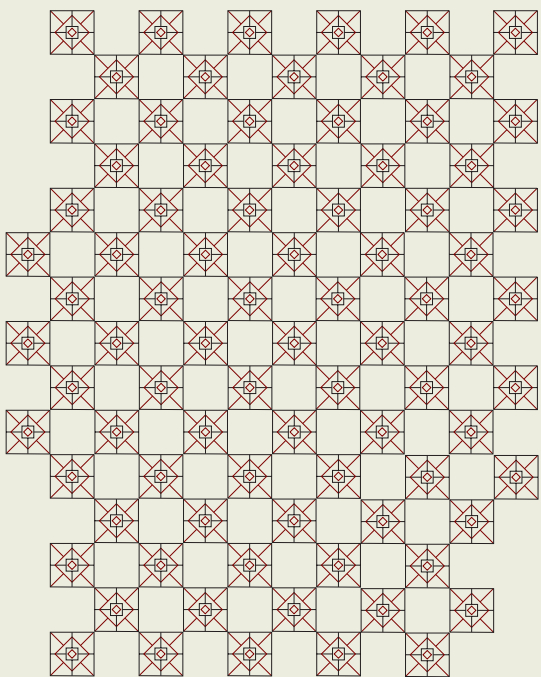
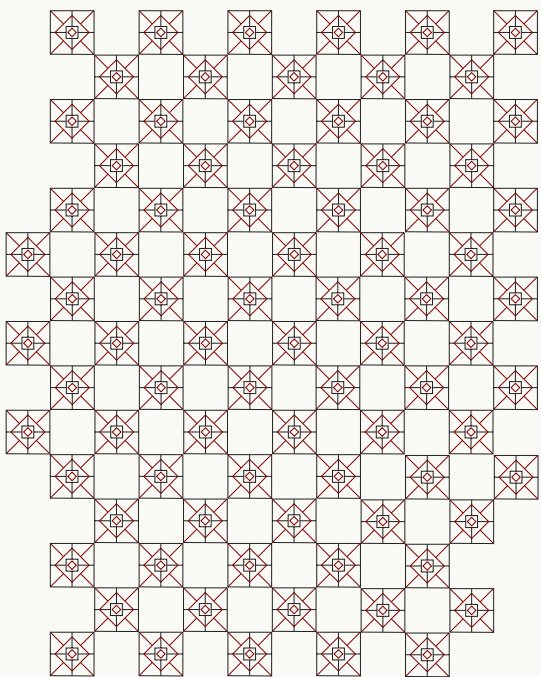




Retro **SPEKTIVE**

*Znanstvena revija za
zgodovinske in
sorodna področja*

IX/1



Retro **SPEKTIVE**

*Znanstvena revija za
zgodovinske in
sorodna področja*

Glasilo Združenja za promocijo kulturne dediščine,
raziskav in novih tehnologij – Retrospektive

Mednarodni uredniški odbor:	dr. Peter Mikša (SI) (odgovorni urednik), dr. Kornelija Ajlec (SI) (glavna urednica) dr. Maja Vehar (SI) (tehnična urednica) dr. Žiga Smolič (SI) (tehnični urednik) dr. Bojan Balkovec (SI) dr. Matija Zorn (SI) dr. Božo Repe (SI) dr. Petra Testen (SI) dr. Aleksander Lorenčič (SI) dr. Claire Strom (USA) dr. Sanja Petrović Todosijević (SRB) dr. Slobodan Marković (SRB) dr. Ivan Laković (MNE) dr. Alexa Stiller (CH) dr. Tvrto Jakovina (HR) dr. Marcela Hennlichova (CZ) dr. Ruža Fotiadis (GER)
Strokovna sodelavka:	mag. Ana Marija Lamut (SI)
Urednika posebne številke:	dr. Kornelija Ajlec (SI) in dr. Božo Repe (SI)

Za znanstveno vsebino tekstov in točnost podatkov odgovarjajo avtorji. Prav tako morajo poskrbeti za avtorske pravice za objavljeno slikovno in drugo gradivo, v kolikor je to potrebno. Ponatis člankov in slik je mogoč samo z dovoljenjem uredništva in navedbo vira. Redakcija tega zvezka je bila zaključena 15. maja 2026.

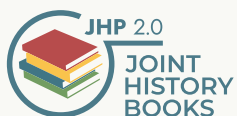
Naslovnica:	Tjaša Krivec
Oblikovanje in oprema:	Jure Stušek
Prelom in tisk:	PODOBA d.o.o., Celjska cesta 7, SI-3250 Rogaška Slatina
Naklada:	100 izvodov
Cena izvoda:	20 €
Letna naročnina:	30 €

Izdaja:	Združenje za promocijo kulturne dediščine, raziskav in novih tehnologij – Retrospektive Slovenska cesta 9b, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija info@retrospektive-journal.org www.retrospektive-journal.org
ISSN:	2630-3426 (tiskana izdaja) 2670-4013 (spletna izdaja)

*Izdajo znanstvene revije Retrospektive sofinancira
Javna agencija za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko dejavnost
Republike Slovenije (ARIS).*



Javna agencija za znanstvenoraziskovalno
in inovacijsko dejavnost Republike Slovenije



Kindly supported by:



Implemented by:



Table of Contents

<i>Editorial Introduction</i>	9
Foreword	11
<i>Zvezdana Kovač</i>	
Borders as Historical Practices	17
<i>Kornelija Ajlec & Božo Repe</i>	
<i>Discussions</i>	21
Borders, Spaces, and Ethnic Maps in South East Europe (An Overview)	23
<i>Srđan Radović</i>	
Occupation Borders as High-Intensity Border-Making: Slovenia, 1941–1945	47
<i>Kornelija Ajlec and Božo Repe</i>	

Banal Nationalism and the (In)visibility of Borders: 79

The Case of Albania and Greece

Kriton Kuci

Teaching History in Contemporary Balkans: 117

*A Comparative Analysis Based on the Survey of the Observatory
on History Teaching in Europe*

Angelos Palikidis

**History Education in Greece:
How do Borders and Neighbors Fit in Conservative Curricula? 139**

Cracking the Canon with Bottom-up Initiatives

Vassiliki Sakka

**Reimagining Civilization and Nationhood
through Education: 159**

The Century of Türkiye Maarif (Educational) Model

Kenan Çayır

***Author information* 186**

Retro **SPEKTIVE**

Discussions

21

DOI: 10.64651/retrospektive.2026.9.1.2

Occupation Borders as High-Intensity Border-Making: Slovenia, 1941–1945¹

Kornelija Ajlec and Božo Repe

1 The research for this article was made possible by the project *Make this Land German ... Italian ... Hungarian ... Croatian! The Role of the Occupation Borders in the Denationalization Policy and the Lives of the Slovene Population* (J6-8248) financed by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS); and the research programme *Slovene History* (P6-0235) financed also by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS).

ABSTRACT

In April 1941, Slovene-inhabited territory was divided among four Axis powers: Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Hungary, and the Independent State of Croatia, each of which claimed that the occupied territory was historically or ethnically its own. This article contributes to phantom border studies on two levels. First, it argues that the key variable in producing the long-term effects of borders is not their duration, but rather the combination of intense coercion, demographic disruption, the replacement of administrative structures, and the violent interruption of established spatial practices. Second, the article distinguishes between classical phantom borders, which emerge through long-term institutional internalization, and coercive occupation borders, which, due to violence and contested sovereignty, produce primarily traumatic and conflictual forms of persistence. Populations often functionally adapted to such borders yet never granted them normative legitimacy. The article further distinguishes between spatial afterlives, which gradually weaken at the local level, and discursive afterlives, that is, legitimizing languages of historical restitution and civilizational hierarchy that remain politically available long after the borders themselves have disappeared. The article thereby refines the existing conceptual framework of phantom borders and proposes a model applicable to other cases of short-lived yet highly coercive border-making in Southeast Europe and beyond.

Keywords

phantom borders, coercive territorialization, occupation borders, spatial afterlives, discursive afterlives, Slovenia, Yugoslavia, Second World War, Southeast Europe

IZVLEČEK

Aprila 1941 je bilo slovensko etnično ozemlje razdeljeno med štiri sile osi: nacistično Nemčijo, fašistično Italijo, Madžarsko in Neodvisno državo Hrvaško, pri čemer je vsaka izmed njih trdila, da je zasedeno ozemlje zgodovinsko ali etnično njeno. Članek k študijam fantomskih meja prispeva na dveh ravneh. Prvič, zagovarja tezo, da pri nastanku dolgoročnih učinkov meja ni odločilno njihovo trajanje, temveč kombinacija intenzivne prisile, demografskih pretresov, zamenjave upravnih struktur in nasilne prekinitve ustaljenih prostorskih praks. Drugič, članek razlikuje med klasičnimi fantomskimi mejami, ki nastajajo skozi dolgotrajno institucionalno ponotranjenje, in prisilnimi okupacijskimi mejami, ki zaradi nasilja in sporne suverenosti ustvarjajo predvsem travmatične in konfliktno oblike ohranjanja. Prebivalstvo se je takšnim mejam pogosto funkcionalno prilagodilo, vendar jim ni nikoli priznalo normativne legitimnosti. Članek nadalje razlikuje med prostorskimi ponotranjenji, ki postopoma in lokalno slabijo, ter diskurzivnimi ponotranjenji, torej legitimacijskimi jeziki zgodovinske restitucije in civilizacijske hierarhije, ki ostajajo politično uporabni še dolgo po izginotju samih meja. Prispevek tako nadgrajuje obstoječi konceptualni okvir fantomskih meja in predlaga model, uporaben tudi za druge primere kratkotrajnega, vendar izrazito nasilnega ustvarjanja meja v jugovzhodni Evropi in širše.

