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*Absent from Public Memory.
Hidden Grave Sites in Slovenia 60 Years
After the End of World War Two*

In 2005, celebrating 60 years since the fall of fascism and the end of World War II, us Slovenians still face a heritage of the past – the consequences of conflicts, which left behind numerous hidden grave sites on our land. These grave sites are the result of post-war mass and individual extrajudicial executions between 1945 and 1946, and they include the sites containing the remains of the members of the armed formations which opposed the partisans, as well as civilians. In a broader sense, hidden grave sites are all grave sites from the aforementioned period containing the remains of soldiers and civilians who could not or were not allowed to have their own graves.¹

According to official information there are 3986 military burial grounds and grave sites dating back to World War II in Slovenia,² but the hidden grave sites, which are the topic of my article, do not count among them. Until now more than 400 such sites have been discovered.

Like in many other countries fighting in the war, the post-war retaliation of the victorious side against the defeated also took place in Slovenia. Here these confrontations were especially bloody, since many different military formations opposing the National Liberation Movement ended up in the Slovenian territory. These formations were also accompanied by multitude of civilian refugees.

More than ten thousand people lost their lives without any legal proceedings, and subsequently they were also erased from public memory. Namely, the crimes committed by the new Yugoslav authorities against their own citizens

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¹ The author presented the issue of hidden graves more elaborately at the exhibition *Prikrito in očem zakrito: Prikrita grobišča 60. let po koncu 2. svetovne vojne* [Out of Sight: Hidden Grave Sites 60 Years After World War Two] from May to September 2005 in Celje, from September to October 2005 in Ljubljana, and in the treatise with the same title.

² Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs of Republic of Slovenia (hereinafter referred to as Ministry of Labour or ML), Information on the state of military grave sites for the session of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 29 July 1999. Official sources refer to even higher numbers.

with mass extrajudicial executions were made even worse by the authorities commanding silence and denying these citizens the right to their own graves. Mass grave sites, individual graves and the victims they contained simply "did not exist". The grave sites were levelled with the ground, covered up, destroyed. The Directive that the graves of German and other invaders and their collaborators should be removed, levelled, every trace of them wiped out was issued by the Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs as early as on 18 May 1945 and passed on by the individual Federal Ministers to their subordinates, unchanged or adapted. The conclusion of the research in the other parts of the former common country will enable an analysis of how precisely and how long this directive was being carried out elsewhere. Already the comparison between the instructions of the Slovenian and Croatian Ministers of Internal Affairs shows that in Croatia the graves of the members of the Croatian Home Guard were not included among those to be erased and removed,³ while the Slovenian instructions did not mention any exceptions; that means that all the grave sites of those included in the group of national traitors were wiped out.

This Directive was also implemented in the following years; namely, it was repeated at the federal as well as the republic level in August 1946, and up to a degree it was also preserved, as far as its contents are concerned, every time new legislation on cemeteries and burial services was passed.⁴

But the destiny of these victims could not remain hidden from the general population. Prisoners who escaped from camps and prisons and, above all, people who saved themselves from the chasms in the Kočevski Rog⁵ forest and the mines of Stari Hrastnik⁶ described their destiny to relatives and friends. Due to extensive material written by political emigrants more was known and discussed about the post-war massacres outside Slovenia than at home. However, this topic was off limits in the Slovenian public. Even as late as in 1980s

³ *Partizanska i komunistička represija i zločini u Hrvatskoj 1944.–1946.* [Partisan and Communist Repression and Crimes in Croatia 1944–1946]. Slavonski Brod 2005, document No. 63.

⁴ Uradni list Socialistične republike Slovenije, 1984, št. 34 [The Official Gazette of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, 1984, No. 34]; Article 35 of the Cemeteries and Burial Services Act, abolished a few days before the reconciliation ceremony in the Kočevski Rog forest in 1990, set out that "no markings, inscriptions, pictures or symbols pertaining to the casualties' affiliation with enemy organisations fighting against the Yugoslav National Liberation Army or the casualties' hostile activities in order to undermine the social structure of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia shall be allowed at the grave sites."

