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1 Bučar, Bojko: Mednarodni regionalizem: Mednarodno večstransko sodelovanje evropskih regij. Diss. Ljubljana: FSPN 1989.

2 Regional political identity is older than nation states and presents a continuing alternative to imperialist and absolutist state building from the sixteenth century onwards. Regional is »anything that structures itself and seeks its identity in opposition to the dominance of the nation state«, »region is another name for the people«. Smej, Štefan: Za kolokvij o regionalizmu. In: *Dialogi* 27/8 (1991), p. 45, p. 52.

The term »regionalism« is *en vogue*, but whereas fashion normally emanates from Paris, in this case the model is probably the American slogan, »small is beautiful«. The *Dictionary of the Slovene Literary Language (Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika)* lists three meanings of »regionalism«: 1. political, »an attribute of a specific area or region referring to its particular economic, socio-political and cultural condition«; 2. literary, »emphasizing regional characteristics in a literary work«; 3. linguistic, »referring to an element of the literary language that is characteristic of only a certain area or region«. The term »regionalism« acquired political meaning only in the 19th century. Since then several nuances of the word's political sense have evolved: provincialism (originally in the administrative sense and later also in the pejorative), patriotism for one's country, separatism, and today's meaning of international linkages irrespective of international political boundaries. The negative meaning of »regionalism« as a destructive force is gradually yielding to the word's positive implication: a force for reconciling (inter)national conflicts.

Today the word has primarily political overtones. Viewed etymologically, all that is not universal is regional. Since for now the human world is restricted to the globe, things regional are in opposition to things global, or worldwide. Europe's and America's interests are, in this sense, part and parcel regional. More often, however, »regionalism« applies to narrower interests; for example, the idea of Central Europe within Europe. A yet narrower entity would be, for instance, the Balkans, which political scientists treat as a subregion. Similar treatment within the context of Central Europe is possible for the Alpe-Adria area, which is especially important to Slovenes.¹

»Regionalism« has become important in two respects: originally, as a way of identifying Western European economic interests in relation to American and Japanese ones and somewhat later, as a result of reflecting upon the political model of nationally splintered post-communist Central Europe – that is, as a result of the so-called second wave of decolonization. There are two options for the unification or integration processes by which Europe seeks to rise economically. The first is the path of economic and political unification, according to which linguistic, cultural, historical and national political interests, as well as ethnic identity, are relegated secondary importance, according to the model of the American »melting pot«. The second path recognizes the legitimacy and primary role of cultural identity, and only then seeks a common denominator in the collective interest of economic prosperity.²

What is Slovenia's place in this opposition? As a nation state it should be hostile to regionalism as defined above; because of its modest geographical expanse, however, it is barely large enough to constitute a European regional entity. Or, perhaps, is Slovenia the place where the state vs. region opposition breaks down? For the Slovene language and culture there are two key unifying elements that both support the regional integrity of the area and define its statehood, thus making equivalent the borders of the Slovene state and the borders of the optimal region in the contemporary sense of the word. In the context of the (sub)regional Alpe-Adria group, Slovenia plays the role of a member state, that is, an independent (sub)region, similar to Croatia, Bavaria, Carinthia and Friuli.

In this scheme of things Slovene literature would be counted as a European regional literature. The title of my article does not confirm this view, for it addresses not the regionalism of Slovene literature but regionalism in Slovene literature, regionalism within the literature. That is to say, Slovenia was not traditionally as uniform as it presents itself today: it was composed of the lands or regions of Carniola (Kranjska), Southern Styria (Štajerska), Southern Carinthia (Koroška), Gorizia, Istria and Hungarian Slovenia (Prekmurje). It is precisely these regions and their literatures that I have in mind when I write of regionalism in Slovene literature. Slovenia, on the other hand, though it may outwardly appear so small, signifies the general, universal opposite to these lands. It is in this manner that the categories are usually laid out when regionalism is discussed in Slovenia.