Ključne besede

fantomske meje, prisilna teritorializacija, okupacijske meje, prostorska ponotranjenja, diskurzivna ponotranjenja, Slovenija, Jugoslavija, druga svetovna vojna, jugovzhodna Evropa

A SPACE WITHOUT A STATE

The study of borders in Europe has shifted profoundly in recent decades. Rather than treating borders as fixed, clearly delineated lines separating political entities, scholars have increasingly approached them as historically contingent constructs, produced and reproduced through social, cultural, and institutional practice. Language, media, education, and visual representation have all been identified as key mechanisms through which borders are naturalized and embedded in everyday life.² Parallel development in critical cartography has further changed traditional understandings of territoriality. Ethnographic maps have been shown to function as active interventions in the production of political space, partializing imagined identities and connecting territory to those identities in order to claim legitimacy over a given geographic space.³ In Southeast Europe more broadly, where imperial legacies, linguistic diversity, and shifting sovereignties have long intersected, such cartographic practices underpinned competing claims to the same territory across successive regimes. These approaches have deepened understanding of how borders persist. But they have also produced an analytical imbalance. By focusing on processes of reproduction and naturalization, they take for granted the prior existence of stabilized borders. In contexts of abrupt political change, external intervention, and absent social consensus, the moment of border creation remains underexplored.

-
- 2 Billig, Michael. *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage, 1995, 8–9, 37–46. On the reproduction of borders through everyday institutional practice and language see Paasi, Anssi. "Boundaries as Social Processes: Territoriality in the World of Flows," *Geopolitics* 3/ 1 (1998): 69–88; and Paasi, Anssi. *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness: The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border*. New York: Wiley, 1997, chap. 2–3.
 - 3 Harley, J.B. »Deconstructing the Map,« *Cartographica* 26/2 (1989): 1–20. On the political function of ethnographic mapping in Southeast Europe specifically, see Radović, Srđan. "Mapping Ethno-Politics: Borders and Cartographic Representation in Post-Yugoslav (Virtual) Space," in *Boundaries and Borders in the Post-Yugoslav Space: A European Experience*, ed. Nenad Stefanov and Srđan Radović. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021, 143–144. See also Crampton, Jeremy W. "Maps as Social Constructions: Power, Communication and Visualisation," *Progress in Human Geography* 25/2 (2001): 235–252; and Duančić, Vedran. *Geography and Nationalist Visions of Interwar Yugoslavia*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. It traces the political mobilization of geographical expertise in Yugoslav state formation.

The Second World War provides one of the most striking instances of such sudden border-making. And while the partition of Slovene-inhabited territory in April 1941 was not the first, it was by far the most radical.⁴ Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, Hungary and the Independent State of Croatia divided the territory already partitioned, ethnically layered and administratively discontinuous, completing its dismemberment rather than initiating it. They did so with different ideological profiles, different administrative traditions, and different visions of what the territory they were seizing was for. The total length of the new occupation borders was 665,5 kilometers. They divided communities, cut across farmsteads, and destroyed pre-existing patterns of movement, trade, and family life across space whose inhabitants had already spent two decades living with the consequences of a prior, internationally ratified partition.

This prior fragmentation was not contextual background. It supplied the raw material, historical ambiguity, jurisdictional overlaps, and demographic complexity from which each occupier fashioned its own narrative of restoration. The absence of a unified Slovene political entity made each of the four territorial claims articulable, if not credible. This article examines how these claims were translated into spatial practice, and what the resulting borders reveal about the long-term effects of short-lived but coercively intensive territorial interventions. The article further argues that the long-term visibility of occupation-era transformations correlates less with the duration of territorial arrangements than with a combination of coercive intensity, demographic disruption, administrative replacement, and the

4 After the First World War, the Slovene ethnic space was divided by two successive international settlements. Following the Carinthian plebiscite of 10 October 1920, the southern part of Carinthia voted to remain within Austria, placing a substantial Slovene-speaking population under Austrian jurisdiction. Under the Treaty of Rapallo (12 November 1920), the western regions, the Julian March, Trieste, Gorizia and Slovene Littoral all the way to Hotederščica, were annexed by the Kingdom of Italy, incorporating approx. 327,000 Slovenes (roughly one-third of the total Slovene population) into the Italian state. The majority of the remaining Slovene-inhabited territory was incorporated into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, later reorganized as the Drava Banovina (1929). No unified "Slovenian" political or administrative entity existed at the outbreak of the Second World War. On the post-WWI partition of Slovene lands, see Ajlec, Kornelija and Božo Repe. *Dismembered Slovenia*. Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana Press, 2023, 17–43. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4312/9789612970864>; Repe, Božo. "Rapalska pogodba in njeno diplomatsko ozadje," *Retrospektive* 6/2–3 (2023): 11–42. <https://doi.org/10.64651/retrospektive.2023.6.2-3.1>; Balkovec, Bojan. "Zgodovinopisje o rapalski meji," *Retrospektive* 6, no. 2–3 (2023): 43–68. <https://doi.org/10.64651/retrospektive.2023.6.2-3.2>.

interruption of pre-existing spatial routines. Their interaction is especially visible in the comparative structure of the Slovenian case. It argues that occupation borders produced forms of persistence structurally distinct from the long-term institutional sedimentation usually associated with phantom borders.

FRAGMENTATION AS ARGUMENT: COMPETING LOGICS OF TERRITORIAL LEGITIMACY

If occupation borders are high-intensity moments of border-making, their imposition cannot be explained by force alone. For occupation borders to function,⁵ they must be accompanied by processes of legitimization that frame them as something more than the outcome of the last battle. In the Slovenian case, the four occupying powers each developed its own legitimizing framework. Despite their ideological differences, all four made the same structural move: each presented its occupation and/or annexation not as conquest but as restoration, correction, or completion of something that had been unjustly interrupted. This structural similarity was not coincidental. Because Slovene-inhabited territory had never constituted a unified political entity and had been repeatedly redistributed among larger powers, the historical record contained ample material for retrospective claim-making. Each occupier could reach back to a period when “its” territory had belonged to a predecessor state or administrative authority and present the 1941 seizure as the resumption of a legitimate order. As Branimir Janković has observed in the context of post-Yugoslav memory conflicts, such strategies draw imaginary national boundaries through predominantly transnational lives, projecting present political arrangements backward as if they were natural and eternal.⁶ The difference between 1941 and the present is one of degree, not of mechanism.

5 To be administered, obeyed, and partially integrated into everyday life.

6 Janković, Branimir. “Drawing National Borders through Transnational Lives: Memory Wars and the Limits of Historiography,” summary paper presented at the Joint History Project conference “Borders in Southeast Europe – Geography or Imagination?”, Podgorica, 16–18 May 2025.

Historical Claims: Selective Continuities

For Nazi Germany, the annexation of Lower Styria and Upper Carniola was framed as the restoration of historically German lands severed by the post-1918 settlement. Siegfried Uiberreither, head of the civil administration of Lower Styria, conveyed to a crowd in Maribor on 28 April 1941 Hitler's instruction to him three weeks prior: "Make this land German again."⁷ The word "again" encoded the claim that this was not acquisition but reacquisition, not a conquest but homecoming. For the Kingdom of Italy, Roman and Venetian precedents supplied the legitimizing genealogy, and contemporary demographic realities were subordinated to claim of historical precedence. The annexation was confirmed, with characteristic delay, by the Chamber of Fasces and Corporations (Camera dei Fasci e delle Corporazioni), the fascist legislature that had replaced Italy's elected Chamber of Deputies in 1939, whose members were appointed rather than elected, but which served the same legitimizing function within the logic of the fascist state. Italy's relationship to the Rapallo border of 1920 structured its territorial imaginary further. The territories west of the Rapallo line (Slovenian Littoral and Istria) were treated as nationally claimed Italian territory already subjected to decades of forced Italianization, while the Province of Ljubljana lay to the east, awaiting gradual integration. This distinction explains the different intensity of assimilation across the Italian zone. When Italy capitulated in September 1943, Germany established the Operational Zone of the Adriatic Littoral (*Operationszone Adriatisches Küstenland*, OZAK), incorporating the Province of Ljubljana alongside Trieste, Gorizia, Udine, Pula, and Rijeka. This was not a temporary administrative measure: it pursued one of the longer-term German strategic objectives, linking the Alpine and Adriatic spaces into a single German geopolitical corridor and attaching these territories to the Reichsgau of Carinthia as a step towards permanent incorporation.⁸ For Hungary, the Treaty of Trianon (1920) was the explicit grievance that

7 Repe, Božo. S puško in knjiго. Narodnoosvobodilni boj slovenskega naroda 1941–1945. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2015, 24.

