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The Rediscovery of a Forgotten War: The First World War in Slovene Film and Documentary Production

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THE REDISCOVERY OF A FORGOTTEN WAR:

THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN SLOVENE FILM AND DOCUMENTARY PRODUCTION

Karin Almasy

Introduction

Until recently, the First World War was neither a central topic in Slovene film production nor was it discussed in Slovene documentary production. That is not surprising, since First World War in general has not been really on display in Slovene remembrance culture. The First World War has been completely overshadowed by the Second World War, which polarizes the society even today. The focus of scientific research and public discussion on the First World War in Slovenia was and is on Isonzo Front; research on other aspects of the war did not really occur until recently. The big anniversary year of 2014 changed this situation and shed light on the underrepresented First World War. A documentary series for TV, *Slovenci in Prva svetovna vojna* (“Slovenians and the Great War of 1914-1918”) was produced, and the first Slovene feature film on that topic (produced in an Austrian-Slovene co-production), *Gozodvi so še vedno zeleni / Die Wälder sind noch grün* (“The Woods Are Still Green”) was introduced to the public. Therefore, it is fitting to say that WWI has become a topic of Slovene cinematography and TV production only in the last few years. It is the main objective of this article to have a closer look at this

recent film and documentary production and portray the main storylines on First World War from the Slovene perspective.¹

A Short History of Slovene Film Production

Due to globalization, like elsewhere, today's Slovene cinemas are dominated by foreign and not domestic movies, mainly Hollywood productions. Unsurprisingly, on rankings of the most seen films in Slovenia, we find Hollywood productions.² The highest ranking genuine Slovene films are mainly comedies and comedy-dramas: The encyclopedia of Slovene film ranks the teenage comedy *Gremo*

1 Note: If not stated otherwise, all quotes from Slovene or German sources; media comments, etc. have been translated by the author herself.

2 There are different rankings of the most watched movies, which vary and whose numbers are hard to verify. According to the ranking of the most watched films between 1992 and 2009 by the national television RTV Slovenija, *Titanic* was 1st, and as highest ranking Slovene production, the Slovene romantic comedy *Petelinji zajtrk* (2007) 4th ("Lestvica gledanosti (1992-2009)," *rtvslo.si*, <http://www.rtvsl.si/kultura/film/lestvica-gledanosti-1992-2009/157135>). According to the "Top All Time" list from 2011, made by the big cinematographic company Cinemania, among all the American productions (again *Titanic* 1st), the teenage comedy *Gremo mi po svoje* (2010) ranked 3rd, the romantic comedies *Petelinji zajtrk* on 7th and *Kajmak in marmelada* (2003) on 11th rank ("Top All Time – Slo 2015," Cinemania, http://www.cinemania-group.si/top_all_time.asp). The ranking from the Slovene Wikipedia instead ranks the first Slovene sound film, *Na svoji zemlji* (1948), about the Resistance during Occupation, even higher than *Titanic* ("Seznam najbolj gledanih filmov v Sloveniji," *sl.wikipedia.org*, https://sl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seznam_najbolj_gledanih_filmov_v_Sloveniji). Whatever the precise numbers might be, for the purpose of this article it is sufficient to say that the domestic Slovene film production has a hard time competing against the American movie industry, but still manages every now and then to produce a Slovene "blockbuster."

mi po svoje (*Let's Go Our Own Way*), with 205,430 viewers, as the most watched Slovene film since independence in 1991, and Marko Naberšnik's—a director we will hear about later—*Petelinji zajtrk* (*Rooster's Breakfast*) as the second.³ But let's rather start with a closer look at the beginning of the Slovene film production.

Before 1918, there was no professional filming activity in Slovene lands. The still existing short film segments from Slovene towns made before 1918 were made by the (foreign) owners of cinematographs who enriched their program for screening with some shots from Slovene cities. The first film segments by a Slovene that survived until today were made by the lawyer Karol Grossmann (1864–1929) in 1905 in the small town of Ljutomer and show private shots of his children playing in the garden.⁴ The history of Slovene feature film only began with the black and white silent films *V kraljestvu Zlatoroga* (*In the Kingdom of the Goldhorn*) (1931) and *Triglavske strmine* (*The slopes of Triglav*, 1932), both about the love for the local mountains. Since those two were the only Slovene feature movies produced in interwar Yugoslavia, the first phase of Slovene film production did not produce many films. The first sound, and therefore often considered being the first “real,” Slovene movie was produced in 1948 and called *Na svoji zemlji* (*On Our Own Land*). With this epic depiction of the Partisan resistance movement in the Slovene Littoral against Italian and German occupation, the second—socialistic—era of Slovene film

3 Silvan Furlan et al., eds., *Filmografija slovenskih celovečernih filmov 1931–2010 / Filmography of Slovenian Feature Films 1931–2010* (Ljubljana: Umco Slovenska kinoteka, 2011), 762.

4 Bojan Veberič, “Die lebenden Fotografien kommen in die Stadt! Das Bild der großen, weiten Welt in den Anfängen der Kinematografie in Ljubljana,” in *Stiki in sovplivanja med središčem in obrobjem: Medkulturne literarnovedne študije*, ed. Mira Miladinović Zalaznik and Tanja Žigon (Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba FF, 2014), 65.

production began. Movies from that era have always to be analyzed within the specific context of the culture scene and movie production in socialist Yugoslavia.⁵ The third phase of Slovene film production started under newly changed political circumstances, with Slovenia's independence in 1991. So, between the modest beginnings and today's modern entertainment industry, are there Slovene movies on historical topics as well? Are there movies on the First World War?

An encyclopedic overview of Slovene film production from its beginnings up to 2010 lists 205 feature films in chronological order and gives an overview of their content.⁶ Searching for the First World War within the Slovene filmography is a luckless enterprise, though this is not due to a lack of interest in historical topics. On the contrary, there are quite a few movies made on historical topics or telling a story embedded into a specific historical context. For example, I was able to identify fifteen films among the already mentioned 205 whose main storylines took place within the setting of Habsburg Monarchy. However, they are not "historical" by nature but mainly cinematographic adaptations of famous novels: *Samorastniki* (*Wild Growth*, 1963, directed by Prežihov Voranc), or *Na klancu* (*In the Gorge*, 1971, directed by Ivan Cankar), or biographies of famous Slovenes, such as *Pesnikov portret z dvojnikom* (*Portrait of a poet with a double*, 2002), on the poet France Prešeren. Another sixteen films deal in one way or the other with living conditions in socialist Yugoslavia, for example: the social consequences of the collectivization in the 1950s, *Rdeče klasje* (*Red Wheat*, 1970); the agitations

5 Ibid., 513 and 736–766.

6 All further information is taken from: *Filmografija slovenskih celovečernih filmov 1931–2010*, ed. Silvan Furlan et al. For the years 2011 until 2014 that are not covered by this encyclopedia of Slovene film, I was able to identify nineteen further films, which were mostly comedies and did not cover the topic of the First World War either. The only exception is the Austrian-Slovene co-production discussed in this article.

