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The Second World War and the Nobility in Slovenia

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Abstract

The article presents the fate of individual members of the nobility who still lived in Slovenia before and during the Second World War with concrete examples. Most nobles rejected Nazi ideology and were therefore considered unreliable by the Nazi authorities. Some of them even supported the resistance movement. Despite that, all members of the former nobility were declared Germans or "Volksdeutscher" after the war. Those who did not withdraw from Slovenia in good time were imprisoned in assembly camps. They either died there due to difficult living conditions or they were executed, and the survivors were later expelled from the Slovene territory. All their (former noble) property was confiscated and nationalized. The post-war period thus represents a decisive moment in Slovene history, when the last remnants of the former nobility, who were part of this territory since the high Middle Ages, were in one way or another removed from the Slovene territory.

Key words: Slovenia, nobility, Second World War, nationalization, deportation

Introduction

"I have always been devoted to the Slovenes; I have lived my entire life in perfect harmony and contentment with them, so that to this day, when I have reached the age of fifty-eight, no one can ever reproach me for having in any way conspired against the Slovene people." With these words, Countess Elsa Auersperg (1888–1963) concluded her appeal to the Ljubljana Confiscation Commission on 12 September 1945. Two weeks later, on 29 August, the commission issued a decision to confiscate all her property on the grounds of her German nationality. In her appeal, the countess, among other things, also invoked her origin:

> I am a Yugoslav citizen of German nationality from the family of Auerspergs, an old family that has lived in Carniola or, rather, Slovenia for more than six hundred years. I have never been politically active, nor have I ever been a member of the German Kulturbund, I have never taken part in the propaganda against the Slovene National Liberation Movement, and despite

> my German nationality, I have always had good relations with the Slovenes."[1]

The new Slovene Communist-dominated government, which conducted a social and ethnic purge in the first months after the war,[2] remained deaf to the plea of the lone and aged countess. Her appeal was rejected. Moreover, three months later, on 19 December 1945, Elsa was deported to Austria. She was found in one of the refugee camps by her brother Erwin (1887–1973), who lived and worked as a hotelier in Austria at the time. Elsa spent the next few years in the Tyrolian town of Hall and died in Innsbruck in 1963.[3]

In a sense, Elsa Auersperg was among the fortunate ones. Her other brother, Adolf (1883–1945), who helped in the administration of the Turjak Castle before the war, met a much darker fate. He and his wife Bianca (née von Adamovich, 1890–1945) retired and lived in Čatež near Brežice, where they remained in advance of WW II. The couple joined the Kulturbund[4] already in May 1941 and allegedly spread enthusiasm for Hitler's Germany, which proved fatal. Immediately after the war, in June 1945, they were arrested and sent to the collection center in Maribor, where Adolf succumbed to disease and died on 19 November, whereas Bianca, who was still held at the Bresternica camp in December 1945, disappeared without a trace.[5]

Among those that interceded with the authorities on behalf of Adolf and Bianca was Elsa, who shed a different light on the wartime developments as well as the destinies of her brother and sister-in-law. Elsa explained to the authorities that although her brother had been a member of the Kulturbund, being a dispossessed former officer and forester in the service of a major land estate had left him with no other option. Adolf and his wife had joined the Kulturbund to protect themselves from intrusive agitators. In addition, Elsa maintained that they were both of very mild character and loyal to the local population because this was how they had been brought up. When the occupying forces were driving the local inhabitants from their homes, the couple stored their furniture and clothes, and returned all the belongings to

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1 ZAL, LJU 468, MLO Ljubljana, Premoženjske zadeve, nemške zaplembe, šk. 1, zapl. št. 31/45.

2 On the Yugoslav government's persecution of unwanted ethnic and social elements, see articles in the miscellany edited by Nećak (1998).

3 ARS, AS 1931, *Seznam Volksdeutscherjev, ki so bili v letih 1945-46 izseljeni od naše oblasti*, št. 59. See also Preinfalk (2005: 146).

4 Kulturbund or Swabian-German Cultural Association (*Schwäbisch-Deutscher Kulturbund*) was a cultural, social, and political organization of the ethnic Germans in Kingdom of Yugoslavia. During WW II, the Kulturbund promoted Nazism in the Yugoslavian German community and collaborated with the German occupational authorities.

5 ARS, AS 1931, *Kulturbund*, 450/1010, 450/2493. See also (Preinfalk 2005: 146).

their owners after the war. Elsa's intercession was fruitless—Adolf, as already mentioned, had died in internment and all trace of Bianca was lost. She had last been seen in the Bresternica camp. The new Communist government seized their house in Čatež (Preinfalk 2005: 146).

These are just two of a number of similar accounts describing the fate that awaited members of the former nobility after the WW II. By then, the nobility no longer represented a special and independent social group like it did in the Habsburg Monarchy, having been formally stripped of noble titles and privileges after WW I in all successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (except Hungary). However, whereas on 3 April 1919, the Republic of German-Austria went as far as legally banning noble titles and making their use punishable (Frölichsthal 1997: 284–85), the laws in the new Yugoslav state were less stringent. The abolition of noble titles would have likely been undertaken by the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, but its existence was too short to address this issue as well. What the state managed to do was issue the Decree of the Presidency of the National Government on 23 November 1918 abolishing the use of "highborn" and "honorable" titles in official written correspondence (Perovšek 1998: 168–69). The problem of the nobility was addressed more specifically by the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. At the end of January 1919, the interim constitution of the new kingdom was proclaimed, with article 7 in its part II (entitled Constitutional Rights of Citizens) stipulating as follows: "The citizens of the kingdom can neither be given or recognized titles of nobility."[6] Two years later, the Vidovdan Constitution of the Kingdom of SHS was even more definitive. Article 4 in Chapter 2 (entitled Basic Civil Rights and Responsibilities) provided as follows: "A single citizenship shall apply for the entire kingdom. All citizens are equal under the law. Everyone is granted equal protection by the governments. No nobility, no titles, and no hereditary privileges shall be recognized" (Škrubej 2010: 301). However, no sanctions were imposed for non-compliance with the stipulation.