⁵ *Ušli so smrti : poročila treh rešencev iz množičnega grobišča v Kočevskem Rogu* [Avoided Death : the Report of Three People Rescued from the Mass Grave Site in the Kočevski Rog Forest]. Klagenfurt – Ljubljana – Vienna 2004, pp. 102–157; compare the dates in *Kočevski Rog*. Maribor 1990, pp. 65–74, recapitulated from *Tribuna*, 22. December 1989.

⁶ Franc Ižanec [Niko Jeločnik]: *Odprti grobovi*, I, [Open graves]. Buenos Aires 1965, document No. 19 (Lojz Opeka); document No. 20 (Anton Petkovšek), IV, Buenos Aires 1971 (Ižanec, *Odprti grobovi*, IV), document No. 18 (Janez Ozimek); F. Žakelj: *Revolucija okrog Limbarske gore* [Revolution around Limbarska gora]. Buenos Aires 1979, pp. 287–295 (Jože Cerar).

the Slovenian State Security Service lurked in the proximity of grave sites, especially bigger ones and those visited more frequently, observed who came to the spots where the remains of these victims were supposedly buried and prevented any possible markings of the graves. The Security Service was especially active every year before All Saints' Day.

History shows that no amount of covering up can hide such crimes forever. But if the Slovenian public only whispered about these crimes 20 years after the events, for the first time discussed them publicly after 30 years, knew about 3 or 4 mass grave sites after 40 years, knew about ten times as many after 50 years, then in 2005 already more than 400 hidden grave sites were known. From 1990 to 2002 the exploration of hidden grave sites was in the domain of individuals and associations outside responsible national authorities – these authorities, more or less unsuccessfully, only dealt with the people ordering the massacres. Since the reconciliation ceremony in the Kočevski Rog forest it was expected that the country would become more decisive in its efforts to finally set the records about this traumatic point in the Slovenian history straight.

The first occasion when the State got more actively involved in the problem of finding the grave sites and setting them in order, at least in theory, was the discovery of the mass grave site in Zgornja Bistrica in September 2001, where 431 skeletons were dug up from two pits.⁷ The question of when the state would acquire a list of these sites and when and how it would start arranging them was becoming more and more important. The Government of the Republic of Slovenia undertook that the national authorities would do everything in their power to find and mark the grave sites and, where necessary, also rebury the remains elsewhere.⁸ However, the political will was not followed by the technical, financial, staff and other conditions.

Not before 2002 were the most basic conditions for establishing the records of the hidden grave sites met.⁹ In cooperation with experts on individual grave sites, crime investigators, the victims' relatives and others, 410 burial locations were found and registered by the end of 2004.¹⁰ However, we know that at least another 160 sites exist, containing the remains of very different numbers of victims of war and post-war massacres.

⁷ Public announcement of the Office of the District State Prosecutor of Maribor, 22. January 2002.

⁸ The statement of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia at the presentation of the comprehensive plan of arranging the post-war casualties' grave sites and adoption of the War Grave Sites Act, 22. November 2001.

⁹ The registering by the government commission begun already in 2000, but only continued until the new commission was established by the so-called Bajuk government. For more information about this see Mitja Ferenc: Ministrstvo za kulturo in evidentiranje prikritih grobišč v RS. [Ministry of Culture and the Registering of Hidden Graves in the Republic of Slovenia. In: *Varstvo spomenikov* [Conservation of Monuments]. 2005, 41.

¹⁰ Mitja Ferenc, Mateja Bavdaž: Evidentiranje prikritih grobišč v RS, stanje 31. 12. 2004 [Registering Hidden Graves in the Republic of Slovenia, the state on 31 December 2004].

