



**Janko Pleterski.** *Slowenisch oder deutsch?: Nationale Differenzierungsprozesse in Kaernten (1848-1914).* Klagenfurt: Drava Verlag, 1996. 487 pp. DM 54,00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-85435-210-5.

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**Published on** HABSBURG (July, 1997)

It is difficult to imagine a case better suited than bilingual Carinthia for investigating the emergence of ethnically inspired national differentiation. For more than a millennium speakers of Slavic and German dialects have lived in close proximity in Carinthia. But it was not until the last century that one's mother tongue attained popular recognition as a marker of social and cultural difference. It came to symbolize affiliation with one of Carinthia's "imagined" peoples or *Volksgruppen*. Under the "Old Order" collective identity was of nominal importance and had more to do with one's locality, religious confession, and relatively fixed social position as a peasant or aristocrat.

This book describes the social and political transformation of Carinthian society in the wake of the "Old Order," and does so in terms of the mobilization of the local population on the basis of ethnic (i.e. linguistic) difference.

In bilingual Carinthia ethnic identity gained political salience during the 1848 revolutions under the auspices of cultural and political elites addressing a rural populace pursuing emancipation from the feudal order. A process of national differentiation was initiated which found its ultimate tragic expression in Carinthia after the Anschluss when mutually exclusive national categories were systematically ascribed through the auspices of the Nazi regime to each resident of the

region, producing state sponsored campaigns of what is now called ethnic cleansing.

Janko Pleterski's detailed account contributes to the comparative study of ethnically inspired nationalism in terms which can be readily related to more recent research on the topic by, for example, Anthony D. Smith and Eric Hobsbawm. But the geographic and historical scope of Pleterski's project is restricted, while the above research is global in its quest for comparison. The analytical distance characteristic of this more recent work is also absent in Pleterski's investigation. He fails, for understandable reasons, to divorce his analysis from the national project which he describes and in which he has participated.

The research leading to this book was shaped by the particular circumstances of local historical scholarship following World War II. Pleterski takes the position of a national minority as his point of departure, a stance which was perhaps facilitated through the experience of his native Slovenia's subordination to more dominant ethnic nations within pre- and postwar Yugoslavia. And through his focus on national (rather than ethnic) differentiation in Slovene Carinthia he commits himself to a demonstration of the integrity of Slovene ethnic territory, of the Slovene aspiration for nationhood. His study subtly represents a "nationalist" historiography where at points he seeks to substantiate what Anthony Smith would call "Slovenia's myth of political constitution." And

through his persistent use of the term "national consciousness" he implies that national identity represents a fundamental option in the collective self-representation of all individuals. As Eric Hobsbawm notes, this hopelessly reduces the complexity of collective self-identification in modern societies.[1]

Fortunately, however, Pleterski is not preoccupied with an account of the ethnogenesis of Carinthia's respective peoples or a history of their national aspirations. Rather, he understands the emergence of the local variant of nationalism as the consequence of an explicitly political confrontation where ethnic difference was effectively manipulated by diverse elites. And he accounts for "objective" conditions which he assumes enabled ("awakened") and eventually provoked the expression of national consciousness.

Pletherski wrote under the tutelage of two history professors, Bogo Grafenauer and Fran Zwitter, whose distinguished contributions to the Slovene national project were shaped by a Marxist perspective whereby considerations of the material base and class structure of society were seen as an imperative precondition for understanding its ideological superstructure. Pletherski's text is guided by this understanding.

The book was written at a time when Slovene ethnic territory was divided by a vigilantly policed frontier separating Yugoslavia from Austria and Italy. Although Pletherski shares an interest in the Slovene national project which includes Slovene speaking Carinthians, he studied Carinthia at a distance. The relation of German Carinthian colleagues to the emergence of nationalism on their home turf was more intimate. Many found it difficult to divorce their research perspectives from a defense of German civilization perceived to be under threat by Communist Yugoslavia which had occupied the Slovene speaking portion of Carinthia following World War II, replicating Yugoslav claims over the same territory at the conclusion of World War I. Fur-

thermore, the domination in the 1960s of a German nationalist orientation among the Carinthian power elite was fueled by an increasingly self-aware Slovene minority elite.[2] The diverse positioning of the region's historians across various real and imagined borders thus inhibited creative intellectual discourse. The publication history of this book reflects a situation where it was extremely difficult to divorce the topic under investigation from the ideological preoccupations of the various power structures sponsoring academic and research activity on either side of the Cold War and national divides.