The Slovene attitude towards regionalism is ambiguous: It is an attitude of acceptance and even enthusiasm when Slovenia is viewed as an independent, homogeneous regional whole, equal to other regions and free of patronage by one of the centers that lie outside the whole, and with which Slovenia has had poor historical experiences, be it Vienna or Belgrade. Slovenia rejects regionalism, however, when its logic would apply to parts of Slovenia, to its individual lands. The splintering of Slovenia into regions which would independently enter into a Europe of

³ Hočevar, Toussaint: Ekonomske determinante v razvoju slovenskega nacionalnega sistema. In: Slovenski družbeni razvoj. New Orleans: Založba Prometej 1979, pp. 32-60, believed that economic prosperity in the future could afford a reconciliation between economic and cultural interests.

⁴ Kržičnik, Ermin: Enotna Slovenija ali Slovenija dežel. In: Dialogi 27/8 (1991), p. 58.

regions (such interest in autonomy is most clearly articulated by the Italian minority in Primorsko [Coastland]) would amount, it is believed, to a direct threat to the existence of Slovene language, literature and culture. In Slovenia, the need for regional status appears only as a corrective to the nation state, not as its functional replacement, for we most certainly cannot say that the Slovene nation state has run its course when it has only just given notice of its existence.

The debate over regionalism reflects the rivalry between economic and cultural models of society. For the economic model any unit is confining, because its principle of survival is continual expansion. Economic logic is on principle hostile to splintering along regional lines. The cultural model, by contrast, at least in the Slovene case, is *a priori* limited by language, history and regional identity; it has a defensive mentality. As the upholder of wider economic interests, the state usually gives the economic model too much latitude.³

Just as the concept of regionalism is popular in Slovenia today, in the last century the diametrically opposed concept of unification (*zedinjenje*) was popular. I am speaking of the political program for a united Slovenia, which was to gather together the juridically separate regions of Carniola, with its predominantly Slovene population, Southern Styria, Southern Carinthia and Primorska. The means of support for Slovenia as a nation state were quite frail: besides a common literary language there was a host of the widely varying dialects (for example, a rural dweller of Prekmurje could not communicate with a Gorizian from Brda without a knowledge of literary Slovene), interregional rivalry (especially the East-West rivalry between Ljubljana and Maribor), and a large portion of the Slovenes isolated in lands with a population speaking another language (Carinthia, Trst/Trieste, Friuli). Behind the program of a united Slovenia was the political union of all Slavs, or all South Slavs. Thus an emphasis on regional consciousness was a danger to the political goals of the period during which Slovenia has been constituted, and it became possible only after 1918, when Slovenia was juridically united (with the exception of Primorsko, which belonged to Italy after the First World War). Before the war there had been great excitement about unification: it was considered necessary to secure guarantees for the young linguistic, cultural and political identity of Slovenia, and those were to be had in a political union with the Yugoslav hinterlands. Only when Slovene culture was thus assured of its safety did the possibility of regional thinking appear. But even then the Slovenes did not discover regionalism themselves; similar Czech patterns, such as ruralism, had a decisive influence.

It is not difficult to identify the regions (areas or lands) within Slovenia, because the borders between them have existed since the Middle Ages. When Slovenia assumed the form of a national entity in 1918, it preserved its traditional regional consciousness, which, however, corresponded to linguistic boundaries. The country was left with only two administrative centers of the former lands – Ljubljana, the regional center of Carniola, and Maribor, the center of Southern Styria. The Primorsko regional centers of Trieste, Gorica/Gorizia and Reka, and Celovec/Klagenfurt in Carinthia, remained outside of Slovenia. Only in recent decades have those »detached« centers been replaced by new ones: Trieste by Koper, Gorizia by Nova Gorica.⁴ Therefore the regional boundaries of the Middle Ages are no longer identical with today's regions in this part of Central Europe.

