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## Yugoslavia from the Other Side. Memorialization of the Yugoslavian Communist Revolution Among Slovenians in Argentina<sup>1</sup>

### *Jugosławia z drugiej strony. Rytualizacja wspomnień o jugosłowiańskiej rewolucji komunistycznej wśród Słoweńców w Argentynie*

**Summary:** The article addresses how Slovenians in Argentina ritualise memories of the socialist Yugoslavia. The Slovenian diaspora in Argentina was established by post-war refugees, who inextricably related the perception of Yugoslavia with memories of the Second World War, the communist revolution and, in particular, the post-war exile and extrajudicial mass executions. The article specifically analyses commemorations of the victims of communist violence as the central anti-Yugoslavian political ritual and argues that imageries of communism, Yugoslavia and the anti-communist struggle, all carefully ritualized in ceremonies and commemorations, not only reinforced the social memories of exile, but also catalysed the social organization of the diaspora, its political ideology, and the framework of its attitudes towards the homeland and the past.

**Key words:** Yugoslavia, Slovenian diaspora, Argentina, exile, rituals, memories, mass executions, violence

Translated by Author

**Streszczenie:** W artykule omówione są sposoby, w jakich Słoweńcy mieszkający w Argentynie rytualizują wspomnienia o socjalistycznej Jugosławii. Początek słoweńskiej diaspory dali uchodźcy, którzy trafili do Argentyny po II wojnie światowej. Ich wspomnienia z Jugosławii nierozzerwalnie łączyły się ze wspomnieniami z wojny, rewolucji komunistycznej oraz, być może przede wszystkim, okresu powojennego uchodźstwa oraz terroru i masowych egzekucji. Artykuł przedstawia upamiętnianie ofiar komunistycznych jako główny anty-jugosłowiański rytuał polityczny, argumentując, że imaginariusium związane z komunizmem, Jugosławią oraz walką z komunizmem było starannie rytualizowane pod postacią upamiętniających je ceremonii i obchodów, co nie tylko wzmacniało społeczną pamięć o uchodźstwie, lecz także działało jako katalizator

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<sup>1</sup> The author acknowledges the financial support from the Slovenian Research Agency (research programme “Slovenian Identities in the European and Global Contexts”; research core funding No. P6-0187).

procesów organizowania się diaspory oraz tworzenia jej ideologii politycznej, a także ram dla jej stosunku wobec ojczyzny i przeszłości.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Jugosławia, słoweńska diaspora, Argentyna, emigracja, rytuały, wspomnienia, masowe egzekucje, przemoc

Tłumaczenie: Klaudyna Michałowicz

## Introduction

The article examines the ways socialist Yugoslavia was imagined by the Slovenian post-Second World War diaspora in Argentina, and how memories of the World War II and the communist revolution, perceived as the fundamental reasons for exile and migration to Argentina, were incorporated in the community's rituals. From 1918 or the end of the First World War, Slovenia was part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians. This entity was in 1929 renamed to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and then in 1945, after adopting a communist political system, became known as the People's Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – later the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In 1990, Slovenia turned into a parliamentary democracy, gaining independence in 1991 based on a national plebiscite.

In the Slovenian diasporic community established by post-war migrants in Argentina, the perception of Yugoslavia was inextricably related to the social memories of the Second World War, the communist revolution and, in particular, the post-war exile and extrajudicial mass executions. The Slovenian refugees fled to Austria and Italy, and later to a range of other European and non-European countries, for political reasons, such as fear of retribution for their wartime collaboration with the occupying German army, anti-communist political struggle, or simply refusal to accept the new communist regime. Particularly in Argentina, Canada and some other countries, they organized themselves in the social, cultural and political sense as closely-knit communities with apparent diasporic characteristics, such as social memories of exile and homeland, aspirations of political changes at home and mythology of return (see Žigon 1998, 2001; Sjekloča 2004; Repič 2006).

In Argentina, the migrants established several Slovenian associations in Buenos Aires, Mendoza and Bariloche, where people were brought together not only by their shared ethnicity and similar experiences of exile and migration, but also by a common anti-communist political ideology that manifested on many levels of their daily life. The principal cause for their exile from the homeland was attributed precisely to the communist revolution and the establishment of a new dictatorial Yugoslav regime in 1945. The imageries of communism, Yugoslavia and the anti-communist struggle were carefully incorporated in various community's political rituals, ceremonies and commemorations (see

Repič 2013, 2014). The political rituals not only reinforced the social memories of the exile, but also catalyzed the social organization of the diaspora, its political ideology, and the framework of its attitudes towards the homeland and the past.

