

THE POLITICS OF TWO SLOVENIAN RED- LETTER DAYS: REFORMATION DAY AND DAY OF REMEMBRANCE OF THE DEAD

Božidar Jezernik

Introduction

The red or black colors used to differentiate between individual days in many calendars are an important aid to organizing life in a particular society. The typographical devices used to distinguish days of special importance are instrumental in turning historical events and persons into the images of the nation, which its members can admire, from which they can learn, and—not least—for which they can also fight. The prevailing ideology has a decisive role in the choice of color for particular days. By defining which days should be marked as particularly important, those in power not only define which days are suitable for work and which for rest. They also appropriate the past, and canonize knowledge and meaning of the past.

In any society, several groups compete for social predominance, which is why all societies contain several collective memories of historical persons and events. In discovering, correcting, elaborating, inventing, and celebrating their histories, David Lowenthal has suggested, competing groups within a society struggle to validate their present goals (Lowenthal 1996: 302). These competing memories are shaped in a constantly ongoing process that leads to important changes to what is still “important” and what is “not important” anymore. Diverse social groups and individuals view the past in their own way and, in reconstructing the narrative, they include those “facts” that confirm their expectations and viewpoints. Preserving the narrative images of persons and events from the past is, hence, a process of continually determining the significance of individual historical figures and events, while ideological, political, ethical, and other perceptions radiate outwards from within the narratives themselves, in the light of which one interprets and evaluates whatever is still of current concern and what already belongs to the past, what is and what is no longer important (see Jezernik 1979: 239).

In this article I analyze the struggle over how, since 1991, the story of the past is being told in Slovenia. I focus on the narratives connected with two red-letter days: *Dan reformacije* (Reformation Day), 31 October, and *Dan spomina na mrtve* (Remembrance Day of the Dead), 1 November. The primary sources for this analysis are Slovenian newspapers and selected pieces of discourse by influential

church and state personalities. The reason these sources were selected is their opposing and contradictory views on the past. I also included émigré newspapers in the analysis because after WW II some 14,000 members of the *domobrance*, Slovenian anti-Communist military units, were extra-judicially executed and about that many fled the country in 1945, mainly to Argentina and the U.S. I analyze the discourse in secular and Roman Catholic periodicals. The historical events most discussed in connection with these days concern the role of the Lutheran Reformation in Slovenia and the fate of anti-Communist resistance fighters from WW II.

In the analysis, I draw on the model proposed by Teski and Climo (1995) for constructing and reconstructing the past through the memory repertoire, and applied by Cheryl Natzmer (2002: 164) in her analysis of creative expressions and reconciliation in post-Pinochet Chile. According to this model, memory is not a matter of simply recalling past experiences; rather, it is a complex and continuing process of selection, negotiation, and struggle over what will be remembered and what forgotten. Telling the story of a nation's past is a highly political act involving contests over whose stories will be remembered and preserved and whose memories will be repressed or forgotten:

The ownership of memory is a question of power. Individuals and groups struggle over who has the right to represent the past and whose memories will become institutionalized. Creative expression is an arena where that struggle takes place and where it can be observed. Through the stories that people tell, the images they create, the social dramas they enact, and the institutions they embrace and resist, the events of the past are interpreted and transformed into social realities. Memories are given physical substance and become history. (Natzmer 2002: 171)

The struggle over memory is especially intense in societies in which the past is highly contested. The process involves remembering and forgetting, changing and reconstructing one's perception of the past, so that it both supports the needs of the present and projects a coherent future. The past is constructed, reconstructed, and continuously reinterpreted in the light of present events and a vision of the future. This model implies that the past is almost as unknown to us as the future.

Reformation Day

The dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991 brought about new lists of red-letter days in all succeeding new states that emerged on its territory. The newly independent Republic of Slovenia, established in 1991, needed its own narrative of continuity on which it could build its legitimacy as a nation-state. On 21 November 1991, the Slovenian Parliament passed the Holidays and Non-Working Days in the Republic of Slovenia Act (*Zakon o praznikih in dela prostih dnevih v Republiki Sloveniji*, *Uradni list RS/I*, No. 26/91: 1088). In this act, the parliamentarians introduced some new red-letter days associated with the historical events that had led to the establishment of the Republic of Slovenia as an independent state: the holidays *Dan državnosti* (Statehood Day) on 25 June and *Dan samostojnosti in enotnosti* (Independence and Unity Day) on 26 December. Other red-letter days received new names, such as All Saints Day on 1 November, which went from *Dan mrtvih* (Day of the Dead) to *Dan spomina na mrtve* (Day of Remembrance of the Dead). The parliament added 31 October as the non-working day *Dan reformacije* (Reformation Day) to Slovenia's other state and religious holidays, and, in 2010, 8 June *Dan Primoža Trubarja* (Primož Trubar Day). Thus, in the autumn, citizens of Slovenia celebrate two successive days with assumed religious content, 31 October and 1 November, the first a Protestant and the second a Catholic holiday.