The title of my article connects politics with literature. The links between politics and literature are in the Slovene case not difficult to describe and define. In the life of the Slovene nation, literature has from its beginnings occupied a privileged place. It assumed political functions, given the absence of an independent state and the corresponding political mechanisms. Politically-engaged literature is, of course, nothing new, but in Slovene letters literature of this kind is unusually prominent. Since Slovene cultural values could not be expressed in statehood, they were expressed in the arts, through, for example, the prominent cultural activity that is literature. As a result the perception of Slovenes as a literary nation persists even today.

It would seem that literary and political regionalism are two very different things for they come into being at quite unrelated times. A look at the catalog of literary terms at the *Research Center of the Slovene Academy of Arts & Sciences* in Ljubljana shows that an awareness of regionalism in literature took shape between the years 1918 and 1945, and in particular between 1927 and 1935. It did so not on the basis of Slovene literature but on the basis of foreign literatures, among which the principal Slavic literatures were Croatian (Kajkavian or Čakavian). The phenomenon of regionalism in literature was only three decades older than an awareness of it. Its origins can be traced to the end of the nineteenth century in France. A characteristic were a cult of the homeland, local atavism and use of dialect.

5 S knjižnega trga. In: Ljubljanski zvon (1927), p. 215.

6 Modra ptica (1931/1932), p. 303.

7 Ljubljanski zvon (1928), p. 485.

8 Ljubljanski zvon (1929), pp. 252-253.

9 Brnčič, Ivo: Književni horizonti: Zagrebška književna revija. In: Ljubljanski zvon (1935), pp. 366-367.

Brnčič, Ivo. In: Ljubljanski zvon (1935), p. 111. Mohorič, Milena. In: Modra ptica (1934/1935), p. 150.

10 Borko, Božidar: Nova smer: ruralisti. In: Jutro 4 (1937), p. 4; Ders.: Češki kmečki romani. In: Jutro 46 (1936), p. 7.

11 Jutro 75 (1939), p. 9.

12 Smej 1991, p. 54.

13 Borko, Božidar in Jutro; Ivo Brnčič; Ivan Potrč.

14 Ljubljanski zvon (1940), p. 403; Sodobnost (1935), p. 142; Novi svet (1947), p. 425.

15 Rehar, Radivoj. In: Obzorja (1938), p. 425.

16 Ljubljanski zvon (1933), p. 61; Jutro (1934), p. 81, p. 84.

The Slovene debate on regionalism took place in the central literary review, *Ljubljanski zvon*. The names of the participants (Božidar Borko, Anton Debeljak, Ivo Brnčič) attest to the fact that it was an explicitly élite matter. The question is why one cannot find Slovene literature of this kind under the loan word »regionalizem«, rather than, at best, under the equivalent domestic term »pokrajinska povest«. Literary regionalism had a blatantly negative regional dimension; it was as much a threat to Slovene national unity as to the process of Yugoslav integration. In the name of the latter the Serbian critic Vladimir Velmar Janković, to give one example, expressed fundamental misgivings about regional art – that is, typically Slovene, Istrian or Serbian art. He himself claimed that Yugoslav letters do not yet exist because literatures in the territories of Yugoslavia are still regional.

Whenever I read one of our authors with typically regional markings in his artistry, I appreciate him with only part of my soul, with only one, limited sentiment, which may well be deep and alive and very strong for a moment, but which will never instill me with any great respect for art of that kind. And in our day a person desires, so to speak, encounters with great things.⁵

In the early thirties the chairman of the French *PEN Club*, Benjamin Crémieux, expressed similar scepticism towards the small and regional in an interview while in Ljubljana:

Among the small nations I think that what bothers me the most is exaggerated regionalism and nationalism, which are predominately evident in rural and folk-national novels, novellas and poetry. Those interminable rural stories.

