152–153; Gestrin, 1991, 208).

In the seventeenth century, the influx of new settlers from Italy declined, not only in ironmaking but also more broadly, particularly from the mid-seventeenth century (Gestrin, 1981, 237). This coincided with an economic downturn and stagnation in the iron industry in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. One notable exception was the Posarelli family, who controlled operations in Javornik near Jesenice for much of the seventeenth century. A more pronounced economic revival occurred in the eighteenth century (Šorn, 1984, 145–157). In the early decades of the eighteenth century, the trade in Carniolan iron was dominated by Peter Anton Codelli, whose family came from the Bergamo region. Michelangelo Zois, also from Bergamo, acquired Codelli's business in 1735. Before coming to Carniola, Zois had worked as a merchant in Venice. In the 1740s, he began acquiring shares in mines and ironmaking plants in Bohinj and Javornik. Over the following decades, Zois amassed extensive holdings that would form the basis for the establishment of the Carniolan Industrial Company (*Krainische Industrie Gesellschaft/Kranjska industrijska družba*) almost a century later (Müllner, 1909, 457; Mohorič, 1969, 79–80, 95–96; Gestrin, 1981, 234; Faninger, 1987, 90–93).

The migration of Italian ironworkers also influenced Slovenian ironmaking terminology. While German loanwords dominate the lexicon, the term *fužina* (derived from Friulian or Venetian Italian *fusine*, *fusina*) came to denote a combined smelting furnace and trip-hammer or, more broadly, pre-industrial ironmaking plants (Snoj, 2016, 134; Oitzl, 2024, 46–48). However, the Italian influence on the terminology was more substantial due to the trade links with

Italian regions. As most products were sold in Italian regions, Italian terms became standard for types of nails, semi-finished products, scythes, and other tools (Gašperšič, 1956, 43–47; Gestrin, 1981, 238).

The migration of Italian ironmaking masters and entrepreneurs must also be seen in the broader context of settlement by northern Italians in the Slovenian area during this period. These migrants – including nobles, merchants, and various master craftsmen – were active in several areas of economic life. Initially, their presence in Slovenia tended to be temporary, but from the late fifteenth century onwards permanent settlement became more frequent and in greater numbers (Gestrin, 1981, 238).

Slovenian ironmaking centres served not only as destinations for immigrants but also as sources of emigration. Many workers relocated to other ironmaking centres, including some outside their provinces. This caused concern among ironworks owners, prompting them to advocate for a system of permits (*passpart*) to regulate and control labour mobility. Such permits were first introduced in the General Mining Regulations (*Bergordnung*) for Lower Austrian provinces (Niederösterreichische Länder) issued by Archduke Ferdinand I in 1553 (Gritzner, 1842, 95) and later in the Mining Regulations for Carniola and Gorizia issued by Archduke Charles II in 1575 (ARS 1073, 420, I–11r, 12r–v). However, as these regulations were not effectively implemented, Archduke Charles issued a supplementary decree in 1581 governing the migration of wage workers (ARS 1, 234, 10, 256–257, 1581, 12/22).

In general, forced migrations on religious grounds were relatively rare in the Slovenian territory compared to other Habsburg provinces, such as Tyrol. Despite the efforts of Counter-Reformation commissions in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, only a small number of ironmaking entrepreneurs or their employees were permanently expelled from the Slovenian lands. One notable exception occurred in 1601, when Lutheran workers from Sava near Jesenice and two blacksmiths from Kropa were expelled (Blaznik, 1962, 72–76, 84–101; Stöger, 2006, 178–180; Mugerli, 2016, 466; Žabota, 2016, 448; Žnidaršič Golec, 2019, 422–423, 429–430).

Ironmaking masters and workers from Upper Carniola (Gorenjska) were highly sought after by other ironmaking centres within Carniola. For instance, many surnames of workers and owners at the ironmaking plants near Zagradec on the Krka River indicate origins in Gorenjska, particularly from settlements below the Jelovica Plateau (Müllner, 1909, 534–538; Vidic, 2023, 28–31, 66). In the mid-seventeenth century, ironworkers from Upper Carniola played an important role in the establishment of ironworks in Čabar, in present-day Croatia.⁶ Many of these workers came from Železniki following a conflict with the senior mining magistrate, Johann Bernhard von Rosetti. For over a century,

6 The Čabar region was originally part of the Duchy of Carniola and only became permanent part of Croatia at the end of the eighteenth century (Kebe, 1996, 525–528; Bajt & Vidic, 2011, 118).

the descendants of these immigrants distinguished themselves from the local Croatian population through their language and traditional attire, with some linguistic peculiarities persisting into modern times. Workers who settled in Čabar also came from Dvor in Lower Carniola (Dolenjska) and from Idrija (Müllner, 1909, 564–565, 601–602; Kebe, 1996, 524–525).

Migration in the mining and metallurgical industry was essentially based on the personal freedom enjoyed by members of this social group living in mining areas. The motives for relocation among entrepreneurs and masters varied and evolved over time. Many sought new business opportunities and social advancement, others were attracted by better working conditions, while some were forced out of their primary areas by adverse circumstances. These circumstances included poor business performance and plant closures, wage reductions or even non-payment, economic hardship and the erosion of existing rights, and poor management decisions by certain stakeholders. Trade links also shaped migration patterns; this is one of the main reasons for the significant presence of entrepreneurs and masters from Italian lands in the Slovenian area (Müllner, 1909, 727; Sprandel, 1968, 350–352; Gestrin, 1981, 234–235; 1991, 293–298; Stöger, 2006, 175–178). Feudal landlords and territorial princes often created favourable working conditions in immigration centres through the issuance of mining regulations. A notable example is the Ortenburg Mining Regulations of 1381, issued by Count Frederick III of Ortenburg to encourage mining and ironmaking activities in the Jesenice area (Mlinar, 2016, 51).

THE QUERY OF IDENTITIES IN IRONMAKING CENTRES

Advancements in ironmaking facilitated the emergence of a distinct social group comprising mining, ironmaking, and other metallurgical workers. This group's unique professional and social identity was shaped by the nature of their work processes, specialised technical expertise, and the privileges granted by landlords and territorial princes. While this identity was especially pronounced among miners in larger mining areas, where the workforce was more extensive, it was also evident in ironmaking centres. Key privileges included personal freedom – essential for enabling migration – and subordination to mining magistrates, which laid the foundation for the creation of mining and ironmaking communities with administrative and judicial autonomy. Such communities began to form in the ironmaking centres of Carniola during the Late Middle Ages (Mitterauer, 1974, 266–272; Oitzl, 2022b, 354–365).

This distinct professional identity, encompassing a broader community, becomes more discernible in sources from the sixteenth century onwards, primarily due to the nature of the surviving records. Direct references to mining and ironmaking communities or neighbourhoods (*Gemain*) are relatively rare. In the mid-sixteenth century, Ferdinand I's Mining Regulations mentions a mining or

ironmaking community (*gemainen perkhknaben pei disem perkhwerch*)⁷ in the Lipnica Valley (OeStA, FHKA, MBW, 96, 149). Approximately three decades later, the Kropa community (*Der Kropper gemain*) is mentioned, although in the context of defining settlement boundaries (ARS 173, 260).

More frequently, especially in mining regulations, sources refer to affiliation with a mining or ironmaking community (*pergkwerch verwondten*) and subordination to mining jurisdiction (*pergkwerchs jurisdiction vndtergehörig*) as key criteria for membership in these communities (ARS 1073, 420, I–11r). When listing members of these communities, sources often enumerated individual occupations rather than using collective designations. Terms referring specifically to stakeholders (known as *gewerken* from the sixteenth century onwards) or to all those engaged in ironmaking were more common. For instance, the term ‘ironworkers’ (*hamersleut*) appears frequently, although its precise meaning – whether it encompassed only stakeholders or included all workers – remains ambiguous (ARS 173, 245, 261, 271; ARS 1, 117, 92–95; Mlinar, 2018, 96).

Already in an earlier paragraph, the changing religious identity in the ironmaking centres was briefly noted. Members of mining communities were generally receptive to Reformation ideas, and by the second half of the sixteenth century, many had joined the new movement. Both representatives of Carniolan ironmaking stakeholders in the late 1560s and 1570s, Pavel Junaver and Matija Rottenmanner, were Lutherans. Rottenmanner was also a burgher of Škofja Loka, where several other Lutheran stakeholders from Železniki resided. The wealthiest stakeholder in the area, Felicijan Gompa, also converted to the Augsburg Confession (Blaznik, 1962, 72–101; Žnidaršič Golec, 2019, 422–423).

Lutheranism was also prevalent in ironmaking centres such as Kropa, the Jesenice area, and Fusine in Valromana, with a smaller presence in Bohinj. A notable figure among them was Lenart Hren, a Ljubljana burgher and the owner of ironworks in Sava near Jesenice. He was the father of Tomaž Hren (also known as Thomas Chrön), who later became the Catholic Bishop of Ljubljana. Ironically, it was the younger Hren’s Counter-Reformation commission of 1601 that led to the forced conversion of most Lutherans to Catholicism. Only the most resolutely Protestant entrepreneurs and workers left the ironmaking centres during this period. Even Julius Bucelleni,⁸ the most influential ironworks

7 The phrase could alternatively be translated as ‘ordinary miners’, but this interpretation needs to be carefully considered within its specific contextual usage. The text that follows makes it clear that these ‘miners’ or members of the mining community were responsible for proposing candidates to the provincial *vicedominus* for the position of mining magistrate.

8 It is not entirely clear whether Julius Bucelleni himself adhered to the Lutheran faith. In 1598, his distant relative Orpheo Bucelleni and Martin Turk, both owners of ironworks at the nearby Javornik, accused him of being a Lutheran (*che è luterano*). However, this accusation could be understood in the context of slander arising from their mutual disputes, as Julius had built a new blast furnace in Sava, which Orpheo and Martin vehemently opposed (Müllner, 1909, 404).

owner in Sava, supported the Catholic cause and did not object to the expulsion of his Lutheran workers (Žabota, 2016, 443–448; Žnidaršič Golec, 2019, 429–430).

Ironmaking centres exhibited at least three linguistic or ethnic identities.⁹ The majority of the population in these centres likely spoke a Slovenian vernacular as their primary language, as suggested by the term ‘Slovenian furnace’ (*windische ofen*).¹⁰ This designation first appears in sources from the mid-sixteenth century, coinciding with the introduction of blast furnace technology. These new furnaces were typically referred to as ‘Brescian’ (*wresanischer (plä)ofen*) or ‘Italian’ (*wällische pläofen*) smelting furnaces, reflecting the origins of the ironmaking masters and entrepreneurs who introduced the technology and were predominantly from the regions around Brescia and Bergamo in Lombardy. By contrast, smelting furnaces employing older technology were often named according to the language of the majority population in these centres. A similar practice is evident in northern Carinthia, where the term ‘German furnace’ (*teutsche ofen*) was used. However, the application of these terms was inconsistent. For instance, an ironworks in Radovna Valley was initially referred to as German, later as Slovenian, and by the early seventeenth century as Carniolan (*öffnenle nach crainerischer arth*) (ARS 1, 236, 4, 1605, 9/25; Oitzl, 2024, 43–45).

An illuminating example of linguistic practices in the Carniolan iron industry is provided by the qualifications required for the position of senior mining magistrate in Carniola and Gorizia. A report from a meeting of Carniolan ironworkers in 1569 stated that candidates for the position should be proficient in German, Slovenian, and Italian (*der theitsch, windisch und wälisch khan*) (Müllner, 1909, 132). Further insight comes from the records of Felix Tollhopf, the senior mining magistrate for Carniola and Gorizia, who, in 1577, defended himself against numerous accusations by explaining that, after the adoption of the new mining regulations, he had communicated their provisions to ironworks stakeholders in all three languages. When he visited Kropa, Kamna Gorica, and Železniki, he specifically read the regulations in Slovenian (*auf die wündisch sprach verdolmötscht und verkhündt*) (ARS 1, 237, 6; Müllner, 1909, 142).

Ethnic identity may also be partially examined through surnames in historical records, although this approach requires caution, as names do not necessarily reflect an individual’s actual ethnic or linguistic identity. The main challenge

⁹ Language can serve as one of the main indicators of ethnic identity (Kočevar, 2019a, 93–95).

¹⁰ In this paper, the term *windisch* is translated as ‘Slovenian’, as the sources used refer to the south-eastern part of the Holy Roman Empire, which corresponds to the territory of present-day Slovenia. However, a distinction must be made between the meanings of the terms ‘Slovenian’ and ‘Slovenians’ in the period under discussion and their meanings from the nineteenth century onwards, when the modern Slovenian national identity emerged (Štih, 2010, 60; Kosi, 2013; Kočevar, 2019b).

lies in distinguishing between Slovenian and German surnames, as Slovenian names were frequently Germanised or translated, given that German was the dominant administrative language (cf. Golec, 2005, 403–405). The documented surnames from ironmaking centres indicate Slovenian, German, and Italian origins. However, these sources predominantly record the names of plant owners rather than ordinary workers, and therefore they cannot provide a complete picture of the linguistic or ethnic composition of these communities.

As previously noted, administrative correspondence was conducted almost exclusively in German, with Slovenian used primarily to record local place names related to ore deposits and forest clearings. For example, a document from 1622 shows the senior mining magistrate Ulrik Pittoni granting Gabriel Bucelleni, a stakeholder in Plavž near Jesenice, the rights to three forest clearings located at *Kosiech na Mesakle, na zachtim vsmerski dolini*, and *saternik vsmerski dolini* (ARS 1, 236, 2/XXXVI/5, 1622, 6/7). More Slovenian toponyms are documented in mining registers preserved from the second half of the seventeenth century (Müllner, 1909, 205, 259–260, 348–349).

The use of Slovenian in mining administration was introduced at the end of the eighteenth century by Sigmund Zois, who instructed his supervisors to write descriptions of mine shafts and mining reports for his operations in Bohinj and the Karavankas in Slovenian. Despite Slovenian being their mother tongue, these supervisors encountered significant difficulties in preparing the reports, as they were accustomed to writing in German (Schmidt, 2015a–b).

Migrations contributed to the establishment of relatively large Italian-speaking communities in certain ironmaking centres. Relationships between Italian ironworkers and princely mining authorities were often strained, particularly in the second half of the sixteenth century. The senior mining magistrate Tollhopf even referred to them as ‘disobedient Italians’ (*vngehorsamen Walhen*), specifically targeting entrepreneurs of Italian origin from the Jesenice area and Bohinj who had abstained from participating in the first elections for the senior mining magistrate four years earlier. In addition to the general resistance to the higher authorities, this seems to have been caused by events between 1571 and 1573, during which the preparation of new mining regulations was accompanied by allegations of manipulation in the election of the mining magistrate¹¹ (ARS 1, 234, 7, 54–55, 60–61; 237, 5, 21–35; 239, 2/XXXV/1, 1571, 9/30; Oitzl, 2024, 136–138).

These dynamics raise intriguing questions about the assimilation, or lack thereof, of Italian ironworkers into the majority population. Until the end of the sixteenth century, Italian entrepreneurs from the Jesenice area and Bohinj

11 The mining authorities faced challenges not only from Italian ironworkers but also from other shareholders who avoided complying with mining regulations provisions they found unfavourable. Significant difficulties also arose in their relations with seigniories, particularly concerning forest management (Müllner, 1909, 138–160).

predominantly used Italian for written correspondence with the senior mining magistrate and the Carniolan *vicedominus* office¹² (ARS 1, 236, 6/XXXVI/5a, 1598, 5/23; 6/XXXIV/9, 1579, 11/5; 237, 7, 417, 420–422, 429; 239, 2/XXXV/1). Their signatures on German-language documents also appeared in Italian (ARS 1, 234, 5, 295). German was used only occasionally, typically when correspondence was drafted by a clerk or German-speaking stakeholders. A notable exception was Andrea Perkozini of Plavž near Jesenice, who used German in one instance (ARS 1, 237, 7, 422). In other ironmaking plants where Italians were the sole or predominant stakeholders, Italian also remained the primary language of correspondence with provincial offices (ARS 1, 235, 3, Kanomlja, 1594, 9/15; Müllner, 1909, 633–634). It can be presumed that the use of Italian in these centres, particularly where a significant number of workers from Italian territories were present, may have been comparable to that of Slovenian or German.

Assimilation appears to have progressed more rapidly in centres where stakeholders of Italian origin did not constitute a majority, such as Železniki and Kropa. In these locations, mining regulations was read in Slovenian by the mining magistrate, while official documents were issued in German. Notably, these documents were generally authored by Slovenian or German stakeholders or prepared collectively on behalf of all stakeholders. Despite the apparently rapid assimilation, the collective memory in Železniki preserved the awareness that during the first two centuries of the centre's existence many ironworkers had come from Italian lands. As late as the nineteenth century, locals referred to the settlement as *Lahovše* ('the Italian place'), while the German-speaking residents of Sorica called it *Ka Bolchen* (Walchen) or *pri Lahih* ('at the Italians') (Globočnik, 1867, 2; Blaznik, 1928, 74).

Records from the Senior Mining Magistrate Office in the *vicedominus* archives show that the use of Italian became much less common during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with Italian-language documents appearing only sporadically (ARS 1, 238). This decline aligns with Ferdo Gestrin's thesis that Italian immigrants to the Slovenian territory during the Late Middle Ages and early modern period preserved their distinct identity for several generations but eventually integrated into the local population (Gestrin, 1981, 238).

CONCLUSION

Migration was crucial to the development of the ironmaking industry in the Slovenian territory, facilitating the transfer of technological innovations. During the Late Middle Ages and early modern period, both the technology and the

12 In Ljubljana in the first half of the sixteenth century, Italian immigrants also corresponded with the city authorities in their native language. This practice provoked opposition from both Slovenian- and German-speaking residents (Gestrin, 1981, 238).

ironworking masters predominantly originated from northern Italian lands. The first Italian masters appeared around the mid-fourteenth century, while migration flows in the iron industry peaked around the mid-sixteenth century. By the latter half of the sixteenth century, Italian ironworkers were present, to varying degrees, in almost all ironmaking centres in the Slovenian territory. As a result, the use of Italian was relatively common in the documents of the Senior Mining Magistrate Office for Carniola and Gorizia during this period. However, with economic stagnation at the end of the sixteenth and throughout the seventeenth century, the influx of Italian immigrants into the ironmaking sector declined, and they gradually assimilated into the majority population.

Closely tied to migration were the identities that emerged or were present in ironmaking centres. A distinct professional identity among mining and metallurgical workers was one consequence of the development of the iron industry. In addition to this, at least three ethnic identities can be identified, although the nature of surviving sources is not particularly explicit, meaning that conclusions about these identities are primarily indirect. The significant number of immigrants and the use of Italian in administrative documents indicate the presence of a discernible Italian community. Meanwhile, the existence of a Slovenian ethnic community may be inferred from the naming of ‘Slovenian furnaces’ and, especially, from the use of the Slovenian language during the reading of mining regulations in ironmaking centres. There are virtually no sources in which individuals explicitly articulated their identities. The closest evidence is the affiliation with ironmaking communities or subordination to mining jurisdiction. It is important to note, however, that ethnic identity did not play a fundamental role in relationships within the iron industry. The resistance of Italian ironworkers to the princely mining authorities was a general characteristic of the mining population and was not determined by ethnic affiliation.

MIGRACIJE IN IDENTITETE V ŽELEZARSTVU NA SLOVENSKEM V
POZNEM SREDNJEM IN ZGODNJEM NOVEM VEKU

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POVZETEK

Migracije so bile za razvoj železarstva na Slovenskem ključnega pomena, saj so poskrbele za vpeljavo tehnoloških novosti. Glavna smer migracij je bila iz severnoitalijanskega prostora, prve sledove lahko najdemo že sredi 14. stoletja, najmočnejši prtok pa je bil okoli sredine 16. stoletja. Šlo je za železarske mojstre in podjetnike, ki so vsaj v 16. stoletju izhajali pretežno iz Lombardije, s sabo pa so pripeljali tudi delavce. Nekatere družine so na Slovenskem pustile dolgotrajne sledi. Italijanski železarji so sploh v drugi polovici 16. stoletja še precej pogosto uporabljali italijanski jezik tudi za dopisovanje z deželno knežjo rudarsko upravo, sčasoma pa so se asimilirali z večinskim prebivalstvom. Druga smer migracij v železarstvo na Slovenskem pa je izhajala iz južnonemških dežel. V železarskih središčih je bilo prisotnih tudi več različnih identitet. Z izoblikovanjem posebne družbene skupine rudarskih in železarskih delavcev znotraj poznosrednjeveške družbe je neposredno povezan razvoj poklicne identitete. Pri tem je pomembno vlogo imela podrejenost rudarskemu sodstvu. V 16. stoletju se je za nekaj desetletij začasno spremenila verska identiteta številnih prebivalcev železarskih središč, ki so sprejeli protestantsko veroizpoved. Iz virov lahko vsaj posredno razberemo tudi prisotnost različnih jezikovnih oziroma etničnih identitet. Večina prebivalstva je bila najverjetneje slovenskega, zaradi migracij pa je bila močno prisotna tudi italijanska skupnost.

Ključne besede: železarstvo, migracije, identitete, rudarska sodišča, tehnološki transfer, predindustrijsko obdobje, Slovenija

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MINING AS MARITIME HISTORY? THE COALMINE IN SEČOVLJE FROM FASCIST BEGINNINGS TO THE EARLY COLD WAR

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ABSTRACT

The author traces the twentieth-century history of the coalmine in Sečovlje in northwestern Istria, with a focus on the early Cold War. Methodologically, she connects the Lefebvrian concept of place with the territory–place–scale–network (TPSN) framework proposed by Bob Jessop, Neil Brenner, and Martin Jones. During the scarce four decades of the mine's existence (late 1930s–early 1970s), its history was defined, on the one hand, by volatile political borders, while on the other hand, it was marked by the environmental border between the land and the sea, as the coal was extracted in the immediate vicinity of the saltpans that Sečovlje and Piran are famous for.

Keywords: Sečovlje, coal mine, Cold War, borders, Istria

L'ESTRAZIONE MINERARIA COME STORIA MARITTIMA? LA MINIERA DI CARBONE DI SEČOVLJE/SICCIOLE DAGLI ESORDI DEL FASCISMO AI PRIMI ANNI DELLA GUERRA FREDDA

SINTESI

L'autrice ricostruisce la storia novecentesca della miniera di carbone di Sečovlje/Sicciole, nell'Istria nordoccidentale, con particolare attenzione ai primi anni della Guerra Fredda. Dal punto di vista metodologico, l'autrice collega il concetto lefebvrino di luogo con il quadro teorico territorio–luogo–scala–rete (TPSN) proposto da Bob Jessop, Neil Brenner e Martin Jones. Nei circa quattro decenni di esistenza della miniera (dalla fine degli anni Trenta ai primi anni Settanta), la sua storia fu definita, da un lato, da confini politici instabili, mentre dall'altro fu segnata dal confine ambientale tra terra e mare, poiché il carbone veniva estratto nelle immediate vicinanze delle saline per cui Sicciole e Piran/Pirano sono famose.

Parole chiave: Sečovlje/Sicciole, miniera di carbone, Guerra Fredda, confini, Istria

INTRODUCTION¹

In this study, I focus on the Lefebvrian concept of *place* in tracing the twentieth-century history of the coalmine in Sečovlje/Siccirole in northwestern Istria. Methodologically, I connect Henri Lefebvre's historically contingent 'interconnections, distortions, displacements, mutual interactions, and [...] links with the spatial practice' (Lefebvre, 1991) with the recent 'complexity shift' in border studies (Wille et al., 2024). The latter has, to my knowledge, not addressed any place characterized by such volatile borders as were present in the northeastern Adriatic in the course of the twentieth century. I borrow from Bob Jessop, Neil Brenner, and Martin Jones' theory of sociospatial relations, the so-called territory–place–scale–network (TPSN) framework (Jessop, Brenner & Jones, 2008), which recently has been fruitfully applied to the Polish–German–Czech energy borderland (Bembnista & Gailing, 2025).

The TPSN framework was proposed as a basis for complex inquiries into, among other matters, 'sociospatial organization such as capitalist economies' (Jessop, Brenner & Jones, 2008, 390). While the authors argued that their four sociospatial dimensions are 'the most salient in work on contemporary political-economic restructuring', they conceded that one additionally important focus may lie on the environment or nature (Jessop, Brenner & Jones, 2008, 392). In the following, I use the Lefebvrian concept of *place* that the coalmine of Sečovlje was to show that Jessop, Brenner, and Jones were correct in their assumption. The tiny coal mine on the Adriatic coast is a case where volatile political economies and a pivotal environmental factor were entangled. While I include the early history of the mine in the interwar period in my argument, as well as its legacies, my empirical focus lies on the early Cold War, including, as sources, regional and Yugoslav newspapers, regional institutional sources, the company files, and CIA reports. The result of this inquiry turned out to posit more questions than it can answer.

The coal mine in Sečovlje was a peculiar case of a small, short-lived industry in a place riddled by borders. During the scarce four decades of its existence between the 1930s and the 1970s, its history was defined, on the one hand, by *political* borders that changed more than once. On the other hand, it was marked by the *environmental* border between the land and the sea. Coal was extracted in the immediate neighbourhood of the salt extracting industry that Sečovlje and the area's main town, Piran/Pirano, have been famous for for centuries. Marine salt extraction and coal extraction literally overlapped, as one of the mine's tunnels reached under the sea.

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In global history, both salt and coal have played a central role. Both have been tagged as ‘gold’ and played pivotal roles in times of war. Salt, the ‘white gold’, was one of the earliest commodities to be traded and the first one over which states held a monopoly; salt taxes were used to finance wars. Coal, the ‘black gold’, obtained parallel features when it became the by far most important energy resource of the industrial age. Coal deposits were often exploited by state-owned companies. Coal too fuelled wars (Kurlansky, 2003; Brüggemeier, 2018). In Sečovlje, the two industries met in one place.

A VERY LONG AND A VERY SHORT INDUSTRIAL HISTORY: SALT AND COAL IN SEČOVLJE

Sečovlje is located at the border between Slovenia and Croatia, south of Piran and Portorož/Portorose. The border is marked by the Dragonja River and has been a matter of dispute stemming from post-Second World War changes in the land registry districts as well as changes in fluvial morphology (Pipan, 2008; Zajc, 2018). When it comes to salt and coal, the contrast could hardly be larger: The saltpans today are an important, if jeopardized, part of the local identity, whereas the adjacent premises of the coalmine have decayed into what is habitually called a ‘lost place’.

Two historical postcards illustrate the moment, in between late imperial Habsburg times and the 1930s, when the coal industry arrived on the local scene. The older photograph, taken after 1902, shows a view of the saltpans and the sea, with the caption *Siccirole. Saline e Stazione Ferroviaria* (Saltpans and Railway Station, Fig. 1). The newer one, from after 1935, shows the same view, now centred on the coalmine. *Saluti da Siccirole* (Greetings from Siccirole), it says, and somebody added the word *miniera* (mine) by hand (Fig. 2). Whoever did this thought they needed to point it out – the mine, after all, was new. The railway station is visible in the second postcard as well, but had acquired a different function. The *Parenzana* or *Porečanka* railway, which had connected Trieste/Trst with Poreč/Parenzo in Istria between 1902 and 1935, had been dismantled, and the Sečovlje station had become the headquarters of the mine’s administration.

According to the legend, Piran was built on salt. For centuries, the sea salt from Istrian shores was a sought after luxury product in Europe. In the late thirteenth century, when the first salt works of Istria were established in Sečovlje, the Venetians held the salt monopoly in the Upper Adriatic. Under the Habsburgs, who declared the Piranese salt as their monopoly at the end of Napoleonic Wars, its market reach became even larger (Colombo, 2011). In the nineteenth century, the saltworks came to spread over 500 hectares, feeding about five hundred families. From the 1860s, a chemical industry based on salt extraction developed, producing ammonia, soap, and glas (Guštin, 2015). Portorož developed into a health and seaside resort. In 1910, Orazio Pupini, the head physician of the sanatorium, underlined the local salt’s exceptionally high quality.



Fig. 1: A view of the Sečovlje saltpans and the station of the Parenzana railway, before the First World War (courtesy of Damir Gregorič).

He declared 'Portorose as a saltwater spa' to be 'unique among the similar spas in the monarchy, and even on the continent' (Pupini, 1910, 16).

After the First World War and with Austria-Hungary's demise, Italy took over Trieste and Istria in 1918/20. The amount of extracted salt increased further, but there were signs that new times had arrived. According to a melancholic report in the *Archeografo Triestino* of 1930/31, salt now was harvested at the expense of nature and traditional craftsmanship, 'modern salt works, without houses and without life, where salt comes into existence when God wills it and is harvested only once a year' (Danielis, 1930–1931, 411).

While the Second World War all but halted salt extraction, it was revived after the war, when the region was gradually taken over by Yugoslavia (Šuligoj, 2015). This revival did not mean that the 'new times' would go away. The saltworks' ecological micro-arrangements with the Dragonja River had been altered by humans several times during their long history. Controlling the river was key, as it was the freshwater source for the salt production, and its sediments substantial constructing the saltpans. The Slovene government too intervened to further industrialize salt extraction. Also, in the 1960s at the latest, the direct connection between the healthy brine and the tourists visiting the Yugoslav seaside broke with the arrival of mass tourism. At the same time, it became harder for the marine salt from Sečovlje to assert itself economically. On the domestic market, the mineral salt from Tuzla in Bosnia-Herzegovina had become a main competitor, while globally African salt arrived on European markets. When in 1968 a water protection wall broke

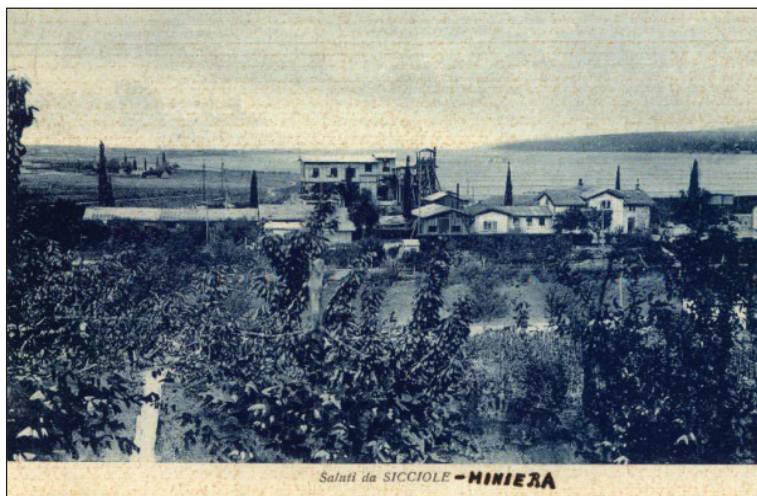


Fig. 2: The view of the Sečovlje salt pans obstructed by the coalmine, probably second half of 1930s (courtesy of Damir Gregorič).

in the southern part of the Sečovlje salt pans, this led to the termination of production in that part, roughly halving the area of salt extraction (Matušin, 2021; Bradašević, 2015).

In 1988, *Soline Pridelava soli d.o.o.* was founded, the company still in charge today. Subsequent efforts concerned the environment. In 1990, a landscape park was established and, in 1993, an area of 6.5 square kilometres with the salt pans at its centre was protected under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. In 1999, Slovenia recognized the saltworks as its national heritage site. After Slovenia's accession to the European Union in 2004, the landscape park became a part of the EU's Natura 2000 network of protected areas (Topole & Pipan, 2022).

Becoming a national heritage site, salt extraction was detached from market constraints and returned to traditional craftsmanship, which requires hard work, patience and modesty. Some of today's saltworkers practice their profession as part of a generations-spanning family tradition. They produce a niche product, so the profit is very modest. The rest of the salt pans, where salt harvesting was terminated at the end of the 1960s, has become a haven of biodiversity. Shimmering white in the summer months, rimmed by reed plants and halophytes, it is home to about ninety species of birds, with twice as many using the former salt pans as a resting place (Faganel & Trnavčević, 2012; Glavaš & Kovač 2015; Topole & Pipan, 2022; Slowenien, 2015; Muzej solinarstva, 2026).

The situation remains fragile. The protection of the Sv. Jernej/St. Bartolomeo canal, like of the premises of the coal mine, has been less successful. Sailing and motor boats use the canal as berths, often illegally. Visibly abandoned boats can also

be seen there. Sečovlje's maritime landscape is threatened by typically neoliberal privatisation schemes. The line of conflict runs between local actors and external investors. The latter have built houses that are bigger than the local drainage system can manage; they would like to deepen the canal in order to allow bigger ships to access and speak about larger fishing companies and of enlarging the nearby small airport, built in 1973 for private small aircraft and sightseeing flights. However, beyond such human interference into this delicate ecosystem, the saltworks are jeopardized much more fundamentally: by the rise of the sea level as a consequence of climate change (Janko Spreizer & Kolega, 2020; Pipan & Topole, 2021).

The decades under the fascist Italian and the socialist Yugoslav and Slovene governments were difficult periods in the salt pans' history in terms of both human and environmental tolls. Twentieth-century salt extraction in Istria does not lend itself much to positive identification. For the adjacent coal mine, this time span is *all* it has to offer. Coal extraction started in the late 1930s and was terminated at the beginning of the 1970s. The commodification of salt extraction heritage has focused on protecting both its Habsburg history since the nineteenth century, when salt-connected tourism started, and its delicate ecosystem. Such tourist-oriented commodification seems to be key for the local identity, and this promotion frame could be the reason why the coal mine has remained, as of yet, a 'lost place' (Fig. 3). In any case, the history of the 'short twentieth century' of these two core local industries remains largely unwritten, let alone in an entangled manner of sociospatial relations. This article is but a first attempt at thinking the two industries together.



Fig. 3: The Sečovlje coalmine in 2011: a 'lost place' (Wikimedia Commons).

FASCISM, IMPERIALISM, AND WAR: ITALY'S NEW COAL MINE ON THE ADRIATIC COAST

After the First World War, the northeastern Adriatic became a part of the Italian state. It was here, specifically in Rijeka/Fiume, that fascism had one of its earliest manifestations, long before Benito Mussolini came to power in October 1922 (Klabjan & Bajc, 2021). Italy took a great interest in the Istrian coal as it had only few deposits at its disposal. In the nineteenth century, the coal from Labin/Albona in southeastern Istria had powered steamships going between the Istrian coastal towns as well as the steam engines industrializing Trieste. When this coal fell to Italy, it was pivotal to the Fascist regime's schemes, as its infrastructural initiatives in Istria testify; Italy not only built streets, waterpipes and electricity lines, but, between 1936 and 1942, also two model mining towns, Raša/Arsia and Podlabin/Pozzo Littorio (Canali, 2006).

After Italy invaded Abyssinia (today's Ethiopia) in October 1935, it began to strive for economic autarchy, which made the Istrian coal deposits even more important. The state-owned Italian Coal Company (*Azienda Carboni Italiani*), founded in July 1935 in Rome, acquired the monopoly over the Sardinian Coal Mining Company (*Società mineraria carbonifera sarda*), founded in 1933 to exploit the Sardinian deposits, and the Arsa Coal Joint Stock Company (*Società anonima carbonifera Arsa*), founded in Trieste in 1919, when Italy took over the Austrian management of the Istrian mines (Bišić-Martinčić, 2024). This was also the moment when soundings for the coal deposits in Sečovlje began.

If the melancholic observer of the salt pans in the 1930/31 *Archeografo Triestino* noted the disrespect for the environment and craftsmanship in salt extraction in the Fascist period, an analogous development occurred in the coal mines. In Labin, during Habsburg times, coal had been for decades extracted above the ground water level. Starting in 1924, the Italians dug much deeper tunnels, in the depths of 300 to 500 metres, risking water contamination. Ruthlessly enforced industrialization persisted, and in 1939, the close to 9,000 miners extracted more than one million tonnes of coal. The miners, who in Habsburg times certainly had not been treated fairly, paid a very high price: Safety precautions were neglected, the work rhythm was relentless, exhaustion led to errors, qualified personnel was missing, fatal accidents happened with increased frequency.² On 28 February 1940, disaster struck; a coal dust explosion claimed the lives of 185 men and injured another 146 – one of the most devastating accidents in Italian industrial history, considering lives lost (Millo & Vinci, 1981; 1985).

In Sečovlje, coal mining had never seen extraction at the level of Labin. Here, things *started* with schemes of enforced exploitation in the service of

2 On the dire working conditions in late Habsburg times, including child labour, in the mine in Labin, cf. Martinuzzi (2008).

Italian imperialism and plans for economic autarchy. In 1935, the *Società carbonifera* started field soundings and dug about five kilometres of tunnels. In depths between 100 and close to 600 metres coal seams were found that were between three centimetres and three metres thick, upon which mining engineers and miners were brought in from Italy. In 1936, they constructed the shaft, and in June 1937, coal extraction began. The longest tunnel reached 265 metres deep; by 1938, some 300 miners worked in three shifts (Pletikosić, 2006, 300).

Two sociospatial border-crossing entanglements are noteworthy here: with Italy's colonial history and with the sea. Italy started probing Sečovlje's coal deposits in the same year it invaded Abyssinia. In the same year, it also gave up the narrow gauge railway that had connected Trieste and Poreč since 1902 – Austria-Hungary's longest narrow gauge railway line. It is unclear whether Italians really transported the tracks to Abyssinia.³ The African country did lack both roads and railways, and Italy did transport a lot of construction materials there (Mallet, 2015). The tracks of the *Parenzana* may well have been among these.

In any case, the railway station (Figs. 1–2) had just lost its function and now housed the administrative offices of the *Società anonima carbonifera di Arsa*. For more than three decades, the railway had transported both agricultural and industrial goods between Istria and Trieste. Much as the *Parenzana* had suffered from the loss of former Habsburg markets, the world economic crisis and the introduction of bus connections, its dismantling still meant a de-modernization for Istria, which saw an upsurge in poverty-related emigration after the train connection was lost. Had the railway still existed, it might have facilitated the transport of materials to and from the mine-to-be (Brate, 2007; Roselli, 1987).

Coal extraction started in 1937. Given the railway was defunct, the mine's choice most probably were the same boats that the saltworks used for their produce, pointing at a shared transport history for salt and coal (Bonifacio, 2019). When, after the war, the Yugoslav Communist Party newspaper *Borba* announced that the Sečovlje mine would be reopened, it too mentioned that 'coal is to be shipped by sea, for it will be possible to bring coal barges right up to the separator'.⁴

As in Labin, in Sečovlje too the recklessness with which the *Società carbonifera* acted took its toll. In terms of sociospatiality, here the border between the land and the sea was concerned. After only a few years of coal extraction, in the winter of 1940/41, thirteen saltpans suffered severe

3 In 1999, Slovenian director Karpo Godina made a short film about this alleged transport of the tracks to Abyssinia, titled *Abesinija* (Godina, 1999).