The number of Slovenian Protestants and Catholics differs dramatically. According to data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, in the census of 2002, 0.8 percent of the population declared themselves to be Evangelical, and 0.1 percent to be members of other Protestant denominations. The majority of Protestants live in Prekmurje, in the extreme northeast of the country. In the same census, the majority of the population, 57.8%, declared themselves to be Catholic.

Despite the tiny number of Protestants, the then governing elite in 1991 turned back to the period of the Reformation. This choice is not so surprising as it may look because the period brought the Slovenians the first books in their mother tongue, a literary language, and the first mention of the name "Slovenian."

Mihelj (2006) relates the inclusion of Reformation Day in the official holiday repertoire to Slovenian nationalism. According to her analysis of "imagining the nation" in Reformation Day celebrations as reflected in newspapers from 1992 to 2003, the nation is superordinated to religion. The Slovenian state (that primarily "belongs" to ethnic Slovenians in that imagining) is also subordinated to the Slovenian

nation. Mihelj (2006: 133) claims that such a view implies a “civil religion.” Although the imagining of the nation in newspapers was not homogenous, the material analyzed shows that a common and undisputed element was relating Protestantism to the development of Slovenian as an independent language. More controversial ideas included linking Protestantism to the very coming into being and continued existence of the Slovenian nation, and viewing Protestantism as a key factor that enabled Slovenia’s transformation into a modern, tolerant, and pluralistic country: These last two ideas were particularly opposed by the Catholic newspaper *Družina*.

The first official celebration of Reformation Day took place in 1992 in the Evangelical church in Puconci, the center of the largest Evangelical parish in Slovenia. The speakers stressed one after another that the Reformation deserved such a holiday. The senior minister of the Evangelical Church, Ludvik Novak, recalled Martin Luther and his theses, and the further development of the Reformation and Protestantism, which brought faith closer to simple men and nurtured the emergence of literary languages and the creation of national cultures. The literary historian France Zadavec dealt in more detail with Slovenian Protestant writers from Prekmurje, saying that their writing helped generations after them to preserve a sense of nation and awakened literary activity even among Prekmurian Catholics.¹

Before 1992, Slovenian Evangelicals had celebrated other days. For instance, on 21 October 1981, in the Evangelical church in Murska Sobota, they held a service to celebrate the bicentennial of the patent of tolerance issued by the Austrian Emperor Joseph II on 13 October 1781. In this patent, the emperor guaranteed Evangelicals freedom of religious, cultural, and national development, and the performance of religious activities. As reported by Catholic weekly *Družina* on 8 November 1981, during the religious service (in 1981), Evangelicals thanked God for the path achieved “od strpnosti do popolne enakopravnosti z drugimi veroizpovedmi v naši samoupravni socialistični družbeni ureditvi,” (“from tolerance to complete equality with other beliefs in our self-management Socialist social arrangement”). The anonymous reporter adhered to the official narrative when concluding his report:

Our Evangelicals only achieved real freedom in the new Socialist social arrangement, which, through constitutional principles and laws, guaranteed them (as

¹ Jože Pobič et al., “Reformacija si tak praznik res zasluži,” *Delo*, 2 November 1992.

well as other faiths in Slovenia) freedom, equality and unhindered activity and profession of religion.

This way of dealing with the Protestant past aptly demonstrates the limits of public religious discourse in pre-1991 Slovenia.

The first mention of celebrating a specific Reformation Day dates to 1989 and the November issue of the monthly *Evangeličanski list*, where it was reported in an unsigned article entitled “Holiday in Ljubljana” that the celebration on 1 November took place “quietly and unnoticed.”

After 1992, the central state commemorative celebrations of Reformation Day were moved from Prekmurje to the capital Ljubljana. Celebrations have since held to a fixed model: a short cultural program and a speech from one of the leading political figures. The accent in the state celebrations has been generally on the cultural and national importance of the Reformation for the Slovenian nation. This accent continued to predominate in official discourse on the state level. For instance, on the occasion of Reformation Day in 2006, President Janez Drnovšek asserted that “for European peoples the Reformation signified a spiritual awakening after centuries of papal reign.”²

The stress on the cultural role of Reformation Day, which is connected with the development of the Slovenian language, supports the national role of the holiday and thus blurs its religious meaning. Contributions by Protestant authors likewise testify to this development, since they often mention that all Slovenians, not only Evangelicals, can identify with Reformation Day. Protestant authors even treat the importance of Martin Luther in terms of his cultural and spiritual achievements, without mentioning his religious importance (Škalič 2000a: 1; 2000b: 1). Such an interpretation of Reformation Day gave rise to a negative reaction by writers in *Družina* after 1993. Theology professor Drago Ocvirk even claimed that by introducing this holiday, politicians had intended to set people against each other. He claimed this on the grounds that the media exploited this celebration “for libeling and mocking Catholicism.”³ Ocvirk interpreted, in the same article, the absence of a religious emphasis in the state celebration of Reformation Day as atheism, and atheism as the negative “Communist” heritage.

² MMC RTV Slovenija, “Dan reformacije, praznik slovenskega jezika,” 31 October 2006. www.rtv.slo.si/slovenija/dan-reformacije-praznik-slovenskega-jezika/45197.