of the Informbiro until 1955 *Moj ata, socialistični kulak* (*My Dad, the Socialist Kulak*, 1987); or with the social conditions in Yugoslavia and specific topics such as xenophobia, *Ovni in mamuti* (*Rams and mammoths*, 1985), alcoholism, *Kormoran* (*A Cormoran*, 1986), corruption, *Odpadnik* (*The Maverick*, 1988); or youth subculture, *Outsider* (1997). Only some parts of the storyline of one film, *Dediščina* (*Heritage*, 1984) took place in 1914. However, this film was not on World War I itself but rather portrayed the life and downfall of a family.⁷

War has indeed been an important theme in Slovene film production, but only World War II: thirty-three of the 205 feature films up to 2010, an impressive number of sixteen percent, are on Partisan life, the Resistance of the Liberation Front (*Osvobodilna fronta*, OF) against occupation, on civil resistance and collaboration during World War II, or about the immediate postwar years.⁸ Therefore, it can be said that WWII has undoubtedly played a decisive role in Slovene cinemas, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, and can be considered a vital theme in Slovene film production.⁹ From the mid-1970s on, and specifically after 1991, Slovene movies tended to become “escapist” in high number: They did not cover political war stories anymore but were in great number apolitical, ahistorical, and entertaining or were political only by addressing social problems.¹⁰ Returning to our initial search for WWI in the Slovene filmography up to 2010, we have to attest to its complete absence. If one judged the importance of historic events based on their reflection in the Slovene film production, it seems as if the First World War has not happened at all, or it is at least of no interest to the Slovene film industry.

7 Ibid., 198–199.

8 This number is my own count, based again on: Furlan, *Filmografija*.

9 See specific analyses of Yugoslav Partisan films in: *Partisans in Yugoslavia: Literature, Film and Visual Culture*, ed. Miranda Jakiša and Nikica Gilić (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), 159–378.

10 Furlan, *Filmografija*, 548–555 and 574.

...And the Absence of the First World War

These results do not surprise at all if we compare them to the importance of WWI in Slovene collective remembrance culture in general. The First World War cannot be considered an important *lieu de mémoire*¹¹ for the Slovene national group identity. Proof to that claim is the fact that memorials glorifying the “heroic fight” of Slovene soldiers and monuments remembering the sacrifices, death and suffering of Slovene people can be found plenty for the Second, but only very few for the First, World War.¹²

11 Pierre Nora, *Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2005).

12 On Slovene monuments remembering victims and “heroes” of the First and Second World War, the Slovene Academy of Science (ZRC SAZU) conducted two research projects, see: “Kulturna demografija prve svetovne vojne,” ZRC SAZU, <http://zmk.zrc-sazu.si/sl/programi-in-projekti/kulturna-demografija-prve-svetovne-vojne#v> and “Zbirka domobraskih spomenikov na Slovenskem,” ZRC SAZU, <http://ikss.zrc-sazu.si/sl/zbirka/zbirka-domobraskih-spomenikov-na-slovenskem#v>. See further: Oto Luthar and Breda Luthar, “The Monopolization of Memory: The Politics and Textuality of War Memorials in Slovenia since 1991,” in *Kulturen der Differenz - Transformationsprozesse in Zentraleuropa nach 1989*, ed. Heinz Fassmann, Wolfgang Müller-Funk, and Heidemarie Uhl (Wien: V&R Unipress, 2009), 195–206; Petra Svoljšak, “La memoria della Guerra in Slovenia,” in *Esercito e popolazioni nella Grande Guerra: autunno 1917*, ed. Marco Balbi et al. (Udine: Gaspari, 2008); “The Slovenes in 1914: Between History and Remembrance,” in *Znanstveni skup 1914 - prva godina rata u Trojnoj Kraljevini I Austro-Ugarskoj Monarhiji*, ed. Vijoleta Kaurić (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2014); and on Slovene remembrance culture on WWI in Lower Styria as well: Karin Almasy, “V spomin žrtvam svetovne vojne: Erinnerungskultur, Gefallenendenkmäler in der Untersteiermark und die Zäsur 1918 für die Slowenen,” in *Heimatfront: Graz und das Kronland Steiermark im Ersten Weltkrieg*, ed. Werner Suppanz and Nicole Goll (Essen: Klartext-Verlag 2017, forthcoming).

After 1918, Slovenes found themselves in the newly founded Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Only shortly beforehand, they had been part of the Austrian military, being considered very loyal and *kaisertreu*, and had fought against Serbia, whereas they were now part of this new Serbian dominated state. Therefore, it is easy to imagine that Slovene (as well as the Croatian and the *prečani* Serbs) war veterans did not have the best standing within the new state; they had fought for a state that did not exist anymore, and the recently founded Yugoslav state proved unable to close the gap torn between the South Slavic people during WWI. From the new state's perspective, Slovene veterans of WWI were not only unworthy of glorification, but somehow suspicious and openly discriminated against: Until 1925, the veteran's pensions for former soldiers mutilated by war were two times higher for soldiers that fought for the Yugoslavian state than for the soldiers from the former Habsburg empire.¹³ It is therefore fair to conclude that there was not room for remembrance within the first Yugoslavia, and without such memory space, there is hardly any public remembrance.¹⁴ Within the second socialist Yugoslavia, there was no place for remembrance of World War I either: The events that took place between 1941 and 1945 were so overtly present, they blocked out almost everything else in public

13 Petra Svoljšak, "Nekaj utrinkov iz delovanja veteranske organizacije Zveza bojevnikov: Organizacija Bojevnikov je trdna in močna, je zveza src in duš. Je temelj prijateljstva in ljubezni med narodi," in *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* XLVI, no. 1 (2006): 282–285; and an extensive overview in: John Paul Newman, *Yugoslavia in the Shadow of War: Veterans and the Limits of State Building 1903–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

14 Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: C.H. Beck, 2007), 39.

remembrance culture. The remembrance cult around the Partisan movement was ritualized and became a very useful instrument to emphasize the South Slavic brotherhood between Slovenes, Serbs, Croats, Montenegrins, Bosnians, and Macedonians. According to the slogan *Bratstvo i jedinstvo* (Brotherhood and unity), there was surely no interest in emphasizing the fact that the South Slavic people fought each other during WWI. One might expect things to have changed after 1991, when Slovenia became independent and Slovenes were finally free to remember World War I. But not much has happened in this regard; the overall presence of WWII continued to overshadow WWI and has polarized the society until today. Political thinking patterns are still taking their cue from the ideological front lines: Partisans vs. *domobranci* (Slovene Home Guard) and Catholics, maintaining the traditional political partition of left and right. The First World War, instead, is basically a non-controversial historical event that does not polarize or stir up Slovene society.