Life in the Slovenian diaspora in Argentina is imbued with a variety of celebrations and commemorations, but herein we shall focus specifically on those commemorations that honour the victims of communist violence, often simply named Homeguard or Memorial Ceremonies. Commemoration of the victims of communist violence has been a central anti-communist and anti-Yugoslavian political ritual ever since 1948, when post-war immigrants in Argentina planted the seeds of a closely connected Slovenian community there. Below, we will briefly outline the Slovenian diaspora in Argentina, followed by an analysis of how the memories of the war and the communist revolution as foundations of socialist Yugoslavia appear in rituals, as well as how diaspora celebrates the state's disintegration since 1991. The research for this article was conducted as part of the longitudinal study of the Slovenian diaspora in Argentina, based mostly on ethnographic approach, and partly on historical research. Specifically for this research, the participant observation and interviews on rituals was used as well as a systematic analysis of historical and written materials, predominantly diaspora's own publications, e.g. "Free Slovenia" weekly newspaper.

### **Migrations to Argentina and the formation of the Slovenian post-war diaspora**

The first Slovenians relocated to Argentina already in the late 19th century, as a result of an agreement between Argentina and Austria (which the Slovenian lands were part of, up until 1918) granting migrant settlers land for cultivation. Slovenians mostly settled in the north of the country, in the fertile provinces of Entre Ríos, Corrientes and Santa Fe; some also in the sub-tropical provinces Formosa, Chaco and Misiones close to the borders with Paraguay and Brazil (Hladnik 1994: 11). Due to dispersed settlement, these migrants did not develop consistent social ties, and their descendants only recently sought to rediscover their origins and establish links to the other Slovenians (Molek 2012). Emigration of Slovenians to Argentina was at its peak after the end of the First World War. Between 1922 and 1929, some 25.000 people moved out of the regions of Primorska (western Slovenia), Prekmurje (eastern Slovenia) and Bela Krajina in the south (Žigon 1998: 40; Rant 1998: 16; Sjekloča 2004: 79). In addition, according to the Treaty of Rapallo signed between the Kingdom of Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians in 1920, a sizeable part of western littoral Slovenia (the Julian March) was annexed

by Italy. Due to resulting poverty and political pressure, the greatest number of Slovenians emigrated from that region precisely.

The Slovenian diaspora established by post-WW II migrants was less numerous than the community of migrants that arrived between both world wars, but was in contrast exceptionally well organized, introverted and self-reliant. After 1947, between six and seven thousand political refugees fled to Argentina (Rant 1998: 15–7). Most came from refugee camps in Austria and Italy, where they had been seeking sanctuary since May 1945. Some were members of the Slovenian Homeguard army, fighting, independently or under German command, against the Partisan resistance; some were civilians in various ways related to the Homeguard soldiers or merely resisted or opposed the communist revolution and the new regime. The foundations of the subsequent tightly-knit diaspora emerged already in the refugee camps, where the people were connected through their traumatic experiences of exile, and the shared oppressive reality of potential extradition to the Yugoslav authorities – whose victims mostly ended up in mass graves, with the few survivors bringing back harrowing stories of tortures and executions in Slovenia. In the war's wake, tens of thousands of people were executed in Yugoslavia, among them at least fourteen thousand Slovenians (see e.g. Ferenc 2005; Dežman 2008). Some victims were seized at home or on the run, whereas a great majority of the Slovenians, who were executed, were sent back to Yugoslavia by the British army from the Homeguard camp Vetrinj in Austria. John Corselis, a British relief worker later wrote that the British extradited between ten to twelve thousand Homeguard soldiers, who were then brutally and extrajudicially executed by their Slovenian compatriots (1997: 131).

The refugees organized the essential levels of the community already in the camps by forming schools, preparing cultural events and celebrations, publishing newsletters, schoolbooks and literature, thus also setting up an ideological stance they would later maintain in the diaspora (Rot 1992; Corsellis 1997: 137; Arnež 1999; Švent 2007). A closely connected ethnic community in Argentina centred around the Slovenian Association (later renamed to United Slovenia), nine regional associations in Buenos Aires, Mendoza and Bariloche, set up Slovenian schools, churches, cultural production encompassing literature and arts, and an overall vibrant social and cultural life (Debeljak 1994; Rot 1994; Rant 1998; Žigon 2001).