4 CIA, CIA-RDP80-00809A000700030607-3, 'Build Hydroelectric Power Plants; Resume Exploitation of Coal Mines', 4 January 1952.

damage. A tunnel had been dug right under them, connecting coal mining once more to maritime history. The mining company refused to conduct repairs to restore the saltpans, but ironically, the case was helped by the war. In 1942, the mine had to reduce its operation to two shifts only because many of its male workers were conscripted, and the tunnel reaching under the sea was closed. The dispute remained unresolved, however, and in November 1942 was brought before a Trieste court, where no decision had been reached by the time Italy capitulated in September 1943 (Pletikosić, 2006, 300; Ratkajec, 2012, 123–134).

Political borders did not disturb the first few years of coal extraction. The mine was in Italy, exploited by Italy, and the personnel, the skilled miners at least, had largely come from other parts of Italy. Opening this mine fit with fascist Italy's policies of economic autarchy; and given that Italy was poor in coal deposits, it made sense to dig for coal in Sečovlje. The mine was part of Italy's industrialization under fascist ideology and economic policy.

For the scarce two years of German occupation (1943–45) that followed Italy's capitulation, a labour camp of the Organisation Todt is documented in Sečovlje (Lavoro Forzato, 2026). Italy being largely dependent on German coal, the Germans sought to keep the Istrian mines running (Wedekind, 2003, 165). In Sečovlje, in August 1944, the Yugoslav Partisans destroyed much of the mining equipment with the help of the miners. They stole a quantity of explosives, with which they blew up several bridges in the vicinity. From then on, at the latest, the mine had problems with electric power supplies so that the water pumps could not operate sufficiently. The tunnels filled with water, and coal extraction became impossible (Pirih, 2015, 119).

THE COAL MINE DURING THE EARLY COLD WAR

Environmental border issues had characterized the Sečovlje coal mine from the beginning. During the Cold War, however, borders of a fast changing political-economic nature also became salient. In February 1947, Italy and Yugoslavia signed a peace treaty, which assigned the districts of Koper/Capodistria and Buje/Buie to Zone B of the Free Territory of Trieste (FTT), while Trieste and its surroundings made up Zone A (Fig. 3). The treaty was ratified in September 1947. Only in October 1954, by the London Memorandum, Zone B of the FTT became part of Yugoslavia and Zone A part of Italy, while the state border was finally ratified by the Treaty of Osimo in November 1975, that is after the coal mine ceased to operate (Pirjevec, Bajc & Klabjan, 2006; Zaccaria, 2018).



Fig. 4: The Free Territory of Trieste (FTT), 1947–54 (Wikimedia Commons). The red-dotted line was the border between Zones A and B of the FTT and is today's border between Slovenia and Italy. The black-dotted line was the border between the FTT and Yugoslavia. The white-dotted line was the border between the FTT and Yugoslavia and is today's border between Slovenia and Italy. The grey-dotted line was the border between the FTT and Italy. The border between the districts of Koper and Buje in Zone B corresponded roughly to the river Dragonja and is today's disputed border between Slovenia and Croatia.

In the aftermath of the war, the mining premises in Sečovlje remained inactive. Only when the signing of the peace treaty was imminent, which would assign the coalmines in Labin and Raša to Yugoslavia, there was some activity in Sečovlje too: The newly-founded *Istarski ugljenokopi Raša* that succeeded the *Società anonima carbonifera di Arsa*, dismantled Sečovlje's metal mining-tower and transported it to Raša (Orlović, 2019, doc. 23). Evidently, there was no plan to re-vitalize the small, partially destroyed and flooded mine on the Slovenian seashore, which now belonged to the Yugoslav-administered Zone B of the FTT, separating it from the larger coal mines in southeastern Istria, which took up coal extraction shortly thereafter.

The peace treaty attempted squaring the circle: It foresaw the FTT to be demilitarized and neutral, governed by an individual who was no citizen of either the FTT, Italy, or Yugoslavia. At the same, Italy and Yugoslavia were both obliged to keep infrastructures running as before. Provisions were formulated to 'provide arrangements which shall facilitate the movement across the frontiers between the Free Territory and the adjacent areas of Yugoslavia and Italy of foodstuffs and other categories of commodities which have customarily moved between those areas in local trade.'⁵

It may be this formulation that provided one good reason to re-start coal extraction in Sečovlje as part of the FTT. Many existing companies continued to operate, albeit changing their names, owners, workforce and structures, and were often unsuccessful in the longer run. The demographic and political changes were a huge challenge. Many factories and workshops were cut off from their headquarters in Trieste or in Italy – which was the case both of the Sečovlje saltpans and the defunct coal mine. Things were the same in the other Istrian mines, now in Yugoslavia. However, matters also remained volatile on another basic level, as the UN Security Council could not agree on a governor, and never would.⁶

In the first year of the FTT's existence, both the Italians and the Yugoslavs started withdrawing economic means – capital, industrial interests and material – from Zone A and Zone B respectively. From an American perspective, by the beginning of 1948, the effect of this on Zone B was more serious than on Zone A: 'Yugoslav action in damaging and removing industrial and agricultural equipment has greatly aggravated already deteriorating conditions. The United States Political Advisor in Trieste suggests that the Yugoslavs denuded their zone in the belief that they were creating problems for the future governor, not for themselves.'⁷ However, by then the initial optimism that an FTT governor would be successfully appointed any time soon had all but evaporated.⁸

5 Treaty of Peace with Italy. Annex IX, Part C, 10 February 1947.

6 Intelligence Review, 59, 3. 4. 1947: The Security Council and Trieste, 17–24.

7 Intelligence Review, 102, 5. 2. 1948: Economic Problems in the Free Territory of Trieste, 14–15.

8 Intelligence Review, 104, 19. 2. 1948: The Situation in the Balkans, Trieste, Greece, and Turkey, 54, 57–59.

Shortly after, the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform, known as the Tito-Stalin-split, in June 1948, changed Yugoslavia's position drastically (Jakovina & Previšić, 2020). For Zone B of the FTT this had repercussions both in terms of border surveillance and economic policy. By February 1949, the number of Yugoslav troops in Zone B, which had been reduced to 3,000, were brought back up to the maximum of 5,000 that the Peace Treaty allowed (Orlović, 2019, docs. 51, 70).

In parallel to heightened military alert prompted by the cessation of Soviet support, Yugoslavia began its rapprochement to the Allied administration of Zone A. It now paid attention not to give reason for complaints at the UN, and, quite opposite to its previous policy, sought to raise Zone B's economic level, in spite of the situation continuing to look volatile (Orlović, 2019, doc. 53). In March 1950, a customs union between Yugoslavia and Zone B was proclaimed, following recent relaxation of travel restrictions, which had given 'Yugoslavs relative freedom of movement between Yugoslavia and Zone B' (Orlović, 2019, doc. 132). Similar measures had already been applied between Italy and Zone A, so this was the moment when attempts at increased integration of the two Zones with their adjacent countries stopped ensuing retaliatory acts between the countries. Introducing this customs union, Yugoslavia initially increased the securitization of the border between Zone B and Zone A, anticipating Yugoslav citizens using Zone B as an escape route to Zone A (Orlović, 2019, doc. 132). Towards the end of 1950, however, this border regime was loosened again, when civilian custom guards replaced the military (Orlović, 2019, docs. 157, 160–161).

This was the context in which works began in Sečovlje that aimed to resume coal extraction. The company *Rudnik črnega premoga Sečovlje* was established on 7 November 1950 by a decree of the Slovenian government and had its headquarters in Sečovlje (PAK PI-193, 36, Pravila, čl. 1–2). The Zagreb-based Communist Party newspaper *Borba* announced on 9 October 1951:

In 1950, work began on restoring the black-coal mine in Secovje [sic], on the Istrian peninsula, near the seacoast. Its coal is on a par with the coal in the Rasa [sic] mine. The Secovje mine was first opened by Italy when it occupied Istria, but was poorly operated, for scarcely anything was done to fill and make safe the places from which coal was extracted. This resulted in galleries and gangways becoming flooded. An auxiliary shaft to the upper gallery has been excavated to facilitate installation of a pumping station which is to be completed by mid-November [1951].⁹

9 The excerpt from the newspaper is contained in a CIA report of a few months later. (CIA-RDP80-00809A000700030607-3, 'Build Hydroelectric Power Plants. Resume Exploitation of Coal Mines'. 4 January 1952).

More than one million cubic metres of water were drained from the mine tunnels.¹⁰ The original plan to start coal extraction by September 1950 proved too ambitious,¹¹ as in November of that year the water had still not been pumped out successfully.¹² The hazardous entanglement with the sea re-started immediately. How to dig under the sea? How to manage the mine's water drainage, 'an immense amount [...], [of] freshwater, but usable only industrially'¹³? The Yugoslavs declared to do better than the Italians who 'did not protect the mine enough from the danger of the water, despite the fact that the Dragonja River runs above the mining and that it [a tunnel] is located almost beneath the sea.'¹⁴ In May 1954, Slovenia's water management administration in Ljubljana would allow the mine to pump out the water into the old Dragonja riverbed and ultimately into the sea, mimicking Italy's practice between 1937 and 1945:

*The mine cannot operate unless the mine water is pumped out. This water will probably be so clean that no special measures will be necessary. Water may leak from the separation, which is not only excessively loaded with clay, but may also contain large quantities of coal in grains and powder. The lost coal represents economic damage and can also harm the surrounding area. Therefore, the necessary measures will be prescribed later, when it is clear what quantities of coal are involved and what damage the waste water is causing.*¹⁵

When this permission was issued, three years of struggle against the water in the mine had just been completed. When this endeavour was taken up in 1950, a water pump and other necessary equipment was brought in from the mines in Raša and Trbovlje. The rhetoric that accompanied the work was one of Yugoslavia helping Zone B towards prosperity. Importantly, in March 1951, the self-management system was introduced, which triggered strong protests from Italy. Maybe this was the strongest sign of how decidedly Yugoslavia had started to treat Zone B as if it was a part of the country (Fig. 5) (Orlović, 2019, doc. 255).

10 Istrski tednik, 14. 10. 1950: Borba z vodo za premog. Rudarji iz Sečjöl so s črpanjem vode iz rudnika že 430 m pod zemljo. In 1954, the amount of 10 million cubic metres is mentioned: Slovenski Jadran, 26. 11. 1954: V rudniku črnega diamanta.

11 La nostra lotta, 22. 4. 1950: Il piano economico nella sua realizzazione. Inizio dei lavori di ripristino alla maniera di antracite di Sicciole.

12 Istrski tednik, 4. 11. 1950: Zakaj nimajo sičoveljski rudarji boljše delovne pogoje.

13 Slovenski Jadran, 26. 11. 1954: V rudniku črnega diamanta.

14 Istrski tednik, 3. 3. 1951: O Sečoveljskem premogovniku. Ne bo nam manjkalo premoga.

15 PAK PI-193, 111, Uprava za vodno gospodarstvo LRS, Ljubljana, Rudnik črnega premoga Sičovelje – odpadna voda, 14. 5. 1954.



Fig. 5: The memorial plaque reads, in Slovene and Italian: 'Factories to the workers! On 25 March 1951, the workers' collective of the Sečovlje mine took the administration of the company into their own hands' (photo: courtesy of Damir Gregorič).

Things did not go smoothly. A report on the huge investments Yugoslavia had made in Zone B given at a Koper District Committee meeting at the end of October 1951 declared them as largely ineffective:

The reactivation of the Sicole [sic] coal mines, which was to be completed by the end of 1951, will not be completed at the time despite the expenditure of 11,000,000 dinars on the project. On 31 July 1951, the production of salt has reached only 10,000 tonnes or 40 per cent of the 1951 plan. Because of a lack of machinery, no salt refining was done. Production of soap, lime and bricks did not meet the set quota. [...] Six million dinars were spent on electrification in Zone B and results have been even poorer since the experts from Ljubljana took over the project. (Orlović, 2019, doc. 189)

In June 1952, the tone of an article in *La nostra lotta*, a regional Italian language weekly that began publication in 1948, is one of outright annoyance:

For the time being, silence, in Sicciole, silence because of the lack of pumps. On the caressing fingers of the 'great mother', oh so worried about the fate of the brothers in Zone B, grow pointed nails behind a mask of hypocrisy. If she [Yugoslavia] were effectively worried about the brothers



Fig. 6: March 1951: Workers posing in front of the improvised wooden mining tower on the occasion of the introduction of self-management. Coal extraction had not started yet (Source: courtesy of Damir Gregorič).

*in Zone B, she would send them the pump for their mine, for which an advance was paid already in July 1951 [...]. It is one thing to chatter about the homeland and about 'our hearts are breaking', and another to get down to business concretely.*¹⁶

As it transpires, the re-opening of the mine was stalled for the better part of a year due to the lack of machinery. The workers, not being able to continue the drainage, started building miners' houses instead.¹⁷

It is unclear what motivated the Yugoslav and Slovene governments. The odds were not really in the tiny mine's favour. A highly ideologized article in *Istrski tednik*, a weekly published in 1950 and 1951 by the Koper section of the National Liberation Movement, framed the mine's significance in very locally rooted terms. The re-starting of the coal extraction would be 'a new step towards our further progress, because we will provide our factories with large amounts of energy, which they are lacking.'¹⁸ *La nostra lotta*, on the other hand, announced that the mine 'would not only provide for internal needs, but also

16 *La nostra lotta*, 23. 6. 1952: Siccirole. Mentre nella miniera regna il silenzio vede l'alba il villaggio operaio.

17 *La nostra lotta*, 23. 6. 1952: Siccirole. Mentre nella miniera regna il silenzio vede l'alba il villaggio operaio.

18 *Istrski tednik*, 28. 4. 1950: 300 ton premoga nam zagotavlja premogovnik v Sečovljah.

export will flourish, with excellent prospects for trade exchange.’¹⁹ The moment the mine started extracting coal again, in October 1953, first with very small quantities, the same newspaper repeated: ‘Currently, the whole production is used up by companies in Zone B. When production will have reached normal quotas, important business with northern Italy is envisaged.’²⁰

Business with northern Italy may have been not too far from the actually existing economic hopes. The split with Stalin had changed the qualities of the borders between Yugoslavia, Italy and the FTT, making them somewhat more porous. On the one hand, the split had cut standing economic relations, and on the other hand it had enforced others which previously had been ideologically less opportune. Until 1948, as part of Moscow’s scheme, Yugoslavia had sent copper, iron, pyrite, canvas, flax, corn, and coal to Czechoslovakia, where especially the ores were critical to heavy industry. In return, Czechoslovakia had shipped machinery and other material goods to Yugoslavia. After Yugoslavia’s exit from the Cominform, Czechoslovakia had stopped to deliver any mining equipment.²¹

The Americans observed that Italy was not interested in Trieste – it being one port city among many in the country – but Istria’s mineral resources:

*[A] great portion of Italy industrially is dependent on coal imported from Yugoslavia. [...] the real significance of the Trieste question lies in the minerals entombed in the surrounding territory, for the Port of Trieste has no practical value to Italy. Immediately after WWII, one of the chief sources of commodities for Yugoslavia was Italian industry. Purchases were made on a barter basis through which Yugoslavia exchanged her coal to Italy for finished products.*²²

This was corroborated by the *Slovenski Jadran*, the weekly that replaced the *Istrski tednik* in 1952. It drew a direct line between prewar and postwar times:

*There is a great demand for this coal today, especially in Trieste and northern Italy, where they were the largest consumers even before the war, and where the furnaces and other devices are adapted to this type of coal. Therefore, under normal conditions, it is expected that the mine will export about three quarters of its total production, while the remainder will cover domestic needs. Export is also supported by the fact that we have cheap maritime connections, which is extremely important in such transports.*²³

19 La nostra lotta, 3. 6. 1950: Procedono alacremente i lavori per il riattamento della miniera di Siccirole.

20 La nostra lotta, 3. 11. 1953: In lotta contro l’acqua per la conquista del calore.

21 CIA, CIA-RDP82-00457R005300760006-8, ‘Survey of the Coal Industry in Yugoslavia’, 28 July 1950; cf. CIA, CIA-RDP82-00047R000300690002-0, ‘The Trieste Question/Politics/Resistance/Status of Macedonia/Possible Solution to the Balkan Question’, 3 February 1954.

22 CIA, CIA-RDP82-00047R000300690002-0, ‘The Trieste Question/Politics/Resistance/Status of Macedonia/Possible Solution to the Balkan Question’, 3 February 1954.

23 Slovenski Jadran, 26. 11. 1954: V rudniku črnega diamanta.

Yugoslavia is said to have established a ‘barter basis’ with Italy right after the war’s end – and long before the split with Stalin – exchanging manufactured goods for coal. Northern Italy is said to have remained economically dependent on these deliveries. After the loss of the Soviet Union’s support, this exchange was to be strengthened. Possibly, this was the reason why the Yugoslavs thought it a good idea to invest in the small, defunct mine in Sečovelje. Before the signing of the peace treaty, Italy had made several attempts at territorial bargaining that support this argument. Istria contained what had been Italy’s major resources of bauxite and coal (Mellinato, 2013, 94–110). In 1946, Italian Prime Minister Alcide de Gasperi attempted to secure the coal and bauxite deposits by offering the Yugoslavs the cities of Rijeka and Zadar/Zara as well as the Dalmatian coast. This did not satisfy Yugoslav Prime Minister Josip Broz Tito, who at the time was aiming also for Trieste and the whole of Venezia Giulia. And Tito too had the mineral resources in sight.²⁴ The border conflict thus was centrally about who would gain access to Istria’s coal and ore deposits, while the exchange of commodities across the borders never seems to have stopped.²⁵

When it came to what internationalizing Trieste would mean, both countries argued with the city’s economic ties to the surrounding lands. The Yugoslavs felt confident enough to ask for a Yugoslav governor, for a customs and monetary union between the FTT and Yugoslavia, a common railway network managed by Yugoslavia, a Yugoslav free zone in the port of Trieste under sole Yugoslav jurisdiction, and a Yugoslav representation abroad for the Free Territory. The Italians, on their part, suggested the same kind of ties of the FTT with Italy, which meant that they suggested a post-fascist continuation of how things had been since 1918.²⁶

Despite of all this, it remains questionable that the decision to re-open the Sečovelje mine was predominantly economically motivated, because another factor has to be considered: that of manpower. It was lacking in the Yugoslav mining industries – and in other industries as well. In Istria people and knowhow had gone missing – both had moved across the border to Trieste or to Italy – so that production generally was modest. The shortage in workers, especially skilled ones, was serious. Yugoslavia’s low level of mechanization both in industry and in agriculture meant that many hands were needed in both. As of 1949, the country’s coal mines operated with only sixty-five per cent of the required personnel, with postwar reconstruction still ongoing in many places. During the harvest seasons, those recruited into the mines deserted. For 1950, a CIA report mentioned how ‘production had fallen so steeply that the Yugoslav Communist Party, for the first time in its history, called upon

24 Intelligence Review, 3, 28. 2. 1946: Venezia Giulia: Area of Dispute, 30–36.

25 Intelligence Review, 1, 14. 2. 1946: Commission to Study Italo-Yugoslav Boundary Problem, 61–63.

26 Intelligence Review, 26, 8. 8. 1946: Yugoslav-Italian Border Settlement Complicated, 32–34.

Party members to leave their office and work in the mines.’ With this measure, ‘the mining industry succeeded in covering the basic coal requirements of the railroads.’ Still, ‘in Croatia alone [...] over 90,000 industrial workers and miners have to be found if the 1949 level of production is to be maintained.’ The Yugoslav government resorted to even stricter laws of obligatory labour that also involved political prisoners and German prisoners of war, in an attempt to force miners to stay at their workplaces in spite of the harsh conditions and poor food.²⁷

Seasonal workplace desertion is documented also in Sečovlje. Before 1954, when the mine was in the Free Territory of Trieste, the majority of employees were recruited in the immediate vicinity of the village, among them many salt workers, who went back to the saltworks during spring and summer (Pletikosić, 2006, 309). This group of workers, engaged in extracting both the ‘white’ and the ‘black gold’, amounts to another piece of the saltworks’ and the mine’s common sociospatial industrial history.

Also the rest of the unskilled workforce at the beginning of the mine’s drainage lived in Zone B, most of them in the Koper district, and a few in the Buje district. The few skilled miners who knew how to operate the pump came from Raša and Trbovlje (Pletikosić, 2006, 305). When the start of coal extraction was finally in sight, in April 1953, *Slovenski Jadran* advertised positions for a mining engineer, various administrative workers, a mechanic with mining experience for leading the technical workshop, a wood turner, a mechanical locksmith with experience in pumps and compressors, and two electricians capable of working with high voltages. Ideally, all were to be proficient in both Slovene and Italian.²⁸

A few days before the first wagon of coal would be extracted on 10 October 1953, there still was ‘a lot of talk in the mine about the staff. The base will be made up of old miners who once worked here. The less experienced ones will [...] learn from the older ones. [...] So far, they have already organized a course for how to use the water pumps, and they will soon organize a course for machinists.’²⁹ In addition to 110 men between eighteen and forty-five years of age there were ‘two engineers, five technicians, seven administrative employees and two student interns.’³⁰ A year later, this number had risen to 240.³¹

La nostra lotta published an almost bucolic account of the mine that ‘after eight years of sleep [...] wakes up under a sky full of good wishes’, making it clear how it had been the local men who had accomplished things here.

27 CIA, CIA-RDP82-00457R005300760006-8, ‘Survey of the Coal Industry in Yugoslavia’, 28 July 1950; Orlović, 2019, doc. 214.

28 Slovenski Jadran, 10. 4. 1953: Rudnik črnega premoga Sečovlje – Koper rabi za svoj obrat.

29 Slovenski Jadran, 2. 10. 1953: Črno zlato v borbi z vodo.

30 La nostra lotta, 3. 11. 1953: In lotta contro l’acqua per la conquista del calore.

31 Slovenski Jadran, 26. 11. 1954: V rudniku črnega diamanta.

It evoked the ‘saltworkers [...] who walked up the street [...] simple people who have made labour the goal of their lives’ and continued its impressionist description bringing the ‘black, almost stubby, form of the castle of the extraction well of the Siccirole mine’ into sight, to then eloquently praise the ‘incredible amount’ of labour that the men had invested there to reach their goal: to extract coal again.³²

All this happened while the territorial confrontation between Rome and Belgrade over the Free Territory of Trieste threatened to escalate. Its de facto non-implementation due to the failure to appoint a governor by the autumn of 1953 risked military escalation (de Leonardis, 1992). As, with the signing of the London Memorandum in October 1954, Zone B became part of Yugoslavia, emigration from Zone B increased significantly. In subsequent years, a protracted immigration from other parts of Yugoslavia ensued – the situation remained precarious in many ways. Importantly, the struggle for enough workers was far from over. By the 1960s, the number of unskilled workers who had arrived from the southern parts of Yugoslavia to Istria exceeded the local ones (Pletikosić, 2006, 305), mirroring Yugoslavia’s trends in the south-north inner migration (Kržišnik Bukić, 2010). Unskilled workers now made up about half of all employees (Pletikosić, 2006, 307).

Shortly after the ratification of the London Memorandum, the Sečovlje mine bought a diesel locomotive from the German enterprise *Demag*, one of the world’s largest mining machinery construction firms. This speaks of great plans, for this was too expensive machinery to be thought of as a short-lived investment. In 1961, the mine ordered spare parts of various sorts from the same company. An engineer translated into Slovene the complex German instructions that had come with the delivery on how to operate the locomotive.³³ At the same time, a discussion was ongoing about what was needed to make profit in the long run: a thermoelectric plant that would guarantee stable energy supplies. It was to be fired by the mine’s carbon tailings that could not be used otherwise. In order to operate the pumps that kept the water out of the tunnels, the mine needed as much electricity per day as the rest of the entire Koper district. Arriving at a point where the mine would use its own tailings to secure its energy needs seemed to make much sense.³⁴

Yet, while machinery was updated, a new separation was built and eventually also a new metal mining tower replaced the improvised wooden one, it never came to the building of a thermoelectric plant that would have secured

32 La nostra lotta, 3. 11. 1953: In lotta contro l’acqua per la conquista del calore.

33 PAK PI-193, 108, Demag – Aktiengesellschaft, Wetter (Ruhr), Demag Diesellok Nr. 3188, 31. 12. 1954; Navodilo za delo z jamsko dizel lokomotivo, prevedel ing. Čermelj; Anleitung für das Anlassen der Diesellok ML 20 in Grubenausführung; Hinweise für das Fahrpersonal der Diesellok L 20, die unbedingt zu beachten sind; Rezervni deli za Diesel lokomotivo LM 20 firme DEMAG, Duisburg, 18. 5. 1961; Ersatzteile zur Diesellokomotive MI 20, 5. 5. 1961.

34 Slovenski Jadran, 26. 11. 1954: V rudniku črnega diamanta.

the mine's energy needs. The mine continued to work in perpetuated precariousness when it came to keeping the water out. It took only a few years before, in 1957, unusually heavy April rains sufficed to spell disaster. The Karst landscape being porous, it seems that underground accumulation basins overflowed and merged with the waters that habitually threatened the mine's tunnels. The pumps did not manage, creating a panic among the miners, but luckily there were no casualties when the mine was flooded yet again. The almost 400 miners remained out of work. In a first moment of desperation, doubts were expressed whether it would be worth the effort to drain the mine once again.³⁵

But then it took less than a year to re-start coal extraction.³⁶ In the following decade, Sečovlje saw its longest uninterrupted operational phase. In 1962, it reached its postwar peak of 26,000 tonnes of coal. However, the European era of coal was waning, as oil had begun to replace coal as the most important, and cheapest, carbon fossil. In Sečovlje, production stagnated and then decreased. Lower extraction meant a decreasing number of workers and a decreasing possibility for maintenance. In September 1972, water filled the mine again, and now it was too expensive to drain the mine once more. The ailing mine was abandoned for good (Pletikosić, 2006).

CONCLUSION: TERRITORY, PLACE, SCALE, NETWORK – AND MARITIME ENVIRONMENT

This study gives insights into the local industrial history of coalmining in early Cold War Sečovlje. It also summarizes the early history of this mine during the interwar period, and the legacies of both coal mining and salt harvesting today. The study is an exploration of the TPSN framework, proposed by Jessop, Brenner, and Jones. It certainly raises more questions than it answers, thereby pointing to interesting prospects for further research into what an entangled microhistory of extractive industries on the northeastern Adriatic seashore is.

The maritime location of the tiny mine is as peculiar as its relative economic insignificance and seeming geopolitical cross-border economic entanglements, which await further research. The mine's overall history features several enigmatic decisions: Firstly, the Italians, who started extracting coal there in the second half of the 1930s, in 1935 dismantled the narrow gauge railway between Poreč and Trieste that could have been a useful vehicle for coal transport. Secondly, the Yugoslavs in 1947 dismantled the metal mining tower that could have been useful a few years later, when coal extraction began again. Thirdly, they closed the mine in 1972. A year later, with the oil

35 Slovenski Jadran, 29. 4. 1957: Epopeja požrtvovalnosti.

36 Slovenski Jadran, 7. 2. 1958: Poplačani napori rudarjev v Sečovljah.

crisis, coal was again in great demand, albeit short-lived, and Sečovlje could have profited from this development. While this history of ‘wrong decisions’ already speaks to the usefulness of the TSPN framework for studying the sociospatial dimensions of political-economic restructuring, also the further findings of this study illustrate how Sečovlje’s sociospatiality merits attention: a tiny (=scale) mine in a contested border region (=territory), characterized by everchanging demographic and political changes (=networks), and not least, situated adjacent to the sea (=place), which makes it a topic of maritime environmental and also infrastructural history.

The TPSN framework also helps in understanding how the Sečovlje mine has largely fallen through all epistemological trap doors. For the past thirty-five years, if not longer, Istria’s history has been divided up among Slovene and Croatian historians. Sečovlje being so small compared to the mines in Labin and Raša in Croatia, hardly any scholar has extended their interest in Istria’s mining history to include the industry on the Slovene coast. The study by Pletikosić (2006) is a two-decade-old notable exception; in most other studies, Sečovlje is mentioned in passing, if at all. In a similar manner, Istria’s mines have largely also fallen out of the sight of Italian scholars of fascism, colonialism, and war, let alone of later developments. To my knowledge, the postwar cross-border coal connection between Yugoslavia and northern Italy, inferred to by my sources, has received little to no historiographic attention. It is one of the key aspects of this history worth pursuing further in the archives, as it will help diversifying the Cold War history of the region, but also more generally.

The maritime location of the mine made (re-)opening it seem unreasonable to start with. At the same time, it is this peculiarity that makes the idea to further entangle the two extractive industries’ history very interesting. Coal and salt share a maritime transport history, and the salt pans and the coal mine literally stood in each other’s way, as is symbolized most forcefully by the tunnel dug under the sea and the questions connected to fresh water and the Dragonja River, vital for both industries.

Not least, they also share a history of labour: A short film with the telling title *Črno in belo*, (Black and White), directed by Jane Kavčič in 1967, gives a glimpse into the heroized worlds of labour of socialist Yugoslavia (Kavčič, 1967).³⁷ It has a musical soundscape, but no words are spoken apart from a leisure scene at the end. The focus is on the rhythmic parallel worlds of extracting salt from the sea and coal from the ground. The film was produced at the moment of the mine’s last peak and visually reaches a point where the difference between the extraction of the ‘black’ and ‘white gold’ seems as nothing but their colour. The new metal mining-tower, from which the camera catches a magnificent view of the sea and the salt pans,

37 The film is available on YouTube.

captures the vision of solid plans for a bright future, which did exist, but, as I showed, never came to fruition.

Reading this ‘maritime mine’s’ history simply as following the rhythm of the larger history of coal mining in Europe, or of the Cold War, or of socialist Yugoslavia, is possibly hiding more interesting questions. Among these are the Cold War cross-border practices this article could only so much hint at; the mine’s economic dependence on geopolitical shifts; and, not lastly, its entanglements and perpetuated struggles with its maritime environment, which may, in fact, turn out to be quite unique.

RUDARSTVO KOT POMORSKA ZGODOVINA? PREMOGOVNIK V SEČOVLJAH OD FAŠISTIČNIH ZAČETKOV DO ZGODNJE HLADNE VOJNE

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POVZETEK

Članek rekonstruira zgodovino majhnega premogovnika v Sečovljah. Osredotoča se na zgodnje obdobje hladne vojne in na prepletanje političnih, gospodarskih in okoljskih meja v zgodovini rudnika. Metodološko združuje koncept prostora (place) Henrija Lefebvra z metodološkim okvirjem teritorij – prostor – merilo – omrežje (TPSN), ki so ga nedavno predstavili: Bob Jessop, Neil Brenner in Martin Jones. V Sečovljah se je pridobivanje premoga začelo pod fašistično Italijo leta 1937, v okviru njene avtarkične in imperialne gospodarske politike. Obalna lega rudnika je povzročala nenehne tehnične težave in konflikte s sosednjimi solinami zaradi kopanja predorov pod morjem in poplavljanja. Po vojnem uničenju in opustitvi rudnika so ga jugoslovanske oblasti od leta 1950 začele obnavljati in oživljati, saj so si, po sporu med Titom in Stalinom, prizadevale vse bolj vključiti Cono B Svobodnega tržaškega ozemlja v Jugoslavijo. Na ponovno odprtje rudnika niso vplivale le lokalne potrebe po fosilnih gorivih, temveč tudi očitna pričakovanja čezmejne trgovine s Trstom in severno Italijo. Članek zagovarja tezo, da navidezna obrobnost Sečovelj zakriva doslej neraziskano zgodovino nadnacionalnih gospodarskih povezav z Italijo v zgodnjih poveljnih letih porajajoče se hladne vojne.

Ključne besede: Sečovlje, premogovnik, hladna vojna, meje, Istra

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ON THE SIDE OF PRODUCTION WASTE: DOCTORS AND OCCUPATIONAL MEDICINE IN SUPPORT OF SICK MINERS BETWEEN BELGIUM AND ITALY

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the toxic legacy of the 1946 Italo-Belgian agreement that sent thousands of Italian workers into Belgian coal mines, many of whom later suffered from severe occupational diseases. Drawing on the author's doctoral research on the return of sick miners from Belgium to Italy, it focuses on the long-term bodily, social, and institutional consequences of mining work after the decline of the Belgian coal industry. Through two case studies – one centred on a widow in Liège seeking posthumous recognition of her husband's illness, the other on socially engaged occupational physicians in Slavia Friulana/Beneška Slovenija, the Slovenian-speaking area of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, the article examines how medical knowledge, diagnostic practices, and compensation systems could reproduce or challenge migrant workers' exclusion. Combining oral history, medical and judicial documents, and sources from associations and welfare institutions, it argues that occupational health was not only a field of suffering, but also a terrain of conflict over recognition, responsibility, and justice. Ultimately, it shows how medicine could become part of a broader dynamic of social discard, but also a tool for resisting it.

Keywords: Italian migration, Belgian coal mines, silicosis, occupational medicine, Slavia Friulana/Beneška Slovenija

DALLA PARTE DEGLI SCARTI DI PRODUZIONE. I MEDICI E LA MEDICINA DEL LAVORO A SOSTEGNO DEI MINATORI MALATI TRA IL BELGIO E L'ITALIA

SINTESI

L'articolo analizza l'eredità tossica dell'accordo italo-belga del 1946, che portò migliaia di lavoratori italiani nelle miniere di carbone belghe, molti dei quali in seguito furono affetti da gravi malattie professionali. Attingendo alla ricerca di dottorato dell'autore sul ritorno in Italia dei minatori malati dal Belgio, l'articolo si concentra sulle conseguenze a lungo termine – fisiche, sociali e istituzionali – del

lavoro nelle miniere dopo il declino dell'industria carbonifera belga. Attraverso due casi di studio – uno incentrato su una vedova di Liegi che cercava il riconoscimento postumo della malattia del marito, l'altro su medici del lavoro socialmente impegnati a Slavia Friulana/Beneška Slovenija, nell'area di lingua slovena del Friuli-Venezia Giulia – l'articolo esamina come le conoscenze mediche, le pratiche diagnostiche e i sistemi di indennizzo potessero riprodurre o contrastare l'esclusione dei lavoratori migranti. Combinando testimonianze orali, documenti medici e giudiziari, nonché fonti provenienti da associazioni e istituzioni di assistenza sociale, l'articolo sostiene che la salute sul lavoro non fosse solo un ambito di sofferenza, ma anche un terreno di conflitto in materia di riconoscimento, responsabilità e giustizia. In definitiva, mostra come la medicina potesse diventare parte di una più ampia dinamica di emarginazione sociale, ma anche uno strumento per opporvisi.

Parole chiave: L'emigrazione italiana, le miniere di carbone belghe, la silicosi, la medicina del lavoro, Slavia Friulana

A LONG LEGACY OF TOXICITY

In 1946, the Italian and Belgian governments signed a protocol that organized the recruitment of Italian workers for the Belgian coal mines in exchange for Belgium's commitment to sell coal to Italy. This agreement must be situated within the broader political economy of post-war reconstruction. Italy faced unemployment, poverty, social unrest, and a severe energy shortage, while Belgium needed to increase coal production rapidly in order to restart its industrial system (Alberti, 2016; De Clementi, 2010). The agreement therefore turned migration into an instrument of economic policy: Italian workers were recruited for Belgian mines through promises of wages, housing, and social protection, while their labour became part of a wider exchange between manpower and energy. Within this framework, once they arrived in Belgium, Italian migrants soon realized that the promises made to them by their government and the Belgian Coal Federation actually masked an agreement based on the exploitation and commodification of labour, workers, and, above all, human beings. The bitter realization that they had been 'sold for a sack of coal' is perhaps one of the most recurring themes in the hundreds of testimonies, interviews, autobiographies, diaries, and memoirs that have been produced over the years by the migrants themselves or collected by scholars, associations, and other organizations (Franciosi, 2024). In fact, we now know a great deal about issues related to migration in the strict sense and

the first twenty years following the protocol. I am referring to aspects such as the dynamics of departures and arrivals, the difficult living conditions of the early years when Italians were assigned the barracks built a few years earlier by the Nazis, the brutality of the work, the deaths in the mines, the Marcinelle disaster, racism, but also aspects such as the export of Italian culture to Belgium or the sense of community that formed among migrants.¹

Another central issue in this story is that of occupational diseases. It did not take long before the miners began to feel the effects of exposure to toxic dust in the mine. The theme of disease recurs constantly, both in direct testimonies and in literature. In the latter, however, compared to elements such as those mentioned above, it has received less attention, except in a few very significant cases, considering the importance of the issue.²

Broadening our view, we can consider occupational diseases as one of the effects of Italian-Belgian policies, one of the most tragic, but not the only one: the protocol of 1946 set in motion a long trail of toxicity that has spread through time and space, reaching the present day and producing material, bodily, environmental, social, and political effects. The interpretive framework adopted here is in dialogue with Marco Armiero's concept of the Wasteocene, understood as a system of wasting relationships that renders socially and politically subordinated people, bodies, and places expendable for the prosperity, security, and capitalist enrichment of others (Armiero, 2021, 19–24, 99–103), and with Daniele Valisena's notion of 'coal metabolism', which connects Italian migration to Wallonia to the extractive, social, and bodily costs of coal production (Valisena, 2026).

In this sense, the miners' bodies were among the places where the toxic legacy of coal extraction, migration policy, and industrial decline was deposited and made visible. Several effects can be mentioned: environmental contamination, which in turn poisons the bodies that cross and will continue to cross the landscape even fifty years and more after the closure of most mines; the long list of deaths at work, adding to the number of miners who died of disease, and to the related social, economic, community, and family impact; the psychological repercussions and memories that remain difficult to process today. I conclude this partial list with the social effects of deindustrialization that have afflicted and still afflict former mining areas and, for the most part, now also former steelworks.³

This article presents selected findings from my doctoral research, entitled *Deindustrialized Bodies. The Return of Italian Miners from Belgium: Occu-*

1 This is in fact a very prolific field of study; I will limit myself to citing a few examples: Morelli (1998; 2004), Morelli & Verschueren (2018), Ricciardi (2016), Salsi (2013), and Franciosi (2024), as this is a very prolific field.