³ Drago Ocvirk, “Reformacija dneva reformacije,” *Družina*, 14 November 1993.

The Reformation and Counter-Reformation have been at the center of ideological disputes in Slovenia since the 300th anniversary of the death of the Primož Trubar in 1886 (Jezernik 2010). Trubar (1508–86) was the leading personality of the Reformation movement. Therefore, differences in views of the past deriving from the celebration of Reformation Day soon after its proclamation as a national holiday made the scene of conflicts over the proper interpretation of history. In 1999, Reformation Day was even presented in *Družina* as “a holiday of the revolt against the Catholic Church.” Theologian Janez Juhant questioned the veracity of historical facts not only in relation to the Reformation, but also to the post-war massacre of domestic opponents of the Yugoslav National Liberation Army.⁴

Reformation Day as a new red-letter day thus appeared as a sign of great ideological confrontation carrying the main message that the positions of the opposing sides are mutually exclusive and that neither side is prepared to compromise. Catholic authors also tried to throw doubt on the date of Reformation Day, the day before 1 November (All Saint’s Day). For instance, the moral theologian Ivan Štuhec said that 31 October as the date for the holiday is “unfortunate timing,” since people are for the most part focused on visiting graves. According to Štuhec, there is a characteristic lack of religious significance for Reformation Day, and it is politically colored, especially because one can see at commemorative ceremonies “faces of politicians who would rather not be involved with religious matters.”⁵

Above all, authors in *Družina* express disapproval of versions of history that have been selectively chosen by left-leaning politicians, and in which the place of the Catholic religion and Church cannot be seen. In their versions of history, these politicians allegedly ascribe cultural and national importance to the Slovenian Reformers and their movement, with Primož Trubar as the icon. After 1992, *Družina* carried a fair number of articles in which Catholic writers attempt to present the other side of the coin and stress the role of the Catholic Church in the preservation and development of the Slovenian language, culture, and nation in general. As Drago Ocvirk wrote, the Slovenian Reformers were taught literacy, educated, and trained by the Roman Church, and the work that the Protestants started was continued by Catholics, not only in language but in all fields of life. According to him, the Catholic Church still today has great national importance, an importance otherwise ascribed to Primož Trubar and the Reformation in general (Ocvirk 1993: 3).

⁴ Janez Juhant. “November 1990,” *Družina*, 7 November 1999.

⁵ Ivan Štuhec, “Vse najboljše!” *Družina*, 2 November 1997.

The profound difference in the perception of the historical role of the Reformation and Primož Trubar, on the one hand, and the Counter-Reformation and its leading representative, Bishop Thomas Chrön (Tomaž Hren in contemporary Slovenian usage), on the other, was most fully expressed at the commemorative ceremony in 2007, during the period of the center-right government of Janez Janša. The authorities at the time gave primacy at the main state celebration to the “Counter-Reformer Thomas Chrön,” while there was no room for mention of Primož Trubar or other prominent members of his movement, such as Jurij Dalmatin, the author of the first translation of the Bible into Slovenian, or Adam Bohorič, the author of the first grammar of the Slovenian language (Vogel 2007: 5).⁶

That Bishop Chrön would appear in the celebration of Reformation Day in 2007 was confirmed before the celebration by the then president of the coordination committee for the state celebration, the politician and writer Aleksander Zorn. The prominent role given to Bishop Chrön was most likely a considered decision. In his 1999 book on Slovenian literature, Zorn claimed that those who want to change society, the state, and politics need to change the past (Zorn 1999: 289). The central celebration of Reformation Day in 2007, then, was an explicit polemic against the liberal perception from the turning point of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which saw Pastor Trubar as a free-thinker and national hero (Jezernik 2010). Or, as Zorn answered a journalist’s question:

Bishop Hren has a dual role. It is known from school curricula that he burnt books but, at the same time, he took very great advantage of what the Protestants had done. He used their language and their translations. He has a dual role, that’s how it is. It would be very difficult to produce any kind of cultural struggle from these two directions of Christianity: Evangelism and Catholicism. Primož Trubar did not write a single hymn. He was not a rebel against the Church as such but against certain forms of the Church. To make from this any kind of story of combat and hang contemporary ideology on it is senseless and far-fetched.⁷

However, Zorn’s interpretation of the past met criticism. The Evangelical Bishop Geza Erniša expressed reservations about Zorn’s role in the celebration of Reformation Day. In Erniša’s opinion, the

⁶ Milan Vogel, “Proslave in njih težave,” *Delo*, 2 November 2007.

⁷ Ksenija Koren, “Proslava poglobila delitve med Slovenci?” *Večer*, 2 November 2007.

inclusion of Bishop Chrön was not “the most felicitous” because Chrön played an important role in the Counter-Reformation and burning of Slovenian books. Bishop Erniša also said that state commemorations were not meant to cause divisions among Slovenians (Blažič 2007: 46; Koren 2007: 3). Other representatives of the Evangelical community asked after the celebration whether it was a celebration of the Reformation or the Counter-Reformation, and some even characterized the commemoration as the rehabilitation of Bishop Chrön (Koren 2007: 3). One of the then leading opposition politicians of liberal background, Pavle Gantar, was considerably more critical of the content of the event. In his blog of 4 November 2007, he wrote that the state commemoration that had been put on that year deserved a different name; *Dan protireformacije* (Counter-Reformation Day) (Gantar 2007).