I hereby examine the rituals with regard to the concepts of the diaspora and social memories, which form an ideological and mythological substratum of the community, providing individuals with a specific framework of remembering and interpreting the past. Among the fundamental characteristics of the diaspora, as a relatively closed emigrant community, William Safran identified the preservation of the traumatic social memories

of dispersion from homeland, and various ties to the homeland (Safran 1991: 83–84). Similarly, Rogers Brubaker posited dispersion, boundary maintenance between the group and the surrounding society and homeland orientation as the essential characteristics of diaspora. They manifest as the persistence of ethnic identity and the concept of the ancestral homeland, which in diaspora represents an “authoritative source of value, loyalty and identity” (Brubaker 2005: 5). This is also apparent in the Slovenian diasporic community in Argentina, in which memories of homeland were essential for the formation and persistence of the Slovenian identity and the community’s own social and ideological integration.

Ethnic communities were also enabled by Argentinean’s own policy of cultural pluralism, which allowed European immigrants to organize official ethnic associations (Schneider 2000: 27–8). The Slovenian societies functioned as organizational structures as well as discourse reference frames for the preservation and ritualizing of personal stories, social memories and a unified ideological stance. Rituals operate as the frameworks of ideological discourses and collectively accepted historical interpretations, which incorporate the stories and memories of individuals (Halbwachs 1980; Fabian 2007). Thus, incorporation of memories in the rituals was essential in the process of establishing and maintaining a closely-connected ethnic community, based on shared experiences of exile. In rituals, personal and social memories are reproduced as narratives, explaining basic questions, such as “who are we” and “why are we here”? As one of the interlocutors expressed: “We are all here because of the injustice that our parents had to suffer ... I should have been born in Slovenia”. Rituals enabled personal narratives of executions and life in the prison and refugee camps to gain collective and even mythical proportions, i.e. to share the narrated experiences as “ours”.

The narratives are shared among the community members as well as transferred to younger generations within the framework of rituals, but also outside of them. In addition to the rituals, other frameworks of reproduction of social memories are schools, cultural events, religious rites etc. They institutionalise everyday processes of remembrance, narrative interpretation and transmission of memory between generations (Connerton 1989; cf. Pickering, Keightley 2013). Social memories are not static but, within the interpretative frameworks, adapt to the current social and political issues. As such they are closely connected to the self-organizing and ritual-maintaining efforts of the community.

In the sense of collectiveness and social characteristics (cf. Brubaker 2005: 4), diaspora is established with the formation of spatial and temporal relations, since social memories always occurs in the spatial context (particularly related to the concept of homeland). The narratives of the exile, of post-war executions and of home and homeland speak of execution locations, refugee camps, landscape and borders across which the people

fled. Remembrance of the home(land) is closely connected with the landscape preserved in social memories, narratives and rituals, because these facilitate migrants to preserve a sense of place and belonging (cf. Bender 2001).

Rituals are of central significance to the diaspora as they enable articulation of narratives and standardization of interpretations as well as social memories that are formed and maintained in relation to the causes of migration, the position of the individuals and the community in the broader social environment, and the general attitude towards the homeland, which is often amalgamated with a mythology of “return” (see Repič 2016). Narratives of the extradition of Slovenian Homeguard members and their relatives from refugee camps to Yugoslavia and of clandestine executions in Kočevski Rog and elsewhere in Slovenia coalesced into a profoundly powerful collective traumatic experience, which branded the social memory and ideological-political stance of the diaspora. Reports of the secret executions were introduced to the refugee camps already by the occasional survivors, who had managed to escape the pits and re-cross the Austrian border. Several cases were later documented of survivors who lay hidden between the corpses in the pits of Kočevski Rog and eventually got out. In diaspora their accounts were later discussed at large and published on numerous occasions (e.g. Kocmur 1965–1971; Kozina 1970, 1990; Zajec, Kozina, Dejak 1998; cf. Švent 2007: 64).