2 Regarding occupational diseases and their recognition in the Belgian mining context, cf. e.g. Geerckens (2009; 2014), Rossini (2006), and more recently Valisena (2026), who addresses the topic from an environmental history perspective, should be mentioned.

3 On Belgian steel deindustrialization and on the social history of Walloon industrial decline and mine closures, cf. Francq & Lapeyronnie (1990), Cammarata & Tilly (2001), and Verschueren (2013).

pational Diseases, Assistance, and Mobilization (1957–1980).⁴ The research reconstructs the return of Italian miners who had emigrated to Belgium after the 1946 protocol, focusing especially on the 1960s and 1970s and on illness as one of the central forces shaping their return.

I propose here an overview of my research to highlight some insights into the experiences of sick miners, framing on the one hand the impact that mining work and the policies promoted by Italy and Belgium had on them, and on the other hand the forms of resistance and reaction to the toxicity that pervaded bodies, communities, and society, both by the miners themselves and by various figures who were involved in assisting and helping sick migrants in various capacities. Specifically, this article focuses on one specific thread: the encounter between sick migrants and medical knowledge, and the ways in which doctors and occupational medicine could reproduce or contest the institutional mechanisms that transformed occupational disease into a private burden. The two cases analysed below do not exhaust the complexity of miners' illness, return, and assistance; rather, they make visible, at different scales, how medical practices, diagnostic thresholds, and individual choices became part of a struggle over recognition and justice.

Methodologically, the article combines oral history with archival and printed sources. I conducted around fifty interviews and informal conversations with former migrants, descendants, widows, physicians, *patronato*⁵ workers, and other actors involved in return, illness, and assistance. These voices are read together with institutional, hospital, welfare, trade-union, *patronato*, and associational records, private judicial and medical documentation, printed sources, and ego-documents. Rather than treating interviews as transparent containers of factual information, following the approach of Alessandro Portelli (1991), I use them as part of a mosaic of voices through which experience, memory, silences, and meanings can be reconstructed. In this framework, the cases selected here are not exhaustive, but representative and analytically dense fragments that allow different uses of medical science – exclusion, recognition, care, and resistance – to be observed in concrete situations.

PRODUCTION WASTE

[My husband] worked in the mines for eleven years, then two years in a factory, in coke ovens where they made coal dust balls, [...] then he went to work here in the zinc furnaces, twelve years in zinc furnaces at 1,600 degrees, twelve years breathing burnt gases [...] he already had bits of coal in his lungs and his illness began to develop. When he coughed, when he spat, pieces of coal came out too.

4 *Corpi deindustrializzati. Il ritorno dei minatori italiani dal Belgio fra malattie professionali, assistenza e mobilitazione (1957–1980)*.

5 A *patronato* is an Italian welfare-assistance institution, often linked to trade unions or social organizations, that provides free support with pension, social-security, and occupational-disease claims.

There are miners who died immediately, after two months of breathing coal in the tunnels, and those who fell ill later. And then there are all the other jobs they did afterwards that [made them ill].⁶ (Carmela M.)

With these words, Carmela M., a witness I interviewed during one of my research trips to Belgium, told me the story of her miner husband. Eighty-nine years old at the time of the interview and living near Liège, she had moved to Belgium in 1956, a few months after the Marcinelle disaster, where she met the man who would become her husband a few years later, Giuseppe C.⁷ Originally from northeastern Italy, he also moved to Belgium at the same time to work in the mines, where he remained for over ten years before following a path common among Italian migrants, namely moving into the metallurgical and steel industry, where he worked until retirement, changing companies and jobs several times. The excerpt reported here is taken from an interview during which the witness spoke at length about the suffering endured by her husband due to the illness he developed as a result of exposure first to coal dust and then to toxic fumes from steelworks and foundries, an illness that ultimately led to his premature death after many years of increasingly intense suffering. I have chosen to include these excerpts not because this story is representative in every respect, but because it brings into view several elements that recur in the trajectories of Italian migrants who fell ill in Belgium: prolonged exposure to toxic environments, diagnostic neglect, the difficulty of obtaining official recognition of the occupational origin of the illness, and the decisive role that individual doctors could play, either in reinforcing or in challenging institutional exclusion.

I was so tired of washing the overalls by hand... washing [my husband's] work overalls covered in coal, [...] when he came home, his eyes were still black with coal, and when he went to bed at night, he would get up because he was always hot. You could wash the sheets as much as you wanted, but they were always dirty with coal... but he... his body, you would have said he had tatouage⁸, so marked was his skin [...] but the real damage was what was [forming] inside, in his lungs. [From his early years working in the mine] he had some bronchial problems. Then his illness developed later, in the early 1970s, but until he died

6 Translated from the original Italian (All interview translations are by the author). [Mio marito] undici anni di miniera ha fatto, poi due anni li ha fatti alla Cockerill, in fabbrica, ai forni a coke dove facevano le palle della polvere di carbone, [...] dopo è andato a lavorare qua ai forni a zinco, 12 anni di forni a zinco a 1600 gradi di calore, 12 anni a respirare i gas di bruciato... aveva già i pezzettini di carbone nei polmoni e ha iniziato a svilupparsi la sua malattia. Quando sputava, quando tirava fuori, uscivano anche pezzi di carbone, ci sono minatori che sono morti subito, dopo due mesi a respirare carbone nelle gallerie e quelli che si sono ammalati dopo. E ci sono anche tutti gli altri lavori che facevano dopo eh che [li facevano ammalare]. Interview with Carmela M., aged 89, province of Liège, 19 October 2023.

7 At this stage of my doctoral research, and in agreement with the witnesses, I have decided to anonymize them, referring to them only by first name and surname initial.

8 From French: 'tattoos'.

they treated him for allergic asthma... but he didn't have allergic asthma, the doctors were treating him wrong. Then, two years before [he died], I was the one who made him change doctors, [because] when the other specialists were treating him... there was the lung specialist who was following him... but don't tell me he didn't see what was wrong with him... he wasn't interested in having him apply for occupational disease benefits, because he wanted to defend the fund. And the family doctor, on the other hand, [said]: 'You're always the same, Mr. C.,' gave him an injection, and left. At first, he seemed to be getting better, but then the disease progressed... and when I couldn't stand seeing him suffer anymore, but the doctors told him he was still the same... then I decided to change doctors: 'You won't see me anymore: a person who feels ill, who is ill, and you always tell me that there's nothing wrong with him?'. For many, many years, he was treated badly. For many years, I couldn't even stand to see the doctor who came to visit him... I told him: 'change doctors' every time, and not once did he tell us that my husband was dying... he was racist towards Italians. I still know people whose husbands died a month later, and he told them they had nothing wrong with them. Doctors did that to Italians... many people I know had husbands [who died, and their doctors] hid the fact that they had died from the mine... the certificate signed by the doctor said that he had died of bronchitis or cancer, but what had caused those diseases?⁹ (Carmela M.)

Coal leaves traces on the body. Some are visible, such as the spots on the skin, the 'tattoos' Carmela talks about, others are invisible, at least initially,

- 9 *Io ero talmente stufo di lavare a mano le tute... di lavare le tute di lavoro piene di carbone. [...] Quando veniva a casa aveva ancora tutti gli occhi neri di carbone e quando si metteva a letto di notte si alzava perché aveva sempre caldo, le lenzuola potevi lavarle quanto volevi ma erano sempre sporche di carbone... ma lui... il suo corpo, avresti detto che aveva dei tatouage, talmente era segnato sulla pelle. [...] [Già dai primi anni di lavoro in miniera] aveva un po' di problemi ai bronchi. Poi la sua malattia si è sviluppata dopo, in principio degli anni Settanta, ma fino a prima di morire lo curavano per l'asma allergica... ma non aveva l'asma allergica, non ce la faceva più, non vedeva l'ora di prendere la pensione talmente stava male, ma i dottori lo curavano male. Dopo, due anni prima [che lui morisse], sono stata io che gli ho fatto cambiare dottore, [perché] quando lo curavano gli altri specialisti... c'era quello dei polmoni che lo seguiva... ma non venire a dirmi che non vedeva quello che aveva... non gli interessava fargli fare la domanda per le maladies professionnelles, perché voleva difendere il fond. E il dottore di famiglia invece [diceva]: "Sempre uguale, signor C., lei è", gli faceva la puntura e se ne andava. In principio sembrava che stava meglio, ma poi la malattia avanzava... e quando io non ne potevo più di vederlo soffrire ma i dottori gli dicevano che stava sempre uguale... allora mi sono decisa a cambiare dottore: "Non mi vedrete più: una persona che si sente male, che sta male e lei mi dice sempre che non ha niente". Tanti... tanti anni lo hanno curato male, tanti anni che il dottore che veniva a visitarlo non potevo neanche vederlo... gli dicevo "cambia dottore" tutte le volte, e mai una volta che ci abbia detto che mio marito stava morendo... e io questo dottore lo vedo ancora a messa... sai quando si scambia la mano in segno di pace? Il Signore Gesù dice di perdonare e io gli do la mano... ma lui era un razzista con gli italiani. Conosco ancora gente che [i mariti] un mese dopo sono morti e lui gli diceva che non avevano niente. I dottori facevano così con gli italiani... tanti che conosco hanno avuto i mariti [che sono morti e i loro dottori] hanno nascosto che erano morti per la mina... il certificato marcato dal medico diceva che era morto di bronchite o di tumore, ma cosa aveva causato quelle malattie? Interview with Carmela M., aged 89, province of Liège, 19 October 2023.*

such as the dust that settles in the lungs. When you think of mining, the first disease that comes to mind is silicosis, one of the most widespread occupational diseases worldwide between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁰ It is an irreversible and incurable disease caused by the accumulation of silica particles in the lungs, which causes permanent scarring of the lung tissue. The effects of this disease can appear shortly after exposure or many years later, leading to progressive deterioration of the respiratory system and ultimately death.¹¹ What Italian miners commonly called *silicosi* or *pussiera*¹² was, from a medical point of view, a form of pneumoconiosis: a disease caused by prolonged inhalation of toxic dusts. Depending on the composition of the dust and the type of lung damage, this condition could be classified more specifically as anthraco-silicosis or pure silicosis, categories through which coal-dust exposure, silica exposure, and eligibility for compensation were negotiated (Rossini, 2006; Geerkens, 2014).

In Belgium, silicosis was officially recognized as an occupational disease only in 1963, almost twenty years after the Italo-Belgian agreement, thanks to a period of worker struggles in which Italians played an important role (Valisena, 2026).¹³ It is impossible to estimate how many people died from silicosis before this date (Geerkens, 2009): too many death certificates do not mention a correlation between work and death (Rossini, 2006, 20–35).

Within the extractive system that Daniele Valisena defines as the ‘coal metabolism’, Italian workers were recruited and exploited and were ultimately treated as production waste by a hostile institutional, health, and social security system (Valisena, 2021). Starting in 1963, the situation changed, allowing workers affected by silicosis and their families to obtain at least some compensation in exchange for the health that had been taken from them. Yet the official recognition of silicosis as an occupational disease did not put an end to the mechanisms of exclusion built into the Belgian system: compensation remained tied to narrow diagnostic categories, proof of exposure, and the capacity to navigate a system largely controlled by employers, experts, and compensation authorities. Firstly, recognition occurred only in advanced and severe forms of pneumoconiosis, as defined by the criteria applied by medical experts and compensation authorities. The early stages of the disease made visible by X-rays, although characteristic of the initial stages of silicosis, were disregarded. As Valisena has shown, the boundary between compensable silicosis and other respiratory conditions was contested rather than medically self-evident. The interpretation of X-rays, symptoms, and functional limitations – and the point at which a worker was considered ‘sick enough’ to qualify for compensation – was negotiated

10 On silicosis as a global professional disease, cf. Rosental (2017).

11 Regarding the medical debate, and partly the historical one, about silicosis and its complications, the key reference text in Italy is Minoia et al. (2019).

12 *Pussiera* was an Italianized form used by migrants for the French word *poussière*, literally meaning dust. In mining contexts, the related term *poussier* refers more specifically to fine coal dust.

13 Regarding the situation prior to silicosis recognition, cf. Geerkens (2009).

among medical experts, political authorities, trade unions, and coal companies (Valisena, 2026). Furthermore, even in severe cases, sick workers who wanted to obtain a disability pension had to prove that they had worked in a company where they had been exposed to silica or other elements and proof of exposure had to be provided by a certificate issued by the employer, even if the disease occurred years or even decades after exposure, with all the difficulties, and often the impossibility, of finding the documentation (Pitzalis, 2019, 24). It should also be added that silicosis, although the best known and most widespread, was not the only disease contracted by miners, who also suffered from other more or less serious diseases, such as other types of pneumoconiosis, bronchopneumopathy, chronic bronchitis, tuberculosis, various forms of pulmonary fibrosis, lung cancer, and obstructive respiratory diseases. Furthermore, silicosis itself can have outcomes that differ from those most easily recognizable and known to doctors at the time, outcomes that are still the subject of study and discussion in medical and academic circles (Minoia et al., 2019, 149–264). Therefore, even after the recognition of silicosis as an occupational disease, an event that had a significant impact on the funds of the Belgian *Fonds des maladies professionnelles* (Occupational Disease Compensation Fund),¹⁴ the Belgian system retained a hostile and obstructionist attitude, granting disability pensions only when the outcomes of silicosis were obvious and irrefutable according to the criteria applied by medical experts and compensation authorities, while denying them for other pathologies and outcomes not recognized as occupational diseases. To paraphrase environmental historian Marco Armiero, the burden of proving that one is ill and that the illness was caused by work fell entirely on the worker, who found himself facing an adversary holding all the power and often having an entire system protecting his interests (Armiero, 2021, 32–55). This story, like many others, clearly highlights how obstructionism within the Belgian medical and social-security systems operated both at the institutional level and in the attitudes of individual doctors who treated Italian patients. In many cases, this obstructionism was reinforced by widespread racism towards Italians, a structural dynamic that has emerged widely from testimonies and historiography. In this sense, diagnostic uncertainty did not function only as a medical problem: it could also become an institutional and political instrument through which recognition, care, and compensation were delayed or denied.

When I saw that he was dying [in the early 2000s], I made up my mind, because I'm a fighter! Many people didn't even pursue their claims after their applications were rejected... but I swore to the Virgin Mary that I would see it through to the end, because it was the right thing to do. [...] And I changed... I called the new doctor, who was the one I already had and who was also good with Italians, and I said to him: 'Listen, doctor, can you come

14 Broadly comparable to INAIL in Italy.

to my house to examine my husband? He's always ill.' He came here, looked at the X-rays and did this [gesture of bringing his hands to his face], and said: 'How much money do you get per month from the Fonds de le maladies professionnelles? Mr C., you have more than eighty percent disability, I'll send you to a specialist' [...] and we went to Professor Bartsch who, when he saw all the medicines he was taking and the X-rays, also did this [gesture of bringing his hands to his face] and also asked: 'How much pension do you receive per month?' and I said: 'Nothing.' 'What do you mean, nothing? You have more than eighty percent disability!' He also sent us to another cardiologist, but every time we went [for check-ups] with [my husband], I argued with him, but later [shortly before he died], he regretted not having changed doctors sooner.¹⁵ (Carmela M.)

What made the difference in this circumstance – which, as Carmela herself states, was certainly not common or representative in its final outcome – was her resourcefulness, her tenacity in pursuing the recognition of her husband's illness. She stood alone against a system capable of protecting itself through figures such as doctors, court-appointed experts, and the *Fonds des maladies professionnelles*. It is precisely for this reason that, in order to confront such an unequal struggle, the support of an insider – someone who knows the system's inner workings, who knows how to navigate them, and who, for ethical or political reasons, chooses to side with those seeking justice without having the means to obtain it – is essential. In this case, the first such person was a doctor who, after years of misdiagnoses and mistreatments, needed only a single examination of Carmela's husband and a look at his X-rays to grasp the seriousness of his condition. But it was above all Pierre Bartsch, a prominent pulmonologist and professor at the University of Liège, who played a decisive role. After examining the patient, Bartsch identified a severe pulmonary fibrosis initially classified as idiopathic and argued that, in this case, it was a consequence of silicosis and silica exposure, rather than allergic rhinitis, for which the man had been incorrectly – and quite plausibly in bad faith – treated for years. Achiev-

15 [Q] uando io ho visto che ormai stava morendo, mi sono decisa, perché io sono battagliera eh! Tanti non hanno neanche insistito quando hanno rifiutato le loro domande... io invece ho giurato alla Madonna che sarei andata fino in fondo, perché era giusto. [...] E ho cambiato, ho chiamato il nuovo dottore, era quello che avevo già io ed era bravo anche con gli italiani, e gli ho detto: "Ascolti dottore, può venire a casa mia a visitare mio marito? Sta sempre male [...]". E lui è venuto qua, ha visto le radiografie e ha fatto così [gesto di portarsi le mani alla faccia], ha detto: "Quanti soldi avete voi al mese dal Fond de le maladies professionnelles? Signor C., lei ha più dell'80% di invalidità, vi mando io da uno specialista". [...] E siamo andati dal professor Bartsch che, quando ha visto tutte le medicine che prendeva e le radiografie, anche lui ha fatto così [gesto di portarsi le mani al viso] e anche lui ha chiesto: "Quanto prendete di pensione al mese?" e io: "Niente". "Ma come niente? Avete più dell'80%!". E lui ci ha mandato anche da un altro cardiologo, ma io ogni volta che andavamo [a fare le visite] con [mio marito] ci litigavo, ma poi più avanti [poco prima di morire] si è pentito di non averli cambiati prima. Interview with Carmela M., aged 89, province of Liège, 19 October 2023.

ing justice nonetheless took many years, with numerous rejected applications, expert reports, and court hearings. It was only in 2013, nearly a decade after the former miner at the centre of this story had passed away following decades of suffering, that the *Tribunal du travail de Liège* (Liège Labour Court) finally recognized that his death had resulted from conditions linked to exposure to mine dust.¹⁶

RETURNING ILL

As recalled by Carmela M., many miners died from occupational diseases without these ever being officially recognized as the cause of death. Likewise, a great number were left without pensions or received pensions insufficient to compensate for their inability to work. My second case follows the experiences of a group of sick migrant workers who, having found themselves in this latter situation, decided to return to Italy, just as thousands of their compatriots did.¹⁷

No longer able to work with damaged lungs, many migrants were forced to decide whether to remain in Belgium or return to Italy – a decision influenced by numerous factors such as the degree of familial rootedness in Belgium, the severity of the illness, the possibility of continuing to work or relying on other sources of income, and, of course, pension entitlements.

This passage from Belgium to Italy also changed the scale at which illness could be contested. In the Belgian mining and industrial districts, Italian miners were not merely isolated victims: many were inserted into politicized and unionized worlds, shaped by Catholic and Communist associations, trade unions, *patronati*, and collective struggles over work, housing, safety, accidents, and illness (Morelli, 2004; Di Stefano, 2015). Return and disease often fragmented this collective fabric. Once back in Italy, especially in marginal villages and mountain or border areas, the struggle for recognition was frequently displaced into a more individual dimension: the sick miner, weakened by respiratory disease, had to face doctors, pension offices, certificates, X-rays, medical files, and social isolation.

Under pressure from the growing visibility of miners' occupational diseases and from the political consequences of Marcinelle, Italy began, from the first half of the 1960s, to provide forms of disability pension for individuals who had worked in the Belgian mines. This had been made possible by the Law no. 1115/1962, promoted by the Communist senator Renato Bitossi, which explicitly recognized silicosis contracted in the Belgian mines.

16 Personal archive of Carmela M., Tribunal du travail de Liège, Case Vve M.-C./FMP, judgment and expert report by Dr Pierre Bartsch, 22 October 2013.

17 The return of migrants to Italy has received little attention from historians of emigration. For some relevant work on the subject in general and specifically on Friuli, cf. Cerase (2001) and Saraceno (1981).

The pension application process, although not comparable to the challenges migrants faced in Belgium, still presented numerous difficulties and disparities (Rossini, 2006, 51–53).

Returning home sick meant carrying in one's body – damaged by the same industrial process that had transformed the mining landscape of Wallonia – the toxic effects triggered by the Italo-Belgian agreement and symbolically disseminating them throughout their regions of origin. These were typically marginal and peripheral areas, often depopulated due to both internal and international migration, now forced to confront the long-term consequences of national policies enacted thirty or forty years earlier. Slavia Friulana/Beneška Slovenija was one of these regions: a historically Slavic (Slovenian)-speaking area in Friuli in north-eastern Italy, within the administrative region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia and bordering Slovenia, where several hundred ill migrants returned from Belgium in the second half of the 1970s. This territory had become part of the Italian state following various adjustments to the eastern border. It comprises about 300 square kilometres divided into a dozen small municipalities, the most prominent of which is San Pietro al Natisone/Špeter Slovenov. The region is characterized by a constellation of small settlements scattered between the valleys of the Natisone/Nadiža River and surrounding hills, many of which remain isolated, poorly connected, and difficult to reach.

In the context of a long and dramatic postwar period that saw Friuli become one of Italy's most economically depressed regions, Slavia Friulana experienced an even deeper underdevelopment. This was further exacerbated by the marginalization of its inhabitants, who had already suffered under fascist Italianization policies and were after the Second World War still subject to ethnic, linguistic, and political prejudice, when Slovenia was part of communist Yugoslavia. In the first three postwar decades, emigration flows halved the local population, decreasing it from 60,000 to between 30,000 and 40,000. Departures from Slavia Friulana were among the most significant in the region, making Udine one of the Italian provinces that provided the highest number of labourers to Belgian mines (Micelli, 2012, 32).¹⁸

For this reason, Slavia Friulana is not only the local background of the second case study. It is one of the places where the toxic afterlife of Belgian mining work was reinscribed into a borderland already marked by depopulation, economic marginality, and the fragile position of a historically Slovenian-speaking community within the Italian state. The return of sick miners therefore allows the relationship between occupational disease, minority status, territorial marginality, and access to medical and welfare institutions to be observed together (Clavora & Ruttar, 1985; 1990; Clavora

18 Cf. Clavora & Ruttar (1990, 47–79). For a historical, social, cultural, and migratory perspective on Benečija cf. Clavora & Ruttar (1985), and Clavora & Pignat (2017).

& Pignat, 2017).

It was within this already highly complex context that, during the 1970s, as the Walloon mining era was drawing to a close, hundreds of migrants from Slavia Friulana returned from Belgium. Upon their return to Friuli, their primary concern was to undergo medical examinations to assess their health and begin the process of applying for pension benefits, either in Belgium or Italy. The designated facility for residents of Slavia Friulana was the Social Hygiene Dispensary (*Dispensario di igiene sociale*)¹⁹ in Cividale del Friuli, where several young physicians, recent graduates from the University of Padua, worked at the time. This detail is crucial for understanding the medical approach these physicians adopted in facing the wave of returning miners. To understand who these doctors were and why they acted as they did, it is necessary to shift the focus for a moment to Padua, an important university city with a long-established medical faculty and then one of the places where new ways of thinking about medicine, work, and health were taking shape. In the period of the 1968 movement, the University of Padua underwent a period of cultural and political ferment that also affected the medical faculty, fostering a climate of sociopolitical renewal. With respect to occupational medicine, this translated into a desire among certain professors and students to promote a practice that moved beyond the rigid frameworks of their predecessors – practices they viewed as mechanical and impersonal. Instead, they sought to develop a more socially engaged and multidisciplinary approach, one attentive to the needs of workers.

In parallel, another crucial moment for the formation of new ideas and practices was the Hot Autumn (*Autunno caldo*), a period of intense labour struggles that followed the 1968 movement and placed particular emphasis on the right to health. In those years, several experiences of medicine with a strong critical and social orientation were emerging across Italy, in organized forms such as Democratic Medicine (*Medicina Democratica*) and in less formal practices rooted in universities, workplaces, local health services, and political activism. The aim was to redefine the role of occupational medicine in a participatory and preventive sense, rather than merely as a reactive response to disease. Places such as Padua became important centres of this culture; after completing their studies, some Friulian doctors brought these ideas and practices to the periphery, pursuing different paths within various institutions but remaining united by the motivation to introduce a different medical practice to Italy's far northeast (Carnevale, 2019). During

19 The *Dispensario di igiene sociale* was a local public-health outpatient facility devoted to prevention, diagnosis, and follow-up of socially relevant diseases, especially tuberculosis and respiratory illnesses; in this case, it operated within the network of the Provincial Anti-Tuberculosis Consortium.

the late 1970s, they carried out numerous investigations in Friulian factories, working as closely as possible with workers, factory councils, and trade unions. In some cases, they found cooperation from companies; in others, they faced resistance, suspicion, or outright obstruction from employers. Some of them, through the Provincial Anti-Tuberculosis Consortium (*Consortorio provinciale antitubercolare*), were assigned at different times to the *Dispensario di igiene sociale* in Cividale del Friuli, where, as mentioned, they had to manage the return of ill miners (mostly from Belgium, but not exclusively).

The recollections of one of these doctors, Guglielmo Pitzalis – whom I interviewed on multiple occasions and who has written about the events – vividly highlight the complexity of the situation:

They were still young, but already ill and disabled, living in a state of double marginalization. In their home villages, they no longer found peers or youths, only the elderly. They did not know how to perform any other job: unlike carpenters or masons, miners do not possess transferable skills, and the old trades no longer served any purpose in now-empty villages. Thus, they became foreigners in their own homeland. (Pitzalis, 2019, 78)²⁰

Thanks to the approach they had developed during their years in Padua – and to their conviction that medicine is not a neutral science but deeply embedded in social dynamics – these doctors understood that illness itself needed to be considered within the broader context of the marginalization and isolation affecting Slavia Friulana. Around the respiratory illnesses there clustered a host of other issues that could not be ignored: psychological difficulties, loneliness, depression, poor environmental hygiene, degradation, alcoholism, smoking, and, more generally, a passive acceptance of disease.

Many of the patients treated at the Dispensary were men over forty, still of working age, mostly unmarried, incapable of engaging in physical labour, lacking transferable skills, and without prospects. They were confined to their native settlements, where the fabric of small artisanal trades had disintegrated following emigration (Cont & Pitzalis, 1983, 28–33). The doctors thus attempted to devise tailored, multifactorial intervention paths. First, they launched a survey to better understand the medical and social situa-

20 *Io li vedevo quando rientravano: erano ancora giovani, ma già ammalati, invalidi e vivevano una doppia marginalità. Nei paesi non trovavano più né coetanei né giovani, ma solo vecchi; non sapevano fare un altro lavoro: il minatore, diversamente dal carpentiere o dal muratore, non porta con sé una professionalità spendibile e i vecchi mestieri, nei borghi ormai vuoti, non servivano più. Così diventavano stranieri nel loro stesso paese. (Pitzalis, 2019, 78)*

tion, administering questionnaires to patients that included questions about their migratory and occupational history, living conditions upon return, and current health status. This investigation revealed over 350 cases of silicosis in various stages and levels of severity, as well as other forms of pneumoconiosis and other effects of mine dust exposure, many of which were not recognized as occupational diseases either by Belgian compensation authorities or, after the miners' return, by Italian institutions.²¹ There were also 208 cases of chronic bronchitis, many cases of liver disease linked to alcohol use, and numerous cardiovascular issues, some directly related to work, others to living conditions.

Second, they initiated collaborations with the National Institute for Assistance to Farmers (*Istituto nazionale di assistenza ai coltivatori*, INAC), a *patronato* office in Cividale, with the Union of Slovenian Emigrants of Friuli Venezia Giulia (*Zveza slovenskih izseljencev Furlanije Julijske krajine*), with the General Federation of Belgian Labour (*Fédération Générale du Travail de Belgique*, FGTB), and with clinics and doctors both in Friuli and Belgium who could treat the aforementioned issues and support the social reintegration of former miners. Since not all former migrants sought out the Dispensary on their own initiative, they also organized participatory conferences and information sessions in the villages of Slavia Friulana. These events addressed pension and health matters and emphasized the importance of visiting the clinic, as can be seen in the words spoken by Pitzalis on one such occasion:

Before concluding, I must say to those who have not yet visited the Dispensary: come not only for the sake of our statistics. From the statistics,

21 The Italian Law no. 1115 of 27 July 1962, promoted by the Communist senator Renato Bitossi, extended the economic, medical, and welfare benefits provided by Italian occupational insurance legislation to Italian citizens residing in Italy who had contracted silicosis in Belgian coal mines and had not been compensated under Belgian legislation. It thus placed them, in principle, on the same footing as workers who had contracted the disease in Italy. After the Belgian Law of 24 December 1963 on compensation for damage resulting from occupational diseases and their prevention recognized miners' pneumoconiosis as an occupational disease, however, INAIL adopted a restrictive interpretation and considered the effects of the Italian Law no. 1115 as exhausted with regard to applications submitted after the Belgian legislation entered into force. This interpretation was contested by the *patronati* and repeatedly challenged in court, since the Italian law provided for the cessation of INAIL benefits only when the individual worker had actually obtained comparable or higher benefits from the competent Belgian institutions. The issue was addressed only much later by the Italian Law no. 780 of 27 December 1975, promoted through bills presented by the Communist deputy Giovanni Bortot and the Christian Democratic deputies Enea Piccinelli and Franco Foschi. In particular, Article 6 of the law expressly provided an authentic interpretation of the Italian Law no. 1115/1962, extending its benefits to eligible survivors of workers who had died from silicosis contracted in Belgian coal mines (Rossini, 2006, 51–53; Bortot, 2015, 140–143).

we try to extract something that can help improve your quality of life. This is not only a medical issue – it is a social issue: alcoholism, the loneliness of the unmarried, hygiene conditions, etc. We want to give you the opportunity to carry out some small activities. Many of you, before becoming miners, were craftsmen, farmers, or woodworkers, and with a bit of willpower and commitment – from the public authorities, and from us doctors – we could consider reviving some of these trades. (Cont & Pitzalis, 1983, 61)²²

Pitzalis's reflections written in 2019 are partially different. He recognized the value of the Dispensary's work, which, for many isolated and ailing individuals, offered the possibility to resist, struggle, and imagine a more dignified coexistence with illness than the degradation into which they had fallen upon their return. However, he also revealed a heightened awareness of the devastating impact that mining work and the Italo-Belgian agreement had on the miners of Slavia Friulana:

In our illusion of changing the world – and for them, we did change it a bit – we imagined, together with local authorities, that some might resume the artisanal activities they had abandoned when emigrating in search of stable wages. Our work began in 1976 and lasted until 1981. [...] By sharing experiences and studies, we were better able to confront certain complications: tuberculosis could be treated and cured, and thus it could be communicated and experienced with more serenity; chronic obstructive pulmonary disease could not be radically cured because it did not respond to medication, but rehabilitation was possible. Doctors approached these illnesses with a new sensitivity to quality of life and felt more personally involved. In the last years, I no longer worked in Cividale, but I continued seeing these people; I maintained an emotional connection with them. Many managed to obtain recognition of their occupational disease – silicosis – in Belgium, some even in Italy, perhaps also for noise-induced hearing loss or serious musculoskeletal disorders. Unfortunately, several of those who lived long enough died of lung cancer, which we were never able to get recognized – neither in Belgium nor

22 *Prima di concludere devo dire a chi non è ancora stato al dispensario, di venire non solo per il gusto della nostra statistica. Dalla statistica noi cerchiamo di ricavare qualcosa che possa essere utile a migliorare la qualità della vostra vita. Non è solo un problema medico, è un problema sociale quello dell'alcool, della solitudine dei celibi, delle condizioni igieniche, ecc.; vogliamo dare la possibilità di svolgere qualche piccola attività. Molti di voi, prima di fare i minatori, o erano artigiani, o contadini o lavoravano il legno e quindi con un po' di buona volontà e di impegno, anche da parte delle autorità pubbliche, anche da parte nostra come medici, si potrebbe rivedere di riprendere alcune cose. (Cont & Pitzalis, 1983, 61)*

in Italy – as the ultimate consequence of their working conditions in the mines. (Pitzalis, 2019, 80–81)²³

CONCLUSIONS

I have chosen to dwell on these two cases, because they are particularly eloquent with respect to two aspects that are highly relevant for studying Italian migration to Belgium from the perspective of what happened after the mines closed.

The first element is the dynamic of discard, the wasting relationship, triggered by the 1946 Italo-Belgian protocol. This was an agreement that produced deep toxic effects, spread across both space and time. This legacy, which has been partially addressed in specialized literature and emerges from interviews, diaries, and similar sources, still needs to be fully understood in all its facets by tracing its histories, stories, and dynamics. In this regard, testimonies such as that of Carmela M. and the investigation promoted by the Friulian occupational physicians represent invaluable documents. The investigation, in particular, by virtue of the approach adopted by the physicians and the human attention they brought to the task, though it remains a localized case, allows us to understand both quantitatively and qualitatively the outcomes of these processes of marginalization. It also prompts us to ask how many thousands of other individuals may have experienced similar trajectories without ever being included in any statistics, and it underscores how important it is to follow the individual and collective stories of these people.

The second element stems from the observation that medicine and health policies played a fundamental role in this story, not only, as several studies have already shown, in the first twenty or thirty years following the 1946 agreement, but also in the later decades, up to the present day. The cases discussed here – there are many more – serve as a window through which we

23 *Nella nostra illusione di cambiare il mondo, e per loro un po' l'abbiamo cambiato, ipotizzavamo con gli enti locali che alcuni avrebbero potuto riprendere le attività artigianali abbandonate per l'emigrazione alla ricerca di uno stipendio sicuro. Il nostro lavoro cominciò nel 1976 e durò sino al 1981. [...] Condividendo esperienze e studi, alcune complicanze si sono potute affrontare [sic] meglio: la tubercolosi si poteva curare e guarire, e quindi poteva essere comunicata e vissuta con più serenità; la broncopneumopatia cronico-ostruttiva non poteva essere curata in senso radicale perché non rispondeva ai farmaci, ma si poteva fare la riabilitazione; i medici guardavano a queste patologie con un occhio più attento alla qualità della vita, portavano una diversa sensibilità e loro stessi si sentivano più coinvolti. Negli ultimi anni non lavoravo più a Cividale, ma continuavo a vedere queste persone, tenevo un legame affettivo con loro; molti riuscirono ad avere il riconoscimento della rendita per la malattia professionale – la silicosi – in Belgio, qualcuno in Italia, magari anche per l'ipoacusia da rumore o malattie osteo-articolari importanti. Purtroppo diversi, i pochi che riuscirono a invecchiare, morirono per neoplasia polmonare, che non siamo mai riusciti a far riconoscere né dal Belgio né dall'Italia come conseguenza ultima delle loro condizioni di lavoro nelle miniere.* (Pitzalis, 2019, 80–81)

can observe how medicine is not a neutral science and how, depending on the practices and uses to which it is subjected, it may wield the power either to include or to exclude.

Before drawing the final conclusions, one clarification is crucial: the decisive issue is not national belonging. In both Italy and Belgium there were physicians who used scientific expertise to minimize disease, delay recognition, or translate suffering into non-compensable categories, and others who mobilized the same expertise to support miners, reopen files, challenge diagnostic thresholds, and make sick bodies legible as evidence of industrial injustice. This contrast should therefore be understood through institutional positions, compensation systems, professional cultures, political trajectories, and individual ethical choices. Precisely for this reason, another relevant theme emerging from both cases is that it is not only state policies that make the difference – though these clearly remain a fundamental factor to consider – but often also the spaces of agency that individual physicians choose, and manage, to carve out for themselves within those frameworks. What separated these positions was the decision either to participate in the dynamics of discard or to resist them: to use medicine as a filter that excluded sick migrants from recognition, or as a practice of justice and inclusion, choosing to see the people before them as human beings before seeing them as miners, migrants, or Italians.

NA STRANI PROIZVODNIH ODPADKOV. ZDRAVNIKI IN MEDICINA DELA V PODPORO BOLNIM RUDARJEM MED BELGIJO IN ITALIJO

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POVZETEK

Ta članek obravnava strupeno dediščino italijansko-belgijskega sporazuma iz leta 1946, v okviru katerega so tisoči italijanskih delavcev odšli v belgijske premogovnike, kjer so mnogi kasneje zboleli za hudimi poklicnimi boleznimi. Na podlagi doktorskih raziskav avtorja članka o vrnitvi bolnih rudarjev iz Belgije v Italijo, se članek osredotoča na dolgoročne telesne, družbene in institucionalne posledice rudarstva po zatonu belgijskega premogovništva. Skozi dve študiji primerov članek proučuje, kako so medicinsko znanje, diagnostične prakse in sistemi odškodnin lahko utrjevali ali pa izpodbijali izključenost delavcev migrantov. Prva študija je osredotočena na vdovo v Liègeu, ki si prizadeva za posmrtno priznanje bolezni svojega moža, druga pa na družbeno angažirane delovne zdravnike v Beneški Sloveniji. Na podlagi kombinacije ustne zgodovine, medicinskih in sodnih dokumentov ter virov iz združenj in socialnih ustanov članek pokaže, da zdravje pri delu ni bilo le področje trpljenja, temveč tudi prizorišče sporov glede priznanja, odgovornosti in pravičnosti. Nazadnje članek prikazuje, kako je medicina lahko postala del širše dinamike družbene izključenosti, pa tudi orodje za upiranje tej izključenosti.

Ključne besede: italijanska migracija, belgijski premogovniki, silikoza, medicina dela, Beneška Slovenija

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“A COAL STAIN IS HARD TO REMOVE”: TÜRKİYE’S MINING AGENDA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE HUMOR MAGAZINES (1960–1980)

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the socio-political situation of Turkish mining and mine workers through humor or caricature magazines published between 1960 and 1980 by using the corpus linguistics method. The corpus linguistics method, which is widely used in linguistics, enables qualitative data to be digitally segmented and analysed in different ways. Coal shortages, rising prices and endless queues became the defining struggles for the urban middle class, workers, civil servants and shopkeepers, giving rise to a “survival humor” that exposed class divides in fuel access. Cartoons revealed miners’ unsafe conditions and occupational diseases and showed their powerlessness before employers. They also criticized government mining policy and patronage networks and debated the nationalization of mines and the role of foreign companies. Beyond economics, coal scarcity was portrayed as eroding traditional culture and morality, affirming humor’s enduring role as social critique.

