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TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN: SKIING AND FOOTBALL IN THE SLOVENIAN NATION-BUILDING PROCESS

DVE STRANI ISTEGA KOVANCA: SMUČANJE IN NOGOMET V PROCESU IZGRADNJE SLOVENSKE NACIJE

Abstract

The shrinking ability of Yugoslavs to imagine themselves as a single unitary nation was further challenged in the 1980s by discourses that asserted the national purity and distinctiveness of every Yugoslav nation. This was especially visible in the field of sports. Slovenian national identification from the 1980s onward was particularly influenced by two sports – skiing and football. International successes of Slovenian Alpine skiers in the late 1970s and the 1980s triggered a skiing frenzy in Slovenia and turned this sport into one of the most distinctive items of Slovenian national identification. Football, on the other hand, has been traditionally perceived as a non-Slovenian sport. Slovenian football clubs rarely qualified to play in the first Yugoslav national league and individual Slovenian players were almost entirely absent from the Yugoslav national football team. Despite the alleged Slovenianness of skiing and non-Slovenianness of football, the nationalist potential of both sports was not politically important as long as the discourse of brotherhood and unity of the Yugoslav nations still applied. However, after this discourse was shattered by growing local nationalisms neither sport continued to play a unifying role but started to function as dividing mechanisms. In this regard, skiing was through its various popular forms and the development of the national economy legitimised as a revived Slovenian tradition while football was negatively branded as a foreign cultural practice.

Key words: sport, nationalism, skiing, football, national economy, nation-building

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Izvleček

V osemdesetih letih so že tako ali tako izginjajočo sposobnost zamišljanja Jugoslovanov v enotno nacijo še dodatno omajali nacionalistični diskurzi, ki so zagovarjali idejo nacionalne čistosti in posebnosti vsakega posameznega jugoslovanskega naroda. Še posebej je bilo to vidno v polju športa. Še posebej sta na slovensko nacionalno identifikacijo od osemdesetih let naprej vplivala smučanje in nogomet. Mednarodni uspehi slovenskih smučarjev v poznih sedemdesetih in v osemdesetih letih so sprožili val navdušenja nad smučanjem in ta šport spremenili v eno izmed najbolj jasnih točk slovenske nacionalne identifikacije. Na drugi strani pa je bil nogomet tradicionalno označen ko neslovenski šport. Slovenska nogometna moštva so le redko igrala v prvi jugoslovanski ligi, pa tudi slovenski igralci so le izjemoma igrali v jugoslovanski državni reprezentanci. Navkljub domnevni slovenskosti smučanja in neslovenskosti nogometa, pa nacionalistična potenciala obeh športov nista bila politično pomembna, vse dokler je diskurz bratstva in enotnosti deloval brezhibno. Rastoči lokalni nacionalizmi so močno zrahljali ta diskurz in oba športa nista več igrala združevalne vloge kot prej, temveč sta začela delovati kot ločevalna mehanizma. V tem pogledu je bilo smučanje skozi popularne forme in razvoj nacionalne ekonomije vzpostavljeno kot oživljena slovenska tradicija, medtem ko je bil nogomet ožigosan z neuglednim slovesom tuje kulturne prakse.

Ključne besede: šport, nacionalizem, smučanje, nogomet, nacionalna ekonomija, gradnja nacije

'In these difficult times, you united our people with your comradeship and morality'
(Slovenian President Milan Kučan greeting the Slovenian national football team upon its return from the 2000 European Championships).

INTRODUCTION

Sport is one part of our everyday life that allows nationalism and national identification to function without much reflection or public awareness. Despite the globalising impulses in sport that are commonly believed to diminish the significance of national identification, globalisation – often also seen as a tool for achieving global understanding and the democratisation of society – seems to be incapable of weakening the strong ties between sport, national identification and nationalisms (Allison, 2005; Allison & Monnington, 2005; Bairner, 2001, 2005a; Cronin & Mayall, 1998; Smith & Porter, 2004).

In order to better understand these processes for the case of Slovenia it is useful to study the power mechanisms that enabled the transformation of sporting practices into the attributes of Slovenian 'national traits' in the 1980s, despite the alleged apolitical nature of such cultural practices that could be characterised as banal practices (Billig, 2001). The primary feature of the nation-building phenomenon in Slovenian sport is the creation and organisation of 'otherness'. This mechanism can be analysed with Anderson's 'imagined communities' (1991) interpretation in mind, with Barth's ethnic distinction (1989), as well as with the utilisation of Hobsbawm's concept of 'inventions of traditions' (1993). All authors namely stress that national identities are articulated and encoded as constantly changing and self re-creating cultural practices that are shaped according to the historical, political and social context.