Herein we shall not address the post-war executions themselves, as they have been addressed by various authors already (e.g. Ferenc 2005) and have, in general, been a rather strongly politicized subject in local terms as of late, but shall primarily deal with the question of how the Slovenians in Argentina developed and maintained their memories of the war, the exile, the communist revolution and the post-war trauma, and how they incorporated these social memories into their ceremonies, commemorations and other rituals. The incorporation of these memories into the community rituals transferred the individual experiences of violence and migration onto the whole community, and politically defined and ritually asserted and communicated its attitude towards Yugoslavia and Slovenia as its part until 1991. We shall examine the commemorations honouring the victims of communist violence as a kind of lasting anti-Yugoslavian and anti-communist political ritual, which reinforces its own specific position based on the prevalent attitude towards the homeland – its past, present and future.

### **Commemorations of the victims of communist violence in Yugoslavia**

The social organization of the Slovenian diasporic community, its activities, identity politics and mobility practices were based on the social memories of violence and exile, reciprocal support, ethnic belonging, relationship with homeland and the mythology

of return. Memorialization permeates annual and religious celebrations, local ceremonies and especially political rituals. Most strongly, it is expressed in commemorations held for the victims of communist violence, which have been regularly organized in Buenos Aires ever since 1948 and have the role of the central political ritual of the Slovenian community in Argentina.

Jože Rant states that the idea behind the June Memorial Ceremony was suggested by dr. Tine Debeljak<sup>2</sup> already in 1946 in Rome, when he was "... preparing the calendar of Slovenian emigrants on request of dr. Miha Krek".<sup>3</sup> Thus, Debeljak marked 1 June 1946 as the "Memorial Day of the Nation's Martyrs", since in that month, one year earlier, "fell the greatest number of our people" (Rant 1998: 365, cf. Svobodna Slovenija 1971: 3–4). The Memorial Day was meant to accommodate mourning ceremonies for the victims of communist violence during the war and after it. Mourning ceremonies were organized in the refugee camps already in 1946, and the Memorial Day as devised by Debeljak was adopted by the Slovenian Association in Argentina, which later held annual commemorations honouring "Slovenian heroes who fell during the communist revolution and occupation", "victims of the communist revolution in Yugoslavia", or "victims of communist violence in Yugoslavia".<sup>4</sup> The first such commemoration in Argentina was held in August of 1948, to be followed, usually, on the first Sunday of June every year.

The organization of the commemorations is carried out by the umbrella organization of post-war Slovenian migrants in Argentina, the Slovenian Association (United Slovenia). The ceremony usually takes place on the premises of the association, while some were also organized across other regional Slovenian associations and clubs in Argentina. Each year, the association names a committee for the organization of the commemoration, which puts forth a detailed program. The course of the commemoration, its speakers, liturgy and accompanying cultural program change from one year to another, but the core content, symbols, narratives and interpretations remain traditionally alike, adapted merely, for example, to the current political situation in Slovenia. Due to a systematic selection of the chief actors and a program adhering to hardline political stances in the community, the subject has avoided any significant ideological rifts, which emerged

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<sup>2</sup> Tine Debeljak was a writer and one of the most influential persons of the post-war Slovenian community in Argentina. He described his memories of the war, the post-war executions and the emigration in numerous literary works.

<sup>3</sup> Miha Krek was an influential politician prior to WW II, a member of the Slovenian People's Party, editor of the "Slovenec" newspaper, member of parliament and government minister. During the war, he had stayed in Rome from where he helped organize assistance to the post-war refugees before eventually moving to the USA.

<sup>4</sup> The title of this celebration changed with the times. In everyday talk, it is mostly referred to as the Memorial or Homeguard ceremony.

in certain other activities within the diaspora, for example its central cultural program, the “Slovenian Cultural Action”.

Commemorations begin with a memorial mass and wreath layings in memory of the victims, and continue with the speeches of the community’s key actors and a cultural program, which may encompass drama, poetry recitals or readings, choir singing and similar activities. The contents of the mass, the addresses and the cultural program are closely related to the memory of the war, of the violence and suffering, the exile from Slovenia, the deportation of the Homeguard to Yugoslavia to be executed, and the ensuing post-war killings. Front and centre is the “struggle of the Slovenian nation for sovereignty”, the “anti-communist struggle” or resistance against the “communist revolution”, and the “suffering of the massacred Homeguard soldiers”. Characteristically, the content is permeated with religious significance. It should be noted that the commemorations are well attended, and frequently reported as filling assembly halls (meaning over one thousand people present). The events are documented by the weekly journal “Svobodna Slovenija” (“Free Slovenia”), the diaspora’s main publication. In close detail, the fifty-year period of celebration was additionally described by Jože Rant (1998: 365–456).<sup>5</sup> Below, I present just some of the cases that illuminate the role of the political ritual in the formation of the diaspora, its political views and relationship towards the homeland, as well as the continuity and development of the commemorations themselves.