Keywords: mining, mine labor, caricature, humor magazines, Türkiye

“LA MACCHIA DI CARBONE È DIFFICILE DA RIMUOVERE”: IL PROGRAMMA MINERARIO DELLA TURCHIA DALLA PROSPETTIVA DELLE RIVISTE UMORISTICHE (1960–1980)

SINTESI

Questo articolo analizza la situazione socio-politica del settore minerario turco e dei minatori attraverso riviste umoristiche o di caricatura pubblicate tra il 1960

e il 1980, avvalendosi del metodo della linguistica dei corpora. Il metodo della linguistica dei corpora, ampiamente utilizzato in linguistica, consente di segmentare digitalmente i dati qualitativi e di analizzarli in diversi modi. La carenza di carbone, l'aumento dei prezzi e le code interminabili divennero le principali difficoltà per il ceto medio urbano, i lavoratori, i funzionari e i negozianti, dando origine a un “umorismo di sopravvivenza” che metteva in luce le disparità di classe nell'accesso al combustibile. Le caricature mettevano in luce le condizioni di sicurezza precarie dei minatori e le malattie professionali, mostrando la loro impotenza di fronte ai datori di lavoro. Criticavano inoltre la politica mineraria del governo e le reti clientelari e discutevano della nazionalizzazione delle miniere e del ruolo delle società straniere. Al di là dell'aspetto economico, la scarsità di carbone veniva descritta come un fattore che erodeva la cultura e la moralità tradizionali, affermando il ruolo persistente dell'umorismo come critica sociale.

Parole chiave: estrazione mineraria, manodopera mineraria, caricature, riviste umoristiche, Turchia

INTRODUCTION¹

Humor is a fragile phenomenon, and as the guardian of this phenomenon, the humorist always tries to maintain the delicate, sensitive balance between joke and offense, social commentary and prejudice, controlled fantasy and madness, and all those repulsive situations on which humor is based and their controlled comic counterparts (Alexander, 1984, 76–78). Humor brings issues that society hesitates to voice within power relations to the agenda with less collective reaction. In this sense, the natural position of humor media is opposition. There is an effort in humorous discourse to correct things that are lacking or going wrong (Peifer, 2012, 266). Indeed, Mikhail Bakhtin said that “laughter destroys all hierarchical distances” (Bakhtin, 1981, 23). In this regard, humor magazines² are important for

1 This work was supported by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (Türkiye Bilimsel ve Teknolojik Araştırma Kurumu – TÜBİTAK), under Project No. 323K395.

2 Although “humor magazines,” “caricature magazines,” and “cartoon magazines” all refer to the same body of Turkish satirical periodicals, each term carries a slightly different scope here. “Humor magazines” serves as the umbrella term for the genre as a whole. “Caricature” narrows this to the artistic and professional dimension of the genre, emphasizing caricature as a drawing craft and its historical development since the Ottoman period. “Cartoon magazines,” in turn, denotes the concrete periodicals themselves as primary sources, that is, the specific issues and titles treated as empirical data rather than as representatives of a genre or a craft.

the Turkish society's familiarization with the general outlines of comedy in terms of understanding religious, behavioral and cultural patterns.

Modern mass communication in Türkiye strengthened in the twentieth century due to developments that emerged in the final quarter of the nineteenth century. With the increasing spread of high-circulation national newspapers, compulsory public education's effort to produce a uniform citizenry, and the circulation of radio and cinema, governments obtained an unprecedented new political and ideological power element. As a continuation of the nation-state building process, throughout almost all stages of modern Turkish history, the press has endeavored to develop a measured relationship with power to avoid closure and other penalties, while also seeking ways to achieve high circulation in competitive market conditions (Cantek, 2024, 130). The tension between press and political authority was not unique to the humor press, as the broader Turkish and Ottoman periodicals have historically served as both witnesses and actors in power struggles, exemplified by the role newspapers played in shaping and recording the government crisis in the late Ottoman Empire (Korkmaz, 2024). When looking at the issue from the perspective of humor media in Türkiye, humor magazines have historically always been among the best-selling magazines. They contain reflections of popular culture and daily life and are among the productive venues where social and political transformation can be observed (Demirkol, 2025, 53).

Although the roots of humor media in Türkiye can be traced back to the Tanzimat period (1839–76) of Ottoman modernization, *Diyojen*, considered the first published cartoon magazine in the mentioned years, had its privilege rights canceled after 183 issues were published (Cantek & Gönenc, 2017, 9). During this early period when the satirical press flourished in the Ottoman Empire, topics such as fashion and women, economic issues and the alafranga lifestyle in the first Ottoman humor magazines indicate a humor publishing that touches daily life (Özdiş, 2010, 107). An important issue in terms of the historical development of humor publishing in Türkiye has been the liberation of caricature from dependence on painting and its establishment as an independent art form. It must be acknowledged that humor magazines reached a level on par with global standards during the Second Constitutional Era (1908–20). The revolution, and the boom it brought to the Ottoman publishing industry provided the framework for revolutionary developments in the publishing technology (Koloğlu, 2006, 92; Brummett, 2000, 34). These developments of the satirical press during the Constitutional Monarchy period and after World War I were followed by the efforts of Cemal Nadir in the early years of the Republic. Well-known publications such as *Akbaba* and *Karagöz* are prominent examples of satirical publications from the Republican Era (Öngören, 2000, 68–80). With Türkiye's transition to a liberal competitive democratic system in the 1950s and in the turbulent political environment of the 1960s and 1970s, caricature became an inseparable part of daily life. During these years, caricature magazines emerged as an entertainment element and displayed an oppositional attitude against the center of power (Topuz, 1985, 138).

A prominent aspect of caricature magazine publishing in Türkiye after 1950 has been its advocacy for various social classes. With the 1947 legal regulation, new unions were established, and as unionism began to mature institutionally in general, almost every union started publishing its own publications. These developments, which brought a marked revival to press and publishing life, would indirectly also turn humor magazine publishing into propaganda or a tool of social struggle. Humor, which Türkiye's organized working class struggle also intensively resorted to, has served an important function in the recent history of the labor movement (Yıldırım, 2019, 147). Although serious public pressure was formed regarding the right to strike from the 1940s, there was no legal regulation either in the single-party system or during the Democratic Party (DP) rule. However, as a result of the constitutional changes initiated by the military administration of the 1960 coup, the right to collective bargaining and strike was legalized by Article 46 of the 1961 Constitution, which was very liberal in terms of individual freedoms and political participation (Doğan, 2015, 333; Ozan, 2015, 659–746). Thus, strikes proliferated across many business sectors at this stage of the workers' history in Türkiye. Consequently, the labor movement, which began to become an important part of daily life, would be among the main topics of humor media.

The rapid change experienced in Turkish society and politics in the 1960s also initiated a permanent transformation in humor media, with the humor culture developing a tendency toward leftist thought. The emergence of new intellectuals in leftist politics and the beginning establishment of a new social opposition center also determined the topic and content preferences of political humor. In this period, caricaturists also positioned themselves on the left of the political spectrum and practiced their profession. In the 1960s and '70s, caricaturists destroyed all previous traditions and created a caricature technique that required the use of a specific line. This transformation was also followed by a thematic change. In those years, the main topics of caricatures were chosen from subjects such as capitalism and social revolution (Aviv, 2013, 228). Humor vividly addressed a quite wide range of topics including terrorist acts, social polarization, daily life and popular culture in the face of a chaotic period. This vitality and mobility was largely inspired by the relationships of large masses migrating from rural to urban areas with the city, adaptation problems, and the problematic nature of the relationship that the culture they created for themselves established with the city and the urban elite (Hoşafçı, 2006, 79).

In the political atmosphere determined by the 1960 Constitution, the rise of leftist thought was accompanied by anti-Americanism (Turan, 2021, 139). This situation was reflected in humor media as well, in the form of Türkiye's close alliance with the United States being heavily criticized. Anti-Americanism, a product of the Cold War, had significant weight in Türkiye's social memory and was embraced by social segments accumulated in shantytown neighborhoods and frequently addressed in leftist humor media (Christofis, 2021, 121).

Industrial cities that rose with economic development that began after the 1960s and the shantytown reality this situation produced created a differentiation between mass culture and popular culture in Türkiye. In response to mass culture imposed by mainstream media tools and political cultural elites, the new popular culture that began to form in the lower strata of society created an alternative cultural framework from the 1970s onwards. Shantytown residents living on the edges of cities became part of popular culture that emerged around phenomena such as earning money with arabesque song lyrics, making sense of the complex problems brought by the city, preparing a future for their children, and struggling against political elites in the face of increasing living costs (Özbek, 2021, 107).

In the 1960–80 period, Türkiye faced a series of military coups, memorandums and economic crises, and these developments left their mark on Türkiye's recent history (Kasapsaraçoğlu, 2021, 259). With the military coup on May 27, 1960, rightist leader Adnan Menderes was removed from power and executed. Then a new constitution was adopted and new bureaucratic institutions were formed. In this process, the national security perception shaped politics and the legal system (Demirtürk, 2015, 155).

As the right to strike from the 1961 Constitution could not be used, the working class took action. Workers held their largest rally to that date at the end of 1962 (Özdemir, 2002, 41). On the other hand, political processes also continued in the form of short-term coalitions. After the May 27 Coup, the leftist movement became somewhat stronger. Parties, worker movements and unions began to make their voices heard (Gürpınar, 2013, 44). With the adoption of the 1961 Constitution, pressure on leftist thought decreased (Aydın & Taşkın, 2014, 16). Following *Yön* magazine, a group of intellectuals established the Socialist Culture Association. Leftist press strengthened in the 1961–71 period. Columnists such as Çetin Altan, İlhan Selçuk, Aziz Nesin tried to write leftist thought in their daily writings (Çavdar, 2004, 131–134). However, this atmosphere would not last very long, because in the 1965 elections, the right-leaning Justice Party (AP) came to power alone. AP remained in power alone until 1969. During this period, Turkish society's luxury durable consumption habits such as refrigerators, washing machines, vacuum cleaners increased, and the assembly system developed in the automotive industry. Therefore, job opportunities multiplied in the small industry area. The 1965–69 period became the years when dialogue between the masses and AP was established (Çavdar, 2004, 152–157; Pelt, 2023, 218–223). However, it was not possible to speak of the same development in the context of worker rights and strikes.

The Second Demirel Government was formed in the 1969 general elections. The economic crisis experienced in 1971 also affected the budget. During this period, separations from Dev-Genç began. The People's Liberation Army of Türkiye (*Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu* or THKO) and the People's Liberation Party of Türkiye (*Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Partisi* or THKP) were established. A major worker uprising took place during this period. The government tried to

restrain the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Unions (*Türkiye Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu* or DİSK), which was established on February 12, 1967. The political and economic vulnerabilities the country was in dragged Türkiye into a new coup with the military memorandum of March 12, 1971. After this date, the Nihat Erim Government, understood as Türkiye's first interim government, came to power (Aydın & Taşkın, 2014, 178–185, 203–220). Türkiye's problems would not end. After the elections in 1973, a coalition between the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* or CHP) and National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi* or MSP), the CHP-MSP was formed. Meanwhile, Türkiye changed its foreign policy by carrying out the Cyprus Peace Operation, isolating it in the international arena. The coalition ended with the Nationalist Front Governments in 1975. Although the Nationalist Front Governments carried politics for a while after this date, subsequently, after the early elections held in 1977, a minority government was established by Bülent Ecevit. This period witnessed extremely troublesome events. From 1978, assassinations targeted university professors. The Maraş massacre and the Abdi İpekçi murder dragged the country into chaos.³ Ecevit resigned from his position and in the 1979 by-election, Süleyman Demirel established a minority government. In the 1960–80 period, industrialization gained new momentum and economic transformation from agricultural towns to industrial cities was experienced, and a new life emerged. During this period, the Tarih Resistance, in which workers occupied the Tarih cooperative factories in İzmir and clashed with security forces enforcing martial law, the assassination of former Prime Minister Nihat Erim, the rise of the Kurdish left, and the emergence of the Apocular, the militant faction organized around Abdullah Öcalan (whose nickname "Apo" gave the group its name) that would later form the core of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), all contributed to the escalating unrest of the era. Following political and social fractures and the spiral of violence the country fell into, another military coup took place on September 12, 1980 (Aydın & Taşkın, 2014, 251–289).

Against this historical and social backdrop, the present study aims to reveal how Turkish humor and caricature magazines represented mining and mine workers within the country's socio-political agenda between 1960 and 1980. Using the corpus linguistics method, it seeks to determine how frequently and in what manner labor struggles, strike movements, and government policies concerning mining were reflected in the humor press of the period. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to a broader understanding of how humor functioned as a tool of social and political critique during one of Türkiye's most turbulent eras.

3 In the Maraş Massacre of December 1978, incited by far-right nationalist groups, over a hundred people were killed, leading to martial law. In February 1979, journalist Abdi İpekçi was shot dead in Istanbul by Mehmet Ali Ağca, later known for attempting to assassinate Pope John Paul II. Together, these events dragged Turkey into chaos ahead of the 1980 coup. For further details cf. Zürcher (2004).

GOALS AND METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted on a historical corpus composed of Turkish humor magazines from the years 1960–80. These documents are OCR-scanned digital files, and problematic documents were made scannable through Abby Finereader. During the research, MAXQDA was used for the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, and concept research was conducted using data mining methodology (Fayyad & Piatetsky, 1996, 11, 27–34, 39). Minerals such as gold, copper, silver, lead, and lignite were researched, and alongside these, concepts such as coal worker, miner, and mine pit were examined. Cartoon analyses were provided through Agent Ransack's visual preview feature. In the metaphorical examination section of the research, relevant sections containing the concepts were extracted from their locations and brought together in a single file, and analysis was conducted on these fragments. In the process of obtaining the quantitative source of the research, raw data was reached by determining the number of documents and hit counts where the concept appeared using MAXQDA, Agent Ransack, and Adobe Pdf Reader software. After these data were classified, they were visualized through the Power BI program to obtain graphs. Using MAXQDA, mining-related passages were first identified and organized within the humor-magazine corpus, and within this methodological framework, MAXQDA's AI-assisted text-scanning feature was also employed for a limited purpose, verifying the frequency and co-occurrence of mining-related metaphors, such as coal, mine, and miner. This use was confined to a single exploratory step, not extending to data interpretation or manuscript writing, both carried out exclusively by the authors. The recurrence of these metaphors suggests that mining occupied a prominent place in the public agenda of the period, and the tool was preferred because it allowed efficient cross-checking of pattern recognition across material that would have been impractical to review manually, while interpretation and conclusions remained the authors' responsibility.

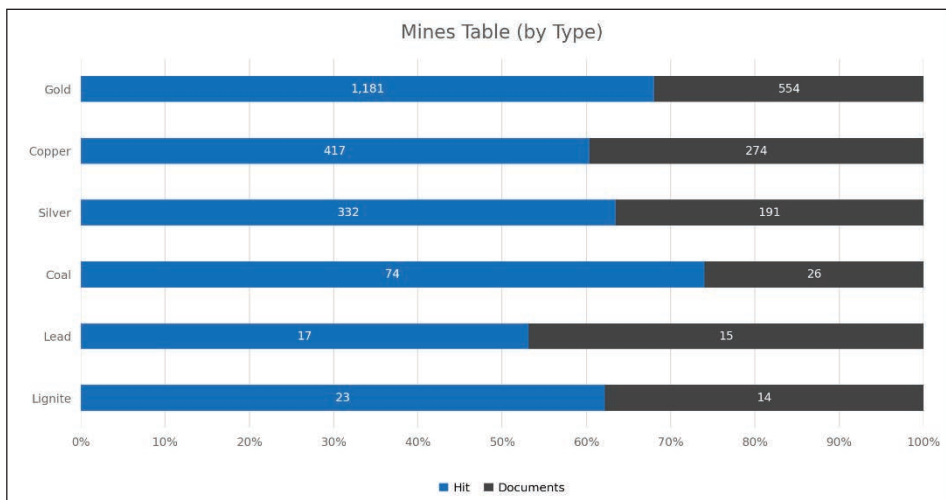
At its core, this study investigates how Turkish humor and caricature magazines reflected the socio-political agenda surrounding mining and mine workers between 1960 and 1980. Within this framework, the research first aims to quantitatively determine, through the corpus linguistics method, how frequently and intensively concepts such as mine, mining, coal, gold, silver, copper, lead, and lignite were used in the humor magazines of the period; it then aims to examine, building on this quantitative data, how mine workers' working conditions, their struggles for the right to strike, and their tense relationship with the state were represented in cartoons. Connected to this, the study also questions how debates over the nationalization and privatization of mines, along with government policies and patronage relations, were addressed with a critical tone in the humor press; and finally, it aims to reveal how everyday problems such as coal shortages, price increases, and coal queues generated class-based anxiety in the lives of the urban lower and middle classes, and how this was transformed, through humor, into a kind of "survival humor."

The 1960s in Türkiye are important in terms of unionisation of miners as in other segments of society. In this context, mine workers made a series of demands from the governments of the period in order to improve their living conditions. Sections of workers, including miners, organized strikes and protests demanding better wages, improved working conditions and job security. Political unrest and ideological divisions also played a role in shaping labor movements during this period. Changes in labor laws and restrictions on the right to strike created a confrontation between unions and governments. Relations between labor unions and the ruling authorities were strained at times. The tensions and the demands of mine workers were reflected in the humor magazines of the period such as *Avni*, *Hıbrır*, *Gırgır*, *Akbaba*, *Limon*, *Öküz*, *Çarşaf*, *Fırt* etc. When the cartoons in the magazines are analysed, the indifference or uncompromising attitude of the government towards the demands of the mine workers is heavily criticized. In addition, demands for the improvement of the living conditions of mine workers are discussed. In the study, the conflict between the government and mine workers will be conceptualised.

If humor magazines are scanned through AI, it can be observed that some metaphors are frequently used in topics such as mining and metals. The intensive use of mining and mines in daily life shows that the mining agenda of the period was all-encompassing in all aspects of life.

Chart 1 shows a distinction between the distribution of mentions of various mineral across the corpus and the intensity with which they were repeated in individual documents. Gold was mentioned most often, reflecting its use

Chart 1: Mentions of minerals in Turkish humor magazines between 1960 and 1980 and the number of documents containing each term.

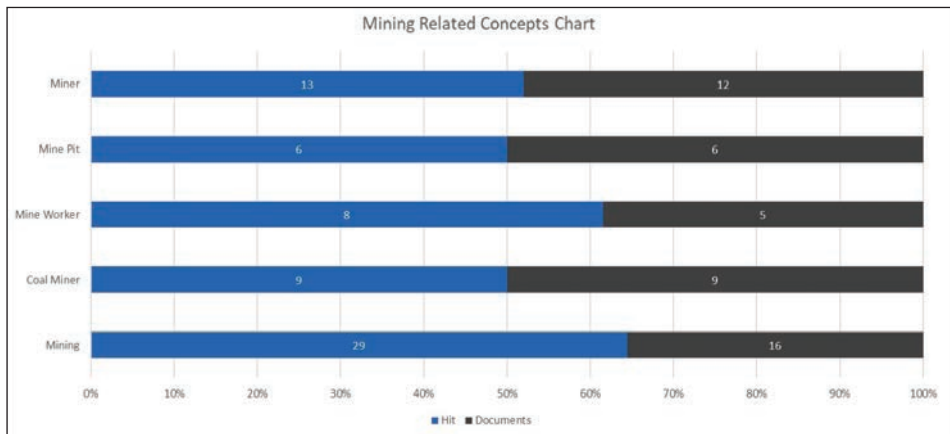


across a wide range of economic, political, and metaphorical contexts. Coal, by contrast, had the highest hit-to-document ratio. Although it was mentioned in fewer documents, it tended to recur more intensively within the documents in which it was mentioned. Copper and silver occupied an intermediate position, whereas lead and lignite remained comparatively limited in both distribution and repetition.

These differences also reflect the varying functions of various mineral in the humor press. Gold, copper, and silver could extend beyond discussions of mining because their associations with wealth, value, money, and economic gain made them particularly suitable for metaphorical and satirical use. Coal was more closely connected to energy shortages, heating, mine labor, working conditions, and the economic difficulties of everyday life. The distribution therefore points to two distinct patterns: the mentions of some minerals circulated across a broad range of figurative and political contexts, while others were concentrated within more specific discussions of energy, labor, and mining. The figures indicate the textual visibility and concentration of these terms within the corpus rather than the social or economic prevalence of the minerals themselves.

Chart 2 shows that mining-related vocabulary occupied a visible place in Turkish humor magazines between 1960 and 1980. The prominence of *mining* suggests that the subject was frequently addressed as a broader economic, political, and industrial issue, while terms such as miner, mine worker, and coal miner brought the human and labor dimensions of the sector into focus. The comparatively concentrated use of mine worker is particularly significant, as it points to sustained attention to working conditions, labor disputes, and the growing political visibility of mine laborers. By contrast, references to mining pits appear to have functioned more as contextual

Chart 2: The number of mining-related terms in Turkish humor magazines in 1960–80 and how many documents they appeared in.

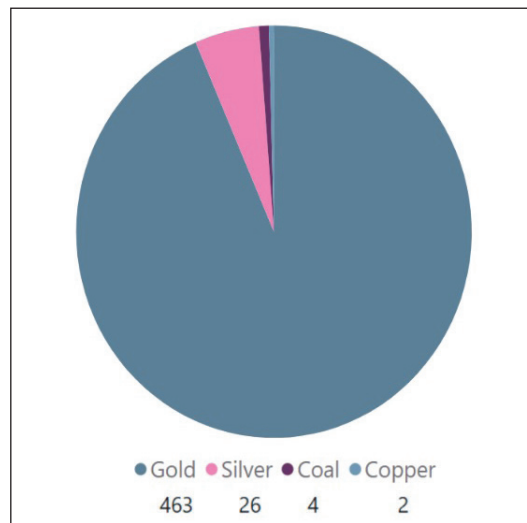


markers of the workplace itself. Overall, the distribution indicates that the humor press did not treat mining merely as an industrial activity, but also as a field shaped by labor relations, social inequality, and political conflict.

The corpus also reveals a meaningful distinction between the terms miner (*madenci*) and mine worker (*maden işçisi*). While *miner* was generally associated with a professional or occupational identity within the mining sector (Akbaba, June 11, 1964, 11; December 13, 1967, 3), *mine worker* more directly emphasized manual labor, harsh working conditions, and the physically demanding character of mining as a heavy industry (Akbaba, January 14, 1965, 8; Gırgır, February 16, 1974, 8; Çarşaf, January 18, 1978, 3). This difference suggests that the humor press used the two expressions not as exact synonyms, but to distinguish occupational status from the embodied experience of industrial labor.

A closer data check on the selected keywords reveals that their usage in cartoon magazines extended well beyond metaphorical reference; a considerable portion of these occurrences were directly shaped by the political climate of the period. Gold, for instance, was not employed merely as a conventional metaphor for wealth but was repeatedly mobilized in cartoons addressing the nationalization and, later, privatization debates of the 1960s and 1970s, appearing as a rhetorical device through which political positions on state versus private ownership of underground resources were satirized (Çarşaf, March 8, 1978, 18; Gırgır, 1980, Issue 415). Similarly, references to coal and lignite were frequently anchored in concrete political events, such as the

Chart 3: Number of metaphorical uses of gold, silver, coal, and copper in Turkish humor magazines between 1960 and 1980.



price-increase policies introduced after the 1971 memorandum, the installment-sale practices of Turkish Coal Enterprises (*Türkiye Kömür İşletmeleri* or TKİ), and the energy debates among advocates of coal, fuel oil, and hydroelectric power during the Ecevit Government (Emeç, 1978, 3), rather than functioning as free-floating figures of speech. This pattern indicates that the frequency data obtained through corpus analysis do not merely reflect the everyday or symbolic prevalence of certain minerals in the Turkish vernacular, but also trace, with considerable precision, shifts in the political agendas of successive governments regarding mining policy. In this respect, the quantitative findings should be read in conjunction with the qualitative cartoon analysis, as the two together demonstrate that lexical frequency in the humor press functioned as an indirect but consistent barometer of contemporaneous political debate on mining and energy policy.

"CAN YOU HEAR MY VOICE?" THE MINE WORKERS' ORGANIZATION AND LABOR STRUGGLES

Comic and humorous drawings, stories and poems related to mining encountered in magazines, have a widespread effect on Turkish social and political life (Cantek, 2024, 206). Moreover, their purchase and reading is effective to a considerable extent, especially on young readers (Demirkol, 2025, 53). The political and economic processes experienced in Türkiye during the 1960–80 period and the transformation that took place profoundly affected cartoons, which remained more orthodox compared to other comedy fields. When a diachronic evaluation of this effect is made, although the 1960–70 period was more stagnant, it is clearly seen that there was a renewal of cartoons in the 1970–80 period. In the 1960–80 period, when Türkiye was trying to resist internal and external stresses, the humor press also pondered over the ideological, political, economic, social, and cultural issues of the period. Although in the decade after the May 27 Coup, cartoonists and cartoons failed to break new ground and remained too much in the background to say anything new to society (Kayış, 2023, 93), the examination of humor magazines of the 1960s demonstrates some regard for the struggles of miners' rights and especially their strikes. There are important references in humor magazines regarding the strikes that mine workers tried to carry out with great difficulty. These cartoons exemplified the portrait of government-worker relations in the transforming political processes.

Thus, on April 7, 1965, in *Akbaba*, the reason for mine workers' strikes was being questioned through humor channels. It was said that the worker could not make his voice heard to anyone; that the working conditions and demands of Zonguldak mine workers⁴ were not heard by the state (*Akbaba*, April 7, 1965, 6). Moreover, the cartoon in Fig. 1, can be considered important in terms of defining strikes in Türkiye

4 This likely alludes to the March 1965 Kozlu/Gelik miners' strike in Zonguldak, in which gendarmerie forces fired on striking workers, killing two miners, following demands for equal wage bonuses and restored allowances. *Milliyet*, 13. 3. 1965: Bloody Incidents in Zonguldak, 1.



Fig.1: Reasons for the Zonguldak miners' strike are being investigated (newspapers), "Up there—I can't hear you. Shout a little louder" (Akbaba, April 7, 1965, 6).

with Mustafa Dinççağ's signature. In the drawing themed "The reasons for Zonguldak mine workers' strikes are being sought," the boss is calling out from a protected, safe position, symbolized by the weak roof above him. The line or rope he holds can be interpreted in terms of keeping the reins in his hands as much as the importance he gives to his own safety. His leaning-in to better hear the miner undoubtedly points

to lack of communication, while the deep well must point to class difference and different worlds. The miners, on the other hand, were symbolized as those who call out but whose voice does not reach above, who work and produce under any conditions (Akbaba, April 7, 1965, 6).

Already in *Akbaba*, an important humor magazine, “the bottoms of mine pits” were considered among the main fronts of poor Türkiye’s “development war” (Akbaba, March 5, 1969, 3).

The humor press criticized the government’s disregard for workers’ strike rights. In the cartoon given with the title “Our Understanding of Strikes” (*Bizde grev anlayışı*), criticism was brought to the government’s understanding of strikes in Türkiye. In the *Sülü and Süleyman* column next to the cartoon in Fig. 2, the Republican People’s Party’s concern about villagers in the Zonguldak region losing their health in mine pits, and Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel’s indifferent approach were reflected to the public (Akbaba, January 22, 1969, 3).

In *Akbaba*’s issue dated October 7, 1970, an evaluation was made regarding worker and mine worker strikes. In this evaluation, regarding the right to strike, after the observation “The word strike was like Hazrat Ali’s Zulfikar in the hands of the Democratic Party before 1950. It cut both right and left,” in the democratization tsunami that began immediately after World War II in Türkiye, Democratic Party pioneers “did not forget the promise of strikes to workers” (Akbaba, October 7, 1970). However, according to the magazine, when they came to power in 1950, they immediately forgot this; emphasizing that Bayar and Menderes did not anticipate where the matter would lead. According to the magazine, strike rights were only restored after the May 27 Coup, based on the idea that democracy could not exist without strikes, and that banning strikes while claiming Western-style democracy was contradictory. This idea was written into the Constitution. The magazine noted

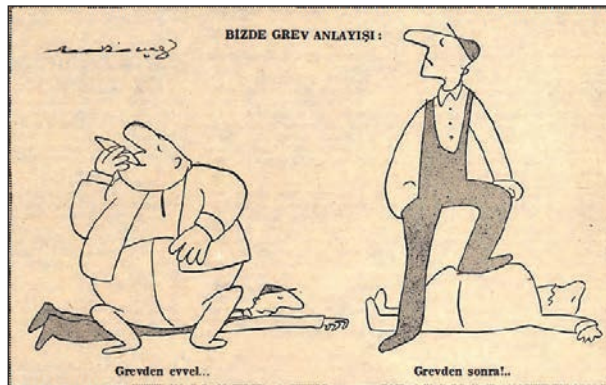


Fig.2: Our understanding of strikes: Before the strike... after the strike! louder” (Akbaba, April 7, 1965, 6).



Fig. 3: The government set up barricade after barricade to block the coal miners' march (Avni, January 12, 1991, 3).

that from then on, the country began experiencing frequent strikes across many sectors, including rubber, mining, steel, petroleum, and maritime workers, as well as groups ranging from tobacco growers to teachers, describing it with the words, “one moment you look and the mine workers [are striking], another moment you look and petroleum workers... are on strike.” The strikes were spreading to other segments of society as well, and interestingly, those who had called for the right to strike were now criticizing the workers who exercised it.

[I]f the mine worker doesn't go down into the pit, he is right in his own way: – Why doesn't the mine worker go down? – Financial hardship [...] – Hey, if these guys don't extract coal, citizens will freeze [...] – Well, aren't these citizens too? If petroleum workers strike, a fuel shortage arises... Well, what will be the end of this? As each person goes on strike, they will find themselves right... and as each person falls into hardship because of strikes, they will get angry at the strikers. (Akbaba, October 7, 1970, 3)⁵

5 *Maden işçisi madene inmedi mi, kendine göre haklı: – Neden inmiyor maden işçisi? – Geçim sıkıntısı. – Yahu, bu herifler kömür çıkarmazsa vatandaş donacak. – Peki, bunlar vatandaş değil mi? Petrol işçileri grev yaparsa akaryakıt sıkıntısı doğar, rıhtım işçileri grev yaparsa piyasa daralır, fırın işçileri grev yaparsa şehir ekmeksiz kalır... Peki, ne olacak bunun sonu? Herbir kişi kendisi grev yaptıkça, kendini haklı bulacak. ve herbir kişi grevler yüzünden sıkıntıya düştükçe, grevcilere yüklenecek. (Akbaba, October 7, 1970, 3)*



Fig. 4: Cartoon published in Akbaba, November 23, 1966.



Fig. 5: "Look, son, this is Turkey... Do you think we can find an empty chimney opening for the minister to crawl through?" (Akbaba, December 23, 1966, 1).

In humor magazines, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, coal sales were defined both as popular and profitable professions (Saygel, 1968a, 4; İzgü, 1969a, 4) and among tradesmen who made credit sales like grocers and butchers (Akbaba, January 14, 1970, 3). In contrast, in the late 1980s, *Hıbr*'s supplement *Reflex* would write that miners described themselves as "those who wander in the dim" (*Reflex*, August 31, 1989, 3).

In the late 1970s, *Çarşaf* approached mine workers' retirement through from both government and patronage perspectives. The magazine, which reflected Demirel's populist rhetoric in its columns as in the example of the opening of Oymapınar Dam (Es, 1977, 17), would not hesitate to subsequently voice that the new Ecevit Government was pursuing somewhat populist policies towards young people. It addressed such rhetoric with the sentences

Government programs are a chain of promises: promises with cek and cak⁶ [...] But how many of these sit cuk properly; time will show that too [...] Since prob-

6 The suffixes "cek" and "cak" refer to the suffixes that come to verbs in the future tense in Turkish.

*ability is probably today's problem, in the young Ecevit Government's program too, ceks and caks are directed more towards young people. The elderly may not get any fresh air. (Es, 1977, 17)*⁷

Alongside the claim that the government would not take a step regarding retirement age, examples from developed countries were provided. Efforts to lower the retirement age limit below sixty, reducing working days to four, and working thirty-five hours per week.

Against such a backdrop, the mine worker was defined with the words:

*[F]or a mine worker, working is consuming life... Making life miserable, being buried while alive... Helpless; he looks to escape this yoke as soon as possible, to break the shackles: By throwing himself into the embrace of retirement. (Çarşaf, March 23, 1977, 17)*⁸

On the other hand, Çarşaf did not refrain from the comparison “for some, working is a guarantee of staying alive longer. A painter, a writer; an artist doesn't even concern himself with the concept of retirement.”

This critical approach was completed with the sentences “some can manage this... It is also the state's duty to guide those who cannot. Here is a fundamental point that was never mentioned in Ecevit's government program” (Emeç, 1978, 3).

In the first months of 1980, a meaningful announcement regarding mine workers' rights struggles was published in *Gırgır*. The announcement was about the exhibition opened by Ümit Kartoğlu and Ohannes Şaşkal both cartoonists at Ankara Contemporary Stage Cultural Center in memory of Cartoonist Burhan Solukçu, who died in 1978.

*Burhan Solukçu had become ill while working as an electrician in the mines. His death was also due to this reason. The exhibition therefore addresses the problems of coal workers. The exhibition will be repeated at Istanbul Cinematheque Association between February 16–28. (Gırgır, February 3, 1980, 4)*⁹

7 Hükümet programları, bir vaatler zinciridir: “Cek”li, “cak”lı vaatler ... Ama bunlardan kaç “cuk” oturur; onu da, zaman gösterir [...] İhtimal günümüzün sorunu olduğu için, genç Ecevit hükümetinin programında da “cek”ler, “cak”lar daha çok gençlere yöneliyor. Yaşlılar, belki hava almayacaklar. (Çarşaf, March 23, 1977, 17)

8 [B]ir maden işçisi için çalışmak, ömür tüketmektir. Hayatı piç etmek, yaşarken gömülmektir [...] Çaresiz; bir an önce bu boyunduruktan sıyrılmaya, prangayı kırmaya bakar: Kendini emekliliğin kucağına atarak. (Çarşaf, January 18, 1978, 3)

9 Burhan Solukçu madenlerde elektrikçilik yaparken hastalanmıştı. Ölümü de bu nedenle olmuştu. Sergi bu nedenle kömür işçilerinin sorunlarını işliyor. Sergi İstanbul Sinematek Derneğinde 16–28 Şubat günleri arasında tekrarlanacak (Gırgır, February 3, 1980, 4).

The completed announcement reminded of the insecurity of Solukçu's life, who could not receive compensation because his illness was not recognized as an occupational disease (Coşgun, 2025). About ten years before Solukçu's death, *Akbaba* magazine pointed to the contradictions surrounding mining policy, attributing them to government decisions and patronage relations. Around the same time, it reported on the CHP's concern that villagers in the Zonguldak region were losing their health working in the mine pits. The magazine also portrayed Süleyman Demirel, nicknamed Sülü, who hailed from İslamköy in Isparta, as growing increasingly distant from the people (*Akbaba*, January 22, 1969, 3).

In *Akbaba*, it was also criticized that mining pit accidents did not produce the expected reaction in society:

*Oyyy uncle... Journalist friends are going to the mining pit accident. In the evening, workers' relatives come to them, they sing a kind of lament: "Oyyy uncle" they say mournfully... Our journalist friend Fikret Otyam, curious about every sound, records this "Oyyy uncle" on tape. And after the men leave, he makes his friends listen to it until morning. ...we have a dear friend. He was complaining bitterly: "Because of one oyyy uncle, he kept us sleepless all night!" Lucky Fikret Otyam... He can keep everyone sleepless, while we groan "Oyyy uncle" all our lives and it doesn't affect anyone's slumber in society one bit! (*Akbaba*, April 21, 1965, 9)¹⁰*

In the mid-1970s, it was humorously voiced in *Çarşaf* that collapsing mining pits had experts, without going into detail (*Çarşaf*, April 7, 1976, 5); it must have been clear to the intended public. In subsequent years, criticisms that Türkiye ranked first in the numbers of dead due to mining (and construction) collapses came to the forefront. *Gırgır* was undoubtedly one of the magazines that most addressed and brought to its drawings topics such as mine workers' problems, working conditions, illnesses and death (*Gırgır*, June 28, 1981, 2; October 18, 1981, 2; April 25, 1982, 2; April 1, 1983, 3; December 18, 1983, 2; June 10, 1984, 2; Limon, September 4, 1986, 4; *Çarşaf*, March 12, 1992, 8). Additionally, miners' marches and strikes would also become subjects for humor magazines (*Hıbrır*, January 10, 1991, 1)¹¹.

10 *Oyyy emece (amca) ...Gazeteci arkadaşlar, maden ocağı kazasına gidiyorlar. Akşam, işçilerin akrabaları geliyor yanlarına, bir cins ağıt yakıyorlar: – "Oyyy emece" diye yanık yanık ... Gazeteci arkadaşımız Fikret Otyam, her sese meraklı, bu "Oyyy emece" yi banda alıyor. Ve adamlar gittikten sonra arkadaşlarına sabaha kadar dinletiyor. [...] şirin bir arkadaşımız var. Yana yakıla şikayet ediyordu: – "Bir oyyy emece yüzünden bizi bütün gece uykusuz bıraktı!" Mutlu Fikret Otyam... Elâlemi uykusuz bırakabiliyor, biz bütün ömrümüzce: "OYYY emece" ler inliyoruz da toplumca kimsenin mişıltsısını etkilemiyor zerre kadar! (*Akbaba*, April 21, 1965, 9)*

11 The magazine had published bank account numbers on the second page for those who wished to stand in solidarity with the miners (*Avni*, January 12, 1991, 7).



Fig. 6: “The other hand is injured, should we make him rest?” (Girir, June 10, 1984).



Fig. 7: These miners have the ability to press on under extraordinarily difficult conditions, undeterred by rain, mud, or roadblocks (Hibir, January, 10, 1991).

NATIONALIZATION

In the spring of 1965, *Akbaba* asserted that Turkish youth was joining the struggle for the nationalization of mining and petroleum resources and that the nation was in a state of awakening everywhere. It articulated this movement with the verses from Namık Kemal’s *Vatan Türküsü* (Homeland Song): “Below is one, above is one, of your land... Rise up, brave ones, to the aid of the homeland!” According to the magazine, “Those who only possess the surface of a country can no longer possess that country. Nations cannot rise unless they also claim ownership of the country’s underground riches” (*Akbaba*, May 26, 1965, 8).