This was one of the reasons that noble titles remained in use in the Yugoslav kingdom during the interwar period, at least on an informal level, in the private sphere. And they also repeatedly appeared in official documents, even well after WW II. The above-mentioned reports by the Ljubljana Confiscation Commission thus still referred to the members of the former (especially high) nobility by their titles (e.g., Count Auersperg, Baron Codelli, Baron Lazarini, and so on). However, as it may be reasonably assumed, the noble titles in these cases were not used to extend courtesy, but rather to further substantiate the grounds for the confiscation of noble—that

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6 The interim constitution was also published in daily newspapers—e.g., *Slovenec*, 13 February 1919.

is, German, feudal, foreign, hostile—property. Undoubtedly, the same also held true for Countess Elsa Auersperg.

Because the former Habsburg nobility in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia has been a hitherto largely overlooked research topic, this article constitutes the first tentative survey and an introduction into a wider and more systematic research of this kind in the future.

The nobility in Slovenia between the two wars

The high nobility in the Habsburg Monarchy was made up of all ranks ranging from barons upwards (hence, barons, counts, princes, and dukes), whereas members of the lesser nobility wore the title of knighthood, or the ordinary "von" or "Edler" (both translating as "noble" in English) (Rugále and Preinfalk 2012: 10–11). A few dozen members of the high nobility that remained in Slovenia before WW II descended from families that had lived in this territory for centuries and considered it their homeland. Despite the agrarian reform, most of them still held vast estates that discouraged them from leaving.

It is not an easy task to determine how much of the nobility or, rather, which noble families remained in Slovene territory. One reason is that it is not always clear whether members of a certain family had a permanent or temporary residence in Slovenia in the interwar period. Thus, for example, the princely Windisch-Graetz family held several castles in the former historical province of Carniola (Planina [Haasberg], Predjama, Bogenšperk, Slatna) and Lower Styria (Slovenske Konjice [Trebnik], Oplotnica), as well as a number of castles in Austria and Bohemia. Therefore, they alternately resided in different locations throughout the year (Stekl and Wakounig 1992). Something similar also holds for the Princes of Schönburg-Waldenburg from Snežnik, who had their permanent residence at the Hermsdorf Castle in Saxony, but spent particularly their summers at Snežnik (Slana 2011: 33–39).

Another issue that makes it impossible to determine how many high nobles lived in Slovenia between the two wars concerns those noblewomen that married commoners and assumed their non-noble status. Thus, on encountering the names Petronela Schumi, Otilija Vidic, Ana Traun, or Ida Mohorč without knowing their family background, nothing whatsoever suggests that they were originally the countesses of Lichtenberg[7]—that is, members of one of the oldest and once the most influential noble families in Carniola.[8] Not only that "hiding" behind the surnames of their middle-class husbands renders the noblewomen more difficult to trace, what also raises

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7 For basic information on the countesses and their marriages, see, for example, Schiviz v. Schivizhoffen (1905: 339).

8 On the Lichtenbergs, see above all Slana (2011).

questions is their noble status, which they lost according to the nobility law by entering into a morganatic marriage.

A further problem is the lack of appropriate sources that would bring to light the names of all the members of the former nobility in Slovenia between the two wars. After the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy and in what had become extremely unfavorable conditions for them, most noblemen withdrew into the background, away from the public eye, until they almost entirely disappeared from the social radar. Because the memory of them all but completely faded in the following decades, one also searches for them in vain in professional literature. Thus, for example, one will have great difficulty in finding out that Baroness Sommaruga resided in the relatively remote Čušperk Manor or that Baroness Puthon remained the owner of the Zalog Manor until the end of WW II. Nonetheless, holding the baronial title, both were members of the former high Habsburg nobility.

Despite the obstacles described above, it is possible to roughly estimate that several dozen (perhaps about 150) members of the former high Habsburg nobility lived permanently or temporarily in Slovenia between the two wars.

Many more representatives were from the lesser nobility. They were members of old families that obtained their noble titles still in the time of the Holy Roman Empire (hence before 1806) but were never elevated to barons or higher ranks (for example, Garzarolli, Vest). Even more numerous was the official and military nobility of the nineteenth century, whose members were not of noble descent but were elevated to the rank of nobility.[9] Having never fully developed their noble identity, they largely remained members of the urban middle class endowed with noble titles.

The (especially high) nobility in Slovene territory faced many difficulties after WW I. Apart from the agrarian reform encroaching upon its estates and the Yugoslav constitution formally abolishing noble titles, the nobility was also affected by its weakening numerical strength. Many (particularly members of the lesser and German-oriented nobility) left the Slovene area and primarily moved to (German) Austria. Some did so even before the disintegration of Austria-Hungary; for example, the Counts of Auersperg from Ig. Unlike his cousins at Turjak, Count Erwin Auersperg, the lord of the manor of Ig, already decided to emigrate after he sold his estate at Ig in the summer of 1918. In retrospect, he wrote the following about it: “Due to the overthrow in 1918, I lost the greater part of my property, because after I sold my estate in what is now Yugoslavia—just before the overthrow—I

[9] For noble families from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see above all Rugále and Preinfalk (2010, 2012) and Preinfalk (2017).

was not quick enough to buy another in the German-speaking territory."[10] A few noble families left later, for reasons mostly to do with complications caused by the agrarian reform. Thus, for instance, Baron Friedrich Rechbach sold his Krumperk Castle and moved to Austria in 1928; his example was soon followed by Baron Michelangelo Zois, who auctioned Brdo Castle near Kranj in early 1929 and created a new home in Austria (Smole 1982: 247; Preinfalk 2003: 39).

Reduced in numerical strength and almost completely stripped of its social role after WW I, the nobility was, at least officially, no longer considered a distinct social group, and it therefore cannot be investigated as such. As a rule, archival materials refer to noblemen as Germans, and they also appear in documents dealing with other Germans or German nationals.