#### *Commemorations during the first post-war decade*

The first commemorations “honouring the victims of communist violence” in Argentina were organized on 6 June 1948, as the “black mass for murdered Slovenians” held in the chapel at Rivadavia Street. On 8 August 1948 a commemoration was held “in honour of Slovenian martyrs”.<sup>6</sup> A speech was given by dr. Miha Krek, followed by the first-person testimony of “a boy who experienced the horrors in person, all the way up to the execution site, (...) the tragedy’s living witness, a testament for us assembled here” (Rant 1998: 365).

Next year, on 12 June 1949, the second commemoration was held with memorial mass and oration, where Narte Velikonja stated: “I feel sadness for being labelled a traitor, for now, yet convinced that this, too, shall change in time”. The ceremony, described in the journal “Free Slovenia” (“Svobodna Slovenija”) in Slovenian and in Spanish, was accompanied by the drama performance of Debeljak’s *Black Mass* (1949) and various

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<sup>5</sup> In addition to the interviews, the stated publications form the basic archival sources of this research.

<sup>6</sup> Tine Debeljak published the book *The Great Black Mass for Murdered Slovenians* in 1949 in Argentina. Parts of its content were often read or expanded upon during commemorations.



artistic representations of the memories of violence (by painter Bara Remec, for example) (Rant 1998: 366).

The journal "Free Slovenia" on 25 May 1950 published an invitation to that year's commemoration entitled: *Slovenian blood spilled for freedom and democracy*:

The Slovenian nation's army, stationed in the Vetrinj camp in Carinthia, (...) [was] massacred according to the secret deals of the victors, who most cruelly rejected to consider the struggle of the Slovenian nation (...). The blood of those 12,000 men, spilled viciously and with injustice, was an early warning cry to the world as regards the dangers of this terror (Rant 1998: 367).

The text refers to the extradition of Slovenian Homeguard members and their relatives and associates from the Vetrinj refugee camp to Yugoslavia, where most were killed and buried in mass graves. During his speech at the commemoration, the then-president of the Slovenian Association, Mr. Miloš Stare, asked all the present parents "to place this memory into the hearts of their children" (Rant 1998: 367). The transfer of social memory through commemorations, ceremonies, education and familial values was essential to the maintenance of the community's ideological position among those ethnic Slovenians who were already born and raised in Argentina.

The invitation to the commemoration of 1952, published in "Free Slovenia" on 29 May 1952, begins:

For the seventh consecutive year now, us anti-communist Slovenians mark the anniversary of the ultimate crime in our history. (...) Our struggle was just! According to divine and human law. (...) When criminals appear in the home, it is man's obligation and right to oppose them. (...) That – and nothing else – was the essence of the anti-communist struggle in our homeland (Rant 1998: 368).

In the initial years of the commemoration, certain recurring characteristics can be observed. The commemoration, alongside other ceremonies with similar content, developed a very significant role in the social cohesion between those Slovenians who sought the company of their kinsmen in the Slovenian Association. Their ties were based on national belonging, and especially a shared historical fate and political stance. At the 1952 commemoration, dr. Alojzij Odar once again stressed the relation between national identity, the Catholic faith and politics: "Our victims, violated by communism, fell as Slovenian, human, Christian victims" (Rant 1998: 369). Furthermore, the association was highly active in organization of mutual assistance, helping new immigrants with their documentation, accommodation, employment and other issues. Initially, all employed members contributed up to 10% of their salaries in solidarity to the newcomers, supporting them until they were able to secure paying work and a place to live.