WWI from a Slovene Perspective

We already established that World War I does not occupy a central position within the Slovene remembrance culture and the national “master narrative,” meaning the “dominant narrative about the past.”¹⁵ Now I would like to have a closer look at how WWI is represented in the Slovene master narrative and how the story of WWI is told and interpreted from the Slovene’s perspective. Concerning what of First World War is remembered and on which aspects there is

15 Konrad H. Jarausch and Martin Sabrow, “‘Meistererzählung’ - Zur Karriere eines Begriffs,” in *Die historische Meistererzählung: Deutungslinien der deutschen Nationalgeschichte nach 1945*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch and Martin Sabrow (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck 2002), 17.

research,¹⁶ certain central themes were given a lot of attention, while other topics do not appear much. This is not surprising because in all national master narratives, certain themes are highlighted and certain motifs strengthened; meanwhile, certain other aspects are “forgotten” or left aside.¹⁷ For the purpose of getting a better picture of a master narrative, we can differentiate between 1) its material components (which events and people from the past are connected with each other to form the historical storyline?), 2) its

16 To name just some of the most important authors and their publications on WWI: on the Isonzo Front, Petra Svoljšak, *Soča, sveta reka: Italijanska zasedba slovenskega ozemlja (1915–1917)* (Ljubljana: Nova revija, 2003), on the disintegration in 1918 Walter Lukan, *Iz črnožolte kletke narodov v zlato svobodo? Habsburška monarhija in Slovenci v prvi svetovni vojni* (Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba FF, 2014), on remembrance culture, Oto Luthar, *O žalosti niti beside: Uvod v kulturno zgodovino velike vojne* (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2013), on different aspects of WWI, the collective volume, Peter Vodopivec and Katja Kleindienst, eds., *Velika vojna in Slovenci* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 2005), on social and gender aspects of WWI in the Slovene Littorial, see e.g. Marta Verginella, “Ženske in prva svetovna vojna,” in *Zgodovina je slastna: kulturna zgodovina hrane; 100 let začetka prve svetovne vojne: programska knjižica / 37. zborovanje Zveze zgodovinskih društev Slovenije*, ed. Branko Šuštar (Ljubljana: ZZDS, 2014). For a good overview, see also *Take vojne si nismo predstavljali (1914–1918)*, ed. Marko Štepec (Ljubljana: Muzej novejšje zgodovine Slovenije, 2014) and similar publications from the aforementioned museum.

17 On the Slovene master narrative, see the excellent critical overview of Peter Štih, “Miti in stereotipi v podobi starejše slovenske nacionalne zgodovine,” in *Zbornik 33: Zborovanje Zveze zgodovinskih društev Slovenije*, ed. Mitija Ferenc (Kranj: Littera picta, 2006), 25–47; and in German: “Slowenische Geschichtsmýthen und Feindbilder,” in *Zeitschrift des Historischen Vereines für Steiermark* (Graz: Historischer Verein für Steiermark, 2004), 59–67.

theoretical-methodical dimension (according to which line of reasoning are these material components put together to form the narrative?), and 3) its semantic components (with what kind of language, phrases, slogans, etc. are these ideas expressed?).¹⁸ For the purpose of getting a clear impression on the Slovene view on WWI, I will now try to briefly identify the main “storylines” or “themes” of First World War from the Slovene perspective (the material components) and then search for them within the two mentioned film productions.

The central canonical theme of WWI from a Slovene perspective is undoubtedly the Isonzo Front (or *Soška fronta* because the Slovene name for that river is Soča). At this bloody frontline, where military operations lasted for twenty-nine months, specifically two events or battles stand out: Doberdob and Kobarid (Karfreit/Caporetto). The high plateau of Doberdò (or Doberdob, a small village on the same-named plateau with a mainly Slovene population in today's Italy) was one of the bloodiest battlefields since the second battle of the Isonzo in July and August 1915 and therefore became synonymous for great losses, spilled blood, and the horror of war. A semantic aspect to this material component is the song and slogan “Doberdob - slovenskih fantov grob” (Doberdob, the grave of Slovene soldiers).¹⁹ Kobarid, in-

18 Jarausch, *Meistererzählung* 17.

19 The only Slovene war novel about World War One written by Prežihov Voranc is named *Doberdob* as well, see: Lovro Kuhar [who was publishing under the pseudonym Voranc, Prežihov], *Doberdob: Vojni roman slovenskega naroda* (Ljubljana: Naša založba, 1940) and the German translation by Karin Almasy und Klaus Detlef Olof, *Doberdo: Slowenischer Kriegerroman* (Klagenfurt: Mohorjeva, 2008/09). On this war novel in German see: Heinrich Placke, “Doberdo - Ein Roman des Slowenen Prežihov Voranc / Lovro Kuhar über den I. Weltkrieg an der Isonzo-Front,” in *Erich Maria Remarque, Im Westen nichts Neues und die Folgen*, ed. Thomas Schneider (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2014), 61–84.

stead, is remembered as the great success of Habsburg and German troops in the twelfth battle of the Isonzo, when they were able to defeat Italian troops using poison gas. The culmination of this famous and bloody event is known as “Čudež pri Kobaridu” (“Das Wunder von Karfreit” / “The miracle of Caporetto”). On the other hand, the Western and the Eastern fronts were not much on display for Slovenes and were overshadowed by the Isonzo Front completely. The attention lies clearly on battlefields where Slovene soldiers were fighting and where the Slovene civilian population was affected, as was the case on the Isonzo Front.

Moreover, the Slovene narrative on WWI neither focused solely on military aspects nor on the bigger picture of the great power politics, but mainly on civil aspects of the war and the Slovene destiny during war. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that there were other topics discussed frequently: the process of disintegration up to 1918 and the growing South Slavic political ideas, politics, and petitions fighting for more rights within the Empire, the still existing strong loyalty to Habsburg on the one hand and Vienna's mistrust and fear of expected pan-Slavic tendencies on the other (which led to a great number of arrests, especially among the Slovene national clergy),²⁰ the devastations and deprivations caused by the war, the growing dissatisfaction (as expressed by soldiers in acts of insurrections), and the transition into the new statehood.²¹

20 See detailed, in: Martin Moll, *Kein Burgfrieden: Der deutsch-slowenische Nationalkonflikt in der Steiermark 1900–1918* (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2007).

21 This becomes obvious if we have a look at the *Kronika XX stoletja*, where WWI is discussed on only fifty-two pages: only minor parts really reflect on military aspects, most articles focus on living conditions and the transition between the two different forms of statehood; Marjan Drnovšek et al., eds., *Slovenska Kronika XX. Stoletja I.* (Ljubljana: Nova revija, 1995), 149–201.