The completed research took into account all the grave sites hidden during and after the war, including the grave sites of the casualties of the final battles which had not been taken care of or remained unknown. In accordance with the War Grave Sites Act we have also recorded those rare grave sites which were already moved during the war (for example Jelendol) or after the war (for example Orlov vrh). We took into account the sites where the remains were partly dug out and buried elsewhere (for example, the remains from the karst abysses in the Koper region were reburied at the city graveyard in Koper).¹¹ One eighth of the 410 locations (54 of them) registered until now dates back to the wartime period.¹²

The categories of grave sites

The locations where human remains are buried can be divided into four groups. The largest group of hidden grave sites are pits which had to be excavated before they were used to cover up the crimes after the executions. There are almost 300 of those among the registered sites. They can be found all over Slovenia, even in very inappropriate places. They are mostly located in sparse forests, forest clearings or the edges of meadows, but also in the locations where ponds, dumps and parking lots were later built, in orchards, by the outer walls of graveyards, at river banks, by the streams, on steep slopes, even near small chapels, etc. Some grave sites were uncovered by nature, others were discovered during construction works or found by the victims' relatives or associations searching for them; only a few of them were opened on purpose. The grave sites of German and Italian soldiers, whose reburials take place continuously in agreement with these countries, are the exception. But we seem not to know how to take care of our own citizens. Or cannot or will not take care of them.

Mine shafts (ten of them) and dugouts are another group of hidden grave sites. The Sv. Barbara mine shaft near Laško is the most infamous example, while the largest number of victims – Bosnian and Montenegrin Chetniks and members of the Slovenian Home Guard – can be found in the mines of Stari Hrastnik.

The third group includes anti-tank and other previously excavated ditches. 15 of these are recorded, but despite them being mentioned frequently, only two

¹¹ Mestna občina Koper, Urad za gospodarske in javne službe in promet, Poročilo o organiziranju in pomoči pri iznašanju človeških posmrtnih ostankov iz kraških votlin socerbsko-podgorškega Krasa, avtor Franc Malečkar, 22. 7. 1992 (dalje Koper, Poročilo); Uradni zaznamek, 25. 3. 2004 [The Koper Municipality, Office of Public Services and Transport, Report on the organisation and assistance with the exhumation of human remains from the karst caves in the Socerb-Podgorje Karst region, author Franc Malečkar, 22 July 1992 (hereinafter Koper, Report); official memorandum, 25 March 2004.

¹² This number does not include 17 locations which I have already determined were not grave sites, 38 grave sites without chronological information, and the grave sites dating back to May 1945.

have been partially explored: the one at Tezno near Maribor and the other one in Celje. The known sites include ditches between Brežice and Dobovo, the ones near Mislinja and Slovenj Gradec, the trench in Bistrica ob Sotli, etc. The biggest grave site in Slovenia is probably the one in Tezno near Maribor, which mostly contains the remains of Croatian citizens. A part of this ditch was systematically explored during the construction of the highway, but some of it was left undisturbed by the examiners. More than 1100 corpses were dug out over the length of 60 metres.¹³

The last group of hidden grave sites are the karst abysses. The speleologists recorded human remains in almost 100 karst abysses and they are in various conditions. Some of them are completely open and anyone who would climb inside could step on human bones; while others were blown up in order to cover the tracks.¹⁴ Unfortunately some of these chasms also contain garbage which covered the remains.¹⁵ The remains were brought out of some ten abysses, partially or completely.

The status of the victims

In regard to their status and nationalities, the victims buried at these grave sites are classified on the basis of direct and indirect oral sources and literature. Therefore this is just approximate information, since barely any exhumations and analyses took place. But even when exploring these grave sites in detail we soon stumble upon obstacles when trying to determine whether the remains are soldiers or civilians. Research carried out until now shows that the grave sites in the territory of Slovenia are mostly hidden military grave sites (134). 79 of the sites contains civilians, while soldiers and civilians were buried together at 72

¹³ Policijska uprava Maribor, poročilo ODT v Mariboru o spremljanju izkopavanja posmrtnih ostankov žrtev povojnih pobojev na lokaciji tankovskega jarka v trasi bodoče avtoceste v k.o. Bohova, 12. 7. 1999 [The Maribor Police Directorate, the report of the Office of the District State Prosecutor of Maribor on the monitoring of the exhumation of post-war casualties' remains at the location of the anti-tank ditch at the future highway construction site in Bohova, 12 July 1999]; some sources mention the length of 70 metres and 1179 corpses.