Akbaba, during a period when Demirel was first emerging on the political scene, wrote that “A politician of ours who is new to the political market” opposed the nationalization of petroleum by defending the positions of foreign companies with the justification “We cannot usurp rights given by law.” The magazine’s analysis was: “What kind of business is this! The country is our country, the petroleum is our petroleum, the mines are our mines... Whose property are we usurping from whom? Oh Atatürk’s Türkiye... Would you come to this state?” (*Akbaba*, June 9, 1965, 8). The magazine would define the AP as anti-nationalization a few years later (*Akbaba*, July 24, 1968, 3).

In the late 1960s, *Akbaba* again was addressing the contradiction “Ecevit says we will nationalize our underground and surface wealth... Demirel says let foreign companies operate our mines” (*Akbaba*, May 7, 1969, 3). References to mines were generally embedded in debates over nationalization and the rise of anti-Americanism during the 1960s and 1970s. In these discussions, underground resources were represented as national assets that should be protected from foreign control and mobilized through domestic capital to support economic independence and development (Gürpınar & Kurt, 2026, 28–30; Çarşaf, March 8, 1978, 17). This ideological context helps explain why, under the center-right governments led by Demirel, the nationalization of mines was increasingly framed by left-Kemalist and “Third-Worldist” circles (inspired by contemporaneous anti-colonial movements) as part of a broader struggle against Western imperialism and economic dependency (Gürpınar & Kurt, 2026, 28–30). *Akbaba* also noted, under the title “Endless Demands,” that mining engineers were awaiting the enactment of a fully national Mining Law Draft (*Akbaba*, April 2, 1969, 6). Thus, criticism of Türkiye’s mining and petroleum policies increasingly converged around the language of nationalization and state ownership, a discourse that remained visible into the late 1970s, when Çarşaf announced that the mines would be nationalized (Çarşaf, March 8, 1978, 18).

In the spring of 1971, as the 32nd Government gave way to the 33rd Government, Nihat Erim assumed the prime ministry in place of Süleyman Demirel. *Akbaba* followed with bringing to its agenda the views that the traditional spring cleaning in Turkish neighborhoods would be reflected in politics. In this context, the new government’s discourse that underground wealth would be managed with a national policy was also carried to the magazine’s pages (*Akbaba*, April 28, 1971, 3).



Fig. 8: Mines will be nationalized. "I'm glad I got my mother-in-law to put gold teeth in her mouth... They nationalized it!" (Çarşaf, March 8, 1978, 18).

Nationalization debates continued in the 1970s (Çarşaf, March 8, 1978, 17); in the 1980s, they gave way to the privatization of mines (Gırgır, July 20, 1980, 3; December 2, 1984, 1; February 23, 1985, 3).

On the other hand, concerns about the sustainability of mining in Türkiye also found a place in *Akbaba*. In this context, a statement from the Chamber of Mining Engineers, which was also related to superstructure and planning, drew attention in the magazine, because the chamber had announced that iron reserves would be depleted in 1990. The magazine's commentary is meaningful in that it contains an ambitious analysis regarding Türkiye:

Since everything of ours is tightly connected to each other, it's not difficult to guess the rest. Once we finish the iron, we'll start taking care of the others. We'll finish our coal reserves, finish copper, finish lead, finish tin, petroleum, we'll close shop before reaching the year 2000! We couldn't transition from consuming to producing so that our backs could straighten. (Akbaba, August 20, 1969, 10–11)¹²

¹² Her şeyimiz birbirine sıkı sıkıya bağlı olduğu için gerisini tahmin güç değil. Bir kere demiri bitirdik mi, başlarız diğerlerinin icabına bakmaya. Kömür rezervimizi bitiririz, bakırı bitiririz, kurşunu bitiririz, kalayı, petrolü bitiririz, 2000 yılına varmadan kepengi indiririz! Tüketmekten üretmeye geçemedik ki belimiz doğrulsun. (Akbaba, August 20, 1969, 10–11)



Fig. 9: “Stop yelling, idiot. How can you not get your gold tooth pulled? All the mines have been privatized. Don’t you know?” (Girgir, 1980, Issue 415).



Fig. 10: It is said that the mines will be transferred to the private sector. “He had a gold tooth in his mouth” (Girgir, July 19, 1981).

Undoubtedly, even though it’s in a humor magazine, the commentary is of vital nature. In *Akbaba*, focusing on consumption rather than production regarding mines was a subject of criticism.

PATRONAGE RELATIONS

When viewed in terms of government approach, patronage relations and sustainability, an important evaluation of the magazine was:

Will we never see our two sides come together, dear? Once we had scholars, we didn’t have a nuclear reactor. Now we have a reactor, but no people. Isn’t the situation the same in other matters? We have workers but no work areas. We have mines but no people to operate them. (*Akbaba*, June 4, 1969, 9)¹³

It is not surprising to encounter discourses in *Akbaba*, especially by Vedat Saygel, that mining in Türkiye was shaped unplanned and according to chance factors (*Akbaba*, November 22, 1967, 14; Saygel, 1967a, 20–21). An interesting and sarcastic example of this in terms of government policies and private sector strategies was presented to the public again by Saygel through coal; he linked the scarcity and problems related to coal to a newspaper vendor boy (*Akbaba*, September 20, 1967, 12). An interesting example of the claim that randomness was valid for mining in Türkiye in terms of government or political order finds its counterpart in *Akbaba* again in late 1968. The humor magazine, questioning what profession party leaders could do if they started life again, asserted that it was “clear that they have not touched” mining that they had never shown interest in it until that date. This wording contained serious criticism of mining policy at the state and political level, because it emphasized that administrators did not have the depth and managerial skill to operate underground resources found in the country, and evaluated the inoperation of mines as incompetence (*Akbaba*, December 11, 1968, 9).

Akbaba’s issues of January 14, 1965, and September 25, 1968, took up the theme of miner migration, framing it as a matter that had been approached with official indifference and a lack of planning. In the January 14 issue, an elementary school principal was reported to have left for Germany to work as a miner, explaining, “If we manage to put meat on our table twice a month, that month we count ourselves a happy family,” and adding, “So that my children and I might live like human beings”. What this implied for Türkiye’s future was left largely unstated, conveyed in a tone that was subtle but unmistakably pointed (*Akbaba*,

13 *İki yakamızın bir araya geldiğini hiç görmeyecek miyiz kuzum? Bir zamanlar ilim adamlarımız vardı, atom reaktörümüz yoktu. Şimdi reaktör var, adam yok. Diğer konularda da aynı değil mi durum? İşçimiz vardır iş alanımız yoktur. Madenlerimiz vardır, işletecek adamlarımız yoktur.* (*Akbaba*, June 4, 1969, 9)

January 14, 1965, 8). In the autumn issues of 1968, miners' migration to Australia was mentioned (Akbaba, September 25, 1968, 9) and justified as: "With its iron, coal; rivers, mountains, forests; copper, chrome, tobacco, cotton and many other riches, it's as if we dried up the whole of Anatolia. We can't survive unless we send our people to foreign lands" (Akbaba, October 23, 1968, 3).

Coal would frequently be evaluated from the 1960s among price-increases due to economic conditions, as one of the products whose expensiveness was prominent, and for which people did not believe would become cheaper even when they did (Akbaba, June 7, 1967, 10–11; November 22, 1967, 14; August 20, 1969, 8; January 14, 1970, 3; 1970, 4–5; İzgü, 1970, 4; Saygel, 1971, 6). In humor magazines, price increases of mining products, especially coal, were among the main subjects of criticism in relation to the government, and this subject was addressed in quite different and creative ways. In the last days of 1967, following Aziz Nesin's article under the title "It Always Happens Like This," *Akbaba*, published the verses "Wood prices have been frozen. It always happens like this when entering winter. In October, wood prices freeze. In November, coal prices freeze. In December, the country's children who can't find fuel freeze!" (Akbaba, December 6, 1967, 9). In the summer of 1968, when the heat intensified, it was announced that the prices of coke coal, lignite, and other heating fuels had been frozen, thereby offering the public a measure of relief. Immediately afterward, however, the cost of such measures was conveyed in a mocking tone through the words, "The nation freezes from December to March!" In doing so, the passage also completed the chain linking administration, product, and people, laying bare the gap between the government's seasonal measures and the public's actual needs (Akbaba, August 7, 1968, 9).

In the summer of 1970, *Akbaba* reported that prices were raised on iron, copper (Akbaba, June 24, 1970, 3), coke coal and lignite, and also brought up news on price increases and categorized their number along with other negative news as "poison-bitter news" (Akbaba, August 19, 1970, 3). Similar criticism would also adorn the columns of the humor magazine in early autumn (Akbaba, September 9, 1970, 4). By the early 1970s, the fact that TKİ were selling coal at high prices, and had consequently turned to installment sales, had already become a prominent subject of humor (Akbaba, September 1, 1971, 10).

Similarly, while the transformation from the 32nd Government to the 33rd Government was being experienced in the spring of 1971, at the same time *Akbaba* had brought the wave of price increases to its agenda; it depicted this on the cover page as "Price-Increase Emperor Attila!" While Attila stood on top of a pile of price increase rocks with a price increase flag in his hand, the coal price increase was positioned as the rock at the top of the pile. Below, transportation and electricity price increases related to coal were in notable ranks (Akbaba, April 28, 1971, 1).

According to *Akbaba*’s narrative, during the summer months, the cost of living was gradually increasing due to the chaos and mismanagement the country had experienced in the recent past. In this environment, the Erim Government that came after the March 12 Memorandum had reduced the chaos but could not prevent the high cost of living. Moreover, a price increase in petroleum was expected. Additionally, mismanagement and increasing price hikes were also stemming from waste, especially wasting bread. The magazine’s analysis in the following sentences is striking:

Our lignites could very well bring us all to warm winters with the central heating system, which is an invention of today’s technology, but where is that effort [endeavor/result]? If we could have succeeded in that job once, would there have been any need for us to make another price increase on coke coal? [...] It seems science has not yet overcome the antiquated bureaucratic mentality in Türkiye. As long as it cannot overcome it, price increases are the only way out. (*Akbaba*, June 30, 1971, 3)¹⁴

In the late 1970s, *Çarşaf* addressed the impact of visually based education in a distinctly ironic tone. That coal was foregrounded in this example, given Turkish Radio and Television Cooperation’s (*Türkiye Radyo Televizyon Kurumu* or TRT) status as a state institution, pointed unmistakably to the administration’s broader approach. Indeed, the magazine published a probably fictional scenario after an interested party’s statement: “TRT officials decided to reorganize television programs. In the new implementation that will come into effect in the coming days, some foreign series will be removed from broadcast, priority will be given to productions emphasizing mass education.” The writing was both ironic and sarcastic:

What’s important here is that television viewers ignore current events and see some values they have forgotten the name, taste and definition of on screen again. For example, what is coke coal, how did it burn, by whom was it discovered? [...] Then suddenly, how did it disappear from the market? [...] Our programs will include these and similar topics, our people will drift into sweet, sweet dreams! (*Çarşaf*, November 15, 1978, 4)¹⁵

The subject of indirect criticism in these sentences was coal shortage. However, coal shortage was reflected in humor magazine columns as the main problem. Coal

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- 14 *Linyitlerimiz, günümüz teknolojisinin bir buluşu olan merkezi teshin [ısıtma] sistemiyle hepimizi sıcak kışlara pekala kavuşturabilir ama nerede o himmet [çaba/sonuç]? Başarabilseydik bir kez o işi, hiç lüzum kalır mıydı kok kömürüne bir zam daha yapmamıza?... Galiba bilim yenemedi daha Türkiye’deki köhne kırtasiyecî kafasını. Yenemediği sürece zam, tek çıkar kapısıdır.* (*Akbaba*, June 30, 1971, 3)
- 15 *Burada önemli olan, televizyon seyircisinin güncel olaylara boş vermesi, adını tadını tanımını unuttuğu bazı değerleri, ekranda yeniden görmesidir. Örneğin, kok kömürü nedir, nasıl yanardı, kimin tarafından bulunmuştu? ... Sonra ansızın, piyasadan nasıl yok olmuştu? ... Programlarımızda bu ve buna benzer konular yer alacak, halkımız tatlı, tatlı hayallere dalacak!.* (*Çarşaf*, November 15, 1978, 4)

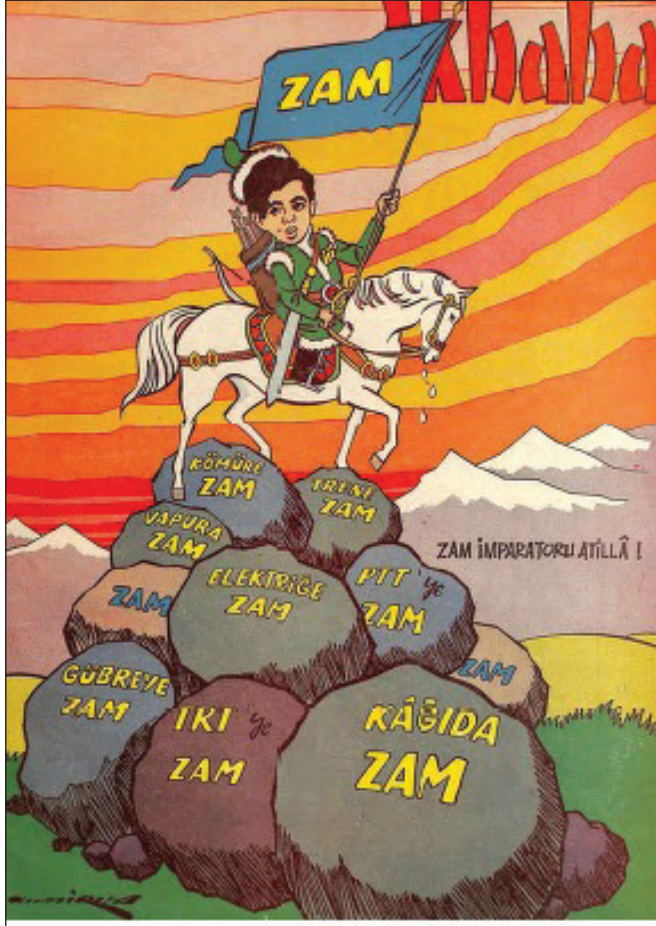


Fig. 11: Attila, the Price Hike Emperor (Akbaba, April 28, 1971, 1).

queues¹⁶ had already been occupying humor magazines' columns since the mid-1960s (Akbaba, February 6, 1964, 6). Vedat Saygel, under the title "Learning Has No Age Limit," included the fictional actor Earl de Fasarya's statement that "the scholars of the future will grow up in minibus, coal and meat queues" and turned people's communication and sharing in queues into a subject of humor (Saygel, 1978, 14–15).

In the second half of the 1970s, Türkiye's political scene was witnessing the struggle between Bülent Ecevit and Süleyman Demirel, and therefore the efforts of the country's right and left currents to come to power. In humor magazines,

16 Two of the article's authors remember spending a considerable part of their childhood in such queues.

caricatures of politicians ranked mines among the main criteria of national wealth. Çarşaf's June 9, 1976, issue, responded to Ecevit's statement that Demirel was playing with fire with: "We found fire, now we need to play! God willing, when we open the great lignite mines for operation in 1998, as a nation we will all play with fire and with whatever we want together," which was an example of evaluating mines as an indicator of wealth (Çarşaf, June 9, 1976, 3). Çarşaf magazine reminded that Süleyman Demirel promised future and wealth with the words "the mine is under this mountain" during the opening of Oymapınar Dam (Es, 1977, 17).

In Çarşaf, Çetin Altan addressed contradictory discourses within a humorous framework; alongside negativities such as the continuous increase in inflation and import-export difference, peasants' sweat going into intermediaries' pockets, he placed the discourse "We are making the mines under the mountains operational. Base prices raised to an unprecedented level have made producers smile. We will realize the welfare state" (Altan, 1977, 16).

As the country started to enter the last quarter of the 1970s, Çetin Emeç would write one of the periodic analyses in Çarşaf magazine on energy sources such as coal and lignite. It can even be said that through this perspective, he created a perspective on the political life of the 1970s. Focusing on electricity problems and outages in residences, Emeç recorded that Türkiye was being dragged into an energy deficit abyss. The author first made the assessment "Türkiye has long been pushed into sick-man status among the conflicts between the thesis and antithesis of poison-antidote." In this context, he noted that first there were discussions between import-dependent fuel source (oil) that could be reached easily and quickly versus domestic lignite that would go slower but heavier, then discussions on coal started just when the final decision was about to be made, followed by discussions on water power.

Emeç resorted to the following sentences to reflect on this development:

According to the lignite supporter, the fuel oil supporter was dependent on the outside, had been sold out. According to the fuel oil supporter, the lignite supporter, the coal supporter was a dreamer and unaware of technology. What was said about the water supporter was perhaps a thousand times worse than the others. Among all these rooster voices, it was clear that morning would not come. Indeed, it didn't. (Emeç, 1978, 3)¹⁷

He drove in his final point:

Now, this bickering, this struggle has been going on for exactly ten years. Those who haven't struck a single match on energy issues in ten years have brought our Türkiye,

17 Linyitçiye göre, fuel oll'cu dışa bağımlıydı, satılmıştı. Fuel oll'cuya göre; linyitçi, kömürcü hayalperestti ve teknikten habersizdi. Su'cu için söylenenler ise, ötekilerden belki bin beterdi. Bunca horoz sesi arasında da, sabahın olmayacağı belliydi. Nitekim, olmadı da. (Çarşaf, December 6, 1978, 3)

which is rich below and above its soil, to a position of begging in energy issues as well. And to whom, can you imagine? (Emeç, 1978, 3)¹⁸

Emeç's assessments were meaningful in terms of energy dependency and also shed light on the polarization in the country from a different perspective.

Çarşaf, in the last days of 1978, reinforced the claim that the Ecevit government approached young people with populist policies and pursued promises with *cek* and *cak* endings. According to the magazine, while price increases were made on many products, with the implementation of the fourth Five-Year Plan, the Government turned to propaganda: "God will give us whatever we desire... our troubles will end in two years... We will stand heroically against anarchy. A mint will be established on every street" (Çarşaf, December 13, 1978, 5). Çarşaf voiced the ministers' solution proposals toward achieving this dream. Finance Minister Ziya Müezzinoğlu's concretized the solution: "as soon as we grab our pickaxe and shovel, we will sweep the homeland from end to end, we will search for gold and silver" (Çarşaf, December 13, 1978, 5). By 1980, the Finance Minister's solution would even become the subject of sports cartoons (Firt, November 25, 1980, 8).

COAL AS A SOCIAL ISSUE AND CLASS ANXIETY IN DAILY LIFE

In the 1960–80 period, humor press, politics, and urban middle-class problems gained wider acceptance as Türkiye's urban population was rapidly increasing (Gelekçi, 2015, 589), but production was not progressing at the same pace. The deterioration in income distribution and the increase in open and hidden unemployment caused the living conditions of broad social segments to weaken. The inability to direct rapid changes in social structure and unplanned urbanization produced results that would shake social security. Sharp class differences had emerged. The political instability and economic crises deeply affected the broader public. In this context, one of the most important problems for the lower and middle classes in Türkiye became heating coal, from its supply to its variable pricing. This issue was also one of the important materials of the humor press. Humorous stories carried the troubles of a fictional but believable Turkish middle class, urban worker segment, civil servant and shopkeeper families to their lines. For example, *Akbaba* was one of the humor magazines that most voiced the reflections of coal need on social life. Vedat Saygel and Aziz Nesin frequently wrote about the negative effects of coal supply and coal price variability on families and social life.

Essentially, the household use of coal and lignite became widespread after 1933. The preparation of industrial development plans and Etibank's effective work on coal, iron and copper operations had expanded the use of coal and lignite

18 Şimdi, *tam on yıldır sürüp gider bu didişme, bu çekişme. On yılda, enerji konusunda tek kibritle çıkmayanlar, toprağının altı, üstünden zengin olan Türkiye'mizi, enerji konusunda da ele, güne avuç açar duruma getirmişlerdir. Hem de, düşünabiliyor musunuz kimlere?* (Emeç, 1978, 3)

as home heating fuel (Ünlü Soylu & Yaktı, 2012, 374). However, population and urbanization growth increased this need and coal queues formed in cities. This situation exacerbated the market price of coal. The difficulties experienced in coal supply and price increases caused the formation of new beliefs and mottos related to coal in society. For example, in a humorous story written by Aziz Nesin, Turkish families were advised to buy little coal so that winter would not last long. Because when too much coal was bought, it was believed that winter would last long. Even when describing the protagonist in the related story, who would grow furious if too much coal was purchased for the building’s central heating as early as summer since a larger coal supply meant the heating would operate longer and thus prolong the winter itself (Nesin, 1967, 4).

Based on the above example, the issue of coal was regarded as one of the most important anxieties of cities and the urban middle class in the 1960s. This problem recurred in two ways. Coal was hard to find, it was a quite expensive, and subject to a variable pricing system. Families had difficulty buying and finding coal, and when they bought it, they also had great difficulty paying coal installments. This problem was voiced in cartoon magazines both through humorous stories and humorous poems. In this context, in the *Akbaba* December 6, 1967, issue, a humorous poem about coal price and supply was written in Aziz Nesin’s column. In the poem titled “It Always Happens Like This,” the problem of not being able to find fuel and coal was criticized with humorous discourse, suggesting that the country’s children froze due to lack of fuel in winter (*Akbaba*, December 6, 1968, 9).

Similar criticism modes were encountered in a humorous dialogue given in Vedat Saygel’s column titled “Aksaray’s Phones Escaped,” where he voiced coal and fuel shortage. According to this, when winter comes, the citizen takes pen and paper and puts possibilities on paper just like having dreams of wealth. He wrote that the citizen dreams of coal in summer, his dreams are made about finding new coal beds. In this fictional but highly credible criticism, finding coal was left to hope: “if miners found a new coal vein, if this vein was very rich, if each mine’s daily capacity found so many tons... Yes yes, next winter there will be no coal shortage! Our bread is hope, our food is estimation, you understand” (Saygel, 1967a, 20). Dreams of getting rich in Türkiye had turned into dreams of finding coal. The possibility of getting rich was more likely than the possibility of finding coal. People’s dreams of accessing coal were also being exploited by politicians. During election campaign periods, election promises including the ideal of “reaching the welfare state” by operating mines were criticized by the humor press (Altan, 1977, 16).

Although citizens dreamed of coal and related election propaganda deepened, there were criticisms in the humor press that administrators did not understand mining. For example, in an article in *Akbaba*’s column called “7 Days,” after the new US president Nixon said “If I started life again, I would become a pianist,” the magazine criticized the politicians’ incompetence in

state administration with a guess of what job Türkiye’s party leaders would choose if they started life again:

If we said they would choose trade, it’s clear from the country’s commercial situation that they couldn’t handle it. If we said they would choose law, the decisions they make are returned from the Court of Cassation and Council of State. Even if we were to say that they would choose mining, this is clearly disproven by the fact that they have never touched the underground resources in which they have shown no interest whatsoever. (Akbaba, December 11, 1968, 9)¹⁹

The article emphasized that administrators lacked the in-depth knowledge and capability required to coordinate the operation of the mines, and attributed both the resulting failure to operate them and the hardships this caused citizens to their own incompetence. The need for minerals and coal to meet society’s daily needs had frequently appeared in magazines and almost become part of “survival humor.” Politics and politicians who could not respond to society’s demands and basic needs, the privileged bosses, were filling the yellow pages of humor. The humor press satirized difficulties in coal supply and class through access to coal. This provides us with more evidence about the relationship between class origins and humor. In this context, while coal producers were among the wealthy segments of society, those who could not supply coal constituted the urban middle class. The humor press creates typologies that long for coal. Among the snobbish dreams of the urban middle and lower classes for the future, there are dreams of “coal they can burn abundantly” rather than monetary wealth.

Türkiye’s new happiness was accessing coal it could burn in abundance. In this context, news of mineral extraction that would ease Türkiye’s consumption was given as great happiness in cartoon magazines. In the August 16, 1967, issue of Akbaba, Reşit Aşçıoğlu’s “England Notes” column, titled “Coolness from Lignite,” referred to a news item in Istanbul newspapers: “The headline said that lignite was extracted in Elbistan. Oh my God, I would never have guessed that the word lignite would blow such a cool breeze on my face on these hot summer days” (Aşçıoğlu, 1967, 9).

As coal had become a chronic problem of the urban poor and middle class, readers’ complaints and negative feelings about coal supply and prices were relieved through cartoons, ensuring that society was freed from its neuroses to some extent. Coal was among the most important expenses in family budgets, and this situation was reflected in cartoons as well (Akbaba, August 24, 1966, 4).

19 *Ticaret seçerlerdi desek kıvıramayacakları memleketin ticari durumundan belli. Hukuku seçerlerdi desek aldıkları kararlar Yargıtay’dan Danıştay’dan dönüyor, Madenciliği seçerlerdi desek hiç ilgi duymadıkları yer altı kaynaklarına şimdiye dek el sürmemelerinden belli oluyor. (Akbaba, December 11, 1968, 9)*

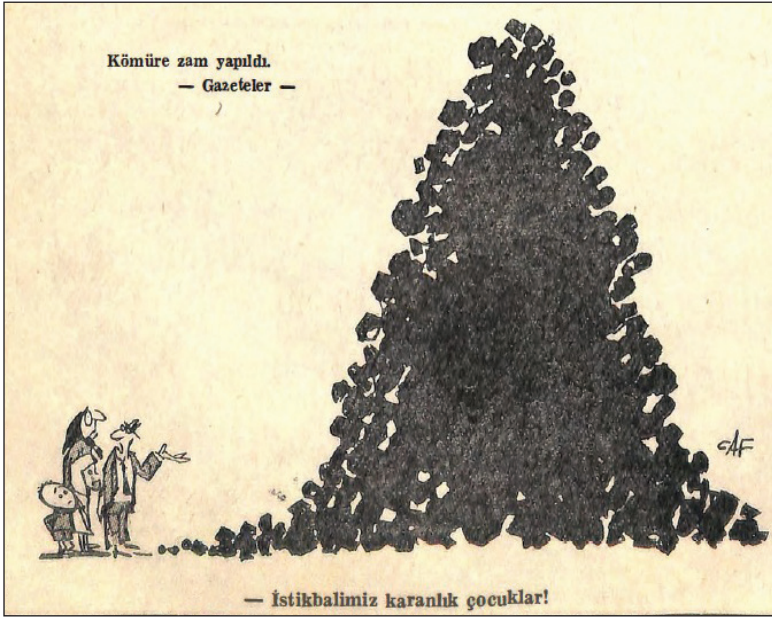


Fig. 12: Newspapers: Coal has gone up. “Our future is dark, children!” (Akbaba, August 24, 1968, 4).

Coal price increases could reach the point of darkening families’ futures. For a society accustomed to expensive coal, it becoming cheaper was described almost as a miracle. In this context, the following verses appeared in a humorous poem titled “Who Would Believe?” in an issue of *Akbaba*:

*Rice and bulgur in pantries,
If we said they exist, who would believe it?
Cheap coal at the coal dealer’s,
If we said it exists, who would believe it? (Akbaba, June 7, 1967, 10)²⁰*

People’s suffering due to expensive coal was conveyed through some interesting cartoons (Mim Uykusuz, January 15, 1969, 11). In the one by Mim Uykusuz, there were two different political propositions. Essentially, while the cartoon mentioned that a kilogram of coal cost 210 lira, at the same time, to emphasize that Turkish money had also lost its value, money was being thrown into the stove to try to keep warm. When the lady of the house saw the money burning in the stove and started

20 *Kilerlerde pirinç, bulgur Vardır desek kim inanır? Kömürçüde ucuz kömür Vardır desek kim inanır.* (Akbaba, June 7, 1967, 10)

screaming in panic, the man of the house stated that he had calculated this type of heating and that this was the most profitable option.

Society's difficulties in accessing coal continued in the 1970s. In 1971, short-term coalition governments and political instability had caused high inflation. There were serious price hikes in essential consumer goods. The high inflation and increasing prices experienced in the country, especially of coal and lignite, were among the criticism materials of cartoon magazines. Under the title "Price Increase Fury," *Akbaba* also criticized the price of lignite and the technology used to extract it. While it was explained that after the March 12 Memorandum, the chaos had partially subsided, price hikes continued. Critique was voiced that if the energy from lignite coal was extracted with the central heating system, which was the technology of the day, people could have warm winters, but because this was unsuccessful, price increases were made on coke coal (*Akbaba*, June 30, 1971, 3). In this way, the growing fuel problem of the urban middle class was criticized through humorous modes.

It is possible to multiply examples regarding the expensiveness of coal. The discovery and extraction of coal was important in Turkish economic history and the person who found coal in the country valued as the historical figure Uzun Mehmet. However, coal prices had risen so sharply that its history was all but forgotten. The satirical press seized on this, noting that by then the word "coal" evoked nothing but price hikes. In the analysis titled "The Story of Coal" the topic was addressed with the following statements:



Fig. 13: Newspapers: 210 lira per ton of coal. "Don't shout, ma'am, I've calculated... this is more profitable!" (*Akbaba*, January 15, 1969).

If the opened campaign gives the expected result, a statue of Uzun Mehmet will be erected in Karadeniz Ereğli. 172 years after the discovery of coal, we know the question that comes to the tip of your tongue: "Why didn't they decide to erect a monument before?" you will say. Aaah, ah! After all these years of raising coal prices, did the authorities even find time to remember the origin of coal? (Akbaba, September 1, 1971, 10)²¹

Humor magazines also criticized coal prices for straining family budgets. While newspapers reported that TKİ had begun offering installment sales, Akbaba pursued the same subject in its column "Siamese Brothers":

We warn the Monument Association: When erecting Uzun Mehmet's statue, don't forget to include TKİ. The symbolization is up to you. Whether Uzun Mehmet's finger now points to the enterprise, or the enterprise's manager points to the mine pit to Uzun Mehmet, we don't know how you'll do it. But TKİ and Uzun Mehmet must definitely be together. What will be written on their plaques is easy to say. For example, it could say: Uzun Mehmet: The first man to find coal called black diamond! TKİ: The one who sells coal at real diamond prices in three installments! (Akbaba, September 1, 1971, 10)²²

Muzaffer İzgü, who wrote for Akbaba, also drew attention to the increase in sugar and coal prices following the devaluation of Turkish currency. In the article, he expressed that after devaluation, citizens could not sleep, that with the decrease in the lira's exchange value, salaries had also melted one hundred percent, and in this environment, the coal dealer and sugar dealer would also demand price increases and the price of everything would increase, including the expressions "the coal dealer is also human, he also has wife and children and sugar will enter his house" (İzgü, 1970, 4).

Humor magazines frequently addressed the social consequences of coal shortage in Türkiye. They even expressed that coal shortage in Türkiye caused different techniques to develop in families, and included fictional but credible stories and scenarios emphasizing that coal and fuel procurement was realized through cooperation among all family members. In Akbaba, while Muzaffer İzgü was writing about the difficulties

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- 21 *Eğer açılan kampanya umulan sonucu verirse, Karadeniz Ereğli'sine Uzun Mehmet'in heykeli dikilecekti. Kömürün bulunuşundan 172 yıl sonra dilinizin ucuna gelen soruyu biliyoruz: "Neden daha önce anıt dikme kararı almadılar?" diyeceksiniz. Aaah, ah! Bunca yıl kömüre zam yaptıktan, kömürün babasını hatırlamaya vakit mi buldu ilgililer? (Akbaba, September 1, 1971, 10)*
- 22 *Anıt Derneğini Uyarıyoruz: Uzun Mehmet'in heykelini dikerken Türkiye Kömür İşletmelerine (TKİ) yer vermeyi unutmayın sakın. Sembolize etmesi sizden. Artık Uzun Mehmet'in parmağı işletmeyi mi gösterir, işletmenin yöneticisi Uzun Mehmet'e maden ocağını mı gösterir, nasıl yaparsınız bilmeyiz. Ama mutlak TKİ ile Uzun Mehmet bir arada olmalı. Pilakalarına yazılacaklar kolay. Örneğin şöyle denilebilir: Uzun Mehmet: Kara elmas denen taş kömürünü ilk bulan adam! TKİ: Taşkömürünü gerçek elmas fiyatına üç taksitle satan! (Akbaba, September 1, 1971, 10)*

people of low income faced in accessing coal, the father character in his story, when children got covered in coal dust during the family's production of coal balls from coal dust, said "uh oh, my father would say, you became just like the day we took you out of the coal sack!" Upon the father's this comparison, the child said:

For some reason, we poor children of the neighborhood came out of coal sacks, while Yaşar, Nedim, and Rifat were brought by storks. Maybe because we were born in winter, when storks weren't here. It was our mother's fault, if she had gritted her teeth a little and brought us to the world after March, we too would have achieved the happiness of riding a stork. (Akbaba, December 31, 1969)²³

In the continuation of the story, the scene where the whole family participated in making fuel from coal dust was described. According to this, since low-income families could not access coal, they produced coal balls from coal dust through family cooperation. This production scene was depicted in-depth in the story. The father would pile coal dust in the middle, the center of the dust would be opened, and filled by water carried in buckets. Children would draw water from the pump, while the mother would carry water. The water would be mixed with coal dust by the father. To give shape to the mortar made with coal dust, the mortar would be placed in trays and the top would be smoothed by hand. Then the trays would be turned over and the coals taking the shape of the tray mold would be arranged in rows. Four days later, the coal molds arranged on the ground would be collected. In four days, the dust would dry into balls. These coal balls would then be carried inside one by one by family members and carefully stacked in a huge box (İzgü, 1969b, 14–15).

Saygel, in his column titled "We're Broke, Man," also criticized coal and its prices in an article he constructed about his nephew asking how an exam he took at school went, the nephew replying that he was hopeful, as the family answered the exam questions together. One of the questions asked at school was "What is coal, how is it obtained?" When the student explained this question in a complex way, the writer addressed the matter through daily satire and expressed the following:

Man, my brother exploded. Haven't I explained to you a thousand times how coal is obtained? What are you mumbling about, you dog! There are two ways to obtain coal: with ration card and without ration card. The rationed one costs two hundred ten lira per ton, the non-rationed, that is, a ton of the black market one ton depends on bargaining. (Saygel, 1968b, 8)²⁴

23 *Nedense, biz mahallenin fakir çocukları kömür çuvalından çıkmış, Yaşar, Nedim, Rifat'lar ise, onları leylek getirmişti. Belki de, biz kışın dünyaya geldiğimizden leylekler burada değillerdi. Kabahat ananın, azıcık dişini sıkıp da bizi Marttan sonra dünyaya getirseydi, leyleğe binmek mutluluğuna biz de erişirdik . (Akbaba, December 31, 1969)*

24 *Ulan diye patladı kardeşim. Maden kömürünün nasıl elde edildiğini şimdiye kadar bin kere anlatmadım mı sana? Ne kem küm edip duruyorsun it! Kömür elde etmenin iki yolu vardır; Ordinolu ordinosuz. Ordinolunun tonu iki yüz on liradır, ordinosuz, yani karaborsa satılanın tonu pazarlığa bağlıdır: (Saygel, 1968b, 8)*

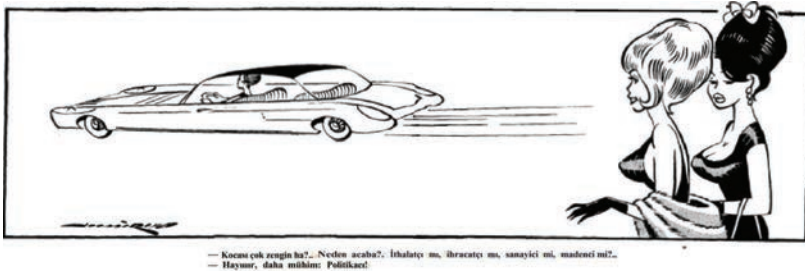


Fig. 14: Cartoon published in *Akbaba*, December 23, 1966, 11.

In the cartoon in Fig. 14, there is data expressing the wealth of mine operators. In the dialogue in the cartoon, two high society women talk while looking at a woman driving a car. One says to the other: “Her husband is very rich, huh? Why, I wonder? Is he an importer, exporter, or miner? No, more important: Politician!” (*Akbaba*, December 23, 1966, 11). Here, there is an emphasis that mine operators are among the wealthy class. Therefore, only a few segments can ride this luxury car.

COAL QUEUES

One of the basic materials in the hands of the humor press during this period were coal queues. In the *Akbaba* column “7 Days,” satirizing daily news throughout the week, coal queues were frequently addressed in the Thursday section. One of the remarkable aspects of this criticism was the comparison of Türkiye’s summers and winters with those in (the rest of) Europe, emphasizing that Turkish families spent their summers and winters in queues. The dimensions reached by expensiveness and heating problems were conveyed as follows:

*Winter came... Not only to us, but also to France, America, Italy, Switzerland. How does winter come to those countries?... Let me tell you: Just as summer comes with beaches opening, sails swelling, boats sailing, speedboats flying, beaches and seas filling with human joy, it comes like that, with new, different, special joy: With skis, winter entertainments, mountain sports, hunts... How does it come to us? I don't need to tell you that, you all see: With queues... Bread queue, coal queue, gas queue. ...At least let's change the name of one of the four seasons in the calendar: Spring, summer, autumn... Queue! (*Akbaba*, February 6, 1964, 6)²⁵*

25 *Kış geldi ... Yalnız bize değil, Fransa'ya, Amerika'ya, İtalya'ya, İsviçre'ye de geldi. Nasıl gelir o memleketlere kış?... Ben size söyleyim: Yaz, nasıl plajlar açılarak, yelkenler şişerek, kotralar kanatlanarak, şarpiler uçuşarak, kumsallar, denizler insan neşesiyle dolarak gelirse öyle gelir, yeni, başka, özel bir neşeyle: Kayaklarla, kış eğlenceleriyle, dağ sporlarıyla, avlarla... Bizde mi nasıl geliyor? Onu benim söylememe haccet yok, hepiniz görüyorsunuz: Kuyruklarla... Ekmek kuyruğu, kömür kuyruğu, gaz kuyruğu....Bari takvimde dört mevsimden birinin adını değiştirsek: İlkbahar, yaz, sonbahar ...Kuyruk! (*Akbaba*, February 6, 1964, 6)*

Although European societies celebrate the arrival of summer and winter with certain joy and rituals, it was noted that in Türkiye, due to production shortage and high cost of living, deep poverty emerged and queues formed for all kinds of consumer goods. Winter was felt by people waiting in coal queues, but in Europe, winter was met by winter joys and sports.