8 Cerkenik, Denis. *Med rasizmom in nujno*, 1943–1945. Historia 46. Ljubljana: Založba Univerze v Ljubljani, 2023.

caused the severing of lands governed for a thousand years, now to be restored through parliamentary reincorporation.⁹ The Independent State of Croatia grounded its territorial claims in older pan-Croatian doctrines originating with Pavao Ritter Vitezović at the turn of the eighteenth century, which had positioned Slovene lands as part of a Greater Croatia. These ideas, developed in a very different ideological context during the Habsburg period, were appropriated and repurposed by the Ustashe for their own expansionist programme.¹⁰ In practice, the annexation fell short of this ambition being given only five villages in the Posavje region and a small territory in Styria region.¹¹

Across all four cases, history functioned less as an objective record than as a selectively mobilized repertoire.¹² The same pattern characterizes what Margit Feischmidt has analyzed as the Hungarian neo-nationalist Trianon mythology: although the commemorations invoke a historical trauma, they *»rather speak to current feelings of loss and disenfranchisement, offering symbolic compensation through the transference of historical glory, pride, and self-esteem within a mythological framework.«*¹³ The 1941 Hungarian occupation of Prekmurje and the recurring Trianon revisionist discourse draw on the same deep grammar.

9 Hungary was the only country among the occupiers to annex occupied lands through an act of parliament on 16 December 1941. This was deliberate to show the annexation not as a conquest, but as a constitutional reintegration supporting the restitutive narrative.

10 On the historical development of these ideas in the Habsburg context and Slovenian–Croatian political relations, see Rahten, Andrej. »Croatia Alpestris: Vprašanje umestitve slovenskih dežel v hrvaške pravniške koncepte.« *Annales: Series Historia et Sociologia* 12/1 (2002): 1–10.; and Zajc, Marko. *Where Slovenian Ends and Croatian Begins: The Slovenian–Croatian Border in the 19th and Early 20th Century*. Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2006.

11 Yet the ideological seriousness of Croatian claims is illustrated by the dispute over the municipality of Hum na Sutli, which the NDH sought to obtain from Germany on the grounds that it was the site of the first public performance of the Croatian national anthem *Lijepa naša* in 1864 and ultimately securing it in mid-June 1941. See: Ajlec and Repe, *Dismembered Slovenia*, 100–102.

12 The phrase »selectively mobilised repertoire« draws on Rogers Brubaker's treatment of ethnicity and nationalism as practical categories rather than fixed properties: Brubaker, Rogers. *Grounds for Difference*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2025, 3–28.

13 Feischmidt, Margit. »Memory–Politics and Neonationalism: Trianon as Mythomoteur.« *Nationalities Papers* 48/1 (2020): 130–143. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2018.72>

Ethnic, Demographic, and Civilizational Arguments

Nazi Germany expanded “Germanness” to include populations deemed capable of assimilation. The racial classification commissions operating between 1941 and 1942 sorted the population into four tiers.¹⁴ The logic was circular: populations classified as assimilable were by that classification, already partly German. Italy emphasized the supposed “italianità” of the region’s educated classes, subordinating demographic reality to civilizational claim.¹⁵ Hungary relied on census data from the period of its own rule and collected under conditions of substantial official pressure to register as Magyar, which highlighted the inherently self-confirming character of such evidence.¹⁶ All three also invoked hierarchies of civilization, asserting qualitative superiority that rendered numerical minorities analytically irrelevant: German racial organization, Mediterranean cultural inheritance, Hungarian administrative competence. The NDH’s claim followed the same logic in a different register: rather than census data or racial classification, it deployed a historic-legal argument that Slovene ethnic identity was itself a miscategorisation and that the populations of Slovene lands were, properly understood, Alpine Croats, whose true identity had been obscured by centuries of Habsburg administrative division.¹⁷ In this version of ethnographic mapping, identity was not measured but reassigned, with historical jurisprudence substituted for demographic evidence. The practical reach of this claim was minimal, but its structural similarity to the other three legitimizing frameworks is analytically significant. These ethnic and civilizational arguments reflected what Srđan Radović has identified as the fundamental operation of ethnographic mapping: the spatialization of imagined iden-

14 Ajlec and Repe, *Dismembered Slovenia*, 69; Ferenc, Tone. *Nacistična raznarodovalna politika v Sloveniji v letih 1941–1945*. Maribor: Obzorja, 1968, 178–221.

15 Ajlec and Repe, *Dismembered Slovenia*, 69–70; Rodogno, Davide. *Fascism’s European Empire: Italian Occupation during the Second World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 71–96.

16 Ajlec and Repe, *Dismembered Slovenia*, 69–70; Romsics, Ignác. *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*. Budapest: Corvina Books/Osiris, 1999, 197–213.

17 Rahten, “Croatia Alpestris,” 1–10; Ajlec and Repe, *Dismembered Slovenia*, 70.

tity, binding territory, and identity together in order to claim legitimacy over a geographic space.¹⁸

FROM JUSTIFICATION TO PRACTICE: OCCUPATION BORDERS AS SPATIAL REGIMES

The imposition of borders in 1941 did not conclude the process of territorial reordering. It marked its beginning. In Lefebvre's terms, borders had to become not just conceived space¹⁹ but perceived and lived space, something that the populations on either side encountered in their daily routines.²⁰ Von Hirschhausen and colleagues adopt Lefebvre's triad explicitly as the three levels of phantom border analysis, imagined, experienced, and designed space, and the Slovenian case allows all three to be observed in an unusually compressed timeframe.²¹

In the territories annexed by Nazi Germany, occupation borders were conceived not as temporary divisions but as the threshold of permanent transformation. Administrative structures were replaced within weeks, German law was introduced, place names were Germanised. Approx. 63,000 Slovenes were expelled to Serbia and Croatia, with a further 17,000 fleeing voluntarily to the Italian zone. Around 17,000 ethnic Germans from Kočevje/Gottsche were resettled from the Italian occupation zone into

18 Radović, "Mapping Ethno-Politics", 143–144.

19 As in space of planners and decree-writers.

20 Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991, 33–46. For the application of Lefebvre's triad of perceived–conceived–lived space to spatial analysis, see Schmid, Christian. *Henri Lefebvre and the Theory of the Production of Space*. London: Verso, 2022, 115, 270–279.

21 Von Hirschhausen, Béatrice, Hannes Grandits, Claudia Kraft, Dietmar Müller, Thomas Serrier, and Tim Beurskens. "Phantom Borders in Eastern Europe: A New Concept for Regional Research." *Cambridge University Press Slavic Review* 74, no. 2 (2015): 377–378. <https://doi.org/10.5612/slavicreview.74.2.361>. The authors note that their three levels of phantom border analysis, imagined space, spatial experience, and the shaping of space, correspond to Lefebvre's triad, though with an important modification: unlike Lefebvre, they do not distinguish between the registers of action available to different social classes, arguing instead that "all the levels of society 'imagine' and 'design' or 'shape' the space". Ibidem, 378.

vacated Slovene territories along the Croatian border.²² Population displacement was not a secondary consequence of occupation policy but one of the principal mechanisms through which the new borders were to be stabilized and naturalized. Racial classification commissions sorted the remaining population by assimilability: the higher categories were earmarked for Germanization, the lower for further displacement. Formal annexation to the Third Reich had been planned for 1 October 1941, but was repeatedly postponed, partly because organized armed resistance had begun spreading and growing faster than anticipated.²³ The German project of coercive territorialization extended beyond administrative structures into the visual and symbolic fabric of space. Every settlement was to look German: place names were Germanized, street names and shop signs changed, Slovene-language inscriptions removed from public spaces. The J for Yugoslavia on boundary markers was replaced with D for Deutschland. In the high mountains, symbolic appropriation was equally systematic. The Germans, who had lost Triglav after 1918 when the mountain passed to Yugoslavia, reclaimed it symbolically, depicting it on postage stamps and transferring mountain huts formerly managed by the Slovene Mountaineering Society to the German Mountaineering Society;²⁴ the Aljažev dom hut in the Vrata Valley was renamed Kugy-Haus.²⁵ The occupation borders in the mountains were intended, as Peter Mikša has argued, to mark the national space