Conservatives saw the event completely differently. The theologian Metod Benedik, for instance, stressed in *Družina* that Reformation Day is not just a religious holiday for Protestants, or there would not be a state commemoration.⁸ All who helped create the image of the nation must have their place in such a celebration. In his opinion, the ceremony clearly presented the influence and power of the cultural and spiritual activity of Protestants. On the other hand, the ceremony had also showed Bishop Chrön in the right light. For Chrön, printing and disseminating Protestant literature “in any language” was an anti-state activity, and the burning of such books was the implementation of the politics of re-Catholicization. More than the image of Pastor Trubar, Benedik was worried about the public image of Bishop Chrön, which is supposed to have been greatly distorted (Benedik 2007: 3).

A writer for the conservative weekly *Demokracija*, Gregor Blažič, presented another view in an article aptly entitled “Reformer or inquisitor?”⁹ Blažič acknowledged Bishop Erniša’s understanding that the inclusion of Bishop Chrön in the state celebration of Reformation Day was disturbing for the representatives of the Evangelical Church: Bishop Chrön had headed the Counter-Reformation commission, which, with military assistance, destroyed almost everything that the Protestants had created, and expelled them and their adherents or brought them back violently into the Catholic Church. However, Blažič argued that in reality Bishop Chrön had not had a leading role at all in dealing with the Reformation. The main initiator of the Counter-Reformation in Slovenia was Ferdinand II, archduke of Austria, while

⁸ Metod Benedik, “Koga škof Hren še vedno straši,” *Družina*, 11 November 2007.

⁹ Gregor Blažič, “Reformator ali inkvizitor?” *Demokracija*, 15 November 2007.

Chrön was only his agent on a lower level. Moreover, although wagonloads of books were burnt on Chrön's bonfires, Blažič notes that Chrön protected the first translation of the Bible into Slovenian, the work of Jurij Dalmatin. Blažič then presents his view of history with a leap to the second half of the twentieth century, claiming that the debate about how many books Bishop Chrön destroyed also touches on the question of how much literature the authorities destroyed in socialist Yugoslavia between 1945 and 1990 (Blažič 2007: 48).

In 2008, the center-left government of Borut Pahor came to power. The change of government affected the official interpretation of Reformation Day. The principal speakers at the main commemorative ceremony, President Danilo Türk, in 2008, and Speaker of Parliament Pavle Gantar, in 2009, both stressed the positive achievements of the Slovenian Reformation in the cultural field. President Türk presented the period of the European Reformation and especially the role of Slovenian Protestants in the sixteenth century as an important source of inspiration. He stressed that the publication of the first Slovenian books and the translation of the entire Bible placed "the Slovenian nation irrevocably on the map of European nations," and explained that the powerful personality of Primož Trubar was at the center of this important activity. Pavle Gantar stressed in his speech that the Reformation, and with it the Protestant movement in Slovenia, had left an indelible mark, since the foundations were laid for the cultural development and progress of the Slovenian people. In Gantar's opinion, Slovenians could wish that Protestantism had touched them even deeper, including in economic and cultural and rational foundations. He quoted Max Weber's idea of the connection between the development of modern rational capitalism and the Protestant ethic.

The reaction of *Družina* was predictable. In 2009, the columnist Andrej Fink alleged that Reformation Day is intended to raise a revolt against the Catholic Church and the pope, and expressed his amazement at the "strange religious zeal":

So many words about Trubar's merits and the first Slovenian books, and not a euro of support from the government side for his recently published translated Catechism. Strange religious zeal! Only one reformation in Slovenia is not yet finished: ideological and political!¹⁰

Judging from discourse related to Reformation Day celebrations and typical reactions to it, the introduction of Reformation Day then does not seem to have contributed to the unity of the Slovenian people.

¹⁰ Andrej Fink, "Čudna religiozna vnema," *Družina*, 8 November 2009.

Recollections of the past still differ: left wing and liberal politicians and Protestants highlight the role of Protestantism in Slovenia far more than conservative politicians and Catholic intellectuals. The same groups quarrel over the red-letter day that follows immediately after Reformation Day.

Day of Remembrance of the Dead

Although the great majority of Slovenians do not celebrate Reformation Day, 1 November is an important holiday that people observe in large numbers. On 1 November, cemeteries in Slovenia are full of lit candles, flowers, and people remembering the deceased. The custom is a clear expression of Catholic tradition of All Saints and All Souls' Days (Kuret 1970: III, 112). The whole of pagan Europe celebrated its festivals of the dead, and the old pagan belief in the return of the spirits of the deceased later obtained Christian concept and entered popular belief. Still today in some places in Slovenia, people say that the souls of the dead sit on the graves on All Saints Day and watch who visits them (Kuhar 1990: 12).

Facing death incites horror and fear in people because of the feeling of helplessness, since death cannot be resisted by any human means. On the other hand, death is perhaps the strongest linking factor of human societies, which unites the powerless individuals into a powerful community.

