

Commemorating Caporetto/ Forgetting Kobarid. Strategies of commemoration in fascist Italy – KATJA ŠKRLJ

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The Battle of Caporetto (28 October – 9 November 1917) is considered to be one of the biggest military defeat in modern Italian history. In Italian collective memory the term “Caporetto” is still a synonym for a terrible defeat. In my paper I will try to demonstrate how a military defeat was used as an instrument of apology for Italian expansive politic on its eastern border. I will also try to show how a memory of fallen Italian solders was colonised to build up fascist ideology and its politics in 1930s.

In the first decade after the First World War different commemorative monuments were erected in order to remember the tragic years of 1914–1918 and the lost generation. Monuments to the fallen solders are not just *sites of memory and sites of mourning* (Jay Winter) but also the *most effective national symbols* – places of identification with the fallen national heroes (Benedict Anderson) and *justification of their sacrifice* (George L. Mosse). In the years following the war almost everybody has found their place in national commemorations apart from minorities of gender (women), age (children, elder people), status (prisoners) and geography (populations of occupied territories). The last group is especially significant for the case study discussed in this paper.

In this paper I will focus on strategies of commemoration of the First World War in Slovenian ethnic territory that was in the period during the two world wars part of Italian state. I will analyse the political use of remembrance and forgetting in the case of memory of the First World War in Italy and Slovenia/Yugoslavia. Considering the above mentioned different roles of monuments I will focus on the Italian Ossuary in Kobarid. This commemorative monument of the fallen Italian solders will be taken for case study because it is a classical example of *physical, linguistic and performative* remembrance. The monument was erected in 1938 and Benito Mussolini himself came to Kobarid for the inauguration. The special attention will be given to the opening

ceremony and the happening in the “back stage” (the attempt on Mussolini’s life planned by a Slovene anti-Fascist insurgent organisation that eventually was not carried out).