Thanks to the 100th anniversary of the beginning of WWI in 2014, interest on that “seminal catastrophe of the twentieth century” has grown noticeably. Not only are there significantly more conferences, publications, and research on that topic, but what has especially increased is the presence of the topic in a broader public sphere. An official committee for the 100th anniversary of WWI was founded, national memorials held, and exhibitions on topics connected to the First World War were put on display.²² The public television and radio, RTV Slovenija, was active as well: On a special website, all news segments, reports, short television documentaries, round table discussions, radio reports, event tips, and other information on WWI were collected and presented in order to attract more public interest.²³ For the objective of this article, I want to concentrate now on two outstanding productions, both released in 2014, by giving a short overview of their content, reception, and the circumstance of their production first and then analyzing them according to

22 See more detailed: Karin Almasy, “Der Stellenwert des Ersten Weltkrieges in der slowenischen Erinnerungskultur und das Gedenkjahr 2014 in Slowenien,” in *Gedenken und (k)ein Ende - was bleibt vom Jahr 2014? Das Gedenkjahr 1914/2014 und sein historiografisches Vermächtnis*, ed. Bernhard Bachinger et al. (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 2017), 51–67. For the web presence of the National Committee, see: “Slovenian National Committee for the 100th Anniversary of World War I (2014–2018),” *100letprve.si*, http://www.100letprve.si/en/noga/slovenian_national_committee/; and for the museum of First World I in Kobarid: Kobariski Muzej, <http://www.kobariski-muzej.si/>.

23 See the news portal on WWI of the national television portal “RTV Slovenija,” at: <http://www.rtv slo.si/1sv> (accessed Sept. 30, 2015).

the mentioned criteria (material component, theoretical-methodical dimension, and semantic components of the Slovene master narrative on WWI).

In February 2014, RTV Slovenija aired a high quality documentary series in five episodes named *Slovenci in Prva svetovna vojna* (“*Slovenians and the Great War of 1914-1918*”). This has been the first Slovene television documentary series on the First World War. Therefore, it is worthwhile having a good analytic look at this big project undertaken by the historian and curator of the National Museum of Contemporary History Marko Štepec and the well-known movie director Valentin Pečenko.²⁴ The second production worth mentioning and discussing in detail is the first feature film from a Slovene director on the First World War, namely the Austrian-Slovene co-production *Gozdovi so še vedno zeleni/Die Wälder sind noch grün* (“*The Woods Are Still Green*”) by the popular movie director Marko Naberšnik.²⁵ Other recent, much shorter, TV and radio features, news segments, documentaries, etc.—although they cover interesting aspects of WWI—will not be considered in the following analysis due to the lack of space and the considerably different format

24 Valentin Pečenko and Marko Štepec, *Slovenci in 1. Svetovna vojna 1914-1918* (Ljubljana: RTV Slovenija, 2013). In all further citations mentioned in short as Pečenko/Štepec (2013). The documentary series has now also been subtitled into English. Thanks to Marko Štepec for that and further information.

25 Marko Naberšnik, *Die Wälder sind noch grün / Gozdovi sp še vedno zeleni* (Vojnik: Fiviva, 2014). In further citations mentioned in short as Naberšnik (2014). See the official website, at: <http://www.die-wälder.com/> (accessed Sept., 30, 2015).

and scale of these productions.²⁶ Also the only three documentary segments produced earlier than 2014 will not be considered in the following analysis for the same reason: Two of them deal exclusively with the Isonzo Front: a seven minute long contribution to the television show “Kalejdoskop” (Kaleidoscope) about the still existing traces and remains of the Isonzo Front on the mountain Rombon by Drago Kocijančič from 1967,²⁷ and a documentary from 1997 named *Bitka*

26 Most noteworthy of all the recent smaller productions is the TV documentary *V Fokusu: Ženske v veliki vojni 1914–1918* on Slovene women during WWI by Valentin Pečenko and Petra Svoljšak, who guides the thirty minutes long TV documentary. Topics discussed are: The difficult supply situation at the “home front,” where mostly women had to take care of those left behind; women in hospitals and the emergence of the whole new profession of nursing; women in the arms industry and abandoned agriculture, where they were burdened in multiple ways and had to be “landlord, servant and horse all at once”; see at: “Videonovice,” *rtvslo.si*, accessed Sept. 30, 2015, <http://www.rtv-slo.si/prva-svetovna-vojna/TVinRAarhiv>. Another very interesting documentary is named *Doberdob: Roman upornika* [Doberdob: The novel of a Rebel] and was produced in 2015 by Martin Turk in a co-production of Bela Film, RTV Slovenija, and RAI Furlanija julijska krajina. The documentary covers WWI in large segments by focusing on the aforementioned writer Prežihov Voranc and his novel on WWI, *Doberdob*. Voranc experienced the fighting at the Isonzo himself and deserted over to the Italians. After the war, he was one of the first, and later on even highest-ranking members, of the Yugoslav Communist Party. Due to that fact, he was forced to live under irregular circumstances and in hiding. Therefore, the manuscript of this only Slovene novel on WWI got lost and had to be rewritten several times. See footnote 19.

27 See the seven minute long video in black and white: “Sto let, odkar so soško fronto stresli prvi boji,” *rtvslo.si*, accessed Sept. 30, 2015, <http://www.rtv-slo.si/kultura/razglednice-preteklosti/sto-let-odkar-so-sosko-fronto-stresli-prvi-boji/365741>.

za reko (*Fight for the river*) directed by Igor Pediček and produced by Micom productions. The third one, *Slovenci v vojni 1914–1918* (*The Slovenes during the war 1914–1918*) was produced by Božo Grlj and Marko Štepec in 2009.²⁸

Gozdovi so še vedno zeleni / Die Wälder sind noch grün

In striking and impressive pictures, shot at original locations on the former frontlines in the high mountains of today's Western Slovenia (at the mountain Mangart in the Julian Alps, along Soča River, at the Kluže Fortress and Strmol Castle), the film is not what one might expect from a "war movie" on WWI. As a positive critique in *The Hollywood Reporter* stated, the producers were indeed "not interested in crafting some kind of wartime action adventure."²⁹ The movie is surprisingly quiet, silent and unhasty, though never dull or tedious. We do not see the masses fighting, killing and dying in the trenches. Instead, the director chose an isolated and seemingly idyllic and safer outpost in the mountains.

28 Thanks to Marko Štepec for that information. I do not exclude the possibility that there were some other tiny news segments; however, the documentary production earlier than 2014 can basically be summed up with these three productions. For *Bitka za reko / Fight for the River*, see: *The International Historic Films Complete Online Catalog* at <http://ihffilm.com/22841.html>; and the Slovenian Film Center at <http://www.film-center.si/sl/film-v-sloveniji/filmi/1419/bitka-za-reko/> (accessed Sept. 30, 2015). The last aforementioned segment is also available online, see: "Slovenci v vojni 1914-1918," *YouTube.com*, accessed June 6, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmFCwURQfEo>.

29 Elizabeth Kerr, "'The Woods are Still Green': Shanghai Review," *The Hollywood Reporter*, updated June 26, 2014, accessed Sept. 30, 2015, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/woods-are-still-green-shanghai-714018>.