The custom of visiting the cemetery on 1 November and decorating the graves of their near and dear developed in the 1870s in accordance with the spirit of nascent individualism—in Slovenian towns, too. Because of the powerful feelings that the idea of death triggers, the new custom in the process of democratization of political life quickly became an important tool in the struggle for hearts and minds. The graves of great men and famous patriots became an important gathering point of those with similar political attitudes. With the end of the WW I, graveyards had grown considerably in Slovenian towns and villages. Visits to the graves of the victims of war gained strong emotional associations and new interpretations, which again strengthened the feeling of solidarity. From this feeling developed the custom of collecting the “countable coin”—that is, a certain coin given as a contribution for the poorest by each visitor.

Interwar Yugoslavia was multi-confessional, yet in 1931, as reported by *Nova Doba*, the Catholic feast of *Vsi sveti* (All Saints Day) on 1 November was declared a national holiday when all shops had to remain closed. By then, All Saints Day was already firmly rooted in

tradition (Koštomaj 1923: 1; Kuret 1970: III, 112–13).¹¹ The authorities of socialist Yugoslavia did not put an end to it, despite socialist Yugoslavia being based on a radical break with the past. In the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, other religious holidays, including Easter and Christmas, were removed from the official calendar. But 1 November remained marked as a red-letter day. Instead of abolishing All Saints Day, the socialist regime wanted to give it a new, secular content. The regime symbolized the change with a new name: *Dan mrtvih* (Day of the Dead). 1 November was also marked in a new way. Numerous commemorative ceremonies, designed to play a role in the shaping of social memory (Connerton 1989: 48), took place throughout Slovenia on 1 November. Commemorations took place at carefully selected locations, generally beside memorials and graves of members of the National Liberation Army, hostages and other victims of the Nazis and Fascists. The locations selected and commemorative ceremonies suggested that thousands of people “in the years of the most difficult trials, gave their lives for freedom and peace.”¹² The commemorative ceremonies were normally also attended by school children.¹³ Members of the Communist veterans’ Alliance of Combatants took these opportunities to “explain the meaning of the memorial celebrations” (Kos 1981: 11). Only rarely did delegations of pupils carry wreaths or flowers to the memorial plaques or graves of important Slovenian men of letters (Črnič 1978: 18).

Such commemorative ceremonies served as a means to shape the way people were supposed to think about historical events, especially about the National Liberation Struggle during WW II and the Socialist Revolution of 1941–45. The past, especially “the brightest period of our past,” as this period was called by the regime, was placed in the service of a “bright future.” Although the ruling Communist elite was well aware of the power of memory, they also recognized the superior force of forgetting. Day of the Dead had an important role as a basis for social remembering and for forgetting. The regime truly attempted to make a complete break with the (Christian) past and to secularize the present in its entirety; as is well-known, the Yugoslav Communists “were at cross purposes with God” (Čupić 1988: 7). However, paradoxically, secularization of the Christian past did not obliterate its narrative framework. History was still interpreted as a

¹¹ See Vinko V. Gaberc, “O smrti in o življenju,” *Nova Doba*, 31 October 1925; Fran Koštomaj, 1923. “Na Vseh svetih,” *Nova Doba, Priloga*, 1 November 1923.

¹² Jože Čurin, “Spomini živijo,” *Javna tribuna*, 11 November 1986.

¹³ In remembrance of the dead “even pre-school children paid reverence” (Gojanovič 1986: 7).

conflict between Good and Evil (Plumb 1969: 98). At the commemorations, the participants remembered the fallen heroes of the National Liberation Struggle and the Socialist Revolution, reiterating that thousands and thousands of men and women died from 1941 to 1945 for freedom and for a better life in the future. According to the essayist Jože Javoršek, these statements had the deeper meaning:

So, the words that we hear so often on Day of the dead are not meaningless: 'They died so that they would live with us!' They live with us and they demand of us that they fulfil everything for which they fought with their lives and with their deaths.¹⁴

Under conditions of the Yugoslav Communists' "dictatorship of the proletariat," strong voices of opposition were not heard. Yet, the contributors to *Družina* stood against the interpretation of 1 November as a secular holiday. But first in the 1980s, did they begin to strengthen their opposition to celebration of 1 November. First, their opposition appeared mainly in the constant repetition that 1 November is All Saints Day, and that we actually remember all the deceased a day later, on 2 November (All Souls' Day). However, these appeals met with little success, since the writers in *Družina* admitted that the name Day of the Dead "had also become customary among Christians."¹⁵ Columnist Lojze Peterle, who was later to become prime minister in the first democratically elected Slovenian government, then asked:

November 1st, this essentially joyful Christian Feast of All Saints is becoming increasingly the bare day of the dead. We drive death from life and consciousness and lead the corpses to the commune. In the consciousness of the believer, death should mean above all a herald of new life. Do we live and believe thus? Are we not increasingly gnawed by the doubt that death is the end of all?¹⁶

After the independence of Slovenia in 1991, the name of 1 November holiday was officially changed into Day of Remembrance of the Dead. From November 1991 on, the main commemorative ceremony was devoted to those who had fallen in the ten-day war with Yugoslavia in June 1991. Since then each year the highest representatives, in the presence of a guard of honor of the Slovenian army, lay a wreath in the

¹⁴ Jože Javoršek, "Živeli bodo z nami," *Dogovori*, 4 November 1986.