The Nobility during the Second World War

In Slovenia, WW II began on 6 April 1941, when Germany invaded the Kingdom of Yugoslavia; the latter capitulated after only eleven days. The territory of Slovenia was divided by three occupiers—Germany occupied the northern part (Gorenjska, Koroška, and Štajerska), Hungary Prekmurje, and Italy the southern part (Dolenjska, Notranjska, and Bela krajina) with the capital Ljubljana, after already having occupied the entire western part of Slovenia (Primorska and part of Notranjska) in accordance with the Treaty of Rapallo in 1920. In the German-occupied area, the Germans pursued a very harsh anti-Slovene policy (Germanization of official life, expulsions of intellectuals and Slovene families, conscription into the German army), while the regime under the Italian occupier was somewhat milder. In the Italian part, called the Province of Ljubljana, a resistance movement soon emerged—the Liberation Front (Osvobodilna fronta), organized into partisan units—in which the Communists eventually took the lead. The partisan movement, later recognized by the Western Allies, more or less successfully resisted the occupier and continued to fight even after the capitulation of Italy in September 1943, when the formerly Italian-occupied area was occupied by German forces.

Against the Partisans, another part of the Slovenes organized, mainly under the influence of the Catholic Church, which opposed communism. These so-called village guards or home guards (Domobranci) allied themselves with the occupier, first the Italian and then the German, which further deepened the civil war between the Slovenes. After the end of

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[10] Erwin Auersperg, Lebenslauf, s. d. (a document in the author's possession): "Durch den Umsturz des Jahres 1918 verlor ich den grössten Teil meines Vermögens, da es mir nicht rasch genug gelungen war, nach Verkauf meines im heutigen Jugoslavien gelegenen Besitzes – knapp vor dem Umsturz – ein anderes Gut in einer deutschsprachigen Gegend zu erwerben."

the war, the Domobranci withdrew abroad, but the Allies returned them to Yugoslavia, where they were executed by the new communist government. These interwar and post-war events still burden relations between Slovenes today.

As already mentioned, a few dozen members of the former high Habsburg nobility remained on Slovene territory before WW II. Their actions during the four-year war depended on each respective individual and had no common denominator—except, perhaps, that none of them joined the Partisans. However, there were a few individuals that provided moral, financial, and material support to the resistance movement. After the war, this was not only highlighted in their own letters seeking to prevent their property from being confiscated or themselves from being expelled, but it was also confirmed by numerous witnesses. One such example was Baron Henrik Lazarini (1906–1987), who was the mayor of Krško during the war. When he was threatened with the confiscation of property in 1946, the National Liberation Council of the City of Krško interceded on his behalf, confirming his Slovene identity and assuring that he was the only expert and agricultural clerk during the occupation, and that it was

> common knowledge that he assisted wherever he could to the Slovene people to prevent the economy from collapsing. He prioritized Slovenes over Gottscheers. He consistently supported and sympathized with the Liberation Front… he was an agent of the intelligence services Kozje.[11]

Nevertheless, the former mayor of Krško suffered a heavy defeat: his entire property was seized and he was expelled from the country (Lazarini 2013: 354–55).

Another active Partisan supporter was Countess Friederike Schönborn (née von Schlözer, 1908–45) at her mansion Slivnica near Maribor. In her memoirs, Vida Hauc (born in 1931 at Dobrovci near Miklavž on the Drava Field), the daughter of an active female Partisan and courier, highlighted Countess Schönborn's Slivnica mansion as one of the major illegal intelligence centers in Styria. The countess disappeared in the turbulent months immediately after the war, and the stories regarding her death and murderers can no longer be verified.[12]

Interestingly (but not at all surprisingly, given the general conditions in Slovenia), some families were divided, with their members supporting opposite sides. There are three known brothers in the Lazarini family: the oldest Henrik (1874–1950), the lord of the manor of Smlednik, remained

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[11] ZAL, LJU 468, MLO Ljubljana, Premoženjske zadeve, nemške zaplembe, šk. 21, zapl. št. 1731/45.

[12] The audio record of the interview with Vida Hauc is accessible at https://4d.rtvslo.si/arhiv/spomini/174406678.

more or less neutral, even though the occupying forces appointed him the mayor of Smlednik; the second-oldest brother Pius (1875–1947) was explicitly anti-German ever since the First World War and supported the Partisan movement; whereas the youngest brother Gottfried (1878–1943) overtly sided with the Germans and became the leader of a local agricultural organization (Ortsbauernführer) in Smlednik. The post-war destiny of the three brothers was in complete correspondence with their orientations—the neutral Henrik was expelled from Yugoslavia, Pius was granted the permission to remain in Slovenia (and was even permitted to reside in Smlednik), and the pro-German Gottfried was executed by the Security Intelligence Service already at the end of 1943 (Lazarini 2013: 371–72).[13]

Of course, such examples are not only found in the Slovene area, but also elsewhere, including Austria. Immediately after Austria was incorporated into the Third Reich, a part of the Counts of Czernin emigrated to the United States of America, from where they lobbied for renewed Austrian independence, whereas another member of the same family joined the Nazi organization Neues Österreich and was known among his contemporaries as one of the staunchest Nazis (Walterskirchen 1999: 57).