¹⁴ The explosions sometimes brought down only a part of the entrance, while at other locations the entrances collapsed completely. The most widely known hidden graves in the Kočevski Rog forest are such an example: the Jama pod Macesnovo gorico cave and the Jama pod Krenom cave, where the reconciliation ceremony also took place in 1990.

¹⁵ For additional information on karst caves – grave sites see Andrej Mihevc: *Množična grobišča v jamah v Sloveniji* [Mass Grave Sites in Slovenian Caves]. In: Brez milosti : ranjeni, invalidi in bolni povojni ujetniki na Slovenskem. [No Mercy: Wounded, Injured and Unhealthy Post-War Captives in Slovenia]. Ljubljana 2000 (hereinafter Mihevc, Brez milosti). In: *Brez milosti. Ranjeni, invalidni in bolni povojni ujetniki na Slovenskem*, Ljubljana 2000, pp. 331–349; same author: Identifikacija žrtev pobojev v breznih na Kočevskem Rogu in Matarskem podolju s pomočjo novcev [Identifying the Post-War Casualties in the Kočevski Rog Forest and the Matarsko podolje. Abysses on the Basis of Coins]. In: *Naše jame*, [Our Caves], 1995, pp. 85–89.

sites; we do not have any information whatsoever about a quarter (109) of them. The hidden sites where Slovenians were buried have a different status from the burial sites containing the remains of people of other nationalities, since most of them are civilian grave sites (69). We especially find Slovenian civilians near the camps of the OZNA (Department for the Protection of People) security agency (Strnišče, Hrastovec in Slovenske gorice, Brestrnica, etc.) or near its local prisons. However, as far as the numbers are concerned, the military grave sites containing the remains of Slovenians are larger.

The nationality of the victims

Without exhumations and other research it is not suitable nor professional to give detailed estimates about how many casualties of different nationalities were buried in the Slovenian territory. However, in accordance with the partial information collected by the Institute of Contemporary History, we could come to a conclusion, as far as Slovenians are concerned, that at least 13.556 soldiers and civilians, who disappeared during the post-war massacres, were denied their own graves, and so were approximately 6.300 civilians, village guards, Chetniks and members of the Slovenian Home Guard killed during the war fighting against the partisans.¹⁶

People of other nationalities were also executed extrajudicially in Slovenia, most of them were members of the NDH (Independent State of Croatia) armed forces (the Croatian Ustashe and Croatian Home Guard), members of the Serbian Volunteer Corps, Montenegrin and other Chetniks as well as civilians, who accompanied these armed forces over the Slovenian territory, retreating to the Koroška region. The rejection of refugees, captured around Bleiburg (Pliberk) and the river Drava valley towards Croatia, was accompanied by mass executions, especially of the Ustashe and the Home Guard officers, and these events remain known in the Croatian collective memory as the "Bleiburg Tragedy", the "Way of the Cross" or the "Death Marches".¹⁷ Many soldiers and civilians were captured already before that, while retreating from the Croatian to the Austrian border, by the Yugoslav Army. Croatians, Serbians and Montenegrins who

¹⁶ Tadeja Tominšek – Rihtar, Mojca Šorn: *Žrtve druge svetovne vojne in zaradi nje (april 1941 – januar 1946)* [The Victims of World War II April 1941 – January 1946]. In: *Žrtve vojne in revolucije* [Victims of War and Revolution]. Ljubljana 2005.

¹⁷ The highest estimates refer to as many as 600.000 people; *Hrvatski holokaust* [The Croatian Holocaust], p. 110. The Croatian demographer Vladimir Žerjavić calculated that around 49.000 Croatian Ustashe, Home Guard and civilians supposedly lost their lives, as many as 30.000 of the 40.000 captured at Bleiburg and another 10.000 soldiers and approximately 7.000 civilians from the Vetrinjsko taborišče camp and other camps. Certainly not all of them were executed in Slovenia, since mass graves of "the Way of the Cross" were also discovered in Croatia in the past years, for example in the Maceljški gozd forest; Vladimir Žerjavić: *Operacije i megalomanije oko Jasenovca i Bleiburga*. Zagreb 1992; Vladimir Žerjavić: *Gubici stanovništva Jugoslavije u drugom svjetskom ratu*. Zagreb 1989.

reached the Koroška region before the middle of May were returned to Yugoslavia from the camps by the English authorities.