In spite of, or perhaps because of, these borders the author's 1963 defense of his dissertation (the source of the book under review here) in Ljubljana was noted in the German language media and academic circles of Carinthia. Pletherski's text threatened the absolute monopoly on the interpretation of Carinthian history held by German nationalist historians schooled in the historiographic tradition of Martin Wutte. His text can be in fact read as a polemic against this tradition. The *Volkszeitung* in Klagenfurt (cited in Sima's introduction, p.14) headed its short commentary on Pletherski's doctoral promotion with the caption "Wo ist Slowenisch-Kaernten?"[3] And the text's major academic review in German written for Carinthia's leading historical journal (*Carinthia*) by Robert Barbo (1965), a bilingual exile from Carniola, attacked the merit of Pletherski's research through what Valentin Sima qualifies (p. 12) as a spiritual defense of the superiority of German civilization reminiscent of the Wutte tradition (cf. Wutte 1943).

Pletherski's dissertation gained more positive attention among Carinthia's young Slovene intellectuals. For many of them it represented, according to Sima, their first encounter with an interpretation of Carinthian history which provided an alternative understanding of the province's constituent ethnic groups under the period of national differentiation. Pletherski's focus on nationalism

and his Marxist-inspired sociological analysis emphasizing a dynamic relationship between various social strata/classes influenced a series of historical and sociological studies conducted by Slovene minority scholars. And these were eventually joined by German colleagues unencumbered by the entrenched historiography of Martin Wutte. Subsequent research thus reflects a plurality of methods and interpretations regarding the history of inter-ethnic relations in Carinthia which was totally absent in 1963.

Acknowledging the growing interest in alternative interpretations of Carinthian history, Franci Zwitter translated Pleterski's text into German during the 1970s. Nevertheless, its eventual publication in Carinthia, albeit under the sponsorship of the Slovene minority press, was delayed until well after Slovenia's secession from Communist Yugoslavia--thirty-three years after it was written. Even though Pleterski's text is a well established, if not rather dated, reference work among regional specialists (most of whom read Slovene), its publication in German enables access by a much broader group of scholars interested in the region or the theme.

Two leading questions inform the book's content and structure: 1) What are the main social and economic factors which influenced national consciousness and the political orientation of the population of Slovene Carinthia between the 1848 revolutions and the outbreak of World War I? 2) How did the national consciousness and political orientation of this population make themselves felt during this period?

Pleterski approaches these questions through a chronological presentation. Since the Slovene speaking population of Carinthia has been confined largely to the peasantry, he devotes parts of several chapters to the changing socio-economic circumstances of this social formation, distinguishing between smallholders, agrarian workers, and large land owners. He outlines the diverse ways in which the peasantry's material concerns

have been effected by superordinate authority, represented initially by a feudal aristocracy and replaced following the 1848 revolutions by state functionaries, commercial elites, and large landholders who were mostly German speakers. And he registers the political orientation of diversely positioned peasant groups through extensive use of material from the flourishing Slovene and German press of this period, as well as election results which, with the extension of suffrage, became a significant source for evaluating the political orientation of the groups under consideration.

With the same degree of precision, Pleterski also describes the formation of a nominal working class recruited in part from the Slovene peasantry and the Slovene commercial, clerical, and cultural elite (which he identifies as the Slovene bourgeoisie) in the shadow of its dominant German counterpart. His attention to the working class and social democracy in this period is disproportionately great compared to their relative significance in the political landscape. And this perhaps reflects a commitment to a Marxist understanding of social evolution.

Initial attempts in 1848 to mobilize Slovene speakers in a movement for a united Slovenia occurred in Carinthia and were led by members of the local clergy, most notably Matija Majar. Their appeals were directed primarily toward monolingual Slovene-speaking rural communities. But this attempt at ethnic mobilization in the political vacuum created by the abolition of *Grundherrschaft* fueled liberalism among the predominantly German speaking bourgeoisie in Carinthia. A fundamental ideological opposition between liberalism and clerical conservatism was established which persisted in shaping the political profile of Carinthian politics throughout the waning decades of Habsburg dominion. Pleterski's primary objective in this study is to identify how the German and Slovene national programs, set in motion by the 1848 revolutions, were accommodated by these opposed political camps which an-

chored themselves throughout the Habsburg lands.