However, most of the former high Austrian nobility, or at least the high and essentially still feudal and traditional nobility, denounced Hitler and Nazism (with inevitable exceptions, of course, like everywhere else). The distrust between them and the Nazi movement was mutual. A typical example of such a family from the Slovene milieu was the Counts of Herberstein in Ptuj and Vurberk. Their wartime activities are described in a letter that the district leader (Kreisführer) sent to the Styrian Homeland Association (Steirischer Heimatbund) in Maribor on 28 December 1942 regarding the counts Gundakar (1902–61) and Hubertus (1905–45) Herberstein. Gundakar engaged in agriculture and administered the estates in Hrastovec and Ptuj, and Hubertus was a forestry manager with his residence at Vurberk. In the spirit of the Nazi obsession with race and pure blood, the report opened by determining that "all Herbersteins were of German descent, but just as most Austrian aristocrats, they, too, exhibited all kinds of blood mixtures." The report continued by describing Hubertus Herberstein as an arrogant individual that kept exclusively to himself, whereas Gundakar sought to keep up with the times and had a more collaborative appearance, albeit out of pragmatism rather than conviction. During the Yugoslav period, the report proceeded, neither brother had in any way endeavored to strengthen Germanhood. It concluded that all Herbersteins were legitimist aristocrats, steeped in tradition and the Church, and that they would, at best, adapt to the

[13] After Pius died in the early 1947, a dispute erupted at his funeral between the bearer of the flag featuring a five-pointed star and the sexton holding the cross over priority in the procession (Lazarini 2013: 308).

National Socialist worldview externally, without ever internalizing it. The report concluded with the following:

> Both young Herbersteins are philosophical opponents, without openly declaring themselves as such; they are both fervent church-goers and see themselves as active promoters of the Catholic idea and as advocates of internationalism. Albeit not actively posing as opponents, they are and will forever remain against National Socialism, and it is impossible that they will change (appendix).[14]

The Herbersteins' position was very similar to that adopted by the rest of the former Habsburg nobility that still remained in Slovene territory, but much more neutral and passive compared to most of their counterparts living in the Republic of Austria, for instance, where the nobility took active part in the resistance to Nazism and also paid dearly for it. According to some estimates, almost 85% of the highest nobility (counts and princes) were politically persecuted, interned, or actively involved in the resistance (Walterskirchen 1999: 58). The Anschluss prompted the emergence of numerous resistance organizations in Austria that were either founded or led by noblemen and that subsequently (by 1944) merged into a common resistance movement called O5. Immediately after seizing power and in the course of the years that followed, the Nazis drove many noblemen to concentration camps, including Max and Franz of Hohenberg, the two sons of the heir-apparent Franz Ferdinand, the victim of the Sarajevo assassination, Count Peter Revertera, Count Georg Thurn-Valsassina, Count Alois Lodron, and Count Anton Goess. The family of Archduke Franz Salvator of Austria was held under strict house arrest in the Persenbeug Castle in Lower Styria. One resistance center was housed in the Pottenbrunn Castle near St. Pölten in Lower Austria, where the Nazis executed the castle lord Count Josef Trauttmansdorff and his wife Ellie shortly before the end of the war (Walterskirchen 1999: 59–60).

Although noblemen in Slovenia did not organize a resistance movement, many experienced the Nazis' hatred firsthand. There is a famous example of Count Otto Thurn-Valsassina, a noble from Ravne na Koroškem, whom the Germans dispossessed and sent to prison when they occupied the Meža Valley in 1941, first to Klagenfurt and then to Dachau, from where he returned at the end of 1944 (Wlodyga 1991: 15–16).

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[14] ARS, AS 1931, serija Delna gradiva oseb – originalni nemški dokumenti 1936–1946, t. e. 482, št. III 124295. On 27 February 2006, the text was translated from German by Karel Smolle, a permanent sworn-in court interpreter for the Slovene, Serbian, Croatian, Macedonian, and Bosnian languages. The text is published in its entirety in the appendix at the end of the article.

The passivity of the nobility in Yugoslavia compared to the nobility in Austria might be explained by their relationship to their home state. Whereas noblemen in Austria fought for their country, which they considered their homeland despite its republican system, their counterparts in Yugoslavia never felt or developed a deep sense of belonging to the new state. Not least, because it was headed by the king whom they fought against just a few years before in WW I battles as officers of the Austrian army. This is why they retreated into a state of passivity at the onset of WW II and were also left more or less alone by the German occupying authorities. Just like the rest of the population in the occupied territory, many, especially younger noblemen, were recruited into the Wehrmacht (e.g., a few Auerspergs, Herbersteins, Attems, and others).

Older noblemen often assumed (or continued to perform) official functions under the occupying authorities. Apart from the already-mentioned Lazarinis, one of whom was the mayor of Krško, the other of Smlednik, and the third the representative of farmers, the mayoral office was also held by Baron Hermann Rechbach in Kamnik (Rugale and Preinfalk 2012: 206) and Oto von Detela in Preddvor (Rugale and Preinfalk 2010: 49–50).[15] Most of them survived the war and faced retaliation by the new Yugoslav authorities only afterward.

Other members of the former nobility fell victim to the war itself. Many lost their lives before its end, almost exclusively at the hands of the Partisan or resistance movement. There is a very infamous story about the Counts of Lichtenberg, who lived at Bevke near Vrhnika during the war. In May 1942, the Intelligence Security Service launched a raid on their house over the alleged treason committed by both sons, shooting the father, the mother, and the two daughters (Žajdela 1996: 160–63).[16] Around Christmas of 1943, the same service executed Gottfried Lazarini for having collaborated with the Germans, as well as his nephew Franc (1911–43), even though no complaints had been filed against him as a mere witness; later, the Intelligence Security Service admitted its wrongful action (Lazarini 2013: 372).[17] Another event that attracted major attention was the attack on the Castle Dob near Mirna at the end of 1942, killing several persons who sought refuge there, along with the castle lord Count Felix Logothetti (born in 1893),

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15 Detela was not of high noble descent because the noble title "Edler" was first conferred onto his father, Oto Detela, Sr. in 1898 (Rugale and Preinfalk 2010: 47–48).

16 ARS, AS 1656/11, Gradivo sodnega procesa Preserski most: dopisa duhovniškega urada Bevke in občine Vrhnike o bratih Lichtenberg, Herbertu in Marjanu, glavnima pričama v primeru Preserski most, 1942.