Rather than telling the stories of many, the first Slovene (-Austrian) movie on WWI tells the story of one young soldier. Holding a seemingly safe post in late summer 1917 on the front to Italy (shortly before the “Miracle of Kobarid”), three Austro-Hungarian soldiers are isolated from the major frontline fighting in the valley. Their spot is not safe for long, however, because Italian artillery shelling strikes their observation post, kills one soldier and mutilates their commander, who loses a leg. Nineteen-year-old Carinthian soldier Jakob Lindner (Michael Kristof) is now on his own, commanded to hold the base, trying to prevent his Czech-Jewish commander Jan Kopetzky (Simon Šerbinek) from dying. They run low on water, alcohol, and food, and the help promised by the anonymous voice on the field telephone never comes. When there is no water left, he heads down to the Soča valley in order to get some and almost runs into Italian troops. In this scene, shot in the woods at night, the actor Kristof manages to convince the audience of being a frightened and overwhelmed young man, scared for his life. When he comes back to the mountain shed, his commander has died. He drinks the remaining rum; the field telephone is ringing, but he does not answer. He falls asleep and has a nightmare that is at first not apparent as one. In his nightmare, he is punished for not answering the field telephone by a strict general who is feasting at a richly set table. The general shouts at him and tells him that his disobedience caused the death of 40,000 soldiers in one night. After a strict lecture on loyalty (“Who’s your father, Lindner? / Josef Lindner, a carpenter by trade. / Wrong, the Emperor is your father. / Where are you from? / Neuhaus bei Lavamünd is my home, General, Sir. / Wrong, the Empire is your home, Austria-Hungary!”)³⁰, he is sentenced to death by the general and executed by a soldier in a gas mask with

30 Naberšnik (2014), 01:24:40.

a machine gun. When he awakes from this disturbing dream, the field telephone is ringing again. But Lindner does not answer. He makes two caskets for his dead comrades, packs his few belongings and the personal belongings of his diseased comrades, and leaves the shed. The end is left open, and the audience does not learn what happened to Lindner. Since he once mentioned that his home is just on the other side of the mountains, and he could reach his home in a day, we hope he makes it home in one piece but are left with uncertainty. In a final scene, we see today's Kluže Fortress and in a museum's glass cabinet the personal belongings shown in the movie, among them the (fictive) diary of Lindner.³¹ Even though the director and screenplay writer Naberšnik was inspired by original sources, mainly letters sent home by soldiers from the frontlines—the title of the film itself is a line taken from such a letter—the portrayed characters are purely fictitious.³²

*“Finally a Movie on WWI that We Can at Least to Some Extent
Call Our Own”*

How were the public opinion and the reviews on *Gozdovi so še vedno zeleni*? For this purpose, I had a look at Slovene reviews and press statements about the movie. The film was very well received, and won some prestigious prizes, for example at film festivals in Shanghai, Jagran, Cottbus, and Ljubljana.³³ What is somehow very specific to the Slovene reviews on this film is the repeated discussion of its “Sloveneness” and whether this co-production

31 Naberšnik (2014), 01:40:44.

32 As Marko Naberšnik explained in a TV interview, to be seen at: <http://www.rtvsllo.si/prva-svetovna-vojna/TVinRAarhiv> [30.09.2015] and Izak Košir, Intervju z Markom Naberšnikom: Prva svetovna vojna je bila drugačna od druge, 16.10.2014, in: <https://www.dnevnik.si/1042684670> [30.09.2015].

33 See die-wälder.com.

can be considered a *Slovene* cinematic achievement at all. What maybe sums up this opinion best is the following film review on one of biggest Slovene news portals: After explaining the very tight financial situation of the Slovene film industry, which constantly relies on subventions due to the market's smallness,³⁴ director Marko Naberšnik "had no other choice than making his third feature film, the war drama *Gozdovi so še vedno zeleni*/*Die Wälder sind noch grün* in collaboration with our Northern neighbors. [...] With Austrian support, we Slovene people finally got a movie on WWI that we can at least to some extent call our own, since we cannot consider it our own entirely."³⁵ In another review, the national television obviously felt the need to point out the genuine Slovene contribution to this co-production between the Austrian producing studio Artdeluxe Films and Perfo Productions, in "which Perfo from Ljubljana acts as junior partner. Nonetheless, the Slovene team plays a pretty important role, since alongside director and co-producer Naberšnik there is the actor Simon Šerbinek, the director of photography Miloš Srđić, the production designer Miha Ferkov, and the editor Jan Lovše, if we only name the ones with the most important roles."³⁶ What

34 The Slovenski filmski center [Slovenian Film Center] is the public agency of the Republic of Slovenia to co-finance Slovene film productions, on whose funding Slovene film productions rely heavily, see: "About," Slovenian Film Center, accessed Sept. 30, 2015, <http://www.film-center.si/en/about/>.

35 Klemen Černe, "Ocena filma: Gozdovi so še vedno zeleni," last modified Dec. 9, 2014, accessed Sept. 30, 2015, http://www.siol.net/scena/film/recenzije/2014/12/gozdovi_so_se_vedno_zeleni.aspx.

36 MMC RTV SLO, *Gozdovi so še vedno zeleni* [film review on the occasion of the 25th International Film Festival in Ljubljana], last modified Nov. 15, 2014, accessed Sept. 30, 2015, <http://www.rtvsllo.si/kultura/liffe/gozdovi-so-se-vedno-zeleni/351214>.

is particularly striking is who they fail to name: the main actor Michael Kristof, widely praised for this film debut as a frightened young soldier. Kristof, a Carinthian Slovene who attended the Slovene high school in Klagenfurt/Celovec and has a diploma from the Slovene Academy for theater, radio, film, and television (AGRFT) in Ljubljana,³⁷ where he was a student of Naberšnik, is *not* considered a Slovene actor by this critique, which tells us a lot about narrow—national—thinking patterns. Cutting this argument at this point without contributing any further to this discussion on “how Slovene” the film is, I simply wanted to point out that this was a largely debated dimension of *Gozdovi so še vedno zeleni*. Obviously, it is still valid today, when the authors of the Slovene filmography stated that “the ‘peculiarity’ of Slovene film lies in the fact that it was conceived as a national ‘Thing.’”³⁸ The international European film production *No Man’s Land* (2001) on the war in Bosnia, shared the same destiny: Even though it was shot and co-produced in considerable parts in Slovenia, “not even an Oscar win could make the Slovene audience perceive it as an ‘also Slovene’ film.”³⁹

The main reasons for not being considered a “real” Slovene movie are most likely: 1) the soldiers in the film speak German to

37 “Gozdovi so še vedno zeleni,” *kolosej.si*, accessed Sept. 30, 2015, <http://www.kolosej.si/filmi/film/gozdovi-so-se-vedno-zeleni/>.