The humor press also characterized coal queues as educational institutions. For example, the following expressions appeared in *Akbaba*:

The elders say "One language, one person, two languages, two people" [...] Today we can change it like this: One queue, one school, two queues, two schools. Citizen, don't remain ignorant, squeeze from one to another! This innovation in education [...] I moved to the accounting department [and] the office boy who ran the errands had taken on men old enough to be his father, reeling off IMF demands that hadn't even made it into the press! Where did you hear these? From them in the coal queue. While complaining about the high cost of living at lunch, when a friend whose life and thoughts I admire said, "Have you ever thought of buying meat from the municipality's regulated sales places?" I said "Okay" to myself [...] "In order to live orderly, to be well-mannered and knowledgeable, it seems necessary to join a queue." (Saygel, 1978, 15)²⁶

EXPENSIVENESS OF COAL AND THE SOCIAL MORAL PROBLEM

Saygel frequently addressed the reflections of coal shortage in social and economic life and made political references through humorous stories. According to Saygel's, the continuous increase in coal prices that triggered a chain reaction of frauds and deception in society started with frauds in coal sales. Coal shortage occupied citizens' agenda so much that people eagerly bought newspapers to follow price increases to be made on coal. Newspapers also wrote about coal to increase or enable their sales. Or newspaper distributors claimed news about coal price hikes to sell or get rid of newspapers by loudly shouting "Extra! Extra! Read all about it!" Saygel, pondered whether there would be high prices or corruption in the country if there were no such shouting, opined that even whispers about coal price increases increased fraud in society. In his story, a ten-year-old newspaper boy yells "coal shortage, it is in the paaaper" to sell all the newspapers under his arm. Upon the child's shouting, first coal dealer Murtaza, who was about to perform the morning prayer, jumps up and buys a newspaper with

26 *Eskiler, "Bir lisan, bir insan iki lisan, iki insan" derler ya. Günümüzde onu şöyle değiştirebiliriz: Bir kuyruk, bir okul, iki kuyruk, iki okul. Vatandaş cahil kalma, birinden birine sokul! Eğitimdeki bu yeniliği ...Muhasebeye geçtim, büronun getir-götür işlerine bakan çocuk, babası yaşındaki adamları karşısına almış, IMF'nin basına bile yansımayan isteklerini sıralıyor! – Kimden duydun bunları? – Kömür kuyruğundakilerden. Öğle yemeğinde hayat pahalılığından yakınırken, yaşamının ve düşüncelerinin hayranı olduğum bir arkadaş da, – Belediyenin tanzim satış yerlerinden et almayı hiç düşündünüz mü? deyince, "Tamam" dedim kendi kendime . "Düzenli yaşamak, görgülü ve bilgili olmak için, kuyruğa girmek şart galiba." (Saygel, 1978, 15)*

twenty-five pence, biting the bullet and paying. After scanning for coal news in the newspaper, he encounters news saying that coke coal stock had decreased and sales over 750 kilograms would be made. The coal dealer Murtaza was deceived by the newspaper boy. He runs to the street to get back the twenty-five pence, but the child has long since disappeared. Murtaza, who returns to his shop breathing through his nose, unable to control his speed, kicks the pitcher where he performed ablution. He also hurls all the curses he knows. He is angry because he was swindled by a foot-tall child. When he gets to work, he pours tap water onto the coal. He will take the coal that the coffee house owner ordered earlier. He sieves the weighed coal to remove its dust. He sends it to the coffee house owner. When the coffee house owner sees the wet coal, he gets angry and curses the coal dealer until he gets tired. While teaching his apprentice the subtleties of the profession, he suggests adding carbonated water for the coffee to be frothy, adding ginger or if not available, pomegranate peel for the tea to give astringency. He sends tea to shopkeepers this way.

The coffee house owner, who cannot be relieved by cursing, chalks on the credit board for drinkers and non-drinkers, saying: "You bastard, you'll add water to steal half a kilo of coal from a poor man like me, are you going to become rich, you godless one?" (Saygel, 1967c, 12). The characterization of Coal dealer Murtaza and the coffee house owner in the story is the new human profile of the city. In fiction, it is emphasized that these men are people without work ethics, who, when they suffer loss, recover their loss by fraud and deception elsewhere. Both typologies are profane people who pretend to be religious. All this fraud was caused by news of an increase in coal prices.

Another cartoon depicting the fraud that emerged due to price hikes was drawn by Zafer Zorlu. Coal prices had also changed behavioral patterns and an urban fraudulent group had emerged. In the humorous mode of the cartoon in Fig. 15, a fraudster is painting stones to give them the appearance of coal, as its price rose to 580 lira per ton (Akbaba, September 1, 1971, 5).

On the other hand, shops and stores also engaged in coal promotions to attract customers offering all sorts of advantages:

One day we looked, and there was an advertisement in the window of the store ahead: "We're sending two of our customers to Europe." Would the guys next to or across from them just stand by? They also hung different kinds of advertisements: "We meet one month's kitchen needs. Your coal is from us. Have fun like crazy wherever you want. No asking, only choosing, as much stone as you can carry. Rent-free apartment, automobile, motorcycle, bicycle. Whatever else comes to mind is hung on windows, doors." (Akbaba, November 14, 1973)²⁷

27 Bir gün bakıyorduk, ilerdeki mağazanın vitrininde bir ilan: "İki müşterimizi Avrupa'ya yolluyoruz". Yanındaki veya karşısındaki adamlar durur mu? Onlar da başka çeşit ilanlar astılar: "Bir aylık mutfak ihtiyacını karşılıyoruz. Kömürünüz bizden. İstedığınız yerde çılgınlar gibi eğlenin. Sormak yok seçmek var, taşı taşıyabildiğin kadar. Kirasız kat, otomobil, motosiklet, bisiklet. Daha aklına ne gelirse asılmış camlara, kapılara. (Akbaba, November 14, 1973)



Fig. 15: When a metric ton of coal costs 580 lira! (*Akbaba*, September 1, 1971, 5).

Those who shopped from these businesses received coupons or tickets, after a certain period a draw was held, and however many customers would win, they would receive the announced prize. Coal was also depicted as an important promotion in this drawing (Türker, 1973, 14).

COAL AID TO FAMILIES

Despite the tense political atmosphere of the 1960s, economic crises and currency devaluations, mining and coal shortage were expressed in interesting drawings. Families' economic hardship stemming from the cost of coal prompted the introduction of certain social measures. In the cartoon in Fig. 16, the state's coal aid was addressed with a political reference. In the drawing with the proposition "One ton of coal will be given to each family," it was expressed that coal was put into the coal truck with a cup, suggesting that coal aid was something of "a story" (Akbaba, August 21, 1968, 16).

Saygel, describing the bureaucratic difficulties of receiving coal aid, included a story of how, in order to get half a ton of coal, he had to go to officials repeatedly, each time being asked for a different document, and when he finally obtained the requested documents, the coal had run out. In the story, the protagonist gives up on ever receiving coke coal aid and decides to get lignite coal. He finds it more suitable for his budget to buy coal, which is cheaper than lignite coal. However, for this, he needs to fill out some forms. In the article, the protagonist, upon hearing that coal aid was being given to newlywed couples, he immediately applied, but was rejected because he had not transferred his residence to his new address, and after hastily transferring his residence, he heard that this form of aid had ended. The official in charge of coal sales says that if they have children, they might have a chance of receiving coal aid. In this way, the ordeals citizens went through to receive lignite coal aid were

humorized. The protagonist of the story ultimately cannot succeed in getting normal lignite coal despite all efforts, and officials suggest that he should buy powdered radiator coal. However, he gives up because this type of coal is not suitable for stoves. The protagonist of the story returns without being able to buy coal. Later, he finds someone he knows through his neighbor and decides to buy coal with his reference. At a private establishment where he went to buy coal, he offers a bribe to obtain coal. However, those at the private coal depot do not take bribes. It is stated that the business gives quality coal to its customers to compete with the state (Saygel, 1967b, 14).

There were some criticisms that coal shortage was damaging Türkiye's cultural values. Reşit Aşçıoğlu, in his "England Notes" column, mentioned that operating Turkish baths would soon become a dream. Aşçıoğlu, writing about various difficulties experienced in operating baths, noted that baths could not be operated because abundant coal for fuel could not be found, observing that in order "to reach our baths that have become a dream, we will need to go on long journeys in the future and we'll be like going all the way to Europe to wash in a Turkish bath!" (Aşçıoğlu, 1968, 15).

CONCLUSIONS

The world of caricature draws on lived experience, the prevailing conjuncture, and conjunctural developments; in short, it is shaped by the political and topical agendas of the period. Viewed from this angle, it can be considered a means, or method, of tracking that same agenda through a different medium and from a different perspective. Minerals are among the leading raw materials



Fig. 16: Each family will receive one metric ton of coal (Akbaba, August 21, 1968).

used at every stage of life within a state-society structure. Accordingly, it can be argued that the intersection between caricature and mining offers a powerful vantage point from which social issues can be communicated through direct messages.

In light of these intersections, the satirical press, operating within the dynamics of its relationship to political power, sought to treat the problems of different segments of society in a softened, mitigated manner. Broadly speaking, it was politics and the problems of the urban middle class that found acceptance as subject matter in the satirical press of the 1960–80 period. The inability to direct rapid changes in social structure and the unplanned urbanization had deepened the problems of the urban middle class (Kozanoğlu, 2001, 58). Because the political instability and economic crises of the period affected broad segments of society, the coal issue readily became one of the elements of class conflict, and in turn one of the major subjects taken up by the satirical press. Humorously toned stories captured the hardships of a fictional yet believable Turkish middle class, the urban working class, and civil servant and tradesman families. At a time when rising population and urbanization had swelled demand, coal queues began to form in the cities, driving up the market price of coal considerably, and the resulting supply difficulties, combined with these price increases, soon turned into a serious economic problem for society at large. Dreams of wealth gave way to dreams of securing an abundant supply of coal, and the satirical press responded with a series of striking cartoons on the subject. Mines and the coal issue turned, in effect, into part of what might be called “survival humor”. By writing about the difficulties of coal supply, the satirical press also brought to the surface, through satirical undertones, the class differences between segments of society revealed by access to coal, findings that lend further support to the relationship between class origin and humor. On the other hand, the yellowed pages of the satirical press also held cartoons that interrogated social morality through the coal issue, portraying pious urban figures who worked as coal sellers, through their commercial cunning and trickery, as the city’s “Others.”

In the cartoons, the figure of a worker trying, while laboring in the mine, to convey his demands upward, paired with an employer who replies, “I can’t hear you, shout a little louder,” symbolized the failure of workers voices to reach those in charge. Humor magazines made visible the poor working conditions and occupational safety problems in the mines, along with occupational diseases and the precarious lives of miners. Coal shortages and high prices are among the most addressed topics in the humor press of the studied period. Coal queues, installment sales and fuel procurement were depicted as daily life problems of the urban middle class. Aziz Nesin and Vedat Saygel masterfully described the social behavioral changes and moral decay created by coal shortage in their stories. Ironic observations, such as “scholars of the future will grow up in minibus, coal, and meat queues” show the depth of social criticism.

Discussions about the nationalization of mines, government policies and patronage relations were also addressed with a critical perspective in humor magazines. The differences in approaches between the CHP and the AP, the mining policies of Ecevit and Demirel were compared in cartoons. Price increases were criticized with the metaphor of “Price Increase Emperor”. The sentence “for a mine worker, working is consuming life... Making life miserable, being buried while alive” summarized miners’ difficult lives. During this period, coal queues were characterized as a social educational institution in humor magazines. Coal shortage was criticized not only as an economic problem but also as a phenomenon that damaged cultural values. The difficulties experienced in operating Turkish baths and fuel inadequacy were interpreted as the loss of traditional culture. Humor magazines also criticized the role of foreign companies in the mining sector and the inability to evaluate underground riches in line with national interests.

»MADEŽ OD PREMOGA JE TEŽKO ODSTRANITI«: TURŠKA RUDARSKA AGENDA Z VIDIKA HUMORISTIČNIH REVIJ (1960–1980)

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IZVLEČEK

Ta članek, ki se osredotoča na obdobje 1960–80, proučuje, kako so turške humoristične revije prikazovale družbeno-politično agendo rudarstva in dela v rudnikih v Turčiji. Študija uporablja korpusni jezikoslovni pristop k zgodovinskemu korpusu digitaliziranih humorističnih revij, med katerimi so Akbaba, Girgir, Çarşaf, Hibir in Limon ter v njih išče izraze, kot so rudnik, rudarstvo, premog, premogovniški delavec, zlato, srebro, baker, svinec, lignit. Za štetje in razvrščanje izrazov so bili uporabljeni programi MAXQDA, Agent Ransack in Adobe Acrobat, rezultati pa so bili kasneje prikazani v obliki grafikonov v programu Power BI, medtem ko so bile karikature in odlomki, ki so vsebovali te izraze, izolirani za podrobnejšo metaforično analizo. Kvantitativni rezultati kažejo, da je bilo zlato zaradi svojega vsakdanjega in simbolnega pomena v turški kulturi omenjeno veliko pogostejše kot kateri koli drug mineral, medtem ko je bil svinec komajda omenjen; med izrazi, povezanimi z delom, prevladujeta »rudar« in »rudarstvo«, kar kaže na vidnost delavskega gibanja tudi znotraj stripovskega diskurza. Na podlagi interpretacije teh vzorcev študija ugotavlja, da so se karikaturisti dosledno postavljali na stran rudarjev proti vladni brezbržnosti do stavk, nevarnih delovnih pogojev in poklicnih bolezni ter večkrat satirizirali politiko nacionalizacije, privatizacije in klientelizma v zvezi z rudarstvom. Pokazalo se je, da sta pomanjkanje premoga in naraščajoče cene predstavljala trajen vir vsakodnevne tesnobe za mestno prebivalstvo srednjega in nižjega razreda, kar je povzročilo nastanek oblike »humorja preživetja«.

Ključne besede: rudarstvo, rudarsko delo, karikature, humoristične revije, Turčija

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VISUAL ECONOMY OF SAMENESS: PHOTOGRAPHY OF MINERS AND OF MINING LABOR IN SLOVENIAN PHOTOREPORTAGE OF THE TWENTIETH AND EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

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ABSTRACT

Throughout Slovenia's history, across the various historical periods of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries—from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes through Yugoslav Socialism to the Slovenian Liberal republic—photoreportages have consistently portrayed miners and mining labor through a homogeneous visual style characterized by direct, unassuming photography. This article examines how such depictions functioned within shifting political and ideological contexts, focusing on the intersection of visual representation and socio-mythological construction. Drawing on Marx's concept of the commodity form, Barthes's theory of naturalization and myth, and structuralist notions of symbolic exchange, the study employs socio-semiotic analysis to reveal how the imagery of miners gave rise to a "visual economy of sameness." This visual economy abstracted labor into standardized symbolic forms, reinforcing dominant ideological narratives and shaping public memory across historical periods. The article argues that the persistent reduction of miners to emblematic visual signs served as a powerful means of constructing the desired collective identities of different socio-political periods.

Keywords: photography of miners, photography of labor, commodity form, Slovenian photoreportage, myth and photography, symbolic economy, press photography

ECONOMIA VISIVA DELL'UNIFORMITÀ: LA FOTOGRAFIA DEI MINATORI E DEL LAVORO MINERARIO NEL FOTOREPORTAGE SLOVENO DEL XX E DEI PRIMI DECENNI DEL XXI SECOLO

SINTESI

Nel corso della storia slovena, nei diversi periodi storici del XX e dei primi decenni del XXI secolo – dalla monarchia del Regno dei Serbi, Croati e Sloveni al

socialismo jugoslavo fino alla repubblica liberale slovena – i fotoreportage hanno rappresentato con costanza i minatori, il loro lavoro e la loro fatica attraverso uno stile visivo omogeneo, caratterizzato da una fotografia diretta e priva di artifici. Questo articolo esamina il modo in cui tali raffigurazioni hanno operato all'interno di contesti politici e ideologici mutevoli, concentrandosi sull'intersezione tra rappresentazione visiva e costruzione socio-mitologica. Richiamandosi al concetto marxiano di forma-merce, alla teoria barthesiana della naturalizzazione e del mito, nonché alle nozioni strutturaliste di scambio simbolico, lo studio adotta un'analisi sociosemiotica per mostrare come l'immaginario dei minatori abbia dato forma a una "economia visiva dell'uniformità". Questa economia visiva ha astratto il lavoro in forme simboliche standardizzate, rafforzando le narrazioni ideologiche dominanti e plasmando la memoria pubblica nei diversi periodi storici. L'articolo sostiene che la persistente riduzione dei minatori a segni visivi emblematici abbia costituito un potente mezzo di costruzione delle identità collettive desiderate nei vari periodi socio-politici.

Parole chiave: fotografia dei minatori, fotografia del lavoro, forma-merce, fotoreportage sloveno, mito e fotografia, economia simbolica, fotografia di stampa

INTRODUCTION¹

Throughout Slovenia's history, across a range of social and political contexts, there has been a notable consistency in how miners and mining labor were depicted in photoreportages² in print and electronic media. This representational homogeneity—best described as a realistic stylization with a preference for simple, compositionally straightforward photography even to the point of unassuming, amateur aesthetics—is not without its reasons. This observation emerges from research on photoreportages of miners in Slovenian

1 This article results from research conducted for the project N6-0268 *Political Functions of Folktales*, program P6-0435 *The Practices of Conflict Resolution between Customary and Statutory Law in the Area of Today's Slovenia and Neighboring Countries*, *Large Language Models for Digital Humanities* (LLM4DH, GC-0002), supported by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS), and supported by COST Action CA22149, *Research Network for Interdisciplinary Studies of Transhistorical Deliberative Democracy (CHANGECODE)*, funded by COST, European Cooperation in Science and Technology. The author thanks the reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions for revision, Gallery Jakopič (Ljubljana) for the reproduction-ready images of photoreportages, and the editors for their work.

2 The terms "photo essay," "photo story," and "photoreportage" are used interchangeably, especially within the context of Slovenian photojournalism. Throughout the article, the subtle differences in degrees between photo-news, photoreports, and photoreportage are not explicitly addressed (for more on this topic cf. Tomanič Trivundža & Skočir, 2021).

photojournalism since the early twentieth century, which drew from a variety of sources, including newspapers, weekly publications, illustrated weeklies, and magazines.³

In the Slovenian press of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the “real” miner emerges as an elusive figure—simultaneously visible and invisible. Miners are made visible only through a dual filter of signification: materially, via the visual paraphernalia of lamps, helmets, and soot-covered faces; and symbolically through socio-mythological characteristics of roughness, endurance, perseverance, almost unbridled solidarity, and stoicism in the face of insurmountable odds.⁴ Even before one sees the images of miners one expects their appearance to conform to the normative social image-*image* of miners in both meanings—pictorial and linguistic.⁵ The role of cultural memory in the social image-*image* of the miners is not to be underestimated as it often serves to reinforce the particular socio-political connotations. Even beyond the narrow Slovenian context, one of the main reasons for the strong and prevalent cultural mythology of mining in general (Clark & Szerszynski, 2020; Freese, 2003)—coal mining in particular—lies in its central position in the Industrial Revolution. Coal shaped both the capitalist mode of production (Clark & Szerszynski,

- 3 The research was initially conducted by a team of researchers, focusing on the genre of photoreportage in Slovenian dailies, weeklies, illustrated journals, and—toward the end of the twentieth and into the early twenty-first century—digital media platforms. The corpus encompassed nearly all major and minor Slovenian periodicals in these categories, ensuring broad coverage of the media landscape across different historical and political contexts. While the research included a comprehensive selection of media outlets, it did not aim to examine all photoreportage content within them. Instead, sampling was carried out until a sufficiently diverse and analytically productive range of material was identified, enabling theoretically substantiated inferences about representational patterns, thematic developments, and discursive shifts over time. The study focused on both mature photoreportage formats and earlier proto-photoreportages, with the aim of tracing their visual, representational, and ideological functions across Slovenia’s changing socio-political formations. In the process, the research also engaged with the definition of the photoreportage genre itself, as it unfolded through the history of Slovenian photojournalism—mapping its sub-genres, formal variations, and its border cases with adjacent formats such as photo-news. The findings of the broader research were published by Tomanić et al. (2021), who offer a comprehensive analysis of the genre’s development, functions, and cultural significance. Subsequently, the author conducted a more targeted study—using similar methodological parameters—specifically focused on the visual representation of miners. This sub-study enabled a deeper investigation into recurring visual motifs, ideological framings, and the socio-mythological construction of miners across various historical periods of Slovenia. The research was focused on published material in the media, and it excluded other instances where photojournalistic work might appear, such as photobooks, various exhibitions, art galleries, collections, archives, etc.; the emphasis was on the visual representations in the photoreportages of printed and later electronic media.
- 4 Apart from the numerous examples discussed later in this article, miners’ tales constitute a salient example of the reproduction of dominant narratives and tropes framing miners’ characteristics. Cf., e.g., the many tales collected by Tine Lenarčič (2004), which encapsulate several of these recurrent features. For a more in-depth discussion of the role that folktales and narratives play in the constitution of social subjects and political ideologies, cf. Tratnik (2023).
- 5 Cf. the telling comment written by reporter Jana Župančič while encountering the miners to interview them for the photoreportage as she wrote: “Gathered in front of the store by the mine, they appear virtually unrecognizable due to their civilian clothing, lack of helmets and clean faces” (Župančič, 2007; photographs by Damjan Žibert).

2020, 40, 41) and the everyday life of modernity (Freese, 2003, 143). Furthermore, the modern age, particularly in Europe during the Industrial Revolution, was largely shaped by extractive processes—horizontally through colonialism and vertically through extraction industrialism (Clark & Szerszynski, 2020, 104; cf. Sekula, 2018). But even though coal mining fueled the Industrial Revolution, the industrialization of the mining sector itself came only late in the process of industrialization (Sekula, 1983, 203–204). The pre-industrial narratives and representational tropes surrounding mining and miners (as unsophisticated yet quintessential “toilers” for industrialized societies) and visual iconography that emerged in the sixteenth-century European context (pickaxe, soot-covered or blackened faces, carrying a lamp, later also helmets and headlamps)⁶ persisted well into the twentieth century, even though coal itself more or less disappeared from everyday life late in the century. As George Orwell remarked in 1937 in one of the seminal works of documentary literature, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, on the perception of the miner in society: “He is a sort of grimy caryatid upon whose shoulders nearly everything that is not grimy is supported” (Orwell, 1958, 21).⁷ This notion is particularly noticeable in the case of the figure of a miner in Socialist Yugoslavia after the Second World War (the period when Slovenian photoreportage fully developed as a genre) when miners’ manual labor stood as an epitome of “moral investment in work and citizenship” and miners themselves “may be considered iconic for the (self-)imagination of Yugoslav socialist realities” (Petrović & Hofman, 2017, 62–63). Such a central position of miners, for example, engendered numerous stylized monuments featuring the figure of the miner, far more than workers of other branches of industry (Horvatinčič, 2014, 175). This central position of miners in Yugoslav socialist realities did reach Slovenian photoreportages, but, conversely, the stylization itself, so notably manifested in the monuments, never fully reached photography in the photoreportages. Photoreportages of miners stand out in two significant respects. First, the sheer volume of photoreportages devoted to mining surpasses that of all other sectors of industrial labor, including the second most frequently represented branch, the textile industry, with its predominantly female workforce (cf. Tomanič Trivundža, Babnik & Skočir, 2021, 142, 147). Second, the socio-cultural position of the miner—a highly symbolic and ideologically charged

6 For example, in the sixteenth-century woodcuts in *De Re Metallica*, a 1556 treatise on metallurgy by Georgius Agricola (2011), which represent an early, authoritative visual corpus on mining: they established many standard visual elements of the miner at work (tools, underground setting, lighting, etc.).

7 Orwell’s remark neatly captures one prevailing discourse about miners—as simultaneously excluded from “civilization” yet essential to its development—a discourse traceable back to *De re metallica* (Agricola, 2011) and notable in Slovenian photoreportage (e.g., casting miners as those who “carry the country on their shoulders”). These narratives of underground, unsophisticated yet dignified toilers who shape the industrialization above ground—and their recurring discursive figurations—are, to a lesser extent, repeated in the Slovenian press (e.g., Gačnik & Hladnik-Milharčič, 1992). Another recurrent trope is the ascent-descent pattern (prominent in most Slovenian photoreportages on mining). For a suggestive connection of the ascent-descent mining trope to the classical anabasis/katabasis topos—although originally associated with aristocratic literary forms—cf. Craven (2020).

figure—renders its depiction unique and potentially paradigmatic for broader visual representations of labor. No other segment of the working class in Slovenia—particularly within the Yugoslav context—achieved such a dominant socio-cultural position, wherein the workers themselves were almost entirely subsumed by their social image. Consequently, miners became frequent subjects of monuments, documentaries, films, and photographic projects, serving not merely as representations of labor, but as embodiments of broader ideological narratives (cf. Horvatinčič, 2014; Petrović & Hofman, 2017). While recognizing that images and figures of miners have appeared across a broad spectrum of cultural contexts—from art, film, and monuments to the wider tradition of documentary photography, everyday photographic practices, and official archival records and mine documentation—this article focuses primarily on the representation of miners in photoreportages throughout Slovenian history. Its central interest lies in identifying the most normative, widespread, and far-reaching representations of miners as they circulated in print media and, subsequently, in electronic formats.

As we will observe, a certain pattern emerges from Slovenian photoreportages on mining and miners—or rather a certain tension that arises from the coexistence of rather unassuming visuality and highly connotative text. This creates a paradox of the simultaneous overdetermination and underdetermination of the images. On the one hand, the over-determination stems from the miners' elevated, almost “mythical” status, attributed mostly to coal's primacy as an essential energy source bearing the weight of the nation's progress that, even when not indispensable, persisted well into the twentieth century. On the other hand, there exists a stylistic under-determination of these images, which fails to capture the full complexity of social reality—both the harsh realities of mining work and the social meaning of the miners' labor and their societal identities. The highly connotative text of the photoreportages that usually frames and anchors the images is, on the other hand, always already burdened (connoted) by the images themselves—by the cultural, communicative value of the social *image* of the miners in society. This complex duality constitutes what might best be described as a discursively and connotatively productive *tension*, in our case, the linguistic valorization of miners and the unassuming visual homogenization of their representation.

This article argues that while the representation of miners in Slovenian photoreportage has undergone stylistic and narrative shifts, a deeper structural logic remains consistent. This persistence operates across three interrelated levels: (1) discursive sameness, visible in recurring iconography and tropes—helmets, soot-covered faces, and repeated motifs of endurance and resilience; (2) structural sameness, rooted in photography's capacity to abstract and typify labor; and (3) narrative sameness, which encodes values such as stoicism or sacrifice into reproducible symbolic forms. These levels are mutually constitutive and give rise to a patterned visual economy of sameness across changing historical and cultural contexts. This structural persistence can be understood through a socio-semiotic framework that draws on Marx's critique of abstraction in the *commodity form* (Marx, 2010), Barthes's theory of *naturalization*

and *myth* (Barthes, 1977a–b; 1991), and structuralist models of *communication as symbolic exchange* (Lévi-Strauss, 1971; Greimas, 1987; Bourdieu, 1991; Saussure, 2011). Within this framework, photography can be understood as a paradigmatic *commodity form*—a medium whose meaning lies in its heightened (compared to other sign systems) capacity to abstract, typify, and circulate, “exchange” meaning. As *commodity form*, photographs gain meaning primarily through differential relations (through social practices of signification), enabling the miner’s image to function as a sign within a visual economy that obscures the materiality of labor. As Barthes (1977a–b) and Sekula (1983; 2014) note, this abstraction becomes especially potent within photographic realism, where the apparent naturalness of the image amplifies its symbolic role.

The apparent structural and stylistic “ordinariness” of photography of miners in Slovenian photojournalism, especially so in photoreportages, served to amplify broader socio-political discourses *through* and *with* the photographs. Photographs featured in the photoreportages of the Slovenian press of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries inadvertently abstracted the mining labor through metonymical concentration of the social image of a miner “in-through-with” the photographs and metaphorical extension of the meaning—through symbolic economy of photographs—*visual economy of sameness* as the normative representational economy. The rare deviations and transgressions from the normative visualization of the photoreportages highlight the fact that the normative does not constitute the rigid limits of what can be made visible but rather that which constitutes particular affectiveness and social effectiveness of communicative practices (meaning-effect, i.e. sensemaking or exchange of meaning) and furthermore expose the importance of difference between *visibility* (what can be made visible) and the *visual* (what is visualized) (Traue, Blanc & Cambre, 2019).⁸ Abstraction of labor in photoreportages on miners was structurally no less prominent across Slovenia’s pre-war, socialist, and post-socialist transition periods; yet it manifested with differences.⁹

Slovenian photojournalism, with some variations (especially during the occupation period of 1941–45), evolved through four main eras. From 1918 to 1945, it focused on *nationally-conscious photoreportage*. Post-Second World War, it shifted to *socialism-building photoreportage*, coinciding with the first golden age of the genre and the significant rise of illustrated magazines. The late 1960s to the early 1970s introduced *initiative-giving photoreportage*, which in the late

8 For more on the difference between the visual, visible, and visibility, cf. Traue, Blanc & Cambre’s (2019) explanation of the Foucauldian *enounce* and *enunciation* (what is said and what is sayable) in connection to the visual and visual-discursive analysis.

9 These period designations correspond to major historical phases in the territory of present-day Slovenia: the pre-war period (1918–1941), under the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918–1929) and later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929–1941); the socialist period (1945–late 1980s), as part of Socialist Yugoslavia; and the post-socialist transition period (late 1980s–early 1990s), culminating in Slovenia’s independence in 1991 and the establishment of a liberal-democratic republic. While “socialist” refers to a political-economic system, it is here employed as a temporal shorthand in line with historiographical convention.

1980s transitioned to *watchdog photoreportage*. This shift mirrored journalism's changing role from co-creating Slovenian nationhood and a Slovenian socialist society to acting increasingly as a supervisory institution of the liberal republic (Tomanić Trivundža, Babnik & Skočir, 2021, 126).

MINERS, INDUSTRY, AND LABOR IN THE PRE-WWII PHOTOREPORTAGE

During the interwar period, when photojournalism increasingly turned toward the exploration and documentation of social inequalities and themes, especially in Weimar German photojournalism, where both the liberal and the opposition press were increasingly developing picture stories and photo essays,¹⁰ the Slovenian photographic landscape was still predominantly influenced by the pictorial tradition (cf. Kovič, 1990; Štrumej, 2010), focusing on the everyday and the construction of national identity with only a handful of exceptions.¹¹ This was a time when in Slovenia (at the time largely part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (KSCS)) any concerted effort to establish a workers' press (such as the workers' press of the Weimar Republic, the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* and *Arbeiterfotografie*) faced suppression and difficulties, largely due to its perceived affiliations with the Communist Party, which was banned in KSCS in 1921. Censorship intensified, especially following the onset of the 6 January Dictatorship in 1929, a period marked by the official censorship of the press and a comprehensive ban on political parties (cf. Tomanić Trivundža, Babnik & Skočir, 2021).

Proletarian and socio-critical photographs (especially those related to work and labor) struggled to secure a presence in the mainstream illustrated press, for example *Ilustrirani Slovenec*, *Ilustracija*, and *Družinski tednik*. Despite these constraints, the influence of Weimar worker photography found a place within the activities of photo clubs, particularly in the mining region of Zasavje (Lampič, 1990, 27). Proletarian photographs found an alternative route to the public, circulating among the working class primarily as propaganda material in the form of postcards. Notable examples include a postcard commemorating four miners killed in a clash with the fascist organization Orjuna¹² in Trbovlje on June 1, 1924 (Kralj, 1970, 188), a postcard featuring a photomontage of two victims of the dictatorship

10 For the developments of photography especially in the context of Weimar Republic, documentary photography and workers' photography leagues, seminal collections are Witschey (2011) and Ribalta (2015); for the developments of photojournalism and illustrated press in Weimar Republic, cf. Hardt (1989).

11 Some of the exceptions would be "Iz podzemeljske Ljubljane" (From Underground Ljubljana) from *Ilustracija* (Hafner, 1931, 121–122), about people living in the sewers of the city, "Med barakami na Kodeljevem" (In the Kodeljevo Slum), (Jutro, April 10, 1938, 5), photographer unknown, and "Gramozna jama, ljubljanski Ghetto" (Gramozna Jama, the Ljubljana Ghetto), (Jutro, March 3, 1938, 3), photographer unknown.

12 Orjuna is the acronym for Organizacija jugoslavenskih nacionalista (Organisation of Yugoslav Nationalists), organization that stood for a unitarian and centralized Yugoslav state, anticommunism, against separatism and Italian irredentism. It was established in 1921 and dissolved in 1929, along with other parties.

killed by the gendarmerie in 1929 (Kralj, 1970, 250), and postcards depicting opposition candidates with their mouths symbolically tied shut as a protest against the prohibition of rallies (Kacin-Wohinz, 1965, 199).

Work- and labor-themed photoreportages began to emerge in the Slovenian press relatively late in the twentieth century (with only a few exceptions appearing earlier) and they never fully embraced the critically realistic imperative of addressing social inequalities or wider social relations of labor in society. Instead, what evolved were mostly forms of photojournalism, rooted in the tradition of liberal humanistic documentary with a few reaching the stylistic level of those associated with prominent Western illustrated magazines (e.g. *Life*, *Vu*, and *Picture Post*). As a rule, most of the photojournalism adhered to realistic (informative; often illustrative) and less often to stylized (interpretative; often illustrative) aesthetics.¹³ The latter was slowly gaining prominence from the mid-twentieth century onwards (mostly in weekly magazines such as *Mladina*, *Tovariš*, and *7D*).

During the interwar period, the mainstream press in Slovenia scarcely featured standalone photoreportages on physical labor—the few examples tended to unify the visual representation of various types of work (industrial, household, subsistence, and craft) treating them with a uniform visual approach that was characteristic of the era. Whole-page collages dedicated to a specific type of work, as in an example published in *Ilustracija* “V potu svojega obraza boš jedel kruh” (By the Sweat of Your Brow You Will Eat Your Bread) from 1929¹⁴ (Fig. 1), a rare example of this periodical focus on industrial labor. “The withdrawal from the social reality of industrial society to non-industrial national iconography can be seen as a defining feature of early Slovenian photojournalism” (Tomanič Trivundža, Babnik & Skočir, 2021, 131). Slovenian national iconography of the period was decidedly pastoral, tied to a discourse that construed nature as the privileged locus of nation-building, to an idealized and idyllic notion of nationhood rooted in the land and the people, and haunted by the specter of industrialism. Allan Sekula noted the conflict between idealist historiography and industrialism in mining photographs in general:

The mining photographs, however, present a nature that had already been radically altered by organized human energies. They introduce another spectre, that of industry. That spectre, because it raises the issue of practice, proves to be embarrassing for idealist historiography. (Sekula, 1983, 228)

13 The difference between realistic and stylistic is not rigid nor is it easily defined as it is related to the question of social facts building through different visualization strategies. Some of the main authors, useful for this purpose, are mentioned in the concluding part of the article. The difference could be summarized as the difference between stylistic and factual tendencies of photography. For the factographic tradition of Soviet avantgardes that elaborated on these two tendencies quite extensively in its writings, cf., e.g., Tret'iakov (2006a–b). For the difference between critical social documentary and liberal humanistic documentary photography, cf. Sekula (1978), Rosler (2006), and Ribalta (2015).

14 *Ilustracija*, 1929, 1, 5: V potu svojega obraza boš jedel kruh, 146. Photographer unknown.

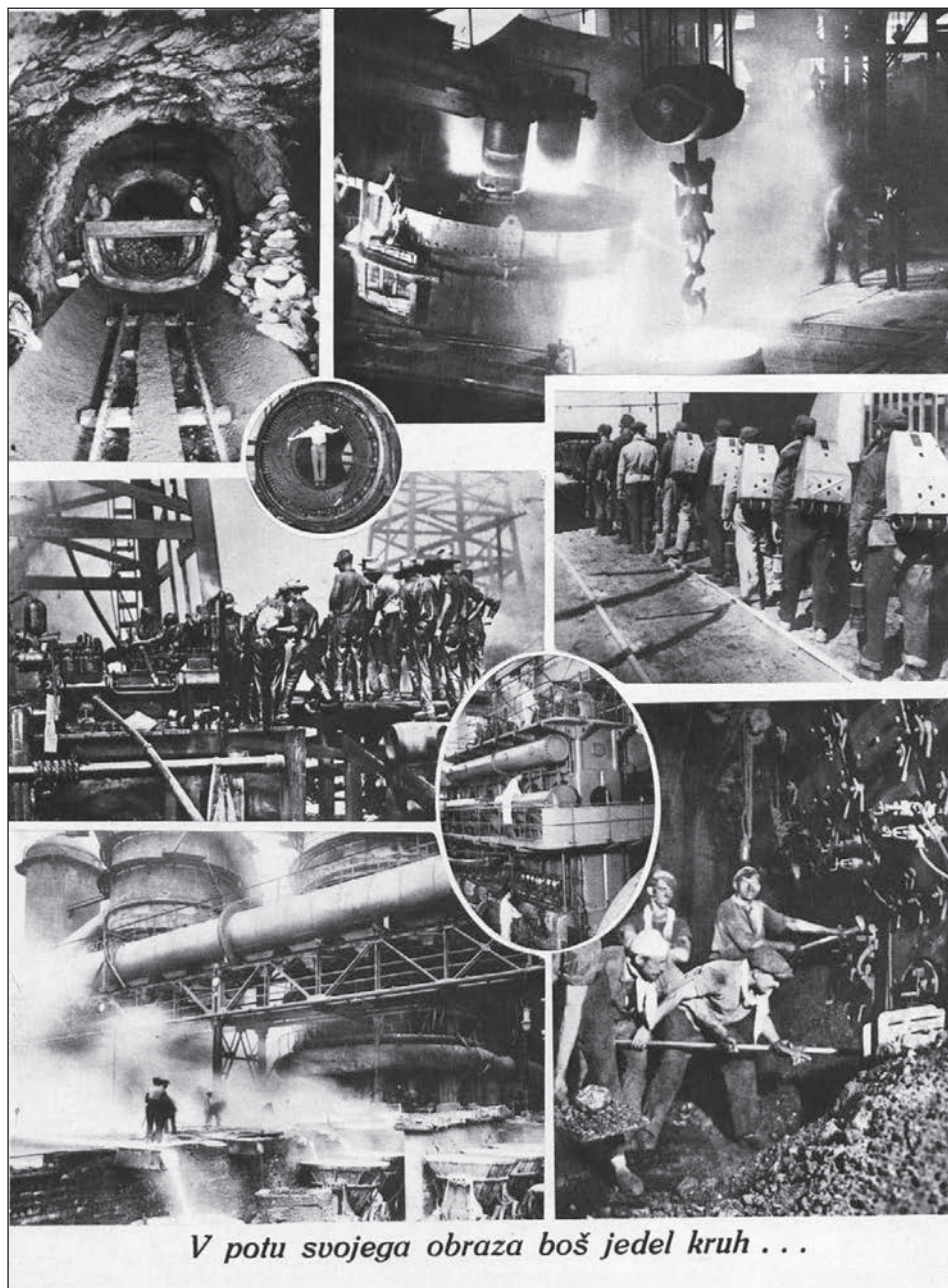


Fig. 1: “By the Sweat of Your Brow You Will Eat Your Bread” (Ilustracija, 1929, 1, 5, 146; photographer unknown).