Sport is one area where Slovenian nationalism was exercised extensively throughout the twentieth century. Its public representation operated as one of the main arenas in which the Slovenian nation and Slovenian national consciousness were constructed. However, sport served not only as a tool charged with nationalist ideas but also as a space in which people were actively producing knowledge of what it means to be Slovenian, just as Irish (Arrowsmith, 2004; Bairner, 2005b; Cronin, 1999; Wulff, 2003), Scottish (Maguire & Tuck, 1998), Welsh (Johnes, 2004), English (Polley, 2004), Argentinian (Archetti, 1999, 2003), Cuban (Burgos, 2005), Tanzanian (Leseth, 2003), Spanish (Hargreaves, 2000), German (Krauss, 2003), Italian (Martin, 2004), Austrian (Horek & Spitaler, 2003), Swedish (Sörlin, 1996), South African (Farred, 1999; Keech, 2004), Sri Lankan (Ismail, 1999) and other national identities. In Foucault's words (2000), people constantly produce and sustain a certain regime of truth[1] that helps them to classify and arrange the world in an understandable way. Nationalism has in this case been playing a double role: it has been enabling and/or corroborating the constitution of the Slovenian nation and, at the same time, popularising sports by endowing them with a seemingly deeper, communal, national meaning. National identification of anonymous masses of individuals in this sense appears as a complex of mutual interrelationships inside the field of sport between individuals, representations and contexts that are emerging as temporary fixations in the chain of constantly negotiated identities. The role of the media and the economy in this process should not be overlooked because those working in the media have been granted the position of the privileged voice while the economy exploits people's national feelings to ensure and

[1] Foucault (2000]) noted that each society has its own '… "general politics" of truth – that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true'.

possibly increase profits. Media workers today hold the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault, 2000) and function as discursive aggregates around which the knowledge about the nation is accumulated, while the national economy normalises nationalist expressions into a sales product of popular consumption.

About the method

In the case of Slovenia, skiing and football functioned as national vehicles and have always been imbued with national symbolism. This does not mean that other sports had no part to play in the Slovenian nation-building process but merely indicates that these two sports have been playing particularly obvious and oppositional roles in this process. Both were important identification points of Slovenianness and Yugoslavness respectively, especially during the last two decades of the Yugoslav socialist state. Through the analysis of their media representations and through ethnographic fieldwork carried out among various social groups – each with its own relation to sport – it is thus possible to trace the processes and techniques employed in sport generally to create Slovenians as opposed to all conceivable 'Others', especially as opposed to non-Slovenian Yugoslavs.[2] This is why media texts and personal narratives can serve as study materials: different statements from different occasions are evidence of the development of nationalist forms of sport discourse that transform sporting practices into a nationalist training ground and, at the same time, conceal nationalist expressions behind the veil of sport fandom. The analysis of the discursive field in the sense of an archaeology or, better still, a genealogy of knowledge (Foucault, 1982) should comprise an examination of any nationalist statements, not only at the semantic level but at the level of their occurrence. As Foucault advises, one should

> *"… grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statement it excludes"* (1982).

Slovenian forms of nationalist discourse are not stable; rather, they are ever changing and emphasise different aspects. They can be identified in various statements by different authors. There could of course be objections to any claim that a single statement by a single author can prove what nationalist forms of discourse operated among the masses. But the author should not be conceived of as a person who delivered the speech or wrote the text on their own. Instead, they should be understood as '… the unifying principle in a particular group of writings or statements, lying at the origins of their significance, as the seat of their coherence' (Foucault, 1982). Each statement referring to a certain nation, which is delivered by the media, should therefore be taken as a fraction of knowledge about the nation, produced by the people, grasped by media workers, advertisers and sport officials, and disseminated in the

[2] Slovenian nationalism of the 1980s and 1990s was predominantly built on the opposition between Slovenians and other Yugoslavs. The idea of the ethnic homogeneity of Slovenia is today especially well managed. Although the last census (as the most 'objective' tool for national classification) from 2002 shows that among two million Slovenian citizens there are almost 2% of Croats, 2% of Serbs and 0.5% of Muslims (in this census, Bosnians are denominated as Muslims), they were not categorised as national minorities like the less numerous Italians (0.1%) and Hungarians (0.3%) were. The 83.1% share of Slovenians was in this census described as 'still high but falling' and was accompanied by the implicit sense of foreign Serbs, Muslims and Croats who have in 2002 '[…] all exceeded the 1% share of the Slovenian population' (Šircelj, 2003). The 6% share of Slovenian citizens who refused to declare themselves in response to this question shows the incapability of censuses to categorise people according to pre-set national schemas. The mere posing of such a question also evidences the Slovenian state's rootedness in the nationalist framework.

form of media texts, producing a particular form of national economy that lives on nationalist feelings.[3]

The mechanisms of national purity and hybridity in Slovenian sport

One of the key features of Slovenian nationalism that makes it similar to other European nationalisms is the alleged national or ethnic purity and originality in its building elements. Nationalist forms of Slovenian state-building discourse have difficulties recognising the possibility of hybridity. Even when a mixed origin is acknowledged, something is added to it in order to make the feature look more nationally or ethnically original.