¹⁵ 31 October 1982.

¹⁶ Peterle, Lojze, "Pozor! Smrti vsop strogo prepovedan," *Družina, Družinska priloga*, 6 November 1983.

main Ljubljana cemetery, Žale, to the memory of the victims of the war for Slovenia.

Although reconciliation between former members of the national liberation movement and their domestic opponents has a very pronounced place in the political rhetoric of post 1991 Slovenia, it has also become customary on the Day of Remembrance of the Dead for political elites to strive to shape the social memory of citizens. More than seeking compromise, politicians seek those points on which consensus is impossible. This tendency was first presented in the Slovenian émigré press. For instance, *Svet in dom*, the literary supplement of *Zedinjena Slovenija*, a Slovenian émigré newspaper published in Buenos Aires, noted that “our writers must erect a memorial to all our dead, they must tell about our struggle and our suffering” (Vaš Jur 1946: 6; quoted in Švent 1992: 47). In another émigré magazine, *Svobodna Slovenija*, a columnist demanded that the domestic authorities stop publicly smearing the good name of opponents of the socialist revolution with the reproach of collaboration and treason, publicly recognize the right of victims of the Partisans, and subsequently *domobranci*, to be fighters for the national ideal for which they gave their lives, and enable free access to the places of torture and massacre and thus give back to the victims their human dignity—including memorial features (Arnšek et al. 1987: 211; quoted in Švent 1992: 104). Similar demands regularly appeared in the Slovenian émigré press around 1 November. Despite mentioning “God’s forgiveness,” emigrants did not seek reconciliation, claiming that the dark “shadow of hatred” tended to fall on this thinking. So, for instance, the newspaper *Družabna pravda* wrote that “there is no cooperation between us and the murderers, but only death” (Žužek 1951: 1; quoted in Švent 1992: 114).

In Slovenia, the post-war extra-judicial executions of Slovenians accused of collaboration were for decades a taboo subject, about which people only spoke in fear and with limitations. However, before the first democratic elections in 1990, members of the newly founded Slovenian Democratic Alliance began to talk about it being worth, on the Feast of All Saints, lighting candles on the graves of the victims of Communist partisan cleansings.¹⁷

After 1992, the post-war massacres became an important theme of the Slovenian media. *Družina*, in particular, devoted a considerable number of short contributions to commemorations of the victims of these massacres. There were also frequently articles in *Družina* about the erection of parish memorial plaques for the

¹⁷ *Naš glas*, 27 July 1990.

domobranci killed during and after the war throughout Slovenia, whereby, according to the writers in *Družina*, a “Christian duty” towards the dead was fulfilled.¹⁸ During the time of the center-right government of Janez Janša, 2004–2008, on 1 November, individual ministers laid wreaths at memorial features or on monuments to victims of the post-war massacres.

At first, the media remembered the victims of the post-war massacres in terms of considering the tragedy of human existence (Zadravec 1992: 1). In some media, though, over the years the center-left political parties’ handling of post-war extra-judicial executions came to be seen as disrespectful. They allegedly did not try hard enough to settle the matter in accordance with civilized standards. Eventually, media commentaries became a source of accusations that Slovenia under communism was also a “a land of graves” (Juhant 1999: 3). After 1999, articles devoted to the post-war executions, show a clearer tendency to revise history. In 2003, the Catholic newspaper *Ognjišče* published an interview with Jože Možina, the director of the public broadcaster *Televizija Slovenija*, on his documentary film on the post-war massacres. Možina explained that

the Communist authorities are here comparable with the Nazis, in that after the war they continued the division into Us and Them, whether this concerned the living or the dead, who could not even have a grave. (Turk 2003: 58–59)

After 1991, contributions appeared in *Družina* and *Ognjišče* focusing on priests and Catholicism as victims of persecution on the part of the former political authorities. There were also articles dealing with the victims of the post-war executions. Catholic authors described Gregorij Rožman, the bishop of Ljubljana during WW II, as the ultimate victim of the Communist regime. In addition, Bishop Rožman’s 1946 conviction for collaboration with the occupying forces was declared to be illegitimate, because its real aim had been to be a condemnation of the entire Catholic Church. Many Catholic writers criticize it as “the time of erroneous faiths.”¹⁹ about which Justin Stanovnik, the editor of *Zaveza*, the quarterly of the league of WW II anti-Communist veterans, explained:

Two (faiths) struck at us. One came from the north... The other faith came from the east... It took firm hold among

¹⁸ Ivo Žajdela, 2007. “Pravica do javnega imena: Postavljene spominske plošče v Beli krajini,” *Družina*, 28 October 2007.

¹⁹ Justin Stanovnik, “Revolucija in zguba slovenskega kulturnega ravnotežja,” *Družina*, 1 November 1998.

the Slovenians. It proclaimed freedom and equality, but introduced servitude and inequality. This faith was so dangerous because it triggered civil war among the Slovenians.²⁰

In short, then, occasioned by the Day of Remembrance of the Dead, contributors to public debate such as those by Možina and Stanovnik equated Tito's partisans with the Nazis.