38 Furlan, *Filmografija*, 513.

39 Ibid., 572. *No Man’s Land* is not listed in this cited *Filmography*; we will see whether a future edition will name *Gozdovi so še vedno zeleni*. If we have a look at Wikipedia’s list of Slovene films and perceive this list as an even more democratic and representative mirror of Slovene public (self-) perception, it says a lot about that topic that the film is not (yet) named there either, see: “Seznam slovenskih filmov,” *sl.wikipedia.org*, accessed Sept. 30, 2015, https://sl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seznam_slovenskih_filmov.

each other; 2) the initial idea came from the Austrian co-producer and co-writer Robert Hofferer, who invited Naberšnik to shoot an intimate portrayal on WWI; and 3) it was financed without Slovene governmental subventions but mainly by private (Austrian) funds. Naberšnik was asked on several occasions why the film was shot in German and whether this constituted a problem for him. He replied that he did not consider it a problem at all; being from Lower Styria, he is accustomed to German language and learned it in school. Moreover, he argued that the film would have been unauthentic in Slovene, because the language of command and “lingua franca” in the Austrian military was in fact German.⁴⁰ This statement shows that the producers obviously endeavored to make their film historically accurate. Also concerning other historical details, the film team was advised by historians, scientists, and others in order to create an authentic imagery. The equipment was manufactured based on historical models, and even original loan objects from private collectors were used.⁴¹ Therefore, the film portrays a very convincing picture of these events. Finally, another aspect of the film that has been stressed by the reviews is its message for peace by demonstrating the horror of war. Probably because it focuses on one single soldier instead of the big anonymous masses of men, the film succeeds in delivering that message to today's audience. Following the popular bottom-up approach of history studies of telling the big story (of WWI) through the small story, *Gozodvi so še vedno zeleni* lets us empathize with all the horror even more.

40 All this information given by Marko Naberšnik, at: “Videonovice,” *rtvslo.si*, accessed Sept. 30, 2015, <http://www.rtvsl.si/prva-svetovna-vojna/TVinRAarhiv>.

41 See: “Die Wälder sind noch grün,” *filmneweurope.com*, accessed Sept. 30, 2015, <http://www.filmneweurope.com/festivals/item/108405-die-waelder-sind-noch-gruen-english-title-the-woods-are-still-green>.

A Television Documentary Series in Five Episodes

The television documentary series *Slovinci in Prva svetovna vojna* (“Slovenians and the Great War of 1914-1918”), on the other hand, is definitely a Slovene production and unique of its kind: It took three years to produce it and was shot at original sites of the First World War, therefore showing interesting shots from Galicia in today’s Ukraine, and Poland, Vienna, Trieste, Sarajevo and of course Slovene locations. What makes it unique and very interesting for historians are the rich historical filmic, photographic, and printed sources used in this multimedia documentary: From the very first private amateur film by Grossmann and first film segments of Slovene towns at the beginning of the twentieth century to official Austro-Hungarian and Italian film reports on the war and rich photo material from the Slovene lands, from newspaper reports to diary entries of soldiers, etc. Quite a few documentaries and movies show World War I from the British, German, or French perspective—from the perspective of big nations. However, one from a Slovene perspective, meaning from a small nation’s view, was missing so far. According to the producers, this was their motive for making a Slovene documentary on WWI: to show the narrative from a Slovene perspective by also using Slovene sources.⁴² The main narrator leading through the documentary is the historian and producer Marko Štepec himself, always reporting in front of the historical site under discussion. Other excellent national and international historians give their expertise on certain topics as well (for example, Petra Svobljak, M. Christian Ortner, Janez Cvirn, Peter Vodopivec, Jože Pirjevec, Marco Mantini, and Janez Švajncar). The different visual and auditory elements are

42 See this interview with Štepec, at: Gorazd Utenkar, “Prva vojna, totalna in nepredstavljiva,” *delo.si*, accessed Sept. 30, 2015, <http://www.delo.si/zgodbe/nedeljskobranje/prva-vojna-totalna-in-nepredstavljiva.html>.

put together, forming a complex collage on WWI, using experts' interviews as well as reports and testimonies by contemporaries read by an off-screen voice, taken from sources such as letters, newspapers, and postcards, while these written sources are shown as well as the sites of former frontlines. All these elements mix with historical filmic and photographic material. By combining this multitude of sources⁴³ into one documentary production, the audience gets a precise feeling of the material, emotional, and scenic world during 1914–1918, already a hundred years away from our own experience.

After these general remarks on the documentary series, I want to have a closer look at the chosen topics. This allows interesting conclusions on the material components of Slovene's gaze on World War I. The five episodes of the documentary series tell the story of WWI in chronological order, and the single episodes are named as follows:

1. *Zatišje pred viharjem* ("Calm Before the Storm")
2. *Krvave galicijske poljane* ("Galician Planes in Blood Bath")
3. *Doberdob, slovenskih fantov grob* ("Doberdob, the Grave of Slovenian Lads")
4. *Preboj pri Kobaridu* ("The Breakthrough at Kobarid")
5. *Propad* ("The Collapse")

43 The shown printed and photographic archival material was contributed by Slovene, Italian, and Austrian archives, such as: Muzej novejšje zgodovine, Ljubljana; Heeresgeschichtliches Museum, Vienna; Kobariški muzej, Kobarid; Museo centrale del Risorgimento, Rome; Musei Provinciali di Gorizia; Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra, Rovereto; Vojni muzej Logatec etc. The archival film material was contributed by La Cineteca del Friuli, Gemona; Filmarchiv Austria, Vienna and Dokumentacija TV Slovenija, from the documentary series *Svet v letih 1900–1939*, a production of TV Zagreb from July 1977, see Pečenko/Štepec (2014), Part 4, 00:43:00.

The first episode gives an excellent overview of the living conditions under Habsburg rule in the late nineteenth century, on economic, cultural, educational, and national circumstances and developments and reflects on historical events back to the revolutionary year 1848, the *Ausgleich* in 1867, and explains alliance policies in Europe, the national “awakening” of Slovenes as well as national rivalries and tensions between Germans and Slovenes. Even though the bigger picture of the political situation in Europe is briefly mentioned, the main focus is on events and developments in the lands co-inhabited by Slovenes. Only after the first half hour is the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie in Sarajevo that led to WWI explained. This first episode is mostly dedicated to the cultural, political, and social life of Slovene people under the Habsburg rule on the eve of WWI; that is, before 1914.