-
- 22 Ferenc's book *Nacistična raznarodovalna politika* remains the foundational study of Nazi denationalization policy in Slovenia. On the resettlement of Kočevje Germans, see Ajlec and Repe, *Dismembered Slovenia*, 89–114. The Germans intended to expel between 220,000 and 260,000 Slovenes but managed to expel approximately 63,000; a further 17,000 fled voluntarily to the Italian zone (*Ibid.*, 71). The figure of 80,000 sometimes cited in older literature conflates expellees with those who fled voluntarily.
- 23 Ajlec and Repe, *Dismembered Slovenia*, 69; Ferenc, Tone. *Okupacijski sistemi med drugo svetovno vojno: 1. Razkosanje in aneksionizem*. Historia 12, Ljubljana: Oddelek za zgodovino Filozofske fakultete, 2006, 230–238.
- 24 Zorn, Matija, and Peter Mikša. »The Rapallo Border between Italy and Yugoslavia after the First World War.« In *Grenzen / Frontières*, ed. Barth-Scalmani et al. Zürich: Chronos, 2018, 165–181.
- 25 The Aljažev Dom hut in the Vrata Valley was renamed Kugy-Haus after Julius Kugy (1858–1944), an alpinist of Slovenian family origins who wrote exclusively in German, identified publicly as German, and was closely associated with the Küstenland section of the Deutscher und Österreichischer Alpenverein in Trieste. His books on the Julian Alps had been instrumental in making these mountains known to the broader German-speaking and Western European world; in his writings he consistently situated the Julian Alps within the German-Austrian cultural sphere. For the occupation authorities, Kugy was an ideal eponym precisely because his work embodied the »old German-Austrian« alpine tradition, enabling the symbolic Germanization of the Julian Alps to be presented not as crude propaganda but as the restoration of a natural and historically rooted cultural continuity. *Ibidem*.

“for a thousand years”.²⁶ The Aljaž Tower on the summit of Triglav, erected in 1895 as an act of resistance against the late 19th Century Germanization efforts and the most prominent Slovenian spatial marker in the Julian Alps, became a site of partisan counter-inscription: three partisan patrols reached the summit between May and October 1944 and hung Slovenian flags there, directly contesting the German claim. Visual territorialization mattered precisely because it attempted to transform occupation from a temporary military condition into an apparently permanent spatial order. And it is in this register, as much as in the administrative and demographic registers, that the phantom effects of German occupation were produced. The expulsion of the Slovenian population from the border strip further reshaped the ethnic and demographic structure of the occupied territory: a report on the emptying of the border zone in Upper Carniola from June 1943 documents the scale of population displacement along the German-Italian border.²⁷ The four-component mechanism of coercive intensity, demographic disruption, administrative replacement, interruption of spatial routines operated here at its maximum. The German zone has accordingly produced the most clearly observable spatial and mnemonic traces, though a systematic quantitative mapping of these effects comparable to the Sudetenland case remains to be undertaken.

The Italian case presents a structural contrast. The Province of Ljubljana was granted a special statute of 18 May 1941 that provided for bilingualism and exempted men from military service. These were concessions that High Commissioner Emilio Grazioli publicly presented as evidence of Italian moderation.²⁸ In practice, however, this autonomy was a propa-

26 Ajlec and Repe, *Dismembered Slovenia*, 89–91.

27 SI AS 1626, Pooblaščenec državnega komisarja za utrjevanje nemštva, Urad Radovljica, 1942 – 1943[Commissioner of the State Commissioner for the Consolidation of Germandom, Radovljica Office, 1942–1943], box No. 1. *Poročilo o izpeljavi izpraznitve mejnega pasu na Gorenjskem*, Bled, 13 June 1942, translated by Niko Hudelja. Published as appendix in Ajlec and Repe, *Dismembered Slovenia*, 155–156.

28 Ferenc, Tone. *Fašisti brez krinke: Dokumenti o italijanski politiki v Jugoslaviji 1941–1943*. Murska Sobota: Pomurska založba, 1987, 109–115; Ajlec and Repe, *Dismembered Slovenia*, 79.

ganda device that remained unfulfilled.²⁹ The Italian authorities initially excluded the Slovene elites from any form of collaboration, believing that the nascent partisan movement could easily be crushed. Only at the end of 1941 did they begin to recognize the advantages of seeking the consent of the local population.³⁰ The result was a hybrid spatial order in which Italian authority was asserted at every institutional level while the surface of everyday life was left partially intact. Italianization of schools and public administration proceeded steadily but ultimately failed.³¹ The Italian zone illustrates the forced and partial functional internalization without normative legitimacy, where populations learned to navigate Italian bureaucracy, to obtain Italian documents, to conduct transactions in Italian, but they did not accept Italian rule as legitimate or natural. When Italy capitulated in September 1943 and the zone passed to German administration, the incompleteness of Italian assimilation became immediately visible.

In Prekmurje, Hungarian occupation policy was explicitly framed as restitution. The division of the region between Vas and Zala counties replicated the pre-Trianon arrangement, functioning as a symbolic reaffirmation of the restitutive narrative. Mass deportations did not occur, as policy focused instead on systematic Magyarization. Hungarian became the language of instruction, suppression of Slovenian publications was near total, as was the revival of assimilationist civil organizations.³² The Hungarian zone demonstrates that the four-component mechanism can operate with lower intensity on individual components while still producing measurable phantom effects. The relative continuity of administrative organization and the lower level of demographic displacement have resulted in more diminished spatial traces. However, the distinct regional identity of Prekmurje, shaped by its layered experience of Hungarian, Habsburg, Yugoslav,

29 Rodogno, *Fascism's European Empire*, 268–269: »There was to be no further misunderstanding as to the real extent of Slovene autonomy: it was a mere propaganda device and it was to remain a dead letter.«

30 *Ibid.*, 304–305.

31 *Ibidem*, 268; also Ajlec and Repe, *Dismembered Slovenia*, 79–82.

32 On Hungarian Magyarisation policy in Prekmurje, see Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, 197–213; and Ajlec and Repe, *Dismembered Slovenia*, 69–70.

re-Hungarian, and socialist-Yugoslav administrative systems remains visible today and constitutes a genuine phantom effect of the occupation.

The Independent State of Croatia occupied a relatively small territory along the Posavje region and in Styria, amounting to approximately 20 km² with around 800 inhabitants.³³ Its authority was fragile, dependent on German and Italian support. The NDH case is included here not as a parallel to the other three zones but as a theoretically necessary negative instance: it tests the four-component model from below by showing what happens when the conditions for coercive territorialization are absent, due to the fact that it requires institutional resources that cannot be conjured from ideology alone, and that the four-component mechanism can fail entirely when state capacity is insufficient.³⁴ The NDH occupation therefore left no measurable phantom effects (of the kind associated with demographic disruption or administrative restructuring), but the memory of Ustasha violence in the affected communities represents a distinct form of mnemonic afterlife that the four-component model does not fully capture.

Across all four zones, occupation borders reshaped the texture of everyday life. Checkpoints, permit systems, and customs inspections disrupted existing patterns of movement, economic exchange, and social interaction. The material disruption extended to infrastructure. Postal routes were severed and redirected (a misrouted teletype message intended for Šmartno v Tuhinjski dolini, sent instead to the identically named Šmartno pri

33 Ajlec and Repe, *Dismembered Slovenia*, 70.

34 The NDH's limited territorial acquisition reflected its structural dependence on German decision-making rather than any lack of ideological ambition. Before the war, the Ustashe had envisaged integrating all of Slovenia into Greater Croatia; they even planned a referendum for the Slovene population. Germany, however, quickly curtailed these ambitions, restricting the NDH to a narrow strip of land along the river Bregana. The intergovernmental commission established in Rogaška Slatina to demarcate the German-NDH border was tasked with realising Hitler's directives »as consistently as possible and in line with German interests«; at its very first meeting, the German delegation made its position known bluntly, »despite the servility of the Croatian party.« The NDH's sole significant diplomatic success in the negotiations was the acquisition of the municipality of Hum na Sutli, obtained on the basis of the emotional argument that it had been the site of the first public performance of the Croatian national anthem *Lijepa naša* in 1864 and the location of a mansion owned by its author, Antun Mihanović. Even this concession was initially contested by German economic interests on account of the glassworks at Straža, owned by Volksdeutsche, which supplied electricity to Rogaška Slatina and the surrounding area. The transfer of authority over Hum took place in mid-June 1941. Ajlec and Repe, *Dismembered Slovenia*, 99–101.

Litiji seven kilometers away, caused the temporary cancellation of an entire border-strip clearance operation), labour markets were restructured around German administrative requirements,³⁵ and in Prekmurje the wartime Germany-Hungary agreement on oil extraction from the Petišovci fields diverted the entire regional oil supply to the Reich, subordinating local economic circulation to the extractive logic of the occupying power.³⁶ The oral testimonies collected during the research project³⁷ convey the borders not as lines on maps but as physical presences through the barbed wire, the watchtowers, the guards who might or might not let you through. They also convey the borders' permeability: smuggling was universal, informal arrangements with border officials were common, and the practical management of everyday life required constant negotiation with formal structures of control. The oral record from the project's regional studies provides concrete illustration. In Prekmurje, residents with land on both sides of the German-Hungarian border were issued permit booklets, to cross at designated points.³⁸ Marija Debelak of Petanjci recalled: »We [...] had to have papers for dual-ownership rights. These were permits. [...] Small booklets, inside was a photograph and the personal details. We got them at the municipal office.«³⁹ This interaction between institutional imposition

35 Mikša, Peter, and Matija Zorn. *Življenje ob meji: Rogaška Slatina in Obsotelje kot jugozahodna meja nemškega rajha, 1941–1945*. Historia 33. Ljubljana: Založba Univerze v Ljubljani, 2020, 50, fn. 36, citing interview with Jože Plemenitaš; and Ferenc, Tone. *Nacistična raznarodovalna politika*, 268–270.