Conclusion

A review of the celebrations of Reformation Day and the Day of Remembrance of the Dead and their different interpretations in public discourse shows that Protestant and Catholic holidays, which the State Holidays and Non-Working Days in the Republic of Slovenia Act linked together after the creation of an independent Slovenian state, do not in reality reflect multi-confessional tolerance and awareness of the importance of both confessions of faith for the cultural development of the Slovenians. According to an analysis of newspaper articles carried out by Eva Batista, commemorative ceremonies on Reformation Day and the Day of Remembrance of the Dead have a feature in common: they selectively shape the memory of the post-war massacres, victims and graves and simultaneously shape the images of former and present political authorities. Since 1991, the religious contents of the two holidays have been subdued and the messages of public figures have become explicitly political in the public debate. On both holidays, commemorations of the past focus on presenting the victims of historical events as martyrs for the 'just cause,' as morally elevated persons, who risked their lives in the struggle against evil. Such commemorations selectively exploit stories of victims from the past in order to show the adherents of the opposing political party as the Other. They also raise those who fight against 'evil' onto a pedestal of high morality.

Because of such behavior, the interpretations of the past in Slovenia of the last twenty years, as Peter Kolšek says, has become 'generally the most current item, without it we are nothing, whether it concerns WW II or independence' (Kolšek 2009: 1).²¹ Also President Türk spoke out against such use of the interpretations of the past, on the

²⁰ Justin Stanovnik, "Spomina ne smemo izgubiti: Ob odkritju neke spominske plošče," *Družina*, 30 October 1994.

²¹ Peter Kolšek, "Božič in dan pozneje," *Delo, Sobotna priloga*, 24 December 2009.

grounds that this is ‘bad practice in Slovenia, that melancholy, tragic events from the past are used for daily politics.’²²

In official discourse, Reformation Day has been de-secularized to a great extent, and strongly related to national values. Prominent participants in public discourse, such as the highest state officials from the centre-left—and, as Mihelj’s (2006; 2007) analyses show, Slovenian mainstream media—stress the connection of Reformation Day and the Slovenian nation, and the decisive role of Protestantism for the Slovenian language and culture, pursuing a nationalistic interpretation of sixteenth-century developments. They emphasize the holiday as a day for all Slovenians. Similarly, what is today’s *Dan spomina na mrtve* was, after 1945, filled with secular meanings. In independent Slovenia, it has been acquiring new, but again secular, meanings. Instead of commemorating those who gave their lives for national liberation and revolution, discourse related to this holiday invokes broader public discussions about victims of Communism and postwar extra-judicial executions in Slovenia.

According to Teski and Climo (1995: 2), the purposes and uses of memories are determined to an important extent by who it is that voices them. The ‘who’ of the memory voice is often a question of power. Not surprisingly, then, if voices of the Catholic Church, specifically in *Družina*, and conservative authors from the centre-right have been against secular interpretations of red-letter days observed on 31 October and 1 November, seeing in them a critique of Catholic values and an attack on the Catholic Church. Since the early 1990s, Catholic writers have attempted to present their own version of the past, stressing the role of the Catholic Church for the Slovenian language, culture, and nation, especially disputing the claims about the strong link between Protestantism and European culture (Mihelj 2007: 278). They also argued that Slovenian Catholic Church, during the Second World War, sided first with Italian and then with German because they wanted to fight against Communism.

Cheryl Natzmer (2002) in her analysis of collective memory in post-Pinochet Chile showed how the political right strived to monopolize social memories of the past through institutionalization and legitimization of its interpretation. The same goal had been pursued by the controlling elites of the Communist Party in Slovenia who, after 1945, also took care to control the collective memory by institutionalization and legitimization of their interpretation of the past. However, similarly as it happened in Chile, opposing collective

²² Danilo Türk, “V Ljubljani bi lahko imeli Trg Demosa,” *Delo, Sobotna priloga*, 24 December 2009.

memories survived against all odds and with the introduction of democratic system of political pluralism, in 1991, the battle of the forces of remembering and forgetting continued in Slovenia as part of democratic political competition. In order to legitimize their present needs, politicians, intellectuals and the media, drawing on Orwellian principle that he who controls the past controls the future (Orwell 1949: 34), are constantly remaking social memory and attempting to make people accept their inventions as the authentic memory of the Slovenian society. The result of this on-going debate is that it is not clear who Primož Trubar was, the father of the first Slovenian book or a heretic, nor what the meaning of the Reformation and the Catholic Church was in the process of construction of Slovenian national identity. In addition, it remains unclear who was on the right side during WW II, the partisans or *domobranci*?