Alongside pastoral and alpine landscapes, this iconography featured traditional crafts and mostly peasant labor. Only after the Second World War did the visualization of domestic, subsistence, and handicraft labor become more clearly separated from the visualization of industrial work and labor—both in separate photoreports-ages and in special sections (usually one-page collages) devoted to domestic and traditional crafts—showcasing the self-initiative and inventiveness of Slovenian self-management. The pre-war portrayal of work did not yet reflect a modern division of labor or the conceptualization of work as paid and organized labor (Komlosy, 2018, 75), nor did it fully embrace photographic modernism as it, to borrow from

Leto XX., št. 14.
Izšla 16. in 25. dan v mesecu.
Osnovni mesecni 300 tiskovnih
in dodatni 100 tiskovnih
tiskovnih dan v mesecu.
Dane posredno tiskovnih
Dne 2.—mesecni Dne 10.—
tiskovnih Dne 10.—Za 10.—
se tiskovnih Dne 10.—

**Politična pisarna v govorici
V Ljubljani, 25. julija 1933.**

**W organizaciji je moč,
kotter moč — toliko pravice.**

**Uredništvo in tiskarna
Ljubljana, politični predel 298.**

DELAVEC
STROKOVNI ČASOPIS.

Vtisi iz trboveljskih revirjev.

I.
Zbrali smo podatke in računali:
V vseh revirjih Trboveljske družbe
je bilo v juniju blizu 2000 rodnih, ki
so nastali od meseca od 200–400
Din, v povprečju okrog 400 Din.
Poleg tega je bilo v revirjih toliko
nastalih otrok okrog 500 rodnih,
ki so bili hčerke vseh proroč-
nja in zastavka. Največkrat se
stavljeno račun nima je kazal, da je
bilo traba za ta mesec dolžne toliko
za 80000 Din povzeli, da
ta bila njih proročnja zastavka. Ka-
kor bi se človeku tudi zdelo, da po-
vede te številke menijo, vendar smo
si rekli, potem ko smo si očetih
prijatelji na lica menijo: Steje, človek
ko ne govori! Oni ne morejo izra-
ziti druge besede za prihodnje, ki bi
bilo proročnja in menijo ne ro-
dnariki kolonizacijski! Ne morejo izra-
ziti toliko daru očetih, ki menijo ob
plačilih duha domov prazne
vredne luke.

II.
Med demagogično brezposelnih je
bi družinski oče, ki nam je dejal:
— Vsega imam te pri kmeti-
moy koronane moke pri bili, Sinoči
mi je žena poročila: Toli malo otro-
čice imam, ki ja je zadržila. Za do-
go smo brez domov. Vse na to
poročilo. —
In glava mi je zastila v prihod-
nem jutru.
Dejali smo očetih ob koncu.
Dolgi trdni bledeli, ob njih pa
nastajala mala stanovanja. Vsešč je
stanovanje, kar sama kmetija. V se-
zanoni vrtički stoji na posestvu ob
trboveljski. Vsešč je poleg kuhinje le
ene sobe. Zoper drugo so postavili
v eno večjo kuhinjo štiri hišniki.
Od štirih na vseh štirih vratih v štiri
večje hišnike. Tu stanujejo štiri
rodbine.
Vstopimo v prvo sobo in vpra-
šamo: — Kaj bo danes za obed? — V
zibcu leži otroček, blizu kakor
vosek. — Nisem jaz so takaj, nam
odgovorila žena. — Sinoči je sko-
čila v trgovino. Kaj bo za obed?
Poleg tega so kuhali! Na eni vrti-
ker je nabrlo enajstih! — Poleg
prijatelji se hiti pripraviš vseh
skladu sate. Na vrti postelji je
spal le po en otroček.
— Kako je s milosrdjem? — V vrti
bili za mimom — je odgovorila
sosed. — Danes na rano skoro
nikdar ne dobimo. Jaz sem se le-
maka na eno do tri lina milosrdja, o čem
mi je nekakšna tve da več ni upo-
rje.

Nabrali so rešitve za koncu.
Rodbarske rodbine, ki bi morale i kmetičke rodbine po mleka ne mo-
trajati najmanj po 8000 tiskovnih mleka i rojo prodati!
na dan, so skoro brez mleka.

**Prepovedano stanovanje za sta-
novanje. Povod lina silka.**
Mlada žena ima na prstu do-
jenčka. Z rodnikami se očitnoje.

Neprijazna kolonija.
Naka pomorost je prišla na se-
stavljeno. Povod lina silka.
Kaj stanovanje, ko na drugem na-
dom. — Prišli so nam morda hčer-
ke iz katerega je bilo razvidno, da je
zastilati moči v zadnji 14 dnevi na
čisti, petletni za 8 letov, a 3000

**Prekoračenje delov-
nega časa.**
Z ozirom na pritožbe delavskih organizacij, da se
po industrijah in obrnih izvršujejo nadure, pa da
nadzorna oblast ne ukrene ničesar, ter da po listih
izhajajo vesti o teh nepravilnostih, je minister so-
dalne politike ladi dne 28. m. m. pojasnilo, da se
nabijajo v zakonu o zahtvi delavcev glede delov-
nega časa popolnoma jasne določbe, po katerih
se morajo revalni delodajalci in delojemalci. V
kolikor se te določbe prekršajo, je vsakdo opre-
yiten prekršilo prijaviti in s pritožbi istega podjela
dokazati. Obliasi imajo nalogo, da v vsakem kon-
kretnem slučaju postopajo proti krivci.

Obred naša nade.
Prijetelj rudar, ki nje je volil,
je dejal: Med izstavi den, ki se
predložijo, se ravno samo čem.
Priredbo je zato, da vidite, kako
zelo so pri nas samostojne rudi-
mare. Sicer boste rekli, da na po-
preva stanovnjak danes si denarja,

Ali groze sosedji lačni so?
Mimo je prišel znanec rudar. —
Ali bo kuharja in blazne kreve? —
Ne vem. Ostali hodi, kakor mo-
gode vrtijo, kar smo imeli. Ne mo-
remo samo to, a to obljubljamo.



Fig. 2–3: Filip Uratnik, “Impressions from the Mining District of Trbovlje,” published in *Delavec*, photographer unknown (Uratnik, 1933, 1–2).

Sekula yet again, “avoided the iconography of industrialism, preferring instead the pastoral, the baroque, the sentimental, and the romantic individualism of the portrait” (Sekula, 1983, 223). Common features of the time were whole-page collages of portraits of founders of established firms with photographs of the exterior facades of the company’s buildings, particularly in the weekly *Ilustrirani Slovenec* (a weekly supplement to *Slovenec*, a conservative daily newspaper) and *Domači prijatelj*, as were the interior workshop shots, which often resembled advertisement photography.

One of the rare examples of realistic representations of workers' living conditions of the time, notably the miners', is Filip Uratnik's "Vtisi iz Trboveljskih revirjev" (Impressions from the Trbovlje Mining District), published in *Delavec* pages 1 and 2 on July 25, 1933 (Uratnik, 1933), which includes several photographs of the mining community: bone-thin children's bodies under telling captions "Are we going to bed hungry?," a photograph of an overcrowded miners' colony with the title "Unfriendly colony," and a photograph of parents who are "Gravely concerned" (Uratnik, 1933, 1–2) (Fig. 2–3). The text vividly depicts the hunger of miners' families and their struggle to survive on meagre wages in deplorable, damp, and overcrowded barracks. This is one of the few photoreportages that uses photographs in an explicitly evidential and accusative manner, not surprisingly published by the Slovenian Trade Union Movement; it also stands out as one of the few illustrated articles in the periodical's history.

MINERS IN PHOTOREPORTAGES IN THE PERIOD OF YUGOSLAV SOCIALISM

Industrial working-class iconography in the Slovenian press of the mid-to late twentieth century is epitomized by figures such as the ironworker, rail worker, foundry worker, and most notably, the miner. Characterized by a face smeared with soot, a helmet, and a tool in hand, these workers are often depicted against the dramatic backdrop of white-hot materials in the process of being worked, enveloped in the luminance of ironwork sparks or, in the case of miners, illuminated by the surrounding miners' headlamps. However, it was uncommon for such powerful symbolic imagery to be featured within photoreportages dedicated solely to the theme of labor. More frequently, such symbolic images were found accompanying articles addressing the political and social dynamics of Yugoslav development, self-management, and the advancement of socialist society, as well as significant state anniversaries and commemorations (as exemplified by the numerous covers of periodicals featuring articles on the economy, self-management, syndicalism movements). By contrast, the photographs included in photojournalism pieces, were compositionally far less complex and unassuming, purposefully relegated to the role of illustrating the text rather than standing as focal visual points in their own right.

In the period immediately after the Second World War, the initial postwar press in Yugoslavia concentrated on fragmented portrayals of industrial accomplishments, including power stations, coal mines, trains, and dams, which Sergei Tret'iakov (2006b, 75) might have termed as "heaps of scrap metal". Additionally, this era featured portrayals of shock workers, often through full-page collages of their portraits, celebrating physical labor and highlighting the contributions of workers' collectives and exceptional individuals in achieving

JESENIŠKI DELAVCI SO NA ČELU UDARNIKOV



JAKOPIC FRANCISKA je zaposlen na »Orichel« stiskalnici v kamniški opskurni. Jakobčeva sodeluje v skupini, ki je prekorčila proizvodnjo iz leta 1939. za 30 do 40 % in je doprinesla za ta uspeh znaten delež



TIHARI ANTON, sodelavec kamniarne v skupini na »Orichel« stiskalnici. S svojo prispevnostjo in vestnostjo je pripomogel, da je kolektiv povečal proizvodnjo stroja za 40 % nad predelovno normo.



KALAN MATEVŽ, vodja delovne mize druge izmene je sposobnost izboljšanja postopka za dvigovanje ingotov na težki prosti, s katerim bodo reparaturni deli skrajšani za nad 30 % in tako omogočena večja stopnja proge



RAJNHARD STANKO, je zaposlen kot prvi voljavce na prosti tanke pločevine. Pripomogel je pri kolektivnem delu, da je prekorčila proizvodnjo proge prednja za 22 % in da je uspela izdelava specialne dinamno na troja pločevine



PLASINI CIRIL, prvi voljavce gotovega enovila na prosti tanke pločevine je pri kolektivnem delu vse poase največ pripomogel, da je proge v mesecu januar, februar in marec prekorčila predpisano stopnjo za 22 %. S strokovnim znanjem je pripomogel k izdelavi dinamno na troja pločevine, ki je dostaj v državi le namo izdelovalci

Tekmojemo v obnovi in izgradnji domovine. Tovariš s tovarišem, skupina s skupino, podjetje s podjetjem, kraj s krajem, republika z republiko, ves narod se je združil v tekmovalno. V času službene zaposlitve so se vrnili stare norme, delavci in delovni inteligent sta združila izkustva, združila sta teorijo s prakso. Tako so nastali novi izumi, novi načini organizacije dela in s tem se je visoko dvignila storitost in kakovost, pristopili smo k racionalizaciji proizvodnje.

Naka ljudska oblast je izdala pravilnik za tekmovalno, hotel s tem dati trdne temelje nadaljnjemu tekmovalno, dati možnost pravilne primerjave in ocenitve uspehov, izdelanosti pa tudi formalno priznanje najboljšim borcem v tem boju. Ta pravilnik dohaja naslov »udarnik« sistema tovariša ali tovarišice, ki v trimesečnem nepretrganem tekmovalno v osmurnem delavniku stalno prekorčuje delovno normo vsaj za 20 % ali povprečno stopnjo vsaj za 30 %, ali ki prihrani v istem razdobju vsaj 10 % na materialu, mazivu, gorivu in podobnem, ali pa s svojimi iznajdbami ali predlogi racionalizacije in pospešitve proizvodnje in podjetja ali ustanovi prinaša gnetno korist. Lepi so uspehi. Od avgusta na september t. l. se je število udarnikov zvelo za 23 %, kar je neoporečen dokaz, da delovni polet ljudskih množic hitro narašča in izboljšuje upanje reakcije, da se bo nake delovno ljudstvo naveličalo, utrudilo.

Ni lahko postati udarnik, pogoj so težki. Udarnik mora združevati v dela teorijo s prakso, vajetnost s strokovnim znanjem. Skora 1/4 udarnikov je v starosti od 30 do 50 let, to je v dobi največje zmogljivosti in je pridobljajo delovnih izkušenj. O potrebi strokovne izobrazbe za častni naziv »udarnik« prča dejstvo, da je več kot 1/4 udarnikov kvalificiranih delavcev in samobitov.

Ko govorimo o delovnem poletu nalaga ljudstva, ne smemo pozabiti na našo mladino. Res je, med udarniki ali število zastopana, ker ji manjka delovnih izkušenj, toda toliko bolj številno je zastopana na vsakem proizvodnem delu. Praga Breke—Bavotič je spomenik delovnega poleta naše mladine.

Kdo so naši prostovoljci, kdo so naši udarniki? To so ljudje, ki also nikdar niso v kakšnih izjemno dobrih pogojih, so delavci različnih strok, tudi delavci nestrokovnjaki, telaki, ki live pogostoma v najtežjih pogojih, in vendar radejo preizkušene norme, dvigajo proizvodnjo, obnavljajo, gradijo. To so zavržili začeta splošnega prepoveda, prehoda od osebnega egoizma k vrhovni ideji skupnosti.

Danes ne delamo za grabliljivega tujca ali za domalega izkoriščevalca, danes btrujemo z veseljem svoje delovne sile za boljše bodočnost naš vseh. S svojim delom ne polnimo lepro pajdelcem, danes gradimo novo srečljivo skupnost, Titova Zagoslavlja.



FORJANC BORIS, asistent v matici urvi, je za izboljšanje dela doprinesel prihranek na času in materialu za nad 25.000.— din. S samostojno organizacijo, s pospešeno izdelavo reparatur, z vodstvom pobudo in z vsagledno dostotnostjo dela je vodil kolektiv, ki je zavržil racionalizacijsko delo ter doprinesel s tem stvarne gospodarske koristi



PEKAR GABRIEL, vodja delovne mize je dal pobudo za napravo za dvigovanje ingotov na rite na težki prosti. Z izvedbo te naprave bo povečana proizvodnja, kajti v primeru okvare bo prihranjen na zastoju proge nad 30 % časa



MERV MARTIN, znanor in vodja mehanizne skupine na prosti rite voljavne je samostojtel izboljšanje varovalnega korita za zanke, s katerim je preprečen znaten odstotek izmetov ter izboljšal zastojo proge. Podvig doprinesel prihranek na času in materialu



MOBER ADOLF, sodelavec na »Orichel« stiskalnici v kamniški opskurni je član, prav za prvo organizator udarniške skupine, ki je prekorčila predpisano proizvodnjo stroja za 30 do 40 %. Tovariš Moše je izločilni sodelavec, ki je vsem vzgled pridnosti



ZLBER JANEZ, topilec v martinarni je prekorčil normo delavnega časa za 30 odstotkov. Svoje delo na enem izmed najtežjih mest izlavlja z vsagledno pospeševanjem in vestnostjo, dviga udarničnega duha in doprinesel tako materialne koristi

tovariš. 17

Fig. 4: "The Workers from Jesenice are at the Forefront of Shock Workers" (Tovariš, 1946, 10, 17; photographer unknown).

production targets. These portraits of shock workers served as a postwar counterpart to the pre-war bourgeois portraits of company founders often featured in mainstream illustrated press. The importance of achieving and surpassing production goals was also accentuated in short comparative reportages on different production collectives competing in achieving state-assigned quotas, or with reportages on exemplary workers and collectives—for instance: “S Hukičevim načinom vrtanja se bo proizvodnja nafte lahko podvojila” (With the Hukič Method of Drilling We Will be Able to Double Oil Production), published in *Slovenski poročevalec* on November 5, 1949,¹⁵ or “Jeseniški delavci so na čelu udarnikov” (The Workers from Jesenice are at the Forefront of Shock Workers) published in *Tovariš*, no. 10, 1946¹⁶ (Fig. 4). A whole preceding page to the latter is devoted entirely to the description and praise of the Stakhanov or Stakhanovite movement, the Soviet movement of shock workers named after “the first among shock workers” which excelled in reaching production quotas and which “proved that one man can work for six.”¹⁷ Celebrating the heroes of socialist labor and promoting higher productivity in postwar reconstruction, industrialization, and socialist state-building. In this respect most of the periodicals were similar to the Soviet agitprop model, while it was the *Tovariš* magazine, which was far more focused on visual representation; as a consequence *Tovariš*, especially in the 1950s, developed recognizable aesthetics.

As indicated, the majority of the images in the photoreportages were deliberately assigned a subordinate role, serving primarily to illustrate the text rather than functioning as independent visual focal points. A telling example of this *apparent* subservience of the image to the written word can be found in a photoreportage published on the Miners’ Day in *Dnevnik* on July 3, 1980 “Luč kopačeve toplote” (Light of the Digger’s Warmth). In the lead section of the article, we can read: “It was in the mining districts where the Slovenian proletariat was forged. [...] The flames of revolutionary rebellion raged [...] However, men with strong fists, tired muscles, and soot-covered faces are saving our homeland yet again” (Šefić, 1980, 9; photographs by Lado Čuk).

If one expected the predominance of social realism style imagery in the photoreportages of the mainstream media (heroization of the proletariat, heroic realism) one would be surprised to find the photographs in this photoreportage quite straightforward and stylistically rather unassuming; the miners are presented as cheerful.¹⁸ The images are doubly “miscoded”: on the one hand,

15 *Slovenski poročevalec*, 5. 11. 1949: S Hukičevim načinom vrtanja se bo proizvodnja nafte lahko podvojila, 1. Photographer unknown.

16 *Tovariš*, 1946, 2, 10: Jeseniški delavci so na čelu udarnikov, 17. Photographer unknown.

17 *Tovariš*, 1946, 2, 10: Stehanov in njegovo delo, 16.

18 Highly stylized and heroic imagery was usually reserved for the covers of magazines and dailies or for the title images of the articles on commemorations.



Fig. 5–6: Matija Dermastia, “Tomorrow is a New Day,” published in *Tovariš* with photographs by Ksaver Dolenc (Dermastia, 1970). Reproduction photographs by: Matevž Paternoster/MGML.

being almost neutral, they are in contrast to the strong textual socialist valorization of the miner as the prototype proletarian (social realist heroization of the proletariat), and, on the other, they are incompatible with the article's subtitle which pointed out: "Mining is hard work—systemic solutions will be necessary" (Šefić, 1980, 9). The entire whole-page reportage informs readers that while their work may well be difficult, the mighty miners can handle it.

The culmination of this socialist realist valorization (again, importantly, with a striking lack of heroic socialist imagery) can be found in the photoreportage about a horrific mining accident, an explosion of methane in the Sretno shaft of the Breza mine in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in which forty-nine miners were killed. Entitled "Jutri bo nov dan" (Tomorrow is a New Day) and published in *Tovariš* in 1970 with photographs by Ksaver Dolenc (Dermastia, 1970) (Fig. 5–6), the photographic presentation of the accident includes the photographs of the solemn parade of townspeople of Breza past coffins and wreaths, images of relatives in mourning, the mourning crowd, and miner pallbearers. The text persistently reminds us that this was a case of natural disaster that tore a deep gash into the self-management goals of the entire district and the miners' wishes and hopes for a better life and a decent salary. The article concludes with a tell-tale note that the townspeople of Breza "showed us what they were made of. They were able to take the cruel blows of nature without panicking, one might even say in a stoic manner. Tomorrow is a new day" (Dermastia, 1970, 13). This reportage reminds the public that the "real" victim of the accident is the self-management goal of the community and, importantly, miners and miners' communities are framed through notions of perseverance, endurance, and stoicism. Especially in the *initiative-giving* period of photoreportage they were presented as the ones that are "carrying the country on their shoulders" as the miners served as an ideal and topical symbol of the sacrifice for the common good—"if miners can do it, so can you." Miners stand metonymically for the citizens of the self-management era and metaphorically evoke the image of the ideal citizenry.

The importance of the role of miners and mining in the visual mythology of labor and the labor movement in general is further corroborated by its unified representation throughout the history of socialist self-management, as well as in numerous reportages about commemorative events connected to the history of the labor movement. Among these, a prominent example was the skirmish between the members of the fascist Orjuna and workers that took place in the town of Trbovlje in 1924. The numerous reportages appearing after the Second World War commemorating this event conflated the struggle for workers' and miners' rights, the Communist Party, anti-fascism, and, last but not least, the National Liberation Struggle (in effect amalgamating the figures of the worker, the communist, the proletarian, and the liberation movement



Fig. 7–8: Jože Belin, “A Wall Made of Living Bodies,” published in *Tovariš* (Belin, 1964, 8–11).

fighter).¹⁹ Anti-fascism is highlighted in the photoreportage covering the commemorative event honoring the fortieth anniversary of the skirmish, entitled “Rdeči revirji grobarji Orjune” (Red Districts²⁰ Buried Orjuna) and published in *7D* (Jančar, 1974; photographs by Dragiša Modrinjak) with photographs showing the miners’ ceremonial guard, the laying of carnations, and the unveiling of the monument to the victims, which was attended by a representative of the Communist Party of Spain, who thanked the “Spanish fighters” (members of the International Brigades fighting in the Spanish Civil War) from the ranks of Zasavje miners. Another typical commemorative reportage was published in *Tovariš*, entitled “Zid živih teles” (A Wall Made of Living Bodies) (Belin, 1964) (Fig. 7–8), composed of archival photographs (including a reprint of a postcard featuring the workers killed in the skirmish with Orjuna), photographs of surviving miners who took part in the fight, and photographs of the sites where the fighting took place. The testimony of one of the victims of the violence, miner Karel Razboršek’s, describing his recuperation, very poignantly reveals the ideology behind such commemorative reportages and can be taken as a paradigmatic example of it: “But I got lucky, so that I was able to work in the mine for thirty-nine years and a half with only my right eye and deaf in the left ear” (Belin, 1964, 10). His experience of the Orjuna attack, and the head injury that physically marked him for life, is discursively subordinated to the notion that this was a small price to pay for the ability to work and contribute to the wider social collective. Tellingly the image shows him pointing to his injuries, to the point where the bullet struck his head next to his right eye and exited near his left ear. In effect, the variation of the visual motifs (victims, survivors, site of the attack) and written testimonies shows an attempt to restructure the event to fit the regime’s ideological narrative of the importance of the worker’s struggle and sacrifice for the constitution of Slovenian (and Yugoslav) socialism.

19 A similar conflation is evident in the socialist monuments of the period. In 1980, such monuments were officially designated as “Monuments to the Revolutionary Labor Movement, the National Liberation War, and the Socialist Revolution,” an umbrella title that encapsulates the ideological synthesis of labor movement, anti-fascist resistance, and socialist revolution. A particularly illustrative example is the monument by sculptor Ivan Sabolić erected in Husino in 1954, dedicated to miners. As Horvatinčič (2014, 175–176) explains, the process of constructing this statue involved broad community engagement, including miners, cultural workers, and members of both the city and municipal boards, who collectively deliberated on the appropriate iconography to represent the miners’ legacy. The monument depicts a miner standing with a rifle in hand, while a pickaxe, lamp, and drill lie at his feet; an iconographic arrangement that captures the transformation of the worker into a liberation movement fighter. The miner is “captured” in the moment of leaving behind his tools and taking up arms, symbolically enlisting in the National Liberation Struggle. This visual narrative materially enacts the ideological fusion of labor, communism, and anti-fascist resistance that was central to postwar commemorative discourse.

20 “Rdeči revirji” (Red Districts) is a Slovenian colloquial term for the mining districts of Trbovlje, Zagorje, and Hrastnik.

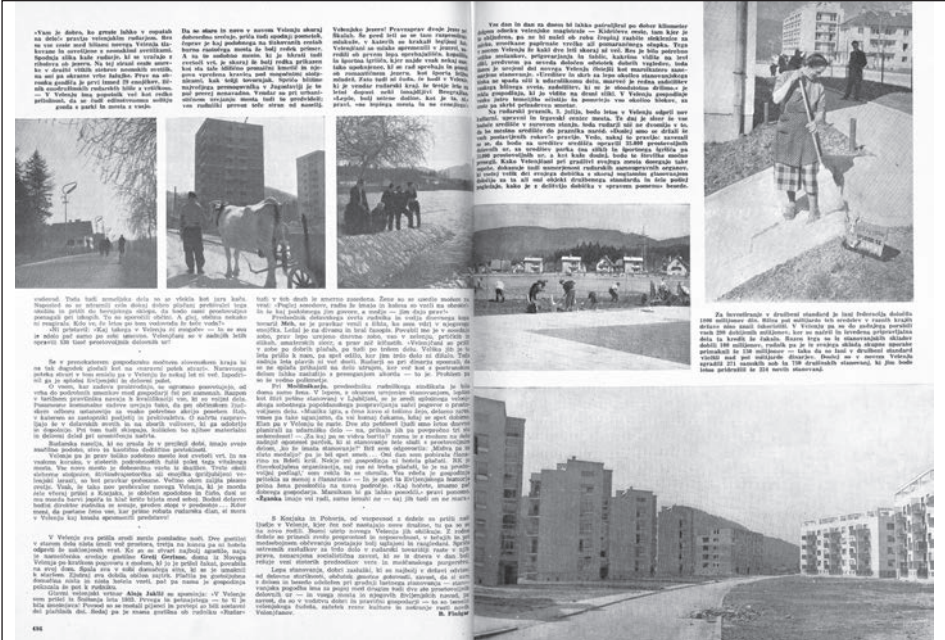


Fig. 9–10: B. Finžgar, “The Velenje Miracle,” published in *Tovariš* on May 1 (Finžgar, 1959).

Igor Gureli

Kaktere je dilalo po sopari in sveži začinici, je kazala četrti čez eno popoldne. Prestor je bil na las podoben prenapolnjeni železniški čakalnici, le da po čakalnici ne postopajo v sive delovne oblike opravišni močje v belih, modrih, rumenih, zelenih in rdečih plastičnih celadah, ki jim ob pasu visijo različne klobučke, vrjake.

pari in sveži zajflni, je
jedne. Prostor je bil na la
zerniki čakalnici, se da po
v sive delovne obleke
modrih, rumenih, zelenih
ab, ki jim od pasu visijo
kove maske.

milijona tona premoaga letna
pripravl v energetski kosi družbe
je dodatnih 200 tisoč ton. In
prejeli sem, da bo moza zastavljen
bi denarji, da ne preostajo
bravajo ga dobavljajo spet naj
milijonov mednarodno delo, ki
od ljudi terja dve "grosdeni" uni bva
nja v krvi, karati pa je bil mesore
ne potoneno prosti slobod. Do
vključno posejidelca, 6. decem
bra, smo radniško izgnali 4 milijon
ov 817 tisoč 400 ton lignita. Pro
stano ogreje ga dobavljajo spet naj
milijonov, dve leti, denarji, moza

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

Velocitni radarji in drugi člani o

REK so doledey za večji končni letni nedelji. Prva udelniška vikend je bil na pobudo rudniških DPO. Udelež skupnih študijskih in sprav, vključno s Slavkom Janžičem in glavno v rudarstva Augustom Tergovcem, jenskih kriv »kar dobro odzorej kolčin, malo luknjača v Tudi druga udelniška akcija, v Organizaciji so jo na iniciativno več kot 2000 zaposlenih. Edor za rudarje, je sodeloval pri študijski Prav tako so obšlih presaj mem 1965 6500 ton nemog.

dravne organizacije REU ter sonda
prihaja izkop premoga hrvaški je šor
bilja je bila 24. novembra, in sicer
Niho se je 1200 knapov, delavcev
v direktoratu REK Veljevo in
dijem proizvodnje dipt. indusrijem
ki sta se po besedah prekratkaj
ba. Nakupali so 6500 ton lignita,
ne cele redne izmene.
je, 12. decembra, je lepo uspela,
odkrija REK Veljevo, prišlo pa je
radi invaritvetnih razlogov za smel
in urjenju okolišč, post in skladni
v rudniški prog ter spot nakupali

»Začel sem v Velenju, pred 19 leti, kot mlad pevec brez uveljavljene kvalifikacije,« se spominja. Veliko praksiškov in inženirskih razpisov sem si moral pridobiti, poudari mi. In uveljaviti. Na poti se srečal s številnimi krutimi

[illegible][illegible]

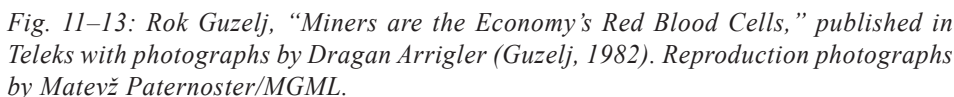
Prvi udarec je prejem dobljav ob gospodarski veloniti leta 1965. Pretegnogostitvo je postalo nerazkopparno s drugini gospodarskimi panogami: prejem je bil podoben, njegove cene so bile daleč pod ekonomskimi, bile so produktivnosti v Evropi.

prezima. Zdravski se navedlo iz razloga što se krenulo na na razrednja ploča raznih kemikalija, ali je njih merozno neoznačavanja. Različni su imali i različite namene, ali su se svi koristili bez neke vrste predostrojenja, dokler ne bi od izloženosti pretrpeli prilično veliku i različitih vrsta ozleđivanja. Zdravski je rekao da su se u vreme odvajanja novca novca poduzimali prenosivost, drugi su pa, kao i drugi, čim su radili došlo posuđe i razne stvari, ali su se svi držali na razini, ali su se držali je drago, soborno za pender, nešto je bilo i su otkriveno. Zdravski je rekao nešto što je bilo razrednja ploča raznih kemikalija, ali je njih merozno neoznačavanja. Različni su imali i različite namene, ali su se svi koristili bez neke vrste predostrojenja, dokler ne bi od izloženosti pretrpeli prilično veliku i različitih vrsta ozleđivanja. Zdravski je rekao da su se u vreme odvajanja novca novca poduzimali prenosivost, drugi su pa, kao i drugi, čim su radili došlo posuđe i razne stvari, ali su se svi držali na razini, ali su se držali je drago, soborno za pender, nešto je bilo i su otkriveno.

42 odhodkov vse skupaj finančne priložnosti premaga, danes pa je slovenskega premaga le še 12,6 odsto. Rodniki delajo na robu finančnih zmogljivosti, rezerve na veliki odstop se počasi izpopoljuje, odpiralna dela in modernizacija jara pa zmanjšajo za najmanj dve leti.

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Tanya Stokar



21 Cf. Andrea Komlosy (2018) and Gareth Lloyd (2008) for a closer explanation of Marx's multifaceted concepts of alienation, actualization, and self-actualization through work.

development, social infrastructure, and living standards with numerous testimonies by locals on their volunteering for the community in workers' brigades (e.g. in building the water pipelines) and, quite tellingly, on how the town authorities were able to engage the peasants from the surrounding villages to work in the mines. "[I]n a word, how to turn anarchic peasant half-proletarians into self-disciplined industrial workers in the shortest possible time," while bringing their "fresh simplicity and straightforwardness" into the town, where they would become more refined and educated (Finžgar, 1959, 485, 486). Numerous photographs showcase the tidy city, volunteer work brigades, leisure activities, and locals cleaning the pavements, with only one, although central, tell-tale image of a miner working in the tunnels. More than any other, this reportage was a rare breach of the otherwise canonical aesthetics of mining and conflation of miners, communists, and resistance fighters; it focused rather on the results of miners' labor and work activities (the town and the community) emphasizing the self-organization of workers, their volunteering, and community-oriented spirit. As Finžgar wrote: "Due to fair wages in mining, the true, unpretentious socialist consciousness grows among the miners' camaraderie, slowly liberating itself from the century-old shackles of religion and bourgeois self-righteousness" (Finžgar, 1959, 486).

Depiction of mining activities more often remained confined to the recurring visual motifs connected to mineshafts, elevator towers, and the imagery of soot-covered mining overalls suspended from chains (in contrast to the previous example). An exemplary case of this type of depiction, which struggled to move beyond these conventional representations, can be found in the photoreportage "Novo življenje živosrebrnega rudnika" (A New Life for the Mercury Mine), published in *Teleks* on April 14, 1983, written by Marjan Raztresen with photographs by Miško Kranjec (Raztresen, 1983). However, there was room to broaden the scope of visual exploration within the mining context. For example the photoreportage titled "Rudarji so rdeče krvničke gospodarstva" (Miners are the Economy's Red Blood Cells), featured in *Teleks* on December 16, 1982, written by Igor Guzelj with photographs by Dragan Arrigler (Guzelj, 1982). This photoreportage represented the miners' labor far more comprehensively, albeit with a recognizable realistic style, canonical valorization of miners, and persisting in their labor environment. It captures moments from their last cigarette before descending into the mine, their elevator journey into the mine, the process of installing support beams, featuring the photograph of the advanced Russian mining drill head, and the interiors of the rescue squad headquarters—complete with emergency breathing apparatuses in the backdrop—and even including a portrait of the rescue team's leader (Fig. 11–13). An earlier example of such comprehensive visualization would be "V zagorskem revirju" (In the Zagorje Mining District) published in *Tovariš* no. 51, in 1949 with the photographs by J. Štravs of the new mining colony, images of various underground and surface activities of mining and, which stands out from most of the other photoreportages, even with the addition of visualization of the leisure time: miners relaxing in front of the mountain lodge which they helped to build "by sacrificing their leave time" (Fig. 14).²²

22 Tovariš, 1949, 5, 51: V zagorskem revirju, 838. Photographs by J. Štravs.



Fig. 14: "In the Zagorje Mining District" (Tovariš, 1949, 5, 51, 838; photographs by J. Štravs).

The lead text of the 1980 *Dnevnik* reportage “Light of the Digger’s Warmth” (Šefic, 1980, 9) adeptly encapsulates the prevailing social imagery of miners, framing them as embodiments of the proletariat, revolutionary resistance fighters, and saviors of the country. This narrative consistently portrayed miners as archetypal, vigorous individuals (Slovenian “knap”), their identities visually signified by soot-covered faces, protective helmets, and captured in the stark clarity of black-and-white photography—a stylistic choice that persisted even into the era of the color press.

Mythologization operates through visual and textual strategies that cast the miner as an emblem of endurance, resistance, and proletarian revolution. Iconographic elements—such as the helmet, the lamp, and the soot-covered face—serve as a visual currency in the circulation of meaning, connoting stoicism, sacrifice, and perseverance as core attributes of the ideal socialist citizen. Photoreportage constructs a sense of historical continuity between the labor movement, the resistance during the Second World War, and the socialist revolution, thereby reinforcing the ideological model of socialist citizenship. Throughout this period, photoreportages consistently convey this narrative, presenting these movements as historically and ideologically inseparable, and ultimately contributing to the legitimization of the Communist Party’s central historical role.

Until the mid-1980s, dailies generally adhered to realistic, straightforward compositions to depict work and labor. Meanwhile, weekly magazines published compositionally more elaborate photoreportages (e.g., from the 1950s in *Tovariš*, and later, in the 1980, in *7D*, *Teleks*, and *Mladina*). However, only a few Slovenian publications achieved the level of critical and stylistic engagement—and the frequency of labor-themed photoreportage—established during the Weimar Republic, particularly in the workers’ press, such as *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* and *Arbeiterfotografie*. Contrary to what might be expected of a socialist media system, most adopted a cross-class mode of representation similar to that found in the mainstream press of capitalist countries, especially in their depictions of miners and mining labor. Moreover, while their work epitomized manual, socialist labor, they were at the same time materially positioned on the social periphery (Petrović & Hofman, 2017, 64).

MINERS IN PHOTOREPORTAGES DURING THE TRANSITION PERIOD AND IN THE INDEPENDENT REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA

The plain, stylistically straightforward tradition in the representation of miners began to crumble with the dynamization and gradual liberalization of the media toward the end of the 1980s.²³ Largely because of the changing political

23 In Slovenia, the 1980s saw a resurgence in socially engaged photoreportage, particularly as the era of “self-management” in media reporting was drawing to a close. This was a time when the disintegration of the Yugoslav federation and the transition to a new socio-economic system prompted a phase of introspection and reassessment of the new and old, marked by critique and, importantly, of visual “creation” of the new social relations.

and social climate, as this was a period of gradual liberalization of Yugoslav societies, a period of growing interethnic and inter-republic tensions, as well as increasing centralization of socialist institutions. With the outbreak of the strike in the Stari Trg mine in Kosovo in 1989, Slovenian society identified with the struggle of the Kosovo Albanian miners against the institutional repression of the Belgrade government. This brought forth a number of photoreportages from Kosovo published in the Slovenian press that focused on miners in a new light, quite different from that of previous reportages in two important aspects. Photoreportages became more focused on visual storytelling, aiming to explain the socio-political context, and usually framed through the stories and images of specific individuals. Furthermore, the representation of mining work was no longer limited to the “atomized” representations of the working act (marking the transition in reporting from *initiative-giving* to *watchdog* reportage). Moreover, the image of Kosovo miners turned into a powerful symbol of the struggle against the central government in Belgrade as the miners’ political agenda coincided with the late-1980s Slovenian socio-political agenda. Only at this point did visual representations of miners reach more profoundly and frequently beyond the visual trappings of the shafts, helmets, and soot-covered faces and entered the wider public space. For instance, as miners took to the streets in protest against the declaration of the state of emergency in Kosovo in “Proti izrednemu stanju” (Against the State of Emergency) in *Mladina*, published on March 8, 1989, with photographs by Jože Suhadolnik,²⁴ or at home where the Kosovo miners were depicted as victims in “Albanci ne pòjejo več” (Albanians are no Longer Singing) in *Mladina* (Lesjak, 1989; photographs by Tone Stojko), often sharing the pages of the Slovenian media with supportive protesters from Slovenia (with photographs of Tito in hand as a sign of unity and against centralism) while “participating” in the solidarity rally in the Cankarjev Dom cultural center in “Scenarij ‘zlahka obljubljene naglice’” (Scenario of “Easily Promised Haste”) in *Delavska enotnost* (Žitnik, 1989; photographer unknown).