36 Kerec, Darja. *Hlev je bil pod Nemci, hiša pod Madžari: okupacijske meje v Prekmurju 1941–1945*. Historia 38. Ljubljana: Založba Univerze v Ljubljani, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4312/9789610604532>, 23–24, fn. 31 and 33, citing *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918–1945*, No. 580. The Germany-Hungary oil agreement was signed on 31 May 1941.

37 The already mentioned project Make this Land German ... Italian ... Hungarian ... Croatian! The Role of the Occupation Borders in the Denationalization Policy and the Lives of the Slovene Population led by Božo Repe between 2017 and 2020.

38 Ibid., 29, caption to fig. 16 (video recording available at http://be.com/watch?v=j_lQrWi2Nbc). Testimony of Rudi Gaber.

39 Ibid., 22, fn. 28.

and everyday practice (what Carnevale and Wilson term the borderscape) is central, not peripheral, to the analysis of occupation borders.⁴⁰

PERMEABILITY AND RESISTANCE: THE LIMITS OF OCCUPATION BORDERS

Despite the efforts of the occupying powers to stabilize and normalize the new territorial divisions, occupation borders in Slovene-inhabited territory never became fully consolidated spatial orders. This reflects the deeper structural tension inherent in coercive territorialization where the imposed framework had to operate simultaneously against the pre-existing social, economic, and cultural networks that the borders cut through but could not dissolve.

Smuggling was the most universal response and the clearest evidence of the borders' permeability. Agricultural products, livestock, salt, tobacco, and manufactured goods circulated through informal networks that bypassed official controls. These were not merely criminal transactions. For many families, they were survival strategies. In the process, the border was experienced not as an impermeable barrier but as a variable obstacle: dangerous, but navigable with the right knowledge, contacts, and timing.⁴¹ Partisan units operated deliberately across occupation zones, exploiting a structural feature of the system its architects had not fully anticipated: the

40 Carnevale, Davide N. and Thomas M. Wilson, »Place-making, Politics and Borderscapes in Southeastern Europe,« *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 38/ 1 (2021): 1–18. The »borderscape« concept, developed by Rajaram, Prem Kumar and Carl Grundy-Warr, eds., *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007, is defined by Carnevale and Wilson as requiring both the materiality of borders and their experiential dimensions: »The border is above all a place, a 'distinct space where people live'; it encompasses both the idea and the actuality of where things are.« Rajaram and Grundy, *Borderscapes*, 4, citing Donnan, Hastings and Thomas M. Wilson. *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State* Oxford: Berg, 1999, 9.

41 On smuggling as an everyday practice in the occupation border zones, see the testimonies collected and archived at <https://okupacijskemeje.si> website; and the local microhistories in Balkovec, Bojan ed. *En krompir, tri države: Okupacijske meje na Dolenjskem 1941–1945*, Historia 37. Ljubljana: Založba Univerze v Ljubljani, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4312/9789610604563>; Vehar, Maja and Peter Mikša. *Obmejni trikotnik: okupacijske meje med Idrijo, Žirmi in Polhograjskimi Dolomiti, 1941–1945*. Historia 36. Ljubljana: Založba Univerze v Ljubljani, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4312/9789610604525>; Balkovec, Bojan ed. *Vinceremo, videt ćemo: Okupacijske meje v Beli krajini 1941–1945*. Historia 34. Ljubljana: Založba Univerze v Ljubljani, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.4312/9789610603146>; Mikša and Zorn, *Življenje ob meji; Kerec, Hlev je bil pod Nemci; hiša pod Madžari*.

multiplicity of authorities, each with its own enforcement priorities, produced gaps and inconsistencies that could be used strategically. A formation pursued by German forces in Lower Styria could cross into the Italian zone; a group operating in the Ljubljana area could retreat into the forests of Lower Carniola where the German-Italian border created jurisdictional uncertainty. The border thus became, from the partisan perspective, a resource of operational flexibility.⁴² The coexistence of four occupation regimes also generated inter-occupier friction. Disputes over jurisdiction, over the allocation of resources and infrastructure that crossed administrative lines, and over the handling of refugees and political suspects arose repeatedly. The spatial order the occupiers sought to impose was, from the inside, considerably messier than its formal architecture suggested. This inter-occupier instability is itself significant for the theoretical argument: it confirms that occupation borders, unlike long-established administrative lines, never achieved the systematic coherence that enables genuine internalization.⁴³

42 On partisan operations across occupation zone boundaries, see Pirjevec, Jože. *Partizani*. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2015, 87–156; and Tomasevich, Jozo. *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945: Occupation and Collaboration*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001, 320–380. The operational use of inter-zonal inconsistencies as a partisan tactical resource is not systematically treated in the existing historiography; this dimension is developed from the archival evidence in Ajlec and Repe, *Dismembered Slovenia*, 215–247.

43 Inter-occupier friction is documented throughout Ajlec and Repe, *Dismembered Slovenia*. On German-Italian tensions over the demarcation of borders and the status of the Province of Ljubljana, see pp. 79–81: Italy sought larger territorial gains and greater political influence, but Germany was unwilling to relinquish its leading position; as Ciano recorded in his diary, the Italians »did not trust the Germans, but being the weaker ally they had to adapt.« On the German Gauleiters' attempts after Italy's capitulation in 1943 to convert operational zone boundaries into permanent borders, attempts blocked by the German Foreign Ministry on diplomatic grounds, see pp. 101–103. On the unresolved border between Hungary and the NDH, which was never formalised by agreement due to disagreements over Banat and Međimurje: »Germany made decisions about the most important matters... Both states lobbied heavily for their respective interests in Berlin, with the Hungarians being significantly more successful«, see pp. 125–126. On the general observation that »occasional conflicts occurred between occupiers that were otherwise allies,« see p. 14. For the broader argument that the messiness of inter-occupier relations prevented the occupation spatial order from achieving systemic coherence, see also p. 14, pp. 79–81, pp. 101–103, pp. 125–126.

OCCUPATION BORDERS AND PHANTOM BORDERS

The problem with Duration

The phantom borders concept, as formulated by von Hirschhausen and colleagues, understands phantom effects as the product of socialization processes within former territories: *“Structures and institutions created by political actors may change very little, or not at all, over longer periods of time,”* and *“the spaces and institutions created in this way can endure well beyond the lifetime of their originating states.”*⁴⁴ In their empirical illustrations, the primary examples are long-established borders as mentioned in previous chapter. The implicit model is one in which the depth of phantom effects correlates with the duration and institutional density of the border in question. The Slovenian case challenges this model. The occupation borders of 1941–1945 lasted four years at most. They were not preceded by decades of gradual institutionalization. They were imposed abruptly, contested immediately, and abolished legally within weeks of the war’s end. By the duration model, they should have left minimal phantom effects. Yet the evidence (demographic, infrastructural, and mnemonic) shows otherwise. This finding is not unique to Slovenia. Korčák and Netrdová’s quantitative analysis of the Sudetenland, which serves as a comparable case of a short-lived but intensely enforced occupation border, confirms strong phantom effects for all measured indicators at the municipal level more than fifty years after the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans.⁴⁵ The Slovenian case, as much as the Sudetenland case, therefore establishes that duration is not the primary variable. What generates durable phantom effects is not the age of a border but the combination of mechanisms by which it

44 Von Hirschhausen et al., »Phantom Borders,« 370.

45 Korčák, Matěj and Pavlína Netrdová. »Historická hranice Sudet a současná sociálně-prostorová diferenciace Česka: kvantitativní pohled na dlouhodobý dopad institucionálních změn,« *Geografie* 127/4 (2022): 365–390, <https://doi.org/10.37040/geografie.2022.011>. The study analyses 2011 census data at the level of individual municipalities and confirms »a strong effect for all indicators, proving the importance of historical context when interpreting the current socio-spatial differentiation« (abstract). See also Netrdová, Pavlína, Matěj Korčák and Vojtěch Nosek. »Measuring and Mapping the Existence of Phantom Borders at a Local Scale: Example of Sudetenland in Czechia.« *Journal of Maps* (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1080/17445647.2023.2300260>.

is imposed and lived: coercive intensity, demographic disruption, administrative replacement, and the violent interruption of pre-existing spatial routines. Occupation borders, unlike classical administrative borders, never achieved normative legitimacy. They were subjected to forced functional adaptation: inhabitants obtained permits, restructured trading habits, developed smuggling routes, but nonetheless the occupation borders were never accepted as legitimate or natural. Their phantom afterlives are therefore not the sediment of long-term institutional embedding but the residue of rupture. Similar happened in the Sudetenland, where the expulsion of Germans, the resettlement of new populations, and the consequent disruption of social and economic networks proved more consequential for subsequent regional development than the duration of the border itself.