17 In January 1946, the public prosecutor for the district of Ljubljana wrote in connection to the death of Franc Lazarini that "Eng. Franc Lazarini was, indeed, shot by mistake" (ZAL, LJU 468, MLO Ljubljana, Premoženjske zadeve, nemške zaplembe, šk. 21, zapl. št. 1730/45).

his wife Stela (née Countess Barbo-Waxenstein), and their son Deodat (Müller-Aci 1960: 301–309; Žajdela 1996: 80, 107). A few months before the end of the war, in February 1945, the lord of the Oplotnica Castle, Count Hubert Ledebur (1901–45), was killed in an ambush staged by the Security Intelligence Service (Baraga 2000: 131).

A substantial number of noblemen left Slovene territory during the war. The raid on the Turjak Castle sent the Counts of Auersperg into flight (Preinfalk 2005: 140–147), and also their princely cousins at Soteska, who feared that they might become victims of attacks as well (Preinfalk 2005: 279–80). The same fate befell the Barons Wambolt at Hmeljnik—a few family members left Slovene territory before the war, and the last remaining Baroness Anne (Anni) in May 1942, after she was nearly killed in a Partisan attack on her castle (Potočnik 1994: 119–20). The Boštanj (or, officially, the Čušperk) line of the Lazarini family left its home Castle Boštanj near Grosuplje. Fearing destruction, the last lord of Boštanj, Ludvik Lazarini (1906–1991) moved most of the castle furnishings to the Rosenau Castle in Lower Austria. The Boštanj Castle was demolished by the Partisans and the Rosenau Castle was torn down by the Soviet army in 1945 (Lazarini 2013: 165, 236).

The nobility's post-war fate

Many noblemen that awaited the end of the war on Slovene soil refused to move in the belief that they had committed no crime and that therefore no harm would be done to them. Most were tragically mistaken and ended up in concentration camps, where some were executed (e.g., the aforementioned Hubertus Herberstein from Vurberk and the Attems family from Slovenska Bistrica); or they died of starvation or disease (e.g., the poet Countess Alexandrina Sermage [1864–1945], the owner of the Dobje mansion, who was sent to Strnišče [Kidričevo] despite her old age, contracted a disease ther,e and died at the local hospital) (Baraga 2000: 146–47). Those who survived were deported from Yugoslavia almost without exception.

Others simply vanished without a trace. Prince Gottlieb Windisch-Graetz (1899–1945), the lord of the Bogenšperk Castle, awaited the end of the war in Postojna, the seat of the family forest management and the family stock exchange. In May 1945, he set out for Trieste, where he was captured and taken to Ljubljana, after which he was never seen again (Baraga 2000: 150). A similar fate befell Count Victor Auersperg (1907–1946). He was arrested, then released and deported, then returned to Yugoslavia and deported again, after which all trace of him was lost.[18] Mention was already

[18] ZAL, LJU 468, MLO Ljubljana, Premoženjske zadeve, nemške zaplembe, šk. 1, zapl. št. 7/45, 14/45, 21/45. See also Preinfalk (2005: 222–23).

made of the uncertain fates of the lady of the Slivnica Castle, Friederike Schönborn, and Bianca Auersperg.

Prince Anton Sulkowski (1896–1968) from Bresternica was imprisoned for "high treason." He was one of the rare noblemen that were released from prison, allegedly due to insufficient evidence to prove his guilt. He was even allowed to remain in Yugoslavia; nevertheless, the authorities stripped him and his wife of most of their property, leaving them with only two castle rooms, a few surrounding land plots, tools, and some cattle. Reportedly, the couple was immensely popular among the local inhabitants. They made ends meet by selling the remaining parts of their property. After the prince died in a motor accident in 1968, the widow moved to Graz (Rjavec 2016: 221).

A tragic fate befell Count Ferdinand Attems (1885–1946) and his family in Slovenska Bistrica. Attems, who assumed Yugoslav citizenship after WW I, allegedly commented upon the onset of WW II and the arrival of Germans in Lower Styria in 1941 to his employees with the following: "Freedom is over, but the law must be obeyed." During the war, he served as a cavalry captain in the Wehrmacht, first in Zagreb and then at the military command in Maribor. According to later testimonies, he kept many locals from being enlisted on the German roster, which might have been one of the reasons for his discharge in 1944. Nevertheless, in May 1945, Ferdinand Attems and his wife Wanda (née Countess Nostitz-Rieneck) were taken to OZNA (the Department for People's Protection) prisons and in August that same year, they were court-martialed in Maribor. Ferdinand was sentenced to twenty-four months of forced labor and his wife to thirteen months of forced labor. However, in the early 1946, they were taken from the prison camp at Bresternica and executed. The same tragic end was met by their son Emil Hans, who served as a tank operator in the Wehrmacht and participated, among other battles, in the battle for Normandy, where he lost a leg. Captured by the U.S. army, he was exchanged via the Red Cross and sent home in the early 1945. After the war, he was sent to the prisons and concentration camps of the OZNA. Emil Hans was executed along with other detainees at the "Zgornja Bistrica Bunker" at the end of 1945. His younger brothers Franz and Alois ended up in OZNA prisons as well (even though the latter had joined the Partisans and in 1945 returned to Slovenska Bistrica with a Partisan rank), but they were both released after a few months and left for Austria (Frank and Šerbelj 1990: 157).

Regardless of their sympathies or even overt actions for the benefit of the Slovene people, some other individuals, too, were treated as enemies of the people, even though local inhabitants would often testify in their favor. Numerous testimonies have thus been preserved regarding the mayor of Preddvor, Oto von Detela. In August 1945, the schoolmaster Peter Jocif, for example, stated as follows:

> Detela as the mayor and Palm [his grandson Karl Palm, author's note] as the municipal clerk responsible for agriculture have consistently strove for the welfare of all; had it not been for them, the occupier's bloody regime would have left a much deeper scar on the community.[19]

Nevertheless, in the following months, Detela's estates were confiscated and his family was sent to the collection camp in Maribor. Both Oto and his wife (née von Vest) died in the camp in the early 1946, and the family of their grandson Karl was deported (Rugále and Preinfalk 2010: 50; Dežman 2018: 19–34).