A 1992 reportage in *Mladina* entitled “Pod mojo deželo” (Under My Country) foregrounded the miners’ nationality in a significant statement of one of the miners: “You turn Slovenian by going underground” (Gačnik & Hladnik - Milharčič; photographs by Borut Krajnc). This was one of the few acknowledgements of the multi-national character of miners (Slovenes, Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks worked side by side in the mine, even though ethnic tensions were almost at their peak—the Bosnian War “officially” started in April 1992), which was symbolically accentuated by photographs of naked miners in the shower. The reportage emphasized the role of mining in the development of the country “above” and the disillusionment of the district-level policies that perceived mining as “the remnant of the old regime” (Gačnik & Hladnik - Milharčič, 1992, 12).

24 *Mladina*, 8. 3. 1989: Proti izrednemu stanju, 6. Photographs by Jože Suhadolnik.

The *Sobotna priloga* photoreportage “Rudnik Trbovlje - Hrastnik v zapiranju: Adijo, knapi!” (The Trbovlje-Hrastnik Mine Is Shutting Down: Farewell, Miners!) published in *Sobotna priloga* (Župančič, 2007; photographs by Damjan Žibert) is a good example of a reportage reflecting the state of “crisis and recession” (Fig. 15–16). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the miners in the photographs became weary, their stern faces reflecting the burden of their labor. They were portrayed in the moments before leaving the shaft, crouching and stooping down at the mineshaft wall—it was as if their faces reflected the weariness of the new Slovenian society and its coming to terms with the glorified function of the free market. But the strength of these visual conventions remains evident in the predominant aesthetics of the photoreportage and furthermore from the telling comment written by reporter Jana Župančič while encountering the miners to interview them for the photoreportage. She wrote: “Gathered in front of the store by the mine, they appear virtually unrecognizable due to their civilian clothing, lack of helmets and clean faces” (Župančič, 2007, 12).

By the end of the twentieth century, in 1999, miners move visibly “step out of the mines”—be it as pensioners in front of their retirement homes in “Mesto upokojencev” (The Pensioners’ Town) in *Mladina* (Krese, 1999) or as occupying abandoned administrative buildings at mine sites in the reportage “Od rudnika Stari trg do Cankarjevega doma in nazaj” (From the Stari trg Mine to Cankarjev Dom and Back Again) (Hladnik - Milharčič, 2007, 16–19; photographs by Tomaž Skale)

12
sobotna priloga
DELO, 3. marca 2007

Rudnik Trbovlje - Hrastnik v zapiranju

Adijo, knapi!



Jana Župančič
foto Damjan Žibert

Dobro jutro, dan je lep, sonce je visoko na nebu, vendar v tem tunelu ni svetlobe. Tudi tu, v tem temnem, vlažnem, hladnem prostoru, kjer so minarji preživeli večino svojega življenja, ni svetlobe. Tudi tu, kjer so se kdaj kdaj srečali, se zdaj ne srečujejo več. Minarji so se zdaj razšli po svojih domačih krajih, vendar v njihovi duši ostaja ta temni, vlažni, hladni prostor. Tudi tu, kjer so se kdaj kdaj srečali, se zdaj ne srečujejo več. Minarji so se zdaj razšli po svojih domačih krajih, vendar v njihovi duši ostaja ta temni, vlažni, hladni prostor.

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Kako izgleda življenje minarja v sili

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Utrujen korak pred prhanjem in prvim toplim obrokom v dnevnu. Optimizma je iz dneva v dan manj.

»A v Zasavju boljega ni. Če si že 20 let tukaj, kam boš šel drugam?« se vpraša Stefan. »In kdo bo sploh vzel rudarja? Kaj naj dela drugega? Ta poklic je povsem specifičen ... Lahko vzame le lopato v roke, gre na cesto, k židarem ali kam? Res nimaš kam iti ...« Miško iz Kisovca je najprej delal v Zagorju, zdaj v Hrastniku, če bo sreča, še v Trbovljah. »Vse bo dal skozi!« »Ja, pa še vedno ne bom šel v penzijo,« grenko doda in pristavi: »Še 13 let.«

Na najgloblji točki v rudniku, približno 250 metrov pod površjem, dva predstavnika mlajše in starejše generacije urejata dostavno pot. Vinko, ki gre naslednje leto v pokoj, utrjeno dvigne pogled. Za nekaj trenutkov prevlada zgovoren molk: Kaj nas hodi te gledat, kot da smo v živalskem vrtu? Pojma ni matel! »Po delu si utrujen kot pes. Spiš kot otrok, za kaj več ni energije.« Ob vprašanju, kaj bo počel, ko bo končno v penziji, spusti pogled na lopato. Uživaj! »Eh, malo zaslužim tukaj. Kaj si boš privoščil s tem drobižem?«

»Po starem zakonu so knapi odhajali v pokoj med 45. in 48. letom, zdaj pa se starostna meja knapov zvišuje. Če bi šlo za intelektualno delo, bi to pomenilo najboljša leta, češar pa za rudarja zaradi fizične iztrpanosti ne moremo reči,« je povedal pomočnik tehničnega direktorja v RTH. Med napornim fizičnim delom namreč najbolj trpita hrbtenica in križ, zaradi vilage po sklepih trga revma, pogoste so okvare vida in sluha, saj se hrup pod zemljo nima kam širiti.

Ko pozneje s knapi z dizelsko železnico zapuščano javno nedrja jame Ojstro, med ozkimi vagoni, v katere se komajda spravijo štirje možje, glasno odnejavajo ugovaranja, ali je med njimi dejansko kakšen abrahamovec. Nihče se ne spomni nikogar. »Korenine smo le videti, mogoče je dobro videti le lupina,« na kompliment odgovori Rufad. V Slovenijo je prišel iz Bosne kot najstnik, končal kovinarsko šolo, s podzemnim delom si služi kruh že 25 let. »Tukaj imam družino in prijatelje, zato se 'dol' ne bom vračal.«

... nekam v kot v muzej se bo zadigal v štil poplujan herc

Kljub zapiranju zasavskih rudnikov in ukijanju z njimi povezanih dejavnosti, kar je in bo povzročalo velike gospodarske, demografske, socialne, zdravstvene in prostorsko-pokrajinske spremembe, tretjino bruto dodane vrednosti še vedno prispeva jo dejavnosti rudarstva in predelovalne industrije oziroma 49 odstotkov sekundarni sektor v celoti. Spremembe so kažejo zlasti v še vedno nadpovprečno rudarskoenergetski in industrijski gospodarski strukturi,

izraziti dnevni migraciji in socialni sestavi prebivalstva. Zalog premoga je še veliko, še posebej v jami Hrastnik – par milijonov ton –, ampak je že zaprta. Tudi prihodnje delovanje TET, ki jo sedaj poganja edinoletni premog iz RTH, je še zavito v dim. Stopnja registrirane brezposelnosti v Zasavju je že zdaj druga najvišja v Sloveniji – 13,2-odstotna (v državi je 10,2). Regionalni razvojni program sicer kot eno od rešilnih bilk med drugim predvideva tudi spodbujanje razvoja turizma v regiji, pri čemer šteje rudarsko delo za turistični potencial. Zlasti po nekdanjem in še aktivnem rudarstvu prepoznavna regija naj bi to lahko izkoristila v najrazličnejših oblikah, med drugim z vključevanjem rudarske dediščine v turistično ponudbo, oblikovanjem tematske rudarske poti in z ureditvijo rudarskega muzeja v Trbovljah.

... in ko se zadnji zagorce bo na brifot najdu, z njim umri bo se spomin. Adijo, knapi! (Naslov in mednaslovi so iz pesmi Adijo, knapi zagorske skupine Orlek)



Vso odkopno opremo bodo po zaprtju jame Ojstro odpeljali v Trbovlje. Češar ne bo mogoče uporabiti, bo ostalo pod zemljo, kjer naj bi se do leta 2015 končala zapiralna dela.



Jutranja temna je končana. Zbor je ob 6. uri zjutraj, tisti, ki se vozijo iz Dolenjske, so vstali že ob pol štirih zjutraj. Pred odhodom pod zemljo sešatek, na katerem so dobili navodila za delo. Šest ur garanja, pol ure za malico. Zdaj čakajo le še dizelsko železnico, da jih bo odpeljala na površje. Po meter na sekundo.



Po prihodu iz rudnika. Preznojene, zaprašene in blatne delovne obleke knapi obešajo na verigo, nato pa jo do naslednjega dne potegnajo pod strop, da se vse skupaj posuši in prežrači. Pranje obvezne rudarske opreme – boksaric, nogavic, blaz, kratkih majic, srajc in površnikov – je enkrat na teden.

Fig. 15–16: Jana Župančič, "The Trbovlje-Hrastnik Mine Is Shutting Down: Farewell, Miners!," published in *Sobotna priloga* with photographs by Damjan Žibert (Župančič, 2007). Reproduction photographs by: Matevž Paternoster/MGML.



Fig. 17–18: Ervin Hladnik - Milharčič, “From the Stari Trg Mine to Cankarjev Dom and Back Again,” published in *Dnevnikov objektiv* with photographs by Tomaž Skale (Hladnik - Milharčič, 2007, 16–19).

(Fig. 17–18), which touches upon the fate of the miners from the Stari Trg mine just before Kosovo's declaration of independence, and their role in the strike of 1989, as well as the state of the mine, and the future of Kosovo. All of this is conveyed through the miners' stories and portraits, combined with the images of international peacekeeping forces and even local Serb community members.





Fig. 19–21: Rok Kogej, “The Socialist Town” published in Mladina with photographs by Jošt Franko (Kogej, 2014, 46–50). Reproduction photographs by: Matevž Paternoster/MGML.



Prihod rudarjev iz jame po končani stavki v rudniku Trbovlje-Hrastnik. /Foto: Borut Krajnc

Medina 12 / 21.03.2014

Revščina zaposlenih

19

NE SREČNO!

Zakaj številni Slovenci konca krize in recesije ne bodo čutili

Piše: Marcel Štefancič, jr.

Evropska komisija je nedavno sporočila, da bo zamrznila približno milijardo evrov, ki naj bi jo Slovenija dobila za sofinanciranje projektov. In zakaj bo izplačilo tega razvojnega denarja zamrznila? Zaradi nepravilnosti in sistemskih napak, ki jih je ugotovila pri črpanju evropskih sredstev in nadzoru.

Kako lahko tako zamočiš, da izgubiš milijardo? Kako te lahko tako zanese, da ti spodnese masivno investicijo v regionalni razvoj in infrastrukturo? Se pri tem zavedaš, da take investicije pomenijo nova delovna mesta, višji BDP in manjšo brezposelnost?

Ironija je v tem, da se vlada verjetno zaveda, kaj to pomeni – in ji je prav zato vseeno za ta razvojni, investicijski denar. Velike investicije pač niso v skladu s politiko te vlade, toda tudi v skladu s politiko prejšnjih dveh kriznih vlad niso bile. Vse tri krizne vlade so imele jasno politiko: obstaja le ena pravilna pot do okrevanja in višje rasti – varčevanje. Ne pa trošenje. Ne pa državne investicije. Trošenje je nepravilnost. Zato ga zlahka pogrešamo.

V Sloveniji pa je okrog 130 tisoč brezposelnih. Uradno. Dejansko je brezposelnih še bistveno več. Vse več pa je tudi tistih, ki so zaposleni, a se počutijo, kot da so brezposelni. Iz knjige *Revščina zaposlenih*, ki so jo napisale Vesna Leskošek, Simona Smolej, Ljiljana Rihter, Ružica Bošković, Barbara Kresal in Maja Breznik, namreč vemo, da se pri nas vse bolj razrašča nova skupina prebivalstva, ki je »kljub zaposlitvi padla pod prag tveganja

revščine«. Ti ljudje so torej zaposleni, a kljub temu revni. Revni zaposleni, zaposleni revni. Prekarci, fleksibilci, honorarci, samozaposleni.

In to je hudo neobičajno, celo absurdno: zaposleni so, a tvegajo revščino. Prej je veljalo, pravi Leskoškova, da je zaposlitev najučinkovitejši način obvarovanja pred tveganjem revščine, zdaj pa nič več – če si zaposlen, še ne pomeni, da nisi reven ali pa da ne tvegaš revščine. Revščina je prej veljala za posledico brezposelnosti, zdaj pa postaja posledica zaposelnosti.

In to je trend, ki ga ne bo mogoče spreminiti: država je namreč navdušena nad fleksibilizacijo trga dela. Kakovost zaposlovanja je ne zanima. Zanima jo le konkurenčnost Slovenije. Slovenija naj bi tako postala vse mikavnejša za tuje investitorje, ki hočejo čim cenejšo in čim brezpravnejšo delovno silo – in vlada to upošteva. Tuji kapital pač išče trge, na katerih ni stavk – vsi ti honorarci, prekarci in fleksibilci pa so idealni trg, saj so tako razpršeni, da se ne morejo celovsko ali sindikalno povezati. Noben sindikat jih ne varuje. Nimajo niti svojega lobija niti svojega varuha.

Ta trend je slika slovenske prihodnosti. Ne edina. Statistični urad RS je nedavno sporočil, da je bil slovenski BDP v zadnjem četrtletju lanskega leta za 2,1 odstotka višji kot predlani v istem četrtletju. Toda ta podatek, ki bi moral povzročiti vsesplošno veselje, ni nikogar razveselil. Ne brez razloga: BDP je narasel, toda narasla je tudi brezposelnost. Ironično: tega, da se je BDP povečal,

ljudje niso čutili, še najmanj brezposelni ali pa revni zaposleni. Od povečanja BDP-ja niso imeli nič. Še bolj rečeno: okrevali smo, ne da bi to čutili.

Rekli so: to povečanje BDP-ja je bilo osamljeno in enkratno, le odklon, le anomalija, zato ni čudno, da ga ljudje niso čutili! Toda: kaj če je ta anomalija slika slovenske prihodnosti? Kaj če je ta odklon prihodnje pravilo – in trend prihodnosti? Kaj če večina ljudi od okrevanja ne bo imela nič? Kaj če se rast ne bo prevajala v splošno blaginjo? To lahko pomeni le eno: da številni Slovenci tudi konca recesije ne bodo čutili. Okrevali bomo, toda brez povečanja zaposelnosti.

In natanko to pravi Paul Mattick, avtor knjige *Vse po starem*, ki je – v prevodu Marka Kržana – izšla tudi pri nas. Velika recesija se po splošnem prepričanju sicer preveša v okrevanje, toda: »To okrevanje bo okrevanje brez zaposlitev.« Tisti, ki so mislili, da bo okrevanje vrnilo blaginjo in delovna mesta, so se zmotili. Politiki, ki so to obljubljali, so lagali. Ljudje, ki potrežljivo – in miroljubno, dostojanstveno, konstruktivno – čakajo, da se bo vse uredilo, da se bo vse spet postavilo na svoje mesto, da bo trg spet navduševal s svojo nezmotljivo samodejnostjo in da bo vse spet po starem, so se ujeli v past. Prav zato, ker bo vse po starem, ne bo nič več po starem.

Kapitalizem pač ni sistem za zagotavljanje zaposelnosti, temveč »sistem za zaposlovanje ljudi, ki proizvajajo profit«. Kapitalizmu namreč »kljub svoji dinamičnosti in ogromnemu povečanju produktivnosti človeškega

Tema
NESREČNO!

Revščina zaposlenih

Mladina 12 / 21. 03. 2014

Vse tri krizne vlade so imele jasno politiko: obstaja le ena pravilna pot do okrevanja in višje rasti – varčevanje. Ne pa trošenje.

Predsednica vlade Alenka Bratušek je rudarje obiskala med stavko v jami. /Foto: Stanislav Rožanc

dela, ki ga je dosegel od začetka 19. stoletja, in kljub odpravi političnih in družbenih ovir za njegovo širitev v 20. stoletju, ni uspelo ustvariti dovolj profita, da bi glavino svetovnega prebivalstva vključil v svoj industrijski sistem».

Če malce bolje pomislite, je kapitalizem res stalno v minusu. Ne pozabite, koliko dokapitalizacij je bilo potrebnih zadnja leta. Stalno ga je treba dokapitalizirati. Stalno ga je treba reševati. Brez državnih spodbud – potemtakem brez stalnega državnega trošenja – ne bi preživel.

A po drugi strani, tudi sam OECD je pred časom napovedal, da delovnih mest, socialnih izdatkov in pravic, ki jih je vzela recesija, zelo verjetno ne bo nazaj niti, ko se bo začelo okrevanje, ko bosta višja rast in BDP. Ne, visoka stopnja brezposelnosti

ne bo izginila. Še huje: postala bo dolgoročna, strukturna. Toda tudi dolgoročna visoka stopnja brezposelnosti sama po sebi ni nič novega, prava novost je, pravi Enrico Pugliese, »da so se ljudje danes navadili živeti z desetodstotno in ponekod še z višjo stopnjo brezposelnosti,« kar seveda pomeni, da visoka brezposelnost ne ustvarja več kritičnih, eksplozivnih socialnih razmer, kot se je dogajalo v tridesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja, v času velike gospodarske in finančne krize.

Veliki test

In res se zdi, kot da vlade širom po svetu vsa ta leta krize izvajajo veliki socialni eksperiment, veliki test: za koliko lahko še povečajo stopnjo brezposelnosti, ne da bi to povzročilo socialno eksplozijo, nemire, upor

ali revolucijo? Za koliko lahko še razgradijo socialno državo, ne da bi počilo? Za koliko lahko še zmanjšajo socialne izdatke, koliko pravic lahko še posekajo in koliko tretjestvo delovne zakonodaje lahko še vsilijo, ne da bi se ljudem zmešalo? Koliko razdejavanja lahko še vnesejo v življenje ljudi in koliko jih lahko še fleksibilizirajo in prekarizirajo, ne da bi ponoreli? In koliko splošne bede – in revščine zaposlenih – lahko še ustvarijo, ne da bi jih ljudje postavili pred strelski vod?

Če se ozrete naokrog, zlahka ugotovite, da je veliki socialni eksperiment čudovito uspel – ljudje so test uspešno prestali. Eksplozije ni bilo. Kaj šele revolucije. Nemiri in vstaje so bili le praske, ki so za sabo potegnile nove in nove teste, še uspešnejše od prejšnjih. Prehod v kapitalizem je s tem končan, pravi Mattick. Ljudje kapitalizem, ki je zdaj bolj kot kadarkoli svetovni sistem, doživljajo kot povsem naravno in samoumevno ureditev. »Čeprav se ljudje nič manj kot prej ne zavedajo, da živijo v razredni družbi, ki jo zaznamuje zatiranje in izkoriščanje, je to zanje naravno stanje, ki nima realne alternative.«

Tako kot se ljudje navadijo živeti s tako hudo, fatalno boleznijo, so se navadili živeti z desetodstotno brezposelnostjo, z zatiranjem in izkoriščanjem, z varčevalnimi ukrepi in izgubljanjem socialnih pravic, z razgradnjo socialne države in zatonom blaginje. Vse to so postopoma sprejeli kot naravno in samoumevno ureditev. Ali bolje rečeno: kapitalizem so prepustili njemu samemu. Kar je napaka. »Če bo kapitalizem prepustjen sam sebi, si lahko od njega ohetamo desetletja gospodarskih težav z vse hujšimi napadi na zasluge in delovne razmere tistih, ki bodo imeli srečo, da bodo ostali medni delavci, valove bankrotov in prestrukturiranj za kapitalistične firme ter vse hujša nasprotja med gospodarskimi subjekti in državami glede tega, kdo bo za vse to plačal.«

Ni kaj, veliki test je uspel: vlade so kapitalizmu vrnilo vso svobodo, tako da lahko počne, kar hoče, ljudi pa so brez enega samega izstreljenega naboja privadile živeti z desetodstotno brezposelnostjo, z zatiranjem in izkoriščanjem, z varčevalnimi ukrepi in izgubljanjem socialnih pravic, z razgradnjo socialne države in zatonom blaginje, hja, s hudo, fatalno boleznijo.

Tako kot je boleč pogled na politiko, ki je kapitalizem – sredi najhujše krize po II. svetovni vojni! – prepustila samemu sebi, je boleč tudi pogled na ljudi, ki vdano in konstruktivno čakajo na vrnitev objubljenе blaginje (in da bo spet »vse po starem«), pa če tudi je jasno, da kapitalizem, ki je itak stalno v minusu, ne bo mogel poskrbeti za vse, da jih je torej odpisal, prekvafiliral v odvečno prebivalstvo in obsodil na življenje v neviđnem slumu. V Sloveniji robove tega neviđnega sluma že okuša petina prebivalstva, ki živi pod pragom revščine, z revnimi

Fig. 22–24: Marcel Štefančič Jr., "No luck!: Why so many Slovenians will not feel the crisis and recession" published in Mladina with photographs by Borut Krajnc (Štefančič, 2014, 18–20).

One of the very few photoreportages that moved well beyond canonical depictions of miners and mining labor was “Socialistično mesto” (The Socialist Town) published in *Mladina* (Kogej, 2014; photographs by Jošt Franko) (Fig. 19–21), which did not focus narrowly on mining work, but rather presented mining in the context of urban development. Photographs of mining work (monitoring the coal flow, handling dynamite) were intertwined and connected to the miners’ everyday environment—the cultural center Delavski Dom Trbovlje, the swimming pool, and even a calendar featuring naked bodies in a Rudnik Trbovlje Hrastnik mine mechanical repair shop. In a sense, it followed in the footsteps of “The Velenje Miracle” (Finžgar, 1959) but in retrospect focused on the lost, and by now, neglected benefits of “democratic socialism,” echoing the resentment of the transitional era (*Mladina* is one of the weeklies in Slovenia most prominently addressing and criticizing the “myth” of liberal and neoliberal capitalism).

By 2014, miners had left the mines for good. In Marcel Štefančič Jr.’s article on capitalism, unemployment, recession, and crisis, “Ne srečno!: Zakaj številni Slovenci krize in recesije ne bodo čutili” (No Luck!²⁵: Why So Many Slovenians Will Not Feel the Crisis and Recession) (Fig. 22–24), published in *Mladina*, Borut Krajnc’s featured photograph shows two miners leaving the Trbovlje-Hrastnik mine carrying a Slovenian flag after the conclusion of the strike. The strike was interpreted in the mainstream media to be “the last real proletarian strike in Slovenia” (Hrastar, 2014). This marks the culmination of the miner’s symbolic transformation into an image of crisis, Sloveneness, the free market, unemployment, and labor.

CONCLUSION

As has been famously argued by Sekula, the first daguerreotype to capture a human figure also depicted a blurred, laboring body—abstract and unrecognizable. The image, taken by Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre around 1838, shows a bourgeois dandy having his shoes polished on the Boulevard du Temple in Paris, with the shoe polisher blurred beyond recognition due to the long exposure time and his working activity. One might add that this was also the first photographic capture of labor relations and, indeed, of the *commodity-form* of labor itself. Disillusioned by the prevalent twentieth-century liberal art discourse that praised this “first arrestment of the human figure,” Sekula wrote:

What is celebrated? The static moment of consumption, the fashionable pose. What is obscured, denied, disavowed? The productive moment, the energetic blur of that other body, unacknowledged, the working body, the invisible shoe-black. A silhouette and a blur. The former is enough to give us a fictitious

25 “Srečno!” (“Good luck!”) is a greeting written on most mine entrances in Slovenia, wishing good luck to miners entering at the start of their shift. At the same time, it is a recognizable Slovenian miners’ greeting and farewell expression.

identity, replete with style. The latter gives us only this: an instance of average labor, eminently replaceable, eminently forgettable, vaporizing in the flux of the moving throng. (Sekula, 2014, 25)

If one aims to understand how social circumstances and power dynamics are manifested in the public sphere, the focus should not solely be on whether a specific social class or profession is made visible. Instead, the inquiry should revolve around the manner of this visibility: *how* the labor of an individual or a group is presented and integrated into the broader public sphere and, furthermore, on *what* is made visible against the background of the understanding that *visibility* (what can be visualized in a particular dispositive) is tied to the *invisibility* (what cannot be visualized in a particular dispositive) (cf. Keller, 2013; Traue, Blanc & Cambre, 2019).

Despite the visibility of labor in the Slovenian press, abstraction and fragmentation still persist; a certain “blurring” remains present, a certain invisibility or inability of visualization remains. In the process of making labor visible, certain aspects are inevitably omitted or made invisible; some possible visibilities related to labor and work are inevitably suppressed. In the case of Slovenian photoreportages in the mainstream press, the visibility of labor predominantly took the form of typified, abstract representations of work activities. The importance of labor was reduced to the importance of active work, the activity itself—and to catch a worker “in the act” means to catch him *at* work—i.e. to represent labor. In the case of mining, labor was predominantly represented by photographs taken at the time of the beginning of the shift and at the end of it (miners before descending the mineshafts and/or riding the elevator down and miners exiting the mineshafts) and, although less frequently, miners depicted in the mineshafts (drilling or placing support beams).²⁶ One thing that unites most of the visualizations is the predominance of a miner with a helmet, headlamp, and—if “caught” at work or at the end of the shift after exiting the shaft—soot-covered face with only a few visualizations of the intellectual labor involved in mining activities. The engineers, controllers, planners, foremen, directors, and other intellectual experts are featured only scarcely if at all. The highly skilled intellectual labor of the mining sector, its professional and managerial cadres, rarely received the attention given to the manual labor.

Notwithstanding their “factual” concreteness and realism, photoreportages and photographs in general inevitably retained an abstract character which only rarely reached the level of what Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites would call “artistically accomplished depictions of social reality encouraging public thought.”

26 Even though one might be tempted to explain this on the grounds of development of photographic technology (advancement in film emulsions and lenses providing ever shorter exposure times over the twentieth century) or the developments in the electrical lighting of the mines, the research found the photographs “in the tunnels” early in the twentieth century (e. g., in *Ilustrirani Slovenec* and later in *Tovariš*); and while certain compositional and stylistic changes are notable over the years, they are not substantial enough to warrant the narrow techno-deterministic conclusion.

More often they remained at the level of “typified perceptions encouraging mythologies of political participation that serve those projecting the shadows on the wall” (Hariman & Lucaites, 2016, 37). Thus, photoreportages often fulfilled the function of preserving and mediating a normative “mythological” image of social relationships, passing through the predominant social filters: self-management, free market, working class, or nationality, to name only a few. In the case of miners, the difficult working conditions are often seen as inherent to their social and working class, or rather, as a mere reflection and characteristic of that class. The individual miner is frequently portrayed merely as a bearer of the discursive typology and visual iconography established through tradition as pertaining to its social class and profession. Not surprisingly, Allan Sekula aptly remarked that “photographic realism is zombie realism” (Sekula, 2014, 18).

The image of the miner in the Slovenian press hardly changed over a hundred years or so, despite developments in both “media”: ore extraction technology (with the diminishment of dependence on coal as the primary source of fossil fuel), and photography “extraction” technology (the diminishment of its uniqueness in the ubiquitous visuality of today). The frequency of photoreportages featuring mining work and labor oscillated in accordance with the assumed political-economic salience of the role of mining and/or miners in society. From a distinctly neutral, straightforward photography in a photo-collage about industrial work in general, published in *Ilustracija* “By the Sweat of Your Brow You Will Eat Your Bread” in 1929,²⁷ to “The Trbovlje-Hrastnik Mine Is Shutting Down: Farewell, Miners!” (Župančič, 2007), the photographic image of miners and their labor remains tied to mines, helmets, and headlamps. On the other hand, their social image was usually conflated with any other current topical social issue except for their own (e.g. work safety, wages, social position, leisure time, cultural activities, social relations that mining engenders in society, etc.).²⁸ Photoreportages that did not directly address mining or mining labor (e.g., “The Socialist Town” (Kogej, 2014) and “The Velenje Miracle” (Finžgar, 1959)) were able to present labor not only in its abstract form, reduced to the perception of a concrete work act, but also in its concrete social meaning—bringing to the fore the broader social role of labor within the network of bonds woven across social time and space, that is, within social relations. These two photoreportages foregrounded the relationship between the working class, culture, socialism, and economy for the urbanism in the mining towns of Velenje and Trbovlje.

27 *Ilustracija*, 1929, 1, 5: V potu svojega obraza boš jedel kruh, 146. Photographer unknown.

28 This does not mean that the severe working conditions were ignored; rather, it suggests that the critical, factual accounts of these conditions served more as a backdrop, reinforcing and naturalizing the broader message without directly emphasizing or addressing these conditions in wider social and economic relations. However, this began to change in the late 1980s and during the transition to a liberal economy, when the working conditions were put in the wider social perspective.

Perhaps unexpectedly, socialist photoreportage in general failed to produce a genuinely “more socialist” representation of miners, their labor, and their lived experience. It fell short of constructing a social image of the miner that would really embody the socialist ideal of a classless society. In a manner characteristic of mainstream media practices—including those in capitalist Western contexts—it reduced miners to the physicality of their laboring bodies and the immediate environment structured by that labor. The ideologized body of the miner was objectified and aestheticized to the point of near-erasure, displaced by the symbolic prominence of tools and paraphernalia associated with mining. The body itself appeared not as a subject of history but as a passive bearer of ideological meaning.

Only when miners’ status ceased to have a salience in economic terms toward the end of the twentieth century did critical photoreportages begin to appear more frequently. Wages, working conditions, health issues, syndicalism movements, retirement, the shifting employment landscape, and the role of mining in the development of the regions, came more frequently to the fore. These reportages addressed the transitional Slovenian society in the 1990s amid growing criticism of liberal reforms and privatization in general. Once the image of miners and mining could be “archived” and safely historicized, the shift in photoreportages toward a non-abstract meaning of the labor in society was frequently more conceivable. The unrecognizable, atomized representation gave way to more individualized photoreportages (identifiable individuals coming to terms with *neoliberal* economy) and to the broader representation of labor (its role in society) only at the point when capitalism deems the working atomized miners’ bodies as being already redundant in the new post-industrial capitalist exchange. The recognition of a laboring body as being always already exchangeable, replaceable, fragmented—that is, abstract—comes only in retrospect, at the conclusion of a certain socio-political constellation, and it comes at the expense of the recognition of the impossibility of actualization through mining labor itself. In the Slovenian press of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, mining labor becomes visible only on the condition of its loss of salience, on the condition of its “disappearance” from the public sphere.

The discrepancy between the textual valorization and photography’s plainness observed in the photoreportages is structurally functional; it does not create a spectacle of labor. Photographs’ aesthetic of ordinariness—frequently bordering on the amateur or vernacular—facilitates affective identification. Viewers are more likely to identify with representations perceived as simple, familiar, or unstaged, which grants such images a heightened sense of realism and proximity. By presenting labor in a typified, visually unremarkable way, the photographs affectively (sic) participate in the interpellation of the observer as a political and social subject. This occurs through multi-layered visual-discursive connotations: the images appear subservient and merely illustrative, but in fact play an active

role in co-constructing a highly connotative discourse.

For an effective and affective communicative role, the photographs in Slovenian photoreportages on mining and miners “had to” adhere to an aesthetic of the ordinary, steering clear of overly stylized depictions of labor as well as remaining in line with the prevalent notion of the period’s valuation of manual labor. This visual strategy is evident across different historical phases of Slovenian photoreportage: from proto-photoreportages²⁹ in the interwar period to more developed examples from the mid- to late twentieth century, and even in the specific ways individual photographs were used; deviations from this visual norm are rare.

“[M]an likes signs, and likes them clear,” stated Barthes (1977a, 29). Yet, even with photography, the proverbial realistic, analogical medium, this depends less on its supposed realism or denotative capacity than on the circulation—the “traffic” in signs. Visual elements become intelligible through repetition, habit, social use, and the mythologization process that “converts” signs into culturally resonant symbols. A key feature of commodity fetishism—unlike other forms of fetishism—is that it is produced within and through the very structures of production (Lloyd, 2008, 7–9). Sergei Tret’iakov, a Soviet productivist theorist concerned with the “taming” of photography for social purposes, would add: “Style arises out of social practice” (Tret’iakov, 2006a, 68).³⁰ Photoreportages of miners in the Slovenian press of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries reinforced the specific notion of labor—labor in the abstract. The power of photography in these photoreportages lay in representing, in a symbolically useful form, only those aspects of mining that could be easily abstracted and exchanged. These atomized fragments of labor—abstract representations—correspond to what Sekula described as “an instance[s] of average labor, eminently replaceable, eminently forgettable, vaporizing in the flux” (Sekula, 2014, 25). The depiction of miners in the Slovenian press serves as a testament to the role of photography as an ideal medium for the exchange of ideologically charged meanings or values. The consistency and relative uniformity of photoreportages on mining and miners produced in what is now Slovenia—across four social systems and five states—supports this perspective, with only rare deviations

29 Early versions of photoreportage can be termed proto-photoreportage. The term describes the nascent state of Slovenian photoreportage of the interwar period (Tomanič Trivundža, Babnik & Skočir, 2021, 123).

30 For a more detailed exploration of the relationship between labor, laboring body, photography and reproduction, and the similarity between the labor and photography (both are meaningful in the capitalist exchange only on the condition of their reproducibility—they are “embodied reproducibility”), cf. Novak (2007, 142). For the alternative “socialist” conceptions of photography in the reproduction of the everyday, cf. Tret’iakov (2006a–b), Osip Birk (1989a–c), Fore (2006), and Buchloh (1984). For a more general conception of the construction (or production) of the socialist everyday through socialist “appropriation” of commodity fetishism, cf. Arvatov (2017).

from the norm.³¹ And Slovenian photoreportages of miners (with some mentioned exceptions) *fragmented* the laboring miner and the labor itself to its most “unassuming” visual form, to the most readily recognizable visual signs—making the miners and mining labor anonymous, equalized, and, importantly, interchangeable and repetitively reproducible. This enabled an intensified *meaning exchange*—amplified levels of connotation—*unification* of meaning in these *visual-discursive composites*.

The research in the photoreportages of miners in the Slovenian press has shown that photography *reified* the abstract mining labor through the process of *forgetting* its *use value* (social labor relations) via the double transfer—metonymical “concentration” of the social and cultural memory in the image of the miner and metaphorical displacement, or “extension,” producing connotative, symbolic, *exchange value* photographs most effective for the interpellation of subjects. This was done through the conflation of miners with the workers’ movement, the communist movement, the Second World War resistance fighter, and the socialist proletarian; through the conflation of miners with a self-managed, self-organized communal worker-citizen; through the conflation of miners with a main protagonist of a fight against the centralist Yugoslav government; and finally through the construction of miners as a sign of a transitional society leaving behind its “proletarian” past.

31 Although rare, these examples (among others Borut Krajnc’s naked bodies of the showering miners from “Under My Country” (Gačnik & Hladnik - Milharčič, 1992), Jošt Franko’s and Rok Kogej’s attempt to overcome the abstract meaning of mining labor in “Socialist Town” (Kogej, 2014), Filip Uratnik’s accusative and evidential photoreportage “Impressions from the Mining District of Trbovlje” (Uratnik, 1933)) are all testimonies to the impossibility of the total naturalization of the sign—the impossibility of creation of a *total* social sign—and speak about the signification game between “centripetal and centrifugal” forces that unfolds between the center (normative narratives) and the periphery (counter narratives); cf. Bakhtin’s (1981) concepts of centrifugal, centripetal, and metalinguistic.

VIZUALNA EKONOMIJA ISTOSTI: FOTOGRAFIJA RUDARJEV IN RUDARSKEGA DELA V SLOVENSKI FOTOREPORTAŽI 20. IN ZGODNJEGA 21. STOLETJA

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POVZETEK

Članek analizira reprezentacije rudarjev v slovenskih fotoreportažah od začetkov žanra v zgodnjem 20. stoletju do začetka 21. stoletja. V okviru obdobja, ki zajema narodnozavedno fotoreportažo v obdobju med obema vojnama, graditeljsko fotoreportažo socializma po letu 1945, pobudniško fotoreportažo v poznih 60. in 70. letih ter nadzorstveno, poročevalsko fotoreportažo, ki se je pojavila v poznih 80. letih, članek sledi temu, kako je bila vizualizacija rudarjev in njihovega dela oblikovana in preoblikovana skozi dominantne ideološke narative. Na podlagi Marxovega koncepta blagovne forme ter Barthesovih pojmov naturalizacije in mita ter strukturalističnega razumevanja komunikacije kot simbolne izmenjave, članek razkriva, kako so fotoreportaže abstrahirale delo prek simbolne ekonomije – »vizualne ekonomije istosti«. Analiza pokaže, kako so normativne vizualizacije delovale v okvirih širših družbeno-kulturnih komunikacijskih praks ter kako so določene podobe rudarjev postale kulturno razširjene. Rudarji in njihovo delo so bili abstrahirani v ponavljajoče se vizualne znake – predvsem s sajami prekrite obraze, čelade in svetilke na glavi – ki so utrjevali socio-mitološki status rudarja, ki je vztrajal skozi različne zgodovinske formacije. Takšna vizualna reprezentacija je rudarja konstruirala kot skoraj razosebljeno ikono, prilagojeno »želeni« kolektivni identiteti določenega zgodovinskega obdobja. Članek sledi premikom v reprezentacijah rudarjev in njihovega dela: od poveljnega enačenja rudarjev z delavskim in komunističnim gibanjem; prek njihove upodobitve kot skupnostnih, samoorganiziranih delavcev-državljanov v srednjem obdobju jugoslovanskega socializma; kot simbolov odpora proti centralistični jugoslovanski oblasti v poznejši fazi federacije; ter nazadnje k njihovem uokvirjanju kot sledov proletarske preteklosti v ideološkem okviru slovenske liberalne republike. Kljub slogovnim in tematskim variacijam je prevladujoča podoba rudarja kot vzdržljivega, samopožrtovalnega delavca vztrajala – ob tem pa je večinoma prezrla materialne stvarnosti dela in družbenega položaja. Abstrakcija dela se tako izkaže kot strukturna značilnost slovenske fotoreportaže o rudarjih skozi njeno zgodovinsko pot.

Ključne besede: fotografija rudarjev, fotografija dela, blagovna forma, slovensko fotoreporterstvo, mit in fotografija, simbolna ekonomija, novinarska fotografija

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