While von Hirschhausen and colleagues acknowledge that phantom effects are contingent rather than automatic, the Slovenian and Sudetenland cases suggest that the existing phantom borders literature has primarily theorized persistence through long-term institutional sedimentation, leaving the effects of short-lived but coercively intensive border regimes comparatively underdeveloped.

Two Types of Phantom Borders

Classical phantom borders become phantom through long-term institutional sedimentation. Embedded through administrative practice, legal culture, infrastructure, and generational socialization, they gradually become the spatial order taken for granted. When abolished, they leave behind the sediment of this gradual embedding, here termed sedimented phantom borders, whose persistence weakens as the underlying structures are dismantled or replaced.

Occupation borders, by contrast, follow a different logic, here termed forced and partial functional internalization without normative legitimacy. Populations obtained permits, developed smuggling routes, restructured trading patterns, adapted daily routines, but never accepted these borders as legitimate or natural. They remained contested impositions. Their

phantom status became visible only retrospectively, after the collapse of the regimes that had sought to normalize them. Inhabitants experienced them as coercion, while partisans treated them as impositions to physically eliminate. Their phantom effects are therefore the residue of rupture rather than the sediment of normalization. This article terms this dynamic traumatic persistence.

The generative mechanism already implicit in the preceding analysis can be specified as a four-component model:

1. *Coercive intensity*: the degree of physical enforcement;
2. *Demographic disruption*: the scale of forced population movement and resettlement;
3. *Administrative replacement*: the completeness with which existing institutional structures were dismantled and replaced;
4. *Interruption of spatial routines*: the degree to which pre-existing patterns of everyday movement, economic exchange, and social interaction were disrupted.

Each component contributes independently to the depth and durability of phantom effects. At times all four operate together, as in the German occupation zone, producing at maximum intensity the most clearly observable traces. The variation between the German zone, where all four components were present, and the Hungarian zone, where coercive intensity and demographic disruption were significantly lower while administrative replacement proceeded fully, within a single case study provides internal comparative evidence for this multi-component model. This formulation resolves a vulnerability in simpler intensity-based arguments: how intensity is measured, and why do some intense interventions leave fewer durable effects than others? The four-component model answers by disaggregating intensity into its constituent mechanisms.

Spatial and Discursive Afterlives:

The literature on phantom borders has focused primarily on spatial afterlives. Most phantom border research has therefore concentrated

on demographic, infrastructural, economic, and electoral patterns that correlate with former border lines (maps, statistics, electoral geography, quantitative indicators) and has produced important results in cases from Sudetenland to Poland and Ukraine.⁴⁶ But it misses a second dimension that is equally important and follows a different temporal logic: discursive afterlives, or the persistence of the legitimizing grammars through which borders were originally justified.

Spatial afterlives are typically local and regional, weakening as the material fabric of space is rebuilt and demographics stabilize. Discursive afterlives are nationally and transnationally scalable because they remain embedded in political language, commemorative practice, and educational systems rather than in a fixed physical location. They can lie dormant for decades and be reactivated rapidly under conditions of political crisis, without any corresponding change in the material landscape. A formal territorial settlement addresses spatial afterlives but it does not address discursive ones, which persist in the political repertoire regardless of what treaties stipulate. The legitimizing grammar deployed in 1941 did not originate with the occupation itself. The occupation instead concentrated, operationalized, and partially legitimized pre-existing repertoires of historical restitution, ethnic protection, and civilizational hierarchy, leaving them discursively available for future political mobilization. Their contemporary resonance therefore reflects discursive availability. This is visible in the continued political mobilization of the Treaty of Trianon in Hungarian public discourse, which Feischmidt analyses as a mythomoteur speaking to current feelings of loss and disenfranchisement,⁴⁷ in Egrý's account of how

46 For quantitative analyses of phantom borders in electoral geography, see: on Poland, Zarycki, Tomasz. »The Electoral Geography of Poland: Between Stable Spatial Structures and Their Changing Interpretations,« *Erdkunde* 69, no. 2 (2015): 107–124. <https://doi.org/10.3112/erdkunde.2015.02.02>; on Ukraine, von Löwis, Sabine. »Phantom Borders in the Political Geography of East Central Europe: An Introduction,« *Erdkunde* 69/ 2 (2015): 99–106. <https://doi.org/10.3112/erdkunde.2015.02.01>; also see Hirschhausen, Béatrice von. »Phantom Borders and Ambivalent Spaces of Identification in Ukraine,« *L'Espace géographique* 46/2 (2017): 126–139. On the Sudetenland, see Korčák and Netrdová, »Historická hranice Sudet a současná sociálně-prostorová diferenciace Česka,« 365–390.

47 Feischmidt, »Memory-politics and Neo-nationalism: Trianon as Mythomoteur.« On the concept of mythomoteur as a constitutive myth driving nationalist mobilization, see Smith, Anthony D. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986, 57–68.

the centenary commemorations reframed Trianon as a postcolonial »common catastrophe of Central Europe«, a discursive innovation that detaches memory politics from specific territorial claims while preserving the grammar of historical victimhood,⁴⁸ and in recurring Italian debates over the Adriatic borderlands. Sabine von Löwis has shown that the east-west division of Ukrainian politics cannot be reduced to the passive inheritance of Soviet administrative geography: spatially grounded identities, while rooted in historical experience, are not inherently political but, using her own formulation, »*may be political exploitable*«. This is a distinction that aligns with the concept of discursive availability proposed here.⁴⁹ The spatial-discursive distinction proposed here extends this observation: phantom effects operate simultaneously on both axes, and the two axes require different analytical tools and different political responses. This distinction has direct implications for understanding why territorial settlements in post-conflict Southeast Europe so often fail to resolve the underlying political tensions. Those tensions are rooted not in spatial legacies, which formal agreements can address, but in discursive availability, which they cannot. These legitimizing languages did not disappear in 1945. They were embedded by four years of state practice into the political vocabulary of the region, where they have remained available for later mobilization.

48 Egry, Gábor. »The Greatest Catastrophe of (Post-)Colonial Central Europe? The 100th Anniversary of Trianon and Official Politics of Memory in Hungary,« *Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej* 18/2 (2020): 123–142, <https://doi.org/10.36874/RIESW.2020.2.6>. Egry shows how the 2020 commemorations reframed Trianon as a »common catastrophe of Central Europe« legible through a postcolonial lens. It is a discursive innovation that detaches the memory politics from specific territorial claims while preserving the grammar of historical victimhood.

49 von Löwis, »Phantom Borders in the Political Geography,« 103. Von Löwis argues that spatially grounded identities and cultural distinctions, while »not necessarily political,« »may be political exploitable« (her own formulation) a distinction that captures the structural availability of historical spatial memories for political mobilization without implying deliberate instrumentalization. This aligns with the concept of discursive availability proposed in this article as analytically more precise than »political reusability.

SOUTHEAST EUROPE AS PALIMPSEST: THE SLOVENIAN CASE IN REGIONAL CONTEXT

Any generalization from the Slovenian case to Southeast Europe must begin from a basic historiographical caution: the region is not a coherent analytical unit but a historically constructed and internally differentiated space.⁵⁰ The forms and effects of occupation border-making varied significantly across different contexts. This article does not claim that the Slovenian case is representative, but it does claim that, as an extreme case, it renders the mechanisms of coercive territorialization unusually transparent.

Southeast Europe can be understood as a historical palimpsest: a space in which successive territorial orders have been layered upon one another without fully erasing the traces of what came before.⁵¹ The territory divided by the four Axis powers in April 1941 was not a blank slate as it already carried multiple layers of prior territorial inscription: the Habsburg administrative framework, partially dismantled after 1918; the internationally ratified partition by the Treaty of Rapallo; and the interwar Yugoslav arrangement of the Drava Banovina. None of these earlier layers had been fully erased. The occupation borders of 1941 were inscribed onto this already-written surface, exploiting its ambiguities, its jurisdictional gaps, and its historical sediment as raw material for competing legitimizing claims.⁵² The occupation borders of 1941 constituted one particularly concentrated inscription in that layered spatial order. The borderscape framework of Carnevale and Wilson provides the appropriate regional context for situating this inscription. Religion constitutes one of the most durable phantom border axes in Southeast Europe, and one underrepresented in the quantitative phantom

50 Todorova, Maria. *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 161–183, 197–198; and in the Todorova-Sundhaussen debate summarised in von Hirschhausen et al. »Phantom Borders,« 377. See also Mishkova, Diana. *Beyond Balkanism: The Scholarly Politics of Region Making*. London: Routledge, 2018, 1–12, where the author argues that the Balkans and Southeast Europe should be understood not as given geographic or cultural realities but as historically constructed frameworks of scholarly interpretation, shaped by shifting political and disciplinary agendas across different national and transnational academic subcultures.