A slightly brighter destiny was in store for the mayor of Kamnik, Hermann Rechbach (1908–74), who tried to protect the town, including by allegedly reaching an agreement with the German army not to blow up the gunpowder factory and both bridges on the Kamniška Bistrica River during their retreat from the town. And yet, only a few weeks after the end of the war, the new authorities arrested him and sent him to prison in Ljubljana, where he was sentenced to death for having collaborated with the occupier. To show their disagreement, the inhabitants of Kamnik started to collect signatures for his acquittal or reduction of his sentence. Thanks to their intervention, the mayor's sentence was lowered to a twenty-year prison sentence and confiscation of property. Rechbach was released from prison after serving nine years, found employment as a clerk at the ceramics manufacturer Keramika at Graben, where his wife worked as well. After her death in 1964, he moved to Vienna, where he died in 1974.[20]

After the war, most of the nobility shared the destiny of other Germans in Slovene territory. Despite having Yugoslav citizenship or clearly identifiable Slovene roots, all noblemen and noblewomen were proclaimed German nationals, dispossessed, and some also deported. Most filed an appeal, seeking to demonstrate their Slovene descent or protesting on the grounds that they were not German but Austrian citizens.[21] In her appeal of 21 November 1945, against the confiscation of her property based on her alleged German nationality, Baroness Leopoldina Lazarini (née Gregorič, 1887–1970) stated with indignation: "I am therefore of pure Slovene descent, and I do not know how anyone can contest this by claiming that I am a

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19 ZAL, KRA 12, Okrajni ljudski odbor Kranj, šk. 57.

20 See the entry on Herman Rechbach in *Kamniško-komendski biografski leksikon* and literature cited therein; accessible at http://www.leksikon.si/Oseba/OsebaId/925.

21 On confiscations carried out by the Ljubljana Confiscation Commission, see ZAL, LJU 468, MLO Ljubljana, Premoženjske zadeve, nemške zaplembe.

German national."[22] A similar statement was submitted by her daughter-in-law Ivanka Lazarini, née Bajc (1909–92).[23]

An interesting fate befell the three Auersperg brothers from Ljubljana, the relatives of the Turjak and the Šrajbarski Turn (Thurn am Hart) family branches. The oldest Rudolf (1891–1971), the middle Emil (1892–1977), and the youngest Victor (1903–46) submitted identical appeals on 11 September 1945, against the decree declaring them German nationals. They highlighted their middle-class Slovene mother Marija Miklavčič and stressed that they always spoke Slovene at home and that they also determined themselves as Slovenes in population censuses. Rudolf, deprived of all his property, was granted permission to remain in Ljubljana until his death. The extremely wealthy Emil was accused of collaborating with the occupier and deported, and Victor's destiny, as already mentioned, remains unexplained to date.[24]

The right to stay in Slovenia was granted only exceptionally—for example, to those that had extended an active and demonstrable support to the Partisan movement (e.g., the already mentioned Pius Lazarini). A noteworthy example is presented by the Barons Allmayer-Beck from Plevna Manor near Žalec, one of the few manorial families that were (at least initially) granted the permission to stay in Yugoslavia and not forcibly expelled. The circumstances that warranted such leniency was that Allmayer-Becks collaborated with the Partisans during the war and supplied them with food, on top of which the baron's father-in-law, Oskar Reiner, who owned landed property in the Croatian settlement Alaginci, provided extensive support to the inhabitants of Žalec or, rather, the Savinja River Valley that had been deported to Slavonia. Nevertheless, life at Plevna grew increasingly harder for the Reiners and the Allmayer-Becks, until they finally gave the property in pledge in 1948 and sold it "at a ridiculously low price" a year later (1949). The Reiners moved to Zagreb, and the Allmayer-Becks emigrated to the United States of America (Zimmermann 1998: 273–74), where a part of the family still lives today.

The right to remain in Slovene territory was also granted to women engaged in occupations that were experiencing workforce shortages in the post-war period. Teachers were especially sought after, many among which hid their noble origin, including Ivanka Lazarini (née Bajc), Emilija Lazarini

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22 ZAL, LJU 468, MLO Ljubljana, Premoženjske zadeve, nemške zaplembe, šk. 19, zapl. št. 1634/45.

23 ZAL, LJU 468, MLO Ljubljana, Premoženjske zadeve, nemške zaplembe, šk. 28, zapl. št. 400/46.

24 ZAL, LJU 468, MLO Ljubljana, Premoženjske zadeve, nemške zaplembe, šk. 1, zapl. št. 7/45, 14/45, 21/45. See also Preinfalk (2005: 222–23).

(née Lehmann), and Marija Auersperg (Lazarini 2013: 373; Preinfalk 2005: 220; Preinfalk 2017: 87, 89).

There are furthermore several known cases of elderly and unmarried noblewomen that languished in rented rooms, slowly selling off that little property that they had managed to keep, and whose presence drew attention from their surroundings. One such example was Baroness Sophie Sommaruga (1894–1979) at Čušperk, who lived in the modest conditions of the former manor's agricultural building. The local inhabitants remember her as a humble lady whose noble upbringing rendered her completely unprepared for an independent life in the post-war Yugoslavia. She depended on the assistance of her neighbors, who cooked and cared for her. She donated most objects that she had managed to save from the demolished mansion to her neighbors and visitors, and some items came into the hands of the Ljubljana Historical Archives. Her dwelling was frequented especially by those members of the former nobility and bourgeoisie that, like her, remained in Slovenia after 1945 (Preinfalk 2014: 159–60).