It looks that more grave sites contain the remains of other nationalities than of Slovenians. In the coming years, when the agreements on reburial and arrangement of the grave sites are also concluded with other countries except Germany and Italy, especially with Croatia and Serbia, a list and a basic arrangement of the grave sites is going to be required, as set out in the Geneva Convention.¹⁸ Associations and individuals from Croatia, Republic of Srpska, Serbia and Montenegro are already inquiring about the grave sites and their relatives. Among registered grave sites 108 of them contain the remains of Slovenians,¹⁹ 84 are the grave sites of Croatian victims and 61 are the grave sites of Germans. 59 grave sites contain casualties of various nationalities,²⁰ while for 62 of them no information in regard to the nationality is known.

Mass grave sites

Only estimates can be given about the number of victims buried at individual grave sites, since the remains at just a few of the sites have been exhumed and counted in their entirety. Both abysses in the Kočevski Rog forest count among the larger sites, considered to contain more than a thousand or several thousands of victims: the Jama pod Macesnovo Gorico cave, containing mostly Slovenian victims, and the Jama pod Krenom cave, where victims of other nationalities besides Croats and Serbs could also be buried. The Stari Hrastnik and the Sv. Barbara v Hudi jami mines, containing Chetniks and members of the Slovenian Home Guard, are also among the larger sites. The grave sites in Bistrica ob Sotli, the Krakovski gozd forest, Poljana and the anti-tank ditch near Tezno

¹⁸ Sporazum med Vlado Republike Slovenije in Vlado Italijanske republike o urejanju vojnih grobišč [Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and Government of the Republic of Italy on arranging the war grave sites]. In: Uradni list Republike Slovenije, Mednarodne pogodbe, 1997, št. 10 [Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, International Treaties, 1997, No. 10]; Sporazum med Vlado Republike Slovenije in Zvezno republiko Nemčijo o vojnih grobovih [Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and Federal Republic of Germany on war graves]. In: Uradni list Republike Slovenije, Mednarodne pogodbe, 1999, št. 6 [Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, International Treaties, 1999, No. 6]; Sporazum med Vlado Republike Slovenije in Vlado Republike Hrvaške o urejanju vojnih grobišč [Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and Government of the Republic of Croatia on arranging the war grave sites], draft.

¹⁹ I have not taken into account the 16 sites where Slovenian civilians were supposedly buried which I determined were not grave sites.

²⁰ There are two grave sites of Slovenians and Serbs, seven grave sites of Slovenians and Italians, six sites of Slovenians and Croats and ten sites of Croats and Serbs. 35 sites contain victims of more than two nationalities, most of them Slovenians, Croats and Germans (21) or other combinations, mostly Slovenians and Germans (5), etc. Russians are supposedly buried at five grave sites, Hungarians also five, Italians in three, Serbs in two, Roma and Ukrainians also two.

mostly contain the remains of Croats. The chasms at the Trnovska planota plains mostly contain the remains of Italians and Slovenians from the Gorica region. Casualties from the Trieste and Koper regions were also transported into karst caves. ("Larger" mass grave sites, containing several hundred victims, include: the Kucja dolina valley near Ljubljana, Košnica near Celje, the anti-tank ditch at Mostec near Dobova, five grave sites at Crngrob, Žančani near Slovenj Gradec, Jevnik near the Sidol village near Kamnik, Lancovo near Radovljica, Mošnje in the Gorenjska region (the grave sites Zgoša, Senožeta, Lisičji rep), Zgornja Bistrica, Hafnarjev graben in Brestanica, Golo on Krim, the grave sites in Celje (Mlinarjev Janez, Lipovškov travnik, Bežigrad, Teharje – under the Cinkarna Celje factory dump), the Gorice nad Šoštanjem hill (six locations), etc.) Especially the karst abysses are shrouded in mystery as far as the number of victims is concerned, particularly those that were blown up and the ones that have not been excavated yet, for example the Ušiva jama cave in the Kočevski Rog forest.