The next significant characteristic of the commemoration was the fact they were managed by the diaspora's authority figures and political elites, for example the association's

president, priests, influential writers and artists, people of high social status, decorated soldiers and others in the positions of opinion makers. The central aspect of the commemorations was to articulate memory, interpret history and conceive a vision for the future. In this vein lies the statement of Velikonja, that the scarlet brand of the Homeguard as the traitors shall eventually – as soon as communism falls – be reversed. Another recurring notion was the implicit correlation of the anti-communist struggle with strong national identity and Catholicism, while communism was conceptualized as a perniciously godless, foreign occupying force. Thus, the communists were regarded as untrue Slovenians and the de-facto traitors of the Slovenian nation (rather than the other way around), while the perceived state of the homeland was one of communist Yugoslav occupation.

#### *Commemorations up until 1990*

The first commemorations stood as a model for all the subsequent ones. The organizational structure remained similar: the organization committee featured members of political elites, Homeguard veterans, renowned artists, opinion-makers and active members of United Slovenia and other local Slovenian associations. The central themes were likewise maintained: remembering the victims of the war, especially the post-war extrajudicial executions, with a focus on martyrdom, exile, and communism as a historical crime. In 1965, during the memorial ceremony marking the 20th anniversary of the exile, the Slovenian House unveiled its “monument to the Slovenian victims of communism”, the work of sculptor France Ahčin. One of the speakers, Homeguard veteran Lojze Debevec who escaped from the Teharje camp, spoke on the subject of the killings: “the bones of our men (the Homeguard) lie scattered shamefully across the Slovenian woods, yearning for their graves” (Svobodna Slovenija 1965; Rant 1998: 395). Another speaker, Emil Cof, an officer of the Yugoslavian King’s Army and later a Slovenian Homeguard officer, spoke at large of the war, of politics and the post-war killings. Among other things, he commented:

The foreign invader was replaced by the Slovenian communist, who had started his vile revolution already during the war, under the guise of a liberation struggle. Thus, the Slovenian nation was dragged into a terrifying slavery to the Red dictatorship (Svobodna Slovenija 1965; Rant 1998: 395).

After twenty years, in addition to the calls for the formation and preservation of historical memory, focus was gradually transferred to the “continuity of Slovenian identity”: the memory of the victims of communism will be preserved, if the Slovenian identity is maintained among younger generations. In this way, Slovenian identity was increasingly in conflict with their conceptualization of Yugoslavia. The communist regime was perceived as an authoritarian occupation of the homeland and an essential threat to true

“Slovenianness”. In this sense, the preservation of Slovenian identity was a continuation of the resistance against communism. On the occasion of a great mass held by a number of Slovenian priests, the Argentinean bishop Segura spoke:

Nurture and preserve your language, your song, your customs and traditions! That way, you shall remain faithful to your own nation, as well as enriching your new home with noble values that inspire the greatness of Argentina, the homeland of your children (Rant 1998: 390).

The diaspora also developed a mythology of return once communism falls, made explicitly present in the ceremonies. Initially, people speculated communism would in fact be short-lived, that they would be able to make a victorious return home soon enough as the carriers of historical justice. In the sixties it became clear their stay in Argentina would be far more extensive, yet the mythology of the return did not lose steam. At the commemoration in 1969, the president of United Slovenia thus opined that it was the explicit duty of expatriates to preserve their stories for later generations. He also added:

We firmly believe that such times shall arise, when Slovenians can visit their forlorn graves. (...) And in those places where our brothers spilled blood, we shall make sanctuaries, with the whole nation honouring the memory of our fallen heroes. (...) Until that time, though, these holy treasures of ours must be guarded by us, expatriate Slovenians (Rant 1998: 402).

In the sixties and seventies of the 20th century, bonds with the Argentinean society were being strengthened. During the commemorations, respects would be paid to the Argentinean liberator San Martín, and reports of the ceremonies were starting to surface in Spanish language as well. At times, news of the Slovenian commemorations even made it into regular Argentinean media.

An important characteristic of commemorations is that the holy masses, speeches, drama and poetry often made connections between the fate of the Slovenians exiled after the war and biblical representations of suffering, persecution and exile. For the commemoration of 1985, Tine Debeljak Jr.<sup>7</sup> wrote a collection of poems titled *The Living Make Pilgrimage Alongside the Dead* (*Z mrtvimi romamo živi*). In it, he reminisced on the communist revolution, the post-war violence and exile. The poem *Smitten* makes parallels between the plight of the migrants and the *Second Book of Moses* (*Exodus*):

All day and all night  
storms howled over our country  
and as the morning rose,  
the northern wind  
brought locusts on its wings.