51 Von Hirschhausen et al., »Phantom Borders,« 388, citing Troebst, Stefan, in Creuzberger, Stefan et al., eds. *Wohin steuert die Osteuropaforschung: Eine Diskussion*. Cologne: Böhlau, 2000, 63.

52 Carnevale and Wilson, »Place-making, Politics and Borderscapes,« 10–11.

borders literature. The Ottoman-Habsburg confessional boundary, separating Catholic and Orthodox Christian populations with Muslim communities as a third layer, produced a spatial grammar of religious difference that survived the dissolution of both empires. The breakup of Yugoslavia, and above all the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina, demonstrated how discursive afterlives operating along religious lines can be reactivated with devastating effect in the absence of any corresponding material border: the tripartite confessional geography of Bosnia, a sediment of Ottoman administrative and demographic organization, became a template for territorial partition that had no formal basis in existing borders. The occupiers did not merely encounter pre-existing confessional divisions, they actively reinterpreted them as political and civilizational borders. The occupation borders of 1941 intersected with these older religious fault lines, most visibly in the NDH zone, where the Ustasha regime framed its territorial claims and violence in terms of Catholic Croatian identity against Orthodox Serbs and Muslims, adding a further layer of mnemonic inscription onto an already multiply-written surface.⁵³

The spatial traces are most clearly observable in three domains: demographic disruption, particularly in German and Italian zones affected by forced expulsions and resettlement; wartime and immediate postwar spatial practices, including patterns of movement and informal economic networks; and forms of social and spatial memory, as reflected in oral testimonies and local narratives of division, control and violence. Unlike the

53 The observation that religion constitutes a durable phantom border axis in Southeast Europe draws on the broader framework of von Hirschhausen et al., »Phantom Borders in Eastern Europe,« 376–377. On the Ottoman confessional geography of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the millet system as its structural legacy, see Bringa, Tone. *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, 19–21: the Ottoman administrative system organized collective identities around religious community membership (Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim), producing »a complete overlap between the notion of a separate nation and membership in a specific religious community,« a legacy that persisted through Habsburg and Yugoslav administrations alike. For the historical development of Bosnia-Herzegovina's confessional geography and the competing Serbian and Croatian nationalist claims that instrumentalized it, see Donia, Robert J., and John V.A. Fine. *Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Tradition Betrayed*. London: Hurst, 1994. On the territorial partition of Bosnia along confessional lines during the 1992–1995 war as an instance of discursive afterlives becoming operative in the absence of existing formal borders, see also Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 186–189. For the NDH's instrumentalization of Catholic identity against Orthodox Serbs and Muslims as an occupation-era layer within this longer confessional geography, see Ajlec and Repe, *Dismembered Slovenia*, 70–71; and Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, 320–380.

Sudetenland case, where these effects have been studied through systematic quantitative methods at the municipal level, the Slovenian traces have been approached primarily through a series of regionally focused micro-historical studies, each examining a specific border zone through archival sources, cartographic analysis, and oral testimonies. Together these studies provide comprehensive empirical coverage of the occupation borders, but a comparable quantitative spatial analysis remains to be undertaken. Any claim about the extent and distribution of phantom effects must therefore remain empirically modest: what can be identified are not uniform outcomes but site-specific and unevenly distributed effects.

One finding is clear enough to state with confidence and supports the multi-component model: the long-term visibility of occupation-era transformations correlates less with the duration of territorial arrangements than with the combination of coercive intensity, demographic disruptions, administrative replacement, and interruption of spatial routines. The variation between German and Hungarian zones within a single case study provides internal comparative evidence for this claim. This axis of comparison offers a productive framework for future research across Southeast Europe,⁵⁴ where the diversity of occupation models provides the natural variation needed to test the model further. The Slovenian case from 1941–1945 is, in this reading, not only a historical object of study but a methodological model: it demonstrates what coercive territorialization produces, how it operates, and why its effects outlast the political arrangements that generated them.

CONCLUSION

The Slovenian occupation borders of 1941–1945 demonstrate that durable phantom effects can emerge not only through long-term institutional sedimentation, but also through coercive forms of territorialization under

54 From the radical coercion of the German zone to the managed continuity of Hungarian rule in Prekmurje.

conditions of contested sovereignty. Unlike classical phantom borders, which become phantom through gradual socialization into a taken-for-granted spatial order,⁵⁵ occupation borders generate traumatic persistence, the residue of rupture rather than the sediment of internalization.

The article has proposed two contributions to the phantom border's framework. The first is the four-component model (coercive intensity, demographic disruption, administrative replacement, interruption of spatial routines) as a more analytically specific alternative to the undifferentiated concept of intensity. The second is the typological distinction between sedimented and coercive occupation phantom borders, with the further internal distinction between spatial afterlives and discursive afterlives. Spatial afterlives weaken locally and gradually; discursive afterlives (the grammars of historical restitution, ethnic protection, and civilizational hierarchy) are nationally and transnationally scalable, can lie dormant and reactivate rapidly, and are not dissolved by formal territorial settlement. Grasping this asymmetry is essential for understanding why post-conflict territorial politics in Southeast Europe so often fails to end the conflicts it formally resolves.

With due caution, the case suggests that contemporary high-intensity territorial interventions may also generate long-term spatial and mnemonic sediments whose effects will outlast formal political settlements, though the long-term consequences of such processes remain, at present, impossible to assess.

55 Von Hirschhausen et al., »Phantom Borders,« 370.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archival sources

SI AS 1626, Pooblaščenec državnega komisarja za utrjevanje nemštva, Urad Radovljica, 1942 – 1943[Commissioner of the State Commissioner for the Consolidation of Germandom, Radovljica Office, 1942–1943].

Other Sources

Janković, Branimir. »Drawing National Borders through Transnational Lives: Memory Wars and the Limits of Historiography.« Summary paper presented at the Joint History Project conference »Borders in Southeast Europe – Geography or Imagination?«, Podgorica, May 16–18, 2025.

»Okupacijske meje.« Accessed May 2026. <https://okupacijskemeje.si>.

Literature

Ajlec, Kornelija, and Božo Repe. *Dismembered Slovenia*. Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana Press, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.4312/9789612970864>.

Balkovec, Bojan. »Zgodovinske opaznosti o rapalski meji.« *Retrospektive* 6, no. 2–3 (2023): 43–68. <https://doi.org/10.64651/retrospektive.2023.6.2-3.2>.

———, ed. *En krompir, tri države: Okupacijske meje na Dolenjskem 1941–1945*. *Historia* 37. Ljubljana: Založba Univerze v Ljubljani, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4312/9789610604563>.

———, ed. *Vinceremo, videt ćemo: Okupacijske meje v Beli krajini 1941–1945*. *Historia* 34. Ljubljana: Založba Univerze v Ljubljani, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.4312/9789610603146>.

Billig, Michael. *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage, 1995.

Bringa, Tone. *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Brubaker, Rogers. *Grounds for Difference*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015.

Carnevale, Davide N., and Thomas M. Wilson. »Place-making, Politics and Borderscapes in Southeastern Europe.« *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 38, no. 1 (2021): 1–18.

Cerkvenik, Denis. *Med rasizmom in nujno, 1943–1945*. *Historia* 46. Ljubljana: Založba Univerze v Ljubljani, 2023.

Crampton, Jeremy W. »Maps as Social Constructions: Power, Communication and Visualisation.« *Progress in Human Geography* 25, no. 2 (2001): 235–252.

Donia, Robert J., and John V.A. Fine. *Bosnia and Hercegovina: A Tradition Betrayed*. London: Hurst, 1994.

Donnan, Hastings, and Thomas M. Wilson. *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State*. Oxford: Berg, 1999.

Duančić, Vedran. *Geography and Nationalist Visions of Interwar Yugoslavia*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

Egry, Gábor. »The Greatest Catastrophe of (Post-)Colonial Central Europe? The 100th Anniversary of Trianon and Official Politics of Memory in Hungary.« *Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej* 18, no. 2 (2020): 123–142. <https://doi.org/10.36874/RIESW.2020.2.6>.

Feischmidt, Margit. »Memory–Politics and Neonationalism: Trianon as Mythomoteur.« *Nationalities Papers* 48, no. 1 (2020): 130–143. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2018.72>.

Ferenc, Tone. *Fašisti brez krinke: Dokumenti o italijanski politiki v Jugoslaviji 1941–1943*. Murska Sobota: Pomurska založba, 1987.

———. *Nacistična raznarodovalna politika v Sloveniji v letih 1941–1945*. Maribor: Obzorja, 1968.

———. *Okupacijski sistemi med drugo svetovno vojno: 1. Razkosanje in aneksionizem*. Historia 12. Ljubljana: Oddelek za zgodovino Filozofske fakultete, 2006.

Harley, J.B. »Deconstructing the Map.« *Cartographica* 26, no. 2 (1989): 1–20.