Thanks to the recently discovered list of grave sites in the Ilirska Bistrica municipality, drawn up by the State Security Administration for its internal purposes a couple of years after the war, we know that more than 1300 German soldiers are buried in 120 spots around that region.²¹

The state of the grave sites

The state of the grave sites corresponds to the fact that they were hidden and were not allowed to be marked or set in order. Almost none of these sites have been arranged. After 1990 the victims' relatives, associations, municipal commissions and other individuals set up various markings nearby, mostly wooden crosses. Since the mid-1990s more permanent markings have been put up, even memorial chapels at certain sites. The Slovenian state only allocated financial resources for the establishment of the Teharje Memorial Park and the chapel in the Kočevski Rog forest, while it has not yet undertaken to set other hidden grave sites in order and it does not know what to do with them. Thus, unfortunately, as many as two thirds of hidden grave sites remain completely unmarked, without any visible signs of their existence. With the exception of erecting or building crosses, there have never been any other arrangements. The only exceptions are Lajše, which was set up as the central grave site and a memorial for the Primorska region and is completely finished, and the ossuary for the victims from Slovenska Bistrica, built in October 2004. Due to the fact that the grave sites remain mostly unknown, there are barely any signposts to point

²¹ Mitja Ferenc: "... Grobovi so zravnani in zaraščeni" : seznam grobov sovražnikovih vojakov, padlih v času NOV na območju občine Ilirska Bistrica ["... The graves are levelled and overgrown : The list of graves of enemy soldiers who lost their lives during the National Liberation War in the Ilirska Bistrica region."] In: *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 2004, No. 1, pp. 160–168.

out the sites to potential visitors. Only two of all locations have been proclaimed a cultural monument – the Brezarjevo brezno abyss, where the remains were dug out as early as in June 1945, and the nearby Kucja dolina valley, where these remains were transported to.²² However, not even it being proclaimed a cultural monument could not protect the Brezarjevo brezno abyss from becoming a refuse pit.

The bronze bell, which was chosen at the open competition for the uniform marking of hidden graves, was only set up by the state in five locations. Namely, the National Assembly set out in the 2003 legislation that the monuments would bear the inscription "Žrtve vojne in povojnih usmrtitev" ("Victims of war and post-war executions").²³ The inscription is very controversial and because the opinions about the selected monument design are also very different, it looks that the monuments are never going to be put up at all.

The numbers and nationality of victims were also supposed to be inscribed on these monuments. From the professional and scientific point of view just inscribing estimates on the monuments without completing any research is disputable. This task is easier at those locations where these procedures have been carried out but failed to yield precise information (not many of them) than at the locations where no research has ever been completed. Marking and arranging the grave sites also depends on research.

In conclusion I shall describe an example of research at one of the registered grave sites, which underlines the problems we could come across and demonstrates that research can lead to results completely different from what we have expected.

In the context of the local peoples' committee Šmarjeta, an OZNA security agent ordered a group of mobilised boys to track down and catch so-called absconders and other people. They arrested around 19 individuals, who were later released or transferred to the prisons in Novo mesto. However, local people as well as the surviving members of the group thought that seven of them, who had gone missing, were murdered in the nearby Jelenca forest. When the police

²² Odlok o razglasitvi Velikega Brezarjevega brezna in grobišč žrtev povojnih pobojev za kulturni in zgodovinski spomenik ter naravno znamenitost ["Decree on the proclamation of the Veliko Brezarjevo brezno abyss and the grave sites of post-war casualties as the cultural and historical monument and natural site"] In: Uradni list Republike Slovenije, 1994, št. 67 [Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, 1994, No. 67].