It would seem that a true novel could never appear in such a nationalistically limited environment.⁶ In contrast, the critic Božidar Borko attributed the Kajkavian poet Dragutin M. Domjanič's regionalism to the author's nobility and interpreted it as a protest not only against the city but against the bourgeois and a materialistic civilization.⁷ At the same time he pointed out the difference between the »insignificant« political and »interesting« literary dimensions of regionalism.⁸ Regionalism was not only undesirable from the point of view of state building; in the same way, although without articulating its arguments, the social left rejected it several years later.⁹

Literary regionalism had in Europe different names: »ruralism« in Bohemia, »Schollenromantik« (»bludo« or »Blut- und Boden-Literatur« or the national socialist direction) in German literature; »populism« in France, the »collectivist novel« in the Soviet Union (critics mention Sholokhov, Panfërov),¹⁰ and the »novel of colonization« in the USA (critics talk about the »frontier novel« or »pioneer novel«).¹¹

The connection between »regionalism« and »ruralism« is apparent at first glance. Regional consciousness is formed on the basis of specific interests of geographically adjacent social groupings and therefore emphasizes specific needs and highlights differences between peoples. The countryside more naturally supports regional aspirations, whereas metropolitan areas, which are generally administrative centers spanning regions represent broader, state interests, and conceal differences between peoples.¹²

The term »ruralism« has an even more limited usage in Slovenia than »regionalism«; the former was used in reference to Slovene but more often to foreign, in particular Czech, literature, between 1933 and 1941, and for a while after 1945. Anton Novačan, on the other hand, was the only Slovene writer identified as a ruralist. The same critics dealt with »ruralism« and »regionalism«.¹³ Left-wing critics did not differentiate between »ruralism« and »regionalism« in literature – in both cases they had in mind conservative, idyllic, idealized, folklorish, anachronistic and unrealistic rural stories, as well as rural lyricism, and they drew a sharp distinction between them and »socialist realist stories« with rural themes by such writers as Prežihov Voranc, Anton Ingolič, Edvard Kocbek and Juš Kozak.¹⁴

Critics of the political right had no qualms about grouping rural writers of the left with rural writers in general.¹⁵ Our most explicit informant, Božidar Borko, rejected criticisms of ruralism's conservative character by saying that, even though ruralists did not trumpet revolutionary social theories, ruralism was not simply a form of Rousseauism but also involved a new social concept.¹⁶ He explained ruralism as a reaction to the hegemony of proletarian and bourgeois letters. He saw ruralism's appeal for a return to the earth as a reaction to the moral shock caused by the First World War. The soil is the »keeper of life«, »a sturdy axle in times full of upheavals, insecurity and anxiety«. Ruralist writers were those who described peasant life; many were themselves from the families of small farmers. The »rural story« is characterized by »a unique



17 Borko, Božidar: Dr. Anton Novačan. In: *Jutro* 157 (1937), p. 7; Česki ruralizem. In: *Ljubljanski zvon* (1933), pp. 61-62; *Jutro* 201 (1936), p. 7.

18 Kmet in vas v sodobnem češkem pripovedništvu. In: *Jutro* 183 (1944), p. 3.

19 Borko, Božidar: Josef Knap. In: *Jutro* 75 (1939), p. 9.

20 Pregelj, Ivan: Nekaj misli o slovstveni izobrazbi slovenskega ljudstva v bodočem. In: *Mladost* (1916), pp. 38-43.

21 Le roman regionaliste dans les îles britanniques 1800-1950. Clermont-Ferrand: Bussac 1945.

naturalism«, »agrarian socialism«, a departure from the tradition of Catholic inspired tendentiousness in realism. In brief, »ruralism« was far from the romanticization of peasant life.¹⁷

These people not only loved the peasant and felt one with him, their view of the land was not only a polemic with the annoying urban bourgeoisie; rather, they studied the peasant and the village with the same attentiveness as the writers of epics about the proletariat studied that social layer, often using sociological, economic and psychological measures. Thus some of them represented rustic naturalism while others sought the inspiration of idealistic and especially ethnic world views and ambitions in their sources. In literature it is not necessary to dwell on the return to the land. You can no longer persuade anyone of the romantic »health« of the countryside and »hell« of the city. In contrast to the old realism, the new Czech rural fiction reveals the peasant's instinctive world and thus fundamentally improves upon the old literature about the peasant; however, it errs in that it prefers instinctiveness and slight the peasant's actual spiritual needs.¹⁸