Hirschhausen, Béatrice von. »Phantom Borders and Ambivalent Spaces of Identification in Ukraine.« *L'Espace géographique* 46, no. 2 (2017): 126–139.

Hirschhausen, Béatrice von, Hannes Grandits, Claudia Kraft, Dietmar Müller, Thomas Serrier, and Tim Beurskens. »Phantom Borders in Eastern Europe: A New Concept for Regional Research.« *Slavic Review* 74, no. 2 (2015): 361–381. <https://doi.org/10.5612/slavicreview.74.2.361>.

Kerec, Darja. *Hlev je bil pod Nemci, hiša pod Madžari*. Historia 38. Ljubljana: Založba Univerze v Ljubljani, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4312/9789610604532>.

Korčák, Matěj, and Pavlína Netrdová. »Historická hranice Sudet a současná sociálně–prostorová diferenciacie Česka: kvantitativní pohled na dlouhodobý dopad institucionálních změn.« *Geografie* 127, no. 4 (2022): 365–390. <https://doi.org/10.37040/geografie.2022.011>.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

Löwis, Sabine von. »Phantom Borders in the Political Geography of East Central Europe: An Introduction.« *Erdkunde* 69, no. 2 (2015): 99–106. <https://doi.org/10.3112/erdkunde.2015.02.01>.

Mikša, Peter, and Matija Zorn. *Življenje ob meji: Rogaška Slatina in Obsotelje kot jugo-zahodna meja nemškega rajha, 1941–1945*. Historia 33. Ljubljana: Založba Univerze v Ljubljani, 2020.

Mishkova, Diana. *Beyond Balkanism: The Scholarly Politics of Region Making*. London: Routledge, 2018.

Netrdová, Pavlína, Matěj Korčák, and Vojtěch Nosek. »Measuring and Mapping the Existence of Phantom Borders at a Local Scale: Example of Sudetenland in Czechia.« *Journal of Maps* (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1080/17445647.2023.2300260>.

Paasi, Anssi. »Boundaries as Social Processes: Territoriality in the World of Flows.« *Geopolitics* 3, no. 1 (1998).

———. *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness: The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border*. New York: Wiley, 1997.

Pirjevec, Jože. *Partizani*. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2015.

Radović, Srđan. »Mapping Ethno-Politics: Borders and Cartographic Representation in Post-Yugoslav (Virtual) Space.« In *Boundaries and Borders in the Post-Yugoslav Space: A European Experience*, edited by Nenad Stefanov and Srđan Radović, 143–[?]. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021.

Rahten, Andrej. »Croatia Alpestris: Vprašanje umestitve slovenskih dežel v hrvaške pravniške koncepte.« *Annales: Series Historia et Sociologia* 12, no. 1 (2002): 1–10.

Rajaram, Prem Kumar, and Carl Grundy-Warr, eds. *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Repe, Božo. »Rapalska pogodba in njeno diplomatsko ozadje.« *Retrospektive* 6, no. 2–3 (2023): 11–42. <https://doi.org/10.64651/retrospektive.2023.6.2-3.1>.

———. *S puško in knjigo: Narodnoosvobodilni boj slovenskega naroda 1941–1945*. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2015.

Rodogno, Davide. *Fascism's European Empire: Italian Occupation during the Second World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Romsics, Ignác. *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*. Budapest: Corvina Books/Osiris, 1999.

Schmid, Christian. *Henri Lefebvre and the Theory of the Production of Space*. London: Verso, 2022.

Smith, Anthony D. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986.

Todorova, Maria. *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Tomasevich, Jozo. *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945: Occupation and Collaboration*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001.

Troebst, Stefan. In *Wohin steuert die Osteuropaforschung: Eine Diskussion*, edited by Stefan Creuzberger et al., 63. Cologne: Böhlau, 2000.

Vehar, Maja, and Peter Mikša. *Obmejni trikotnik: Okupacijske meje med Idrijo, Žirmi in Polhograjskimi Dolomiti, 1941–1945*. Historia 36. Ljubljana: Založba Univerze v Ljubljani, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4312/9789610604525>.

Zajc, Marko. *Where Slovenian Ends and Croatian Begins: The Slovenian–Croatian Border in the 19th and Early 20th Century*. Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2006.

Zarycki, Tomasz. »The Electoral Geography of Poland: Between Stable Spatial Structures and Their Changing Interpretations.« *Erdkunde* 69, no. 2 (2015): 107–124. <https://doi.org/10.3112/erdkunde.2015.02.02>.

Zorn, Matija, and Peter Mikša. »The Rapallo Border between Italy and Yugoslavia after the First World War.« In *Grenzen / Frontières*, edited by Barth-Scalmani et al., 165–181. Zürich: Chronos, 2018.

POVZETEK

Aprila 1941 so nacistična Nemčija, fašistična Italija, Madžarska in Neodvisna država Hrvaška razdelile slovensko etnično ozemlje. Vsak od štirih okupatorjev je aneksijo utemeljeval z lastnimi zgodovinskimi, etničnimi ali civilizacijskimi argumenti, a pri tem posegal po strukturno enakih potezah: zasedbo je prikazoval kot restitucijo ali popravo zgodovinske krivice, ne kot osvajanje. Nemčija je govorila o vrnitvi zgodovinsko nemških dežel, Italija o rimskih in beneških precedensih, Madžarska o restituciji ozemlja, odtrganega s Trianonsko pogodbo, NDH pa je Slovence razglašala za „alpske Hrvate“.

Iz primerjalne analize štirih okupacijskih con izhaja štiristopenjski model trajnih učinkov kratkotrajnih, a zelo prisilnih meja: intenziteta prisile, demografski pretresi, zamenjava upravnih struktur ter prekinitev uveljavljenih prostorskih rutin. Primerjava med nemško cono, kjer so vse štiri sestavine delovale z maksimalno intenzivnostjo, in madžarsko, kjer sta bili intenziteta prisile in demografska destabilizacija bistveno nižji, ponuja notranjo primerjalno evidenco za ta model.

Članek predlaga tipološko razlikovanje med klasičnimi fantomskimi mejami, ki nastajajo z dolgotrajnim institucionalnim ponotranjenjem in postopoma slabijo, ter prisilnimi okupacijskimi mejami, ki povzročajo vztrajanje travm kot ostanek preloma, ne kot preostanek normalizacije. Ključno je tudi razlikovanje med prostorskimi ponotranjenji, ki so pretežno lokalna in postopoma slabijo z obnovo materialnega tkiva prostora, ter diskurzivnimi ponotranjenji, torej legitimacijskimi jeziki zgodovinske restitucije in civilizacijske hierarhije, ki so nacionalno in nadnacionalno prenosljiva ter ostajajo politiki na voljo ne glede na formalne ozemeljske dogovore in se v razmerah krize hitro ponovno uporabijo. To razlikovanje pojasnjuje, zakaj ozemeljske ureditve po spopadih v jugovzhodni Evropi tako pogosto ne razrešijo temeljnih političnih napetosti. Slovenija v letih 1941–1945 je metodološki model za razumevanje prisilne teritorializacije v jugovzhodni Evropi in širše.

Author information

Kontakti avtorjev

Kornelija Ajlec, dr.

[HTTPS://ORCID.ORG/0000-0003-1834-7515](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1834-7515)

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, Department of History
Aškerčeva cesta 2, Ljubljana, Slovenia
kornelija.ajlec@ff.uni-lj.si

Kenan Çayır, dr.

[HTTPS://ORCID.ORG/0000-0003-3669-3673](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3669-3673)

İstanbul Bilgi University, Department of Sociology
Eski Silahtarağa Elektrik Santrali Kazım Karabekir Cad. No:2/13,
Eyüpsultan-İstanbul
kenan.cayir@bilgi.edu.tr

Zvezdana Kovač

European Fund for the Balkans
Majke Jevrosime 20, Belgrade, Serbia
info@jointhistory.net

Kriton Kuci, dr.

[HTTPS://ORCID.ORG/0009-0009-3307-3082](https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3307-3082)

Mediterranean University of Albania, Faculty of Law and Humanities
Department of Political Science and International Relations
52 Gjergj Fishta Blv, Tirana, Albania
kritonkuci@umsh.edu.al

Angelos Palikidis, prof.

[HTTPS://ORCID.ORG/0009-0000-0517-9052](https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0517-9052)

Democritus University of Thrace, School of Humanities, Department of Humanities

P. Tsaldari 1, Komotini, P.C., Greece

apalikid@hs.duth.gr

Srđan Radović, dr.

Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Institute of Ethnography

Knez Mihailova 36, Belgrade, Serbia

srdjan.radovic@ei.sanu.ac.rs

Božo Repe, dr.

[HTTPS://ORCID.ORG/0000-0002-4949-7156](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4949-7156)

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, Department of History

Aškerčeva cesta 2, Ljubljana, Slovenia

bozo.repe@ff.uni-lj.si

Vassiliki Sakka, dr.

Association for History Education in Greece

Dervenakion 2, Petroupoli, Athens, Greece

vassilikisakka@gmail.com

187