²³ The memorial inscription on the military grave sites, referred to in Article 2 of this Act, except for the grave sites of foreign armies, would read: "*Padel(li) v vojni, Republika Slovenija*" ["Lost his/her/their life/lives during the war, Republic of Slovenia"]; the inscription at the grave sites of war casualties, referred to in Article 3 of this Act, would read "*Umrli(i) kot žrtev (žrtve) vojne, Republika Slovenija*" ["Died as a victim/victims of war, Republic of Slovenia"], while the inscription at the grave sites of the people executed after the war, referred to in Article 4 of this Act, would read: "*Žrtev (žrtve) vojne in povojnih usmrtitev, Republika Slovenija*" ["A victim/victims of war and post-war executions, Republic of Slovenia"]. The changed legislation proposes the following inscription on the grave sites of the latter victims: "To the victims of revolutionary violence, Republic of Slovenia".

found some human bones on the surface on 2 April 2003, they discovered that five people could have been executed there. The names and surnames of the supposed victims were known.²⁴ Because their relatives were still alive, the investigating judge ordered them to be exhumed (order carried out on 10 June 2003). However, only the remains of two persons were found. The experts, on the basis of the comparison between the photos of the supposed victims and the skulls discovered, thought that the skeletons are most likely the remains of the supposed victims.²⁵ However, DNA analysis showed no relation between the skeletons of the two persons and the eight assumed relatives.²⁶ Thus instead of the presumed seven known persons we ended up with two unidentified individuals.

Even 60 years after the end of World War II we still only grudgingly or just on a theoretical level agree that everyone who lost their lives during or because of the war have a right to their name and grave, that the grave sites should be discovered and marked, the victims buried, death certificates given out, and that it is necessary to deal with other issues of pious and humanitarian nature. However, on the practical level there are far too many reproaches that this is simply the past and that it has nothing to do with today's generations. In the fifteen-year period after the reconciliation ceremony in the Kočevski Rog forest, when the knowledge about the extent of murders and number of grave sites was revealed to all Slovenians, and while the politics have many times expressed interest in dealing with these issues, every government was nevertheless reluctant to carry out these tasks, expressed apparent helplessness and pushed these issues aside. The post-war massacres remained the subject of political conflicts and calculation. But the victims' relatives, the public and the researches are entitled to more.

Whether we want them to or not, the questions of finding, researching and marking the hidden graves are often intertwined with the questions of guilt and sin – who committed these crimes, who will answer for them, who is guilty of murder, etc. We can understand that these issues continue to inflame political conflict and are subject to different opinions. But the issue of setting the hidden graves in order should be separated rigorously from all these topics. Namely, the right to a grave is a question of humanity and civilisation and it cannot depend on who was on the winning or the losing side. As long as these graves remain hidden and the current situation continues, the question of winners and losers can soon turn into a condemnation of the descendants – that all of us were losers. Also because even though 60 years have passed since the end of World War II, we still have not brought together the political will, the emotions of the

²⁴ A discussion with Pavel Jamnik. In: Jože Dežman: *Moč preživetja – sprava z umorjenimi starši*. Celovec, Ljubljana, Dunaj 2004, pp. 314.

²⁵ Institute of Forensic Medicine, expert opinion, 14 July 2003.

²⁶ General Police Directorate, Forensic Research Centre, expert opinion, 7 November 2003.

relatives and the scientific effort in order to change the situation and finally deal with these grave sites.

Thus even today the hidden grave sites only with difficulty get the first modest markings. Despite the fact that written sources about the post-war killings are rare and almost non-existent as far as the hidden grave sites are concerned, the historical science has prepared the information about 410 grave sites and submitted it to the competent national authorities. So there are no tangible reasons anymore why the hidden grave sites should not finally be set in order.

Povzetek

Odsotni iz javnega spomina. Prikrita grobišča v Sloveniji 60 let po koncu druge svetovne vojne

V letu 2005 ko se spominjamo 60 let zmage nad fašizmom in konca druge svetovne vojne, se Slovenci še zmeraj soočamo z dediščino preteklosti – s posledicami spopadov, ki so na naših tleh pustili številna množična prikrita grobišča. To so tista grobišča, ki so posledica povojnih množičnih in posamičnih izvensodnih usmrtitev v letih 1945–46, pa tudi grobišča iz časa vojne, v katerih ležijo posmrtni ostanki pripadnikov oboroženih formacij okupatorjev in iz protipartizanskega tabora in tudi civilistov. Širše pa prikrita grobišča imenujemo vsa tista iz omenjenega obdobja, kjer so pokopani vojaki in civilisti, ki niso mogli, oziroma niso smeli imeti svojega groba.