Numerous articles in daily periodicals attest to the fact that Slovenes were quite well informed about ruralism in Czech literature before the war. Information even came in part from original sources, since one of the representatives of this tendency, Josef Knap, was the Czech correspondent to the liberal Slovene daily *Jutro* and contributed essays to *Ljubljanski zvon*. In his programmatic texts we find common Slovene and Czech interests, which serves to bring to light once again, here from a literary point of view, the basic question of the dimensions of Slovene regionalism. In both cases, the Slovene and the Czech, it was a question of sorting out regional and national interests; at least that is how Josef Knap put it:

We are fighting against international influences in Czech culture [...] We want a Czech literature even more Czech in spirit. Cosmopolitanism has gone too far in our country [...] Values have been measured against foreign, in particular French [...] models [...]. We feel the need for a literature that is the fullest expression of the people's soul. We are looking towards the old tradition, we are returning to the earth, to God and Christianity, to the people, homeland and our ancestors.¹⁹

In Slovenia similar pronouncements were heard in association with *Heimat*-stories: »Our true literature must be foreign to a foreigner!«²⁰

Now let us turn to Slovene regionalism in literature, which is identified with rural prose in the title of my paper (unfortunately we will have to leave aside the riches of regional lyric poetry). The countryside became important in lyric poetry before prose. A whole group of poets got known on the basis of works set in their native region: Simon Gregorčič was called »the nightingale of Gorizia«, Srečko Kosovel »the poet of the Kras region« and Alojz Gradnik »the poet of Goriška Brda«. Just as in prose, regional interest centered on Primorsko, and therefore the motivation for Slovene regional literature must be sought in the peculiar condition of that area. The politically isolated Primorsko was, in the Slovene political mind, the area to be reunited with Slovenia at the first opportunity. It was precisely among the poets and writers from this area that the regional theme was strongly tied to the national theme.

A definition of a »regional novel« can be found in the French literary historian Lucien Leclaire, who equates the regional and rural novels and explains them as narratives with regionally limited action.²¹ The »regional novel« arose of a special sense of region and was addressed to the readers of that region. The prevailing motifs are the return to the earth and conflicts with the city. It was only with realism and its descriptive means, including the use of dialect, that the »regional novel« became possible. Since it is often replete with folklore, it begins to resemble the journalistic novel; and because its function is frequently to increase national consciousness, it also resembles the tendentious patriotic novel. The regional novel dates to 1870, when rural themes far outnumbered urban ones. Only by 1930 did the share of rural themes in the novel decrease in favor of urban themes, foremost because of the increasing of labor's role in industry after 1900. Germans have treated regional art under the name »*Heimatkunst*«. In broad, temporally unrestricted terms, »*Heimatkunst*« (native art) is poetry that derives its power from a region, »art rooted in the land«. More narrowly, »*Heimatkunst*« is art that originates with a patriot movement against an urban civilization and naturalism, as well as decadence and symbolism, around the turn of the century. It was born in optimistic opposition to naturalism, which was overly dark and depicted the misery of the times tendentiously. Literary regionalism attempted an atavistic return to the »source of strength«, that is, the people and the region. It romantically mythologized

24 Stanko Kociper: *Goričanec* (1942), Ivan Potrč: *Sin* (1939), Anton Ingolič: *Meja* (1946), Janez Švajncer: *Strelci na meji* (1955), Manica Lobnik: *Gorniki in čas* (1957), Ignac Koprivec: *Hiša pod vrhom* (1957) and *Pot ne pelje v dolino* (1961).

25 Janko Kač: *Grunt* (1932) and *Na novinah* (1942).

26 Jože Kranjc: *Pot ob prepadu* (1932).

corpus of Slovene stories about the uplands is modest; it appears that its way of identifying Slovenes as an Alpine people was simply too exclusive and therefore dangerous to the pan-Slavic minded nineteenth century.