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<sup>7</sup> Tine Debeljak Jr. was the son of Tine Debeljak and Vera Remec. For a long time, he was the editor-in-chief of the publication *Free Slovenia*.

In the poem *The Red Mud*, he uses the symbolism and subject matter of the Revelation (Armageddon), writing of wartime and post-war violence:

The Lord's angel raised his fist  
 over our homeland  
 and a great star fell from the sky  
 streaking like a fiery torch  
 through our clouds  
 crashing into our waters,  
 into our rivers,  
 the Sava, the Drava, the Krka, the Sora.  
 The star was a red-hot stone  
 and red was its devouring flame. (...)  
 Firstborn  
 after firstborn  
 were cast into the torrent  
 that thundered and churned  
 devouring, consuming,  
 a whole generation of firstborn sons  
 12.000 strong,  
 all those who bore  
 the Lord's mark on their brow.

In the continuation, in the poem *Slovenian Brothers Maccabees*, he alluded to the Books of the Maccabees and described a dragon with seven heads and a red crown, which “slaughtered the seven sons of the Slovenian Maccabees”:

Their corpses were fodder for vultures in the Kočevje forests  
 offered to beasts prowling the caves of the Karst,  
 their blood flew with the blood of the rivers.

He concluded with the poems *Departure into the Wasteland (Exodus)* and *The Way to the Promised Land* which speak of exile, flight and arrival to a new homeland where the memory of the exodus must be remembered.

#### *Commemorations after Slovenia's independence*

In the eighties, calls began to sound from the diaspora, aiming at the homeland's own recognition of the post-war executions and other injustices. The eventual independence of Slovenia in 1991 was understood as “liberation from under communism”, which brought a new impetus to the commemorations. At the commemoration in 1990, Tine Debeljak Jr. looked back at the four decades of past rituals, and commented on the changes taking place in the homeland:

Finally, on this year, Slovenia frees itself from communist dictatorship! (...) At last, the system that those we've been cherishing in our memory had been fighting against has crumbled to dust (Rant 1998: 440; Svobodna Slovenija 1990: 22–23).

Alongside remembering the victims of violence, the ceremony thus also became the celebration of the fall of communist Yugoslavia. In his speech, Božo Fink said: "Fighting against that historical blunder, we sacrificed rivers of blood and shouldered our exile, and we do not regret – we've lived to see it destroyed, inside out" (Rant 1998: 441). At the ceremony, a wreath was laid in memory of the victims, and this time the writing on it read: "Victorious". Prior to the commemoration, the "Free Slovenia" journal published the statement of the Slovenian National Committee entitled *Memory and Reconciliation*, which, among other, demanded:

- recognition that the fratricidal war was instigated by the CP [Communist Party];
- condemnation of the genocidal execution of civilians and disarmed military opposition;
- repentance of the violence and a willingness for the injustices to be redressed;
- the rejection of characterizing all those who resisted the communist revolution as traitors, and recognition that the Homeguard (...) acted under occupation within the framework of internationally recognized rights to peacekeeping and self-defence (Rant 1998: 440; Svobodna Slovenija 1991).

These patterns reoccurred in 1991. The report on the commemoration in the Free Slovenia then added that for several years

the commemorations have no longer carried a tone of mourning, but rather of honouring sacrifices for the homeland. This year, finally, many of the places of torture and mass execution, as well as the shameful burial mounds, received the crosses they had so long been waiting for (Rant 1998: 442).

Throughout the nineties and up until present day, the Slovenians in Argentina continued organizing commemorations of the victims of communist violence. On the other hand, following Slovenia's independence in 1991, similar reverence ceremonies have also been occurring within Slovenia – for example the commemorations in the Kočevski Rog, in Teharje, and in other known locations of mass graves or post-war prison camps – with a tendency to express similar anti-communist discourse. Reports from the commemorations in Argentina during the past decades have pointed out that the ceremonies are slowly losing the presence of living Homeguard soldiers, their carriers now becoming younger visible members of the Slovenian community which strive to preserve the continuity of the memory of the Second World War and the mythology of exile, as well as maintain strong bonds between Slovenians in Argentina.