The book is not merely a narrative on the formation of a Slovene elite and the evolution of a Slovene national project. Rather Pleterski persistently investigates, through a sound sociological perspective, the material, social, and legal/administrative conditions promoting mass mobilization by the various political and national factions seeking control in the political vacuum noted above. He sensitively isolates issues of contention and traces an evolving pattern of ideological confrontation. While liberalism gradually became the domain of German nationalism, clericals increasingly solicited support from the Slovene speaking peasantry. And the weak movement for social democracy in Carinthia ultimately adopted a German national stance. This account of national differentiation is thus constructed around the description of an evolving power structure. The author describes how, under the conditions imposed by neo-absolutism, the clergy consolidated its position in the countryside. And he pays equal attention to the subsequent liberal period when clerical authority in the countryside was challenged by legislation producing educational reform (1867) and the extension of suffrage.

Because of the symbolic value of language for ethnic differentiation in Carinthia, Pleterski considers in detail the role of language in the formation of educational and administrative policy. And he recounts the ways in which language identity has figured in the compilation of census data and the use of this information by the German majority to manipulate the composition of election districts and otherwise assure their political hegemony. Furthermore, he outlines the quandaries of identity that confronted Slovene speakers whose social and material position led them to support political platforms which came to be dominated by German nationalists.

The resulting picture is complex, and documents cross-cutting loyalties experienced espe-

cially by Slovene speakers. Thereby the author elaborates at several points on the evolving liberal-clerical split among the Slovene elite who shared, as they still do today, the mutual goal of attaining equality in the public, cultural, and commercial institutions of Carinthia but who disagreed about the overall objectives of the Slovene national project in the larger arena of state making and remaking.

This book is a compelling story depicting the consolidation of German nationalist domination over an increasingly self-aware Slovene minority in modern Carinthia, where the latter is consistently confronted by the prospect of assimilation. With the onset of World War I Carinthians found themselves in a situation where declaration of one's collective self-identification in terms of ethnic affiliation (i.e., national loyalty) became increasingly imperative to the pursuit of one's interests. The daily plebiscite in favor of one's chosen nation was no longer a matter of individual choice. Carinthians were faced with the option: Slovene or German?

As already noted, Pleterski's initial work on the history of relations between Carinthia's Slovene and German speaking populations has influenced numerous studies. The recent work of Andreas Moritsch and colleagues (1991) represents an explicit continuation of nationalism studies initiated by Janko Pleterski. Moritsch recasts themes introduced by Pleterski in a contemporary analytical perspective. And he has undertaken a more thorough investigation of national differentiation in rural Carinthia through extensive use of local sources which are absent in Pleterski's text. In contrast to Pleterski, whose focus and level of generalization is regional, Moritsch seeks to capture the dynamics and specificity of national differentiation as it has been manifest in local rural communities.

Notes:

[1]. While the original Slovene title of this text included the term "narodna zavest" (national con-

sciousness), it is noticeably absent from the German title adopted in 1996. And in all fairness to the author's commitment to a balanced analysis we should note that he also refers repeatedly to political and class consciousness, indicating he may be seeking to stress the subjective dimension of collective identity formation rather than underline the primacy of national self-identification.

[2]. In 1959 a Slovene Gymnasium was established in Klagenfurt which has been of immeasurable importance for the revival of a Slovene minority elite in Austria, especially the generation of scholars attracted to Pleterski's work on their native region.

[3]. This aspersion alludes to the subtitle of his dissertation, which was published two years later (1965) under its original title by Slovenska Matica in Ljubljana: *Narodna in politicna zavest na Koroskem. Narodna zavest in politicna orientacija prebivalstva slovenske Koroske v letih: 1848-1914 (National and political consciousness in Carinthia. National consciousness and political orientation of the population of Slovene Carinthia: 1848-1914)*.

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**Citation:** Robert Gary Minnich. Review of Pleterski, Janko. *Slowenisch oder deutsch?: Nationale Differenzierungsprozesse in Kaernten (1848-1914)*. HABSBUrg, H-Net Reviews. July, 1997.

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