The central Slovene lands are relatively seldom portrayed in regional stories; peripheral regions are represented in inverse proportion, in particular Primorsko and a part of Notranjsko (Inner Carniola), which were ceded to Italy after World War I. The chief representatives of the regional story here were Ivan Albrecht, Andrej Budal, as well as (to some extent) France Bevk and in the late 1930s Narte Velikonja and Ciril Kosmač. In central Slovenia in the 1930s Janez Jalen and Jan Plestenjak renewed the noble tradition of Fran S. Finžgar's stories about Gorenjsko (Upper Carniola). Plestenjak wrote exclusively about the Škofja Loka area (*Lovrač*, 1936; *Bajtarji*, 1937; *Mlinar Bogataj*, 1942; *Herodež*, 1944). Lojze Zupanc (*Stari Hrk*, 1934; *Tretji rod*, 1938; *Mlini stoje*, 1945) and Jože Dular (*Zemlja in ljubezen*, *Krka umira*, 1943) depicted the way of life and lands of Bela Krajina and Dolenjsko (Lower Carniola). The most known Styrian regions in literature became *Slovenske Gorice*²⁴ *Savinjska dolina*²⁵ and *Pohorje*.²⁶ All of the authors I have named continued regional description in the 1930s, though with accompanying emphasis on social problems. Kač, Kranjec and Kociper went the furthest in this direction and defined a regional type (of character) using techniques that recall German »Blut- und Boden-Literatur«. Here is where the regional and »Heimat«-type of rural stories met, and at times it is difficult to distinguish them.

Authors of Slovene rural stories were born for the most part in the countryside. The most culturally stimulating area was Gorenjsko (30%), then Styria (22%) and Primorsko (20%). It was in these areas that most authors lived and wrote. The disproportionately large portion of writers who lived in Styria is surprising, although they were not born there. Their biographies show that their inordinate number has to be attributed to moves from Italian occupied Primorsko. The refugees settled in Styria because it seemed more hospitable to them than central Carniola. Above average productivity was registered in Primorsko, Prekmurje and Carinthia, of course on the weight of contributions by the prolific France Bevk, Miško Kranjec and Prežihov Voranc. Notranjsko, Prekmurje and Carinthia did not give birth to many writers, but those who wrote about these regions did so very intensively.

It seems, then, that the tendency of writers was explicitly programmatic: to give equal literary representation to less well-known Slovene regions, and thus lead to mutual understanding between Slovene regions, thereby creating a single Slovene cultural space. The rural and regional stories (and most probably other literature as well) flourished most in Carniola, the central Slovene region. The regional story of the 1920s had clearly mobilized national consciousness, by emphasizing the »detached« parts of Slovenia. The presentation of regional peculiarities of these areas saved and prepared a cultural space for the »detached« regions in the national consciousness until the time of final national unification. In this sense the Slovene regional story was no different from the German, which favoured German border areas as settings: the *Sudetland*, Upper Silesia, Eastern Prussia, the Banat and Siebenburgen.

What, then, gave impetus to the wave of regional narratives within the context of the rural story in Slovenia of the 1920s? Even more than examples from neighbouring national literatures and world literature in general, political conditions were decisive in the birth of the Slovene regional story: the 19th century program for Slovene unification (*zedinjena Slovenija*) and the State change in 1918, which juridically united Slovene regions with the exception of Primorsko and Carinthia. Underscoring local peculiarities became interesting only when such emphasis no longer could threaten a united Slovene state. The fact that the most explicitly regional form came into being in the politically separated Primorsko and in other marginal regions that were attempting to maintain contact with the center confirms the thesis that in the Slovene case regionalism didn't have the meaning of fragmentation of the political space; rather, regionalism in literature was a means of identifying a particular cultural interest that strives towards a trans-regional creation, that is, Slovene culture.

After Second World War the regional story soon exhausted itself. The Slovene regional story no longer exists because, firstly, there are no more exotic areas in Slovenia to describe, and, secondly, the political needs from which it arose – the building of a united Slovenia – have meanwhile been fulfilled.

(Transl. by Timothy Pogačar)