### **Conclusion: memorialization of Yugoslavia in the rituals of Slovenian diaspora**

The formation and preservation of the Slovenian diaspora depended on the social memories expressed through community events, celebrations, in publications and the arts, etc. (see Repič 2010, 2012, 2013, 2017). Memories of the war, the post-war executions and the exile were thus in diaspora directly connected to the communist revolution, which was understood as the principal reason for the exile, and the perception of post-war Yugoslavia. Ritual assertion of a thoroughly negative attitude towards communism and the formation of socialist Yugoslavia acted significantly in the establishment of the diaspora, particularly its social organization and political ideology.

Imaginaries of Yugoslavia were heavily burdened by the memories of violence during the Second World War, the communist revolution, the exodus, and the post-war executions of Homeguard soldiers and affiliates. These imaginaries were based on narratives of the suffering and struggle of individuals, and thus asserted a profoundly negative attitude towards communism. Hence, post-war Yugoslavia was fully identified with communism as the principal reason for emigration, and with inter-war and post-war violence which was characterized as “the greatest crime in the history of Slovenia”, and the “usurpation of the homeland”. Furthermore, the relationship with the homeland was marked by the fact that Slovenia had up until 1991 been part of Yugoslavia. Thus, powerful mythologies coalesced around the concepts of the ancestral home and eventual, potential return, reinforcing and collectivizing the sentiment of exile and the essential importance of preserving the Slovenian identity, language, culture and Catholic faith. The Slovenian independence in 1991 was thus understood as the “liberation of the homeland”, which profoundly changed the attitude towards Slovenia and the past, and triggered various forms of “roots tourism” and “return mobilities” (see the concepts in Basu 2004; King and Christou 2011). These include roots migration, school excursions and tourist visits of the homeland, including pilgrimage to places of emotional significance such as familial, religious or memorial sites, such as mass graves (Repič 2013, 2016; see also Lukšič Hacin 2004; Toplak 2004).

The Slovenians in Argentina, I argue, formed a perspective of Yugoslavia from the other side: from the other side of the Atlantic, as well as from the other end of the ideological spectrum, they asserted a view (co)shaping the image of Yugoslavia, writing its (and the people’s own) history, standardizing and preserving the memories of the communist revolution, and with political rituals, among other, shaping the community and everyday life in diaspora.

Commemorations honouring the victims of communist violence represent the central political ritual of the diaspora in which traumatic events are remembered within the diasporic framework of interpreting the past, relationship with the homeland and position of the diaspora vis-à-vis Argentinean society. They play a significant role in the formation and persistence of the political and social organization of the community, the standardizing and historical interpretation of the social memories and reasons for the emigration, and a shared ideological platform based on the mythologies of the ancestral homeland, return, and preservation of Slovenian and Catholic identity. The content of the ceremonies appears rather unambiguous, representing a strong ideological and political stance of the community, though in practice, certain ideological divergences do exist within it on the internal level.<sup>8</sup> The commemorations are managed by the political elite of the community, and their staging is highly organized, with a performative expression aimed at the members of the Slovenian community, as well as the Argentinean and Slovenian public. Among the many ceremonies that preserve the memory of the events during the war and after it, the central diaspora-maintaining political ritual appears to be precisely the commemoration of the victims of communist violence. Throughout time, the official speakers of the event were Homeguard veterans, persons who survived the mass executions, eminent artists and academics, and other political elites of the community, whereas the rituals are aimed at preserving the memories of wartime violence, torture, oppression and the over-arching theme of exodus from the homeland. The memories are given authority and power by the narratives of various individuals and their personal experiences of violence, as well as direct allusions to biblical content. In this sense, the commemorations also operate as a way of transferring memories and historical interpretation onto younger generations.

Commemorations also expressed a highly specific conceptualization of the relationship between the homeland and foreign soil: the Homeguard struggle was represented as a nationally-liberating one, united under Catholic faith, and communism was perceived not as an indigenous but rather a pervasively foreign, Soviet influence. The Slovenians conceptualized communism and, by extension, the communist Yugoslavia, as the occupier of Slovenia. The Slovenian independence in 1991 is, accordingly, celebrated as the liberation of the homeland. The commemorations of the victims of communist violence thus manifest as a resilient ritualization of particular memories of the World War II and the communist revolution – perceived as the core of communist Yugoslavia – in addition to simultaneously celebrating its collapse.

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<sup>8</sup> During interviews, quite a few interlocutors were critical or at least reserved with regard to the above-described interpretation of history and the strongly charged political and ideological position of the community, but these frictions did not manifest in the commemorations themselves.

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