A similar fate was met by Baroness Marija Lazarini (1876–1971), who was granted permission to stay at Smlednik Castle immediately after the war, but was subsequently evicted and lived as a tenant on one of the farms in Smlednik (Lazarini 2013: 310–11, 393). Destiny was slightly kinder to Baroness Eleonore Puthon (1880–1960), who was allowed to retain two rooms in her Castle Zalog near Žalec until her death, and Baroness Hilda Wolkensperg (married Svoboda, 1914–2012), who was, likewise until her death, permitted to reside in a part of her family Castle Puštal near Škofja Loka (Preinfalk 2014: 200). The pre-war manorial lady Irma von Georgievits (née von Pongratz, widowed Countess Wurmbrand-Stuppach, 1886–1970) remained in Ormož, which she had considered her home town all her life and refused to leave, even after being interned in the concentration camp at Strnišče immediately after the war and despite her castle being confiscated. During the last years of her life, she dwelled in a small room in the center of Ormož and made her living as an owner of a flower shop. She retained one room at her former castle, where she kept a few pieces of furniture, which she gradually sold off (Rugále and Preinfalk 2012: 171).

The members of the nobility that survived WW II and were afterwards deported or left on their own accord also continued to consider Slovenia as their homeland from abroad. Many longed for their home environment and started to return as soon as the war ended, at first in secret, and after 1991 openly and regularly; many chose their former homeland as their final resting place. Engelbert and Karl Auersperg and their sister Maria Theresa were buried in 2004 in the family tomb at Turjak, as was Engelbert's wife Eleonore in 2019; in June 2018, the Codelli family tomb in the settlement of Štepanja Vas became the final resting place for Countess Livia

Barbo-Waxenstein; and in September that same year, Count Gundeger Herberstein was buried at Vurberk Castle.

It is difficult to say what their national identity or definition was in the decades after WW II. They certainly identified with the country in which they lived, those in Austria as Austrians or Germans, those in Yugoslavia as Yugoslavs or Slovenes. However, many of them intimately kept the old, provincial identity from the time of the Austrian monarchy—so they considered themselves Carniolan, Styrian, or Carinthian.

Today, there are only a few representatives of the former high nobility in Slovenia (e.g., the Lazarinis, the Marenzis, the Auerspergs), slightly more members of the lesser old nobility (e.g., Vest, Garzarolli), and the highest number of those representing the lesser Austrian nobility (e.g., Gspan, Šuklje, Bleiweis, Hofbauer, and so on).[25]

Summary

After WW I and the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy, several members of the former high nobility (barons, counts, princes) remained in the territory of Slovenia within the framework of the newly established Kingdom of Yugoslavia. These were especially members of families that had lived here for centuries and regarded this area as their homeland. Despite the agrarian reform, most of them still held vast estates that discouraged them from leaving. By then, the nobility no longer represented a special and independent social group, having been formally stripped of noble titles and privileges after the First World War in all successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (except Hungary).

It is impossible to determine the exact number of noblemen in interwar Slovenia because some only lived here occasionally, and many noblewomen adopted a non-noble status upon marrying morganatically and can therefore not be easily identified as members of the nobility. At the same time, practically all noblemen withdrew into the background, away from the public eye, until they almost completely disappeared from the social radar and consequently from the relevant sources. Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that several dozen (perhaps about 150) members of the former high nobility remained on Slovene territory before WW II.

Their actions during the four-year war depended on each respective individual and had no common denominator—except, perhaps, that none of them joined the Partisans. However, a few provided moral, financial, and material support to the resistance movement. Although most of the former

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[25] On noble families of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that remained in Slovene territory, see above all Rugále and Preinfalk (2010 and 2012) and Preinfalk (2014).

high Austrian nobility rejected Hitler and Nazism, unlike their counterparts in the Republic of Austria, nobles in Slovenia adopted a much more neutral and passive stance. This was probably because the nobility in Yugoslavia never felt or developed a strong sense of belonging to the new state.

Just like the rest of the population in the occupied territory, numerous, especially younger noblemen were mainly recruited into the Wehrmacht and the older ones often assumed (or continued to perform) official functions under the occupational authorities. For other members of the former nobility, the war proved fatal. Many lost their lives before its end, almost exclusively at the hands of the Partisan or, rather, resistance movement. A significant portion of the nobility left Slovene territory already during the war.

Numerous members of the nobility that awaited the end of the war on Slovene soil refused to leave in the belief that they had committed no crime and that therefore no harm would be done to them. Most were tragically mistaken and ended up in concentration camps, where some were executed, or they died of starvation or disease. Those that survived were deported from Yugoslavia almost without exception. Others simply vanished without a trace.

After the war, most of the nobility shared the same fate as other Germans. Despite having Yugoslav citizenship or clearly identifiable Slovene roots, all noblemen and noblewomen were proclaimed German nationals. On this basis, they were stripped of their property and some were also deported. Only rare individuals were granted permission to remain in Slovenia, for example, those that had actively and demonstrably supported the Partisan movement or women with occupations that were experiencing workforce shortages in the post-war period (e.g., teachers). There are also several known cases of elderly and unmarried noblewomen that languished in rented rooms, slowly selling off that little property that they had managed to keep, and whose presence drew attention from their surroundings.

The members of the nobility that survived the Second World War and were afterwards deported or left on their own accord also continued to consider Slovenia as their homeland from abroad. Many longed for their home environment and started to return as soon as the war ended, at first in secret, and after 1991 openly and regularly; many chose their former homeland as their final resting place. Today, there are only a few representatives of the former high nobility in Slovenia, slightly more members of the lesser old nobility, and the highest number of those representing the lesser Austrian nobility.

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Appendix

The report that the district leader (Kreisführer) sent on December 28, 1942, to the Styrian Patriotic League (Steirischer Heimatbund) in Maribor in relation to counts Gundakar and Hubertus Herberstein.[26]

Auftragsgemäss übermittle ich eine politische Beurteilung der Grafen Gundacker und Hubertus Herberstein. Diese Beurteilung wurde im Einvernehmen mit der SD-Aussenstelle erstellt.