The second episode of this documentary series on the “bloody battlefields of Galicia” is maybe the most surprising one of all, because it puts the Eastern Front and the fight against the Russian army on display—a topic that was not at all in the focus of the older Slovene historiography, even though most Slovene soldiers lost their lives in Galicia and not along the Isonzo River.⁴⁴ The precise numbers of losses in the bloody summer of 1914, the following battles in the winter of 1914–15 and the siege of Przemyśl

44 Already during and also after the war, the events on the Eastern Front were less visualized than the Western and the Isonzo Front, which probably influenced that asymmetrical remembrance; see on that subject: Hannes Leidinger, “Visualisierung des Krieges: Die Ostfront in österreichisch-ungarischen Fotografien und Filmproduktionen,” in *Jenseits des Schützengrabens: Der Erste Weltkrieg im Osten. Erfahrung - Wahrnehmung - Kontext*, ed. Bernhard Bachinger and Wolfram Dornik (Innsbruck: Studien-Verlag, 2013), 464.

is not known, but it is clear that ninety percent of all Slovene soldiers were called to Galicia.⁴⁵ Therefore, more Slovene soldiers lost their lives there than on any other battlefield during World War I.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the narrative of episode two does not focus solely on military aspects, but also on the horror of this frontline, the exhaustion, fatigue, illnesses, and the plenty deaths by freezing or sickness. It compares the euphoric marching into war with the reality of the Galician front lines, which was not what most soldiers naively expected a war to be like.⁴⁷

The third episode deals with the opening of the frontline against Italy along the river Isonzo/Soča and the bloody battles of 1915–16. After the Gorlice-Tarnow offensive in October 1915, when Austria was able to push back the Russian front in Galicia, the Eastern frontline became rather static. Most of the Slovene soldiers were ordered back because the new frontline with Italy opened up in May 1915, and contingents were urgently needed. In the Treaty of London, Italy was promised South Tyrol, the Austrian Littoral, and Dalmatia for joining the Entente. This “bitter betrayal of Italy” was strongly condemned in Austrian and Slovene newspapers. From this time onwards, the diction of newspaper articles became much more emotional than it was before.⁴⁸ This new frontline ran in its lower part almost complete-

45 Pečenko/Štepec (2014), 00:11:05.

46 Cf. as well Marko Štepec trying to raise awareness for the Eastern front publicly, as in: Utenkar, “Prva.”

47 In accordance with that, the exhibition, curated by Štepec on WWI, that was on display until May 2015 in the National Museum of Contemporary History featured the title “Take vojne si nismo predstavljali” [We never imagined such a war], a line taken from autobiographical memories of surviving soldier Ivan Matičič.

48 Petra Svoljšak, in: Pečenko/Štepec (2014), Part 3, 00:05:13.

ly through territories populated by Slovenes, the most precious conquest targets in this area being the cities of Trieste and Gorizia. More than 100,000 civilians had to be evacuated from the area and were brought to Carniola, Carinthia, and Styria and from there to other parts of the monarchy. The inhabitants of Trieste, Gorizia, and Kobarid, though, stayed in large numbers, it is said, because of their strong attachment to their hometowns, stressing their bravery.⁴⁹ For the Slovene soldiers in all battles along the River Isonzo, it is also said—and this is an important topic for Slovenes during WWI—that they were known for their relentless bravery and persistence.⁵⁰ They had to defend their own homeland. If the frontline fell, their own hometowns would fall, which encouraged them a lot. Though episode three focuses on military maneuvers and strategy, it does not lack mention of the horrendous consequences of war for civilians in the cities, as well as for regular soldiers caused by diseases, starvation, freezing, and poor equipment.

Episode four starts by explaining the extensive supply system in the hinterland of the Isonzo front and the big efforts necessary to supply the troops on a daily basis by exploiting the remaining civilian population, the military resources, and the many thousands of Russian prisoners of war. It was in 1917, covered by this part of the documentary series, when the discontent and exhaustion

49 Pečenko/Štepec (2014), 00:08:47.

50 In the fifth episode, General Svetozar Boroević is quoted saying in a speech at Postojna that Slovene soldiers are the most reliable of all, and he would always choose them over all others and will spread this praise among the highest military leaders. This was documented by the priest Andrej Ažman, who was present for that speech, in his parish chronicles. Due to strict censorship, this praise never made it to the newspapers; see Pečenko/Štepec (2014), Part 5, 00:04:45.

of the troops grew exponentially. Acts of desertion had been much rarer among Slovenes than among other nationalities—or in comparison, among Slovenes much lower than on the Eastern battlefields. Many of those who deserted to the Italian side did it because of their pan-Slavic or other beliefs. The most scandalized example of a Slovene deserting was Commander Ljudevit Pivko, who was charged with high treason, and his family at home was incarcerated for their presumed assistance.⁵¹ The latter half of part four deals extensively with the so-called “Miracle of Kobarid,” the twelfth battle of Isonzo, when in October 1917 Austrians, with the support of German divisions, were able to change course of events and pushed the Italian troops all way back to the River Piave. Episode four is, together with episode three, the most military-focused part of this documentary series, dealing precisely and mainly with events on the Isonzo Front. Extensively discussed is, for example, the question of whether it was really mainly the use of poisonous gas that helped the Austrian and German troops succeed in Kobarid, ergo, the Italian press was exaggerating and thereby defending the Italian defeat, or whether it was indeed as well caused by the unpreparedness and low morale of the Italian troops.

Episode five deals with—as the title *Propad* (“*The Collapse*”) already reveals—the last year of war, 1918, the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, and the founding of the new state of the South Slavs (SHS). Even though there were some successes to be celebrated, like the reconquest of Gorizia, the situation was generally bad for the Austrian troops: The supply of weapons and food ran very low. In this respect, the uprising of frustrated and nationally thinking soldiers is mentioned, among them the ones in May in Judenburg, Murau, and Bad Radkersburg (the one in Judenburg

51 Pečenko/Štepec (2014) Part 4, 00:24:08.

being the biggest in the Austrian hinterland) and directly behind the frontlines at the River Piave in October 1918.⁵² The horrible supply situation is also named as the reason for the ultimate defeat, because army commanders such as General Boroević overestimated the strength of their own already severely weakened troops. In September 1918, the monarchy was at its end; in October, Emperor Karl tried to prevent the collapse until the last minute with his Manifest. The famous answer of Anton Korošec, Reichsrat member, soon to be president of the National Council and undoubtedly the most important Slovene politician of this time and the interwar period, supposedly was: “It’s too late, Your Majesty.”⁵³ The latter half of this last episode concentrates on the founding of the provisional State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs and the unification with the already independent Kingdom of Serbia. Very suddenly, people forgot that they had been loyal subjects of the Austrian Emperor until very recently. This is also the time when the ideological slogan of *Völkerkerker* was enforced.⁵⁴ The documentary series ends by mentioning the painful territorial loss of the Littoral (*Primorska*) and Lower Carinthia, as well as the missing official remembrance for the Slovene fallen soldiers and veterans. It finds an abrupt end, as the Habsburg Empire itself did in 1918.

52 Pečenko/Štepec (2014), Part 5, 00:14: 20 and 00:20:05. More detailed on the uprising in Judenburg, see: Karin Almasy, “‘V spomin žrtvam svetovne vojne’ - Erinnerungskultur, Gefallenendenkmäler in der Untersteiermark und die Zäsur 1918 für die Slowenen,” in *Heimatfront: Graz und das Kronland Steiermark im Ersten Weltkrieg*, ed. Werner Suppanz and Nicole Goll (Essen: Klartext-Verlag, 2017).