Univerza v Ljubljani

Works Cited

- Arnšek, Ivan, et al. 1987. Vrnjeni in preživeli domobranci. *Tabor*, no. 9–10: 210–13.
- Batista, Eva. 2010. Komemoracije travmatične verzije mitične zgodovine: Primerjava med praznikoma Dneva mrtvih in Dneva reformacije. Forthcoming.
- Connerton, Paul. 1989. *How societies remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Črnič, Valerija. 1978. Dan mrtvih in mladi; *Naša skupnost*, no. 11: 18.
- Čupić, Miodrag. 1988. *Đavolji trougao*, Beograd: Filip Višnjić.
- Cvetinomiški. 1911. Vseh mrtvih dan; *Angelček*, 174–75.
- Gantar, Pavle. 2007. Dan protireformacije. <http://www.zares.si/dan-protireformacije/>.
- Jezernik, Božidar. 1979. Zgodovina v zgodbah ustne tradicije. *Časopis za kritiko znanost*, no. 33–34: 239–77.
- . Ali je Primož Trubar upesnitve vreden junak? In *Reformacija na Slovenskem (ob 500-letnici Trubarjevega rojstva)*, ed. Aleksander Bjelčevič, 53–72. Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete.
- Kos, Ivan. 1981. Zadobrova-Sneberje; *Naša skupnost*, No. 22, 11.
- Kuhar, Boris. 1990. Mrtvi živijo z nami. *Naša skupnost*, no. 10: 12.
- Kuret, Niko. 1970. *Praznično leto Slovencev* III. knjiga. Celje: Mohorjeva družba.
- Natzmer, Cheryl. 2002. Remembering and forgetting. Creative expressions and reconciliation in post-Pinochet Chile. In *Social Memory and History. Anthropological Perspectives*, ed.

- Jacob J. Climo and Maria G. Cattell, 161–79. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.
- Lowenthal, David. 1996. *Possessed by the past. The heritage crusade and the spoils of history*. New York and London: The Free Press.
- Mihelj, Sabina (2006) Protestantizem in slovenski nacionalizem: Analiza medijskih reprezentacij ob Dnevu reformacije (1992–2003). In *Protestantizem, slovenska identiteta in združujoča se Evropa*, ed. Marko Kerševan, 75–142. Ljubljana: Znanstvenoraziskovalni inštitut Filozofske fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani.
- Mihelj, Sabina. 2007. "Faith in nation comes in different guises": modernist versions of religious nationalism. *Nations and Nationalism* 13, no. 2: 265–84.
- Orwell, George. 1949. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. London: Secker and Warburg.
- Plumb, J. H. 1969. *The death of the past*. London: Macmillan.
- Škalič, Gustav. 2000a. Ob prazniku; *Evangeličanski list* 10: 1.
- Škalič, Gustav. 2000b. Volitve; *Evangeličanski list* 10: 1.
- Švent, Rozina. 1992. *Publicistična dejavnost slovenske emigracije po drugi svetovni vojni*. Unpublished M. A. thesis. University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of History.
- Teski, Marea C., and Jacob J. Climo, eds. 1995. *The Labyrinth of Memory. Ethnographic Journeys*. Westport, CT and London: Bergin & Garvey.
- Turk, Miha. 2003. Moj pogled: Jože Možina; *Ognjišče*, no. 11: 58–59.
- Vaš Jur. 1946. Pismo uredniku "Sveta in doma." *Svet in dom*, May 1946: 4–6.
- Zorn, Aleksander. 1999. *Nacionalni junaki, narcisi in stvaritelji. Eseji o slovenski književnosti*. Ljubljana: Založba Mladinska knjiga.
- Žužek, France. 1951. "In večna luč naj jim sveti!" *Družabna Pravda*, no. 51: 1.

POVZETEK

POLITIKA DVEH SLOVENSКИH PRAZNIČNIH DNI: DNEVA REFORMACIJE IN DNEVA SPOMINA NA MRTVE

Radikalne spremembe v političnem sistemu praviloma prinesejo tudi spremembe v simbolnem sistemu določene družbe. Stari simboli se unikajo novim, ki predstavljajo novo ideologijo in nove politične skupine.

Tovrstne posege v simbolni svet analiziram na primeru dveh praznikov, uvedenih v Republiki Sloveniji leta 1992, in sicer dneva reformacije in dneva spomina na mrtve. Oba praznika, ki padata na dva zaporedna dneva, imata navidezno versko vsebino. Dan reformacije pripada evangeličanski verski tradiciji in je bil ob uvedbi v uradnem prazničnem letu Slovencev popolna novost, medtem ko je bil kot Dan spomina na mrtve stoletja del katoliške tradicije. Sosledje evangeličanskega in katoliškega praznika bi lahko bila dobra priložnost za krepitev tolerance in medsebojnega zaupanja, vendar – kot pokaže podrobnejša analiza – politična (zlo)raba obema praznikoma jemlje njuni sakralni razsežnosti, hkrati pa ju pretvarja v torišče kulturnega boja.

Pri analizi narativne podobe preteklost v povezavi z obema praznikoma, sem se oprl na model, ki sta ga razvila Marea Teski in Jacob Climo (The Labyrinth of Memory. Ethnographic Journeys, 1995) za konstruiranje in rekonstruiranje preteklosti skozi spominski repertoar in ga je Cheryl Natzmer uporabila v svoji analizi post-Pinochetovega Čila.