Die Besitzungen Herberstein in der Untersteiermark gehören rechtlich noch dem alten Grafen Herberstein, der jedoch sehr senil ist und praktisch nicht mehr in Erscheinung tritt. Bewirtschaftet werden die Besitzungen durch die beiden Söhne Gundacker und Hubertus. Hubertus führt hauptsächlich die Forstwirtschaft und wohnt in Wurmberg, während Gundacker sich mehr um die Landwirtschaft kümmert und die Besitzungen in Gutnehag und Pettau verwaltet. Alle Herberstein sind deutscher Abstammung, jedoch sind, wie bei dem meisten österreichischen Aristokraten, auch bei ihnen alle möglichen Blutmischungen festzustellen.

Während Hubertus Herberstein arrogant ist und exklusiv sich abschliesst, versucht Gundacker sich mehr der Zeit anzupassen und zeigt nach aussen hin ein Bemühen mitzutun. Gundacker Herberstein ist bestrebt, wirtschaftlich, hauptsächlich aus Klugheit, mitzuarbeiten.

Beide sind in der jugoslawischen Zeit in keiner Weise positiv für das Deutschtum eingetreten.

Die ganze Familie Herberstein ist nicht nur allein aus Tradition heraus legitimistisch eingestellt, sondern sind sie auch aus Ueberzeugung Legitimisten. Gundacker Herberstein war in der jugoslawischen Zeit Vertreter der Vaterländischen Front für die Oesterreicher in Jugoslavien und hat auch in diesem Sinne gearbeitet. Unter anderem zeigte er auch beim österr. Konsul einen Volksdeutschen an, der Vertretung österr. Firmen hatte, wegen seiner nationalsozialistischen Einstellung.

Aus ihrer legitimistischen Einstellung sind die Grafen Herberstein sehr stark kirchlich gebunden. Sie fühlen sich bis zu einem gewissen Grad, wie viele Adelige, als die weltlichen Vertreter und hatte sich insbesondere Gundacker H. gleich nach dem Umbruch dafür eingesetzt, dass Geistliche in die Untersteiermark kommen und hält er die Verbindung mit dem Bischof von Marburg und auch mit dem Bischof in Graz aufrecht.

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[26] ARS, AS 1931, serija Delna gradiva oseb – originalni nemški dokumenti 1936–1946, t. e. 482, št. III 124295.

Die Herbersteins werden sich nationalsozialistischen Weltanschauung höchstens äusserlich anpassen, sie aber nicht in sich aufnehmen. Sie werden immer traditionell-gebundenen, legitimistischen Aristokraten mit starker kirchlichen Bindung sein. Sie gehen auch nur so lange mit der jetzigen Zeit mit, als sie nicht gegen ihre Anschauung, hauptsächlich in kirchlichen Fragen, steht.

Gundacker H. ist, wie schon betont, bestrebt, wirtschaftlich mitzutun, weil er auf diese Art am ehesten erwartet, wieder zu Geltung zu kommen und seine Besitzungen zurückzubekommen.

Zusammenfassend wäre festzustellen: Die beiden jungen Herberstein sind weltanschauliche Gegner, ohne aktiv als Gegner hervorzutreten, sind kirchlich sehr stark gebunden und fühlen sich als aktive Träger der katholischen Idee und sind international denkend.

Ohne aktiv als Gegner aufzutreten, sind sie und bleiben sie immer Gegner des Nationalsozialismus und können auch nie anders werden.

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POVZETEK

DRUGA SVETOVNA VOJNA IN PLEMSTVO NA SLOVENSKEM

Drugo svetovno vojno je na Slovenskem dočakala le peščica pripadnikov nekdanjega visokega plemstva (knezi, grofi, baroni). Velik del tega, nekdaj vodilnega družbenega stanu je namreč do začetka 20. stoletja bodisi izumrl bodisi po letu 1918 zapustil novonastalo jugoslovansko kraljevino. Ostale so večinoma rodbine, ki so tu prebivale več stoletij in so ta prostor smatrale za svojo domovino. Večina od njih je imela kljub agrarni reformi v lasti še vedno obsežno posest, ki jih je odvračala od odhoda v tujino. Zaradi maloštevilnosti pa tudi zaradi formalne odprave plemiških nazivov in privilegijev po letu 1918 jih sicer ne moremo šteti in obravnavati kot posebno družbeno skupino. Čeprav so se v medvojnem času kazali določeni znaki približevanja nekdanjega plemstva in slovenske družbe, so bili plemiči večinoma dojeti kot Nemci, torej tujci. To je postalo še bolj očitno med drugo svetovno vojno, zlasti pa po njej.

Druga svetovna vojna in obdobje po njej sta pomenila dokončen obračun z nekdanjim plemstvom. Značilno in primerljivo z drugimi državami je dejstvo, da se je tudi na Slovenskem le manjši del plemstva priključil nacističnemu gibanju, saj so med njimi prevladovali legitimisti in monarhisti, ki so odklanjali Hitlerjeve ideje, in so jih tudi nacistične oblasti označile za nezanesljive oz. kot svetovnonazorske nasprotnike. Nemalo je tudi poročil o njihovem podpiranju partizanskega gibanja oz. slovenskega prebivalstva. Kljub temu so bili neposredno po vojni skoraj vsi pripadniki nekdanjega plemstva razglašeni za Nemce oz. »volksdojčerje«. Tisti, ki se niso pravočasno umaknili iz Slovenije, so bili zaprti v zbirna taborišča. Tam so bodisi pomrli zaradi težkih bivanjskih razmer bodisi so bili usmrčeni, preživeli pa so bili pozneje izgnani iz slovenskega prostora. Ostala je zgolj peščica ostarelih plemkinj ali tistih, ki so imele »koristne« poklice (npr. učiteljice). Vsa nekdanja plemiška posest je bila zaplenjena in nacionalizirana. Proces degermanizacije in defevdalizacije slovenskega prostora je tako dejansko in tudi na simbolen način dosegel enega od končnih ciljev. Šele po letu 1990 so se nekateri od izgnanih plemičev začeli vračati v Slovenijo, mnogi od njih so si nekdanjo domovino izbrali tudi za zadnje počivališče.