Tako kot v drugih vojskujočih se državah je tudi na Slovenskem dogajanje po koncu vojne vključevalo obračun zmagovalcev s poraženci. Na slovenskih tleh so bili ti obračuni še posebej krvavi, saj so se na našem ozemlju znašle najrazličnejše skupine vojaških formacij, ki so bile narodnoosvobodilnemu gibanju nasprotni. Poleg tega so z njimi bežale še trupe civilistov. Brez sodnega postopka je življenje izgubilo več deset tisoč ljudi. Tisto kar je za slovenske razmere specifično pa je njihovo brisanje iz javnega spomina. Zločin, ki ga je nova jugoslovanska oblast storila nad lastnimi državljani z množičnimi zunajsodnimi pomori se je namreč stopnjeval še z zaukazanim molkom in odvzemom pravice do groba. Množična grobišča, posamezni grobovi ter žrtve v njih "niso obstajali".

A če se je v slovenski javnosti dvajset let po zločinu o njem le šepetalo, po tridesetih letih prvič javno spregovorilo, po štiridesetih letih vedelo za 3 ali 4 množična grobišča, in se je po petdesetih letih njihovo število podeseterilo, se v letu 2005 ve že za prek 400 zamolčanih grobišč.

Dosedanje raziskave kažejo, da je na našem ozemlju največ vojaških prikritih grobišč. Le za slovenske žrtve velja, da po številu grobišč prevladujejo civil-

na, medtem ko so vojaška grobišča po številu žrtev množičnejša. Glavnino prikritih grobišč, okoli 300, predstavljajo jame, ki leže na najrazličnejših krajih. Druga skupina po številčnosti so kraška brezna (86), protitankovskih jarkov je 15, rudniški jaški in zaklonišč je 10. Nekatera grobišča je razkrila narava, druga so se pokazala ob gradbenih izkopih ali ob iskanjih bližnjih sorodnikov in društev, le redka pa so se odpirala načrtno. Izjema so grobišča nemških in italijanskih vojakov, katerih prekopi potekajo kontinuirano po sporazumih z obema državama.

Podajati podrobne ocene, koliko žrtev različnih narodnosti leži na naših tleh, je brez izkopov in drugih raziskav neprimerno in v veliki meri tudi nestrokovno. Po delnih zbirnih podatkih Inštituta za novejšo zgodovino imamo – kar zadeva Slovence – pomorjenih po vojni okrog 13.500 domobrancev in civilnih žrtev in ta skupina sestavlja večino tistih, ki leže v prikritih grobiščih.

Po šestdesetih letih od konca druge svetovne vojne se tudi le s težavo in zgolj na načelni ravni strinjamo, da imajo vsi, ki so izgubili življenje v vojni ali zaradi nje, pravico do imena in groba, da je potrebno odkriti in zaznamovati grobišča, pokopati žrtve, izdati mrliške liste ter rešiti druga vprašanja pietetne in humanitarne narave. Na praktični ravni pa je še vse polno očitkov, da gre zgolj in samo za preteklost in da to ne zadeva današnjih generacij, ki s tem nimajo nič. V petnajstletnem obdobju po spravi slovesnosti v Kočevskem Rogu, ko se je vedenje o razsežnosti pomorov in grobišč lahko dotaknilo slehernega Slovenca, je bil s strani politike že mnogokrat izražen interes po ureditvi teh vprašanj, a je bilo pri vsaki vladi čutiti pomanjkanje volje za izvajanje teh nalog, navidezno nemoč in odpiranje teh vprašanj na stranski tir. Povojni pomori so še naprej ostali predmet političnega obračunavanja in preračunavanja. Svoji in javnost pa so upravičeno pričakovali več.

Še danes prikrita grobišča le s težavo dobivajo prve skromne oznake. Kljub dejstvu, da so pisni viri o povojnih pomorih redki, o prikritih grobiščih pa jih skorajda ni, je zgodovinska stroka v dveh letih pripravila podatke o 410 grobiščih in jih predala pristojnim državnim organom. Tako ni nobenega oprijemljivega razloga več, da se urejanje zamolčanih grobišč ne bi pomaknilo z mrtve točke.