53 Pečenko/Štepec (2014), Part 5, 00:20:05, and in all detail: Feliks Bister, “*Majestät, es ist zu spät*”: Anton Korošec und die slovenische Politik im Wiener Reichsrat bis 1918 (Wien: Böhlau, 1995).

54 Pečenko/Štepec (2014), Part 5, 00:26:50.

Drawing Conclusions

If we want to sum up the most important “material components” of the Slovene narrative on WWI presented in these two productions, it is fair to state the following: The Isonzo Front is (and obviously will remain) the dominant theme above all other frontlines or military aspects. The first, and so far only, Slovene feature film takes place on the Isonzo front and two out of five episodes of the documentary series deal mainly with events along the river Isonzo/Soča. Nevertheless, the documentary series does not neglect to mention lesser known sites of Slovene involvement in World War I: In episode two, for example, the stationing of one division from Celje in Boka Kotorska and later in Serbia on the Balkan frontline in order to fight Serbia. Meanwhile, some Yugoslav-orientated Slovenes already fought for Serbia against the Habsburg troops. Even though only a few in number, this is also the situation of Slovenes fighting against Slovenes. Other not well known Slovene involvements include a sea battle against Italy on the coast of Ancona in May 1915, mentioned in episode three, and the bloody battles in the Dolomites mountains at Monte Chiesa and Asiago in May 1916, mentioned in episode four, where still today one valley is called *Dolina degli Sloveni*. What is not really discussed instead is the Western front, the *Kriegsschuldfrage* (Question of war guilt); the Russian revolution and the politics of the Great Powers is only mentioned where it is necessary, probably because, from a Slovene perspective, others made the big decisions, and they were just pawns in the game between the Great Powers of Europe. The documentaries portray the picture of a small nation within the Habsburg Empire on its way to a new statehood due to war. Localities most mentioned in the documentaries next to Ljubljana were Trieste and Gorizia, Doberdob, Kobarid and Judenburg, Przemyśl, and Sarajevo. Only few “heroes” are mentioned in these documentaries: General

Borojević, the Emperor(s), among politicians first and foremost Anton Korošec, alongside “traitors” such as Ljudevit Pivko, and “insurgents” such as Anton Hafner (the leader of the Judenburg uprising). Most names mentioned are “small” and historically unimportant Slovene soldiers, who left diaries or letters and give an idea of WWI from the viewpoint of privates. A comparison of the “material components” of this Slovene documentary series in five episodes to one German⁵⁵ and one British⁵⁶ documentary production offers interesting insights. What they all have in common is that they stay mainly within their own national perspective; that is, at the same time, why they differ considerably in the regarded topics and sites. The Slovene storylines on WWI, meaning the

55 The exemplary German production in five episodes, *Der Erste Weltkrieg*, aired on ARD in 2004. Their episodes were named as follows: 1. “Mythos Tannenberg” [“The myth of the battle of Tannenberg”], 2. “Gashölle Ypern” [“The poisonous inferno of Ypern”], 3. “Alptraum Verdun” [“The nightmare of Verdun”], 4. “Schlachtfeld Heimat” [“The home front”] 5. “Trauma Versailles” [“The trauma of Versailles”]. This documentary series was analyzed by Silke Fengler and Stefan Krebs, “Das Schöne und der Krieg: Zur filmischen Ästhetisierung des Ersten Weltkrieges gestern und heute,” in *Jahrbuch für Kommunikationsgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007), 196–210.

56 *The First World War*, a documentary series in ten episodes, based on the book by Hew Strachan and produced by Channel 4 in 2003 and aired again by the BBC in 2014, focuses on the British perspective and interpretation of historical events but offers a broad overview on different regions of the Commonwealth and their involvement in WWI, therefore this series features comparatively “exotic” side stages of the Great War, such as the Ottoman Empire in episode four, “Jihad,” or Africa in episode three, “Global War,” etc. See further: “The First World War,” *bbc.co.uk*, accessed Sept. 30, 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00jz8g2/episodes/guide>.

“theoretical-methodical dimension” (according to which line of reasoning are these material components put together to form the narrative?), differ considerably from the British and German ones. The geographic focus is much smaller, and world politics of the Great Powers is not much mentioned. It seems, and this appears to be a positive aspect, that in the Slovene narrative, WWI is much more presented from a bottom-up perspective, meaning from the point of view of “ordinary people,” of little soldiers, and in a collective sense, from the viewpoint of a small nation.⁵⁷ This is obviously true for *Gozdovi so še vedno zeleni*, but it is also a valid point for the documentary series that strongly relies on historical sources like diaries and letters from soldiers and other contemporaries, thereby portraying the war more from a socio-historical, and not solely military or politically strategic, perspective. On the other hand, one could argue that the Slovene documentary series fails to (or, due to its different guiding question, never attempts to) connect the dots of the bigger picture of Europe’s Great Power politics, but rather stays within the regional frame of events in the Slovene lands.

The “semantic components” of the Slovene narrative on WWI have been on display especially in the documentary series, even present in the titles of the single episodes, especially three *Doberdob, slovenskih fantov grob* (“*Doberdob, the Grave of Slovenian Lads*”) and four *Preboj pri Kobaridu* (“*The Breakthrough at Kobarid*”). Even though the series mentions nationalistic and ideologically one-sided slogans, it critically reflects upon them and explains the context of their emergence. For example, while it was still quite

57 Unfortunately, most international encyclopedic publications on WWI still neglect the small nations and their destinies, see: Walter Lukan, “Zgodovinske opombe o Prvi svetovni vojni,” in *Velika vojna in Slovenci*, ed. Peter Vodopivec and Katja Kleindienst (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 2005), 34.

possible to read about the ideologeme of *Völkerkerker* (“Prison of people’s nations”), an idea reinforced after the disintegration in 1918 to make nostalgic feelings of belonging to the Austro-Hungarian Empire disappear, in older Slovene historiography, such stereotypes cannot be found in this documentary.⁵⁸ In *Gozdovi so še vedno zeleni*, a particularly quiet war movie, I would argue that the “semantic component” is characterized by the speechlessness of the protagonists in front of the overwhelming war experience. Only in the mentioned nightmare, soldier Lindner is confronted with the ideological phrases of fatherland and the father figure of the Emperor.

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Recapitulating Slovene film production on WWI in general, I would argue that until recently it did not really exist, but that the productions under discussion in this article prove to be a very valid and solid powerful thrust in this direction. Both productions discussed at length made great efforts in order to be historically accurate and portray a realistic—neither naïve nor romantic nor nationalistic—picture of the specific situation of Slovene people during the First World War. Since a small but very committed circle of historians and movie producers is trying to raise awareness for WWI in Slovenia, we can expect more such excellent productions in the future. Especially for the year 2018, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the turning point, 1918, in Slovene history, one can expect some more research and TV productions on that topic. Even though WWII is not going to dominate public perception any less, the view on WWI is not completely blocked anymore.

58 Pečenko/Štepec (2014), Part 1.