When it comes to processes of people's identification, the term that best describes what happens is glocalisation (Bennet, 1999). The importation, for instance, of football and polo from England to Europe or to Latin America, allowed for sporting practices not to be simply accepted as a package together with all the meanings that defined them at home.[4] Eduardo Archetti (1999) proves that Argentinean tradition and continuity expressed through these sports have never been polluted by Englishness; they have always been perceived as inherent to the Argentinean national identity, 'pure' and homogeneous by token of its hybridity. If these sports were linked to Englishness, they would have posed a serious threat to the prevailing nationalist forms of Argentinean sport discourse and the dominant 'mestizaje ideology' as Archetti describes it (1999), which is based on the sameness in hybridity. Because of the widely acknowledged mixed origin, Argentineans succeeded in realising, also in the field of sports, a homogenisation that differs substantially from that seen in Slovenia. They managed to homogenise their variegated national community by emphasising its hybrid origin. Such national homogeneity, based on hybridity, is far more inclusive than the Slovenian national homogeneity based on the idea of purity.

Archetti (1999) attributes the dissemblance in the organisation of national homogeneity in sport between Europe and Latin America to the difference in the ways in which sports were introduced. While in Europe the majority of sports were popularised under the pretence of the revival or (re)invention of old (national) traditions (Mosse, 1991), in Latin America, the '… construction of manhood and nationhood through sport was in principle a modernist project because it was fabricated by the introduction of foreign cultural practices and not by the revival or invention of traditions' (Archetti, 1999).

These mechanisms produced two different ways of mobilising individuals into members of the national community; in Europe and Slovenia, the goal was to establish as distinctive a border between Us and Them when possible, while in Latin America the border was much more permeable so as to include as many heterogeneous individuals as possible, disqualifying the importance of pure origin in the process. The final result was nevertheless similar; in both

[3] This is what Latour (2001) calls the diffusion model which postulates the dual functioning of the black-boxing process. In the nationalist sense, the black-boxing process includes the transmission of the idea of the nation between members, and the transmission of objects into signs of the nation. The efficiency of such national black-boxing is guaranteed by its imperceptibility – before a particular nation is invented and put into speech, it does not exist; but once it is put into speech, it appears as if it had been there all along.

[4] Football was not simply adopted and practiced as a sign of Englishness but was adjusted to local situations and contexts; this means that new ideas, new knowledge and new distinctive identities were produced in the process. Football and polo did not make Argentineans more English but helped them practice their distinctiveness in the form of hybridity. In Archetti's words, 'the "ideal" Argentinean football or polo player is a hybrid who becomes a symbol of tradition and continuity' (Archetti, 1999).

cases, delimited imagined national communities were produced because every imagined community always has finite, albeit elastic boundaries and even the most 'messianic nationalists', as Anderson (1991) described them, would not strive to turn all members of the human race into the members of their nation because this would mean the end of it.

Skiing in Slovenian national aesthetics

Skiing grew in importance during the 1980s when it was turned into one of the most characteristic features of Slovenianness and started to be perceived as naturally inherent to all Slovenians. The imagery of the snowy Slovenian Alpine world was intertwined with the imagery of skiing, cow bells, courageous mountaineers, and old Slovenian traditions; they all became signifiers of the chain of equivalence[5] of Slovenianness, and the prevalent one in the homogenisation of Slovenian identification. In 1983, a wide media campaign called *Slovenija, moja dežela* [*Slovenija, my Land*][6] was launched in order to improve the recognition of Slovenia as a unique tourist destination and it had extensive, although unplanned, nationalist effects. The campaign was based on TV spots that pictured Slovenia as a peaceful, beautiful country with all the attributes of an idyllic, fairy-tale folkloristic scenery: the greenery of the nature, the snowy mountains, the simple, friendly, hard-working people etc. The media in other republics of Yugoslavia reacted to the campaign with disapproval and mockery: the message of the campaign was read in a way that portrayed Slovenians as 'country people'; the common euphemism for Slovenia became 'the country'. More than a decade latter an article reminiscing on this campaign in the Serbian newspaper *Vreme* [*Time*] depicted the spirit of the time and confirmed its nationalist success:

> *"At that time Slovenia carried out its campaign 'Slovenija, moja dežela', which was a logical continuation of the slogan: 'Europe now!'*[7] *… What should be of special interest to us is the research that preceded the Slovenian campaign and was performed a few years before the*

[5] According to Ernesto Laclau (2000), the discourses that produce identities operate with the logic of equivalence. Following the logic of equivalence, particular identities of the subjects are dissolved within a discourse by means of creating a purely negative identity that threatens those identities. At a skiing competition, the logic of equivalence is clearly displayed. The signifiers such as Slovenian nation, the green racing suits, Elan skis, cow bells etc. build the chain of equivalence of Slovenianness. The Slovenian nation becomes the highest equivalent of these particularities: the longer the chain of these signifiers, the less the general equivalent is attached to any particular signifier and the more it becomes a sign of an undefined universal Slovenianness.

[6] The term *dežela* stands, in Slovenian, both for *province* in the sense of an administrative region (primarily during the time of the Austrian Empire), and *land* in a romanticised, even fairy-tale context. A third meaning is, somewhat poetically, *countryside* (as opposed to *city*) in the sense of rural. It was this latter meaning that was widely satirically exploited by the media in other ex-Yugoslav republics, with the poetic quality of the term being transversed to mean *peasant* in the pejorative sense of *backward* and *thick*.

[7] *Evropa zdaj!* [*Europe now!*] was a slogan launched by the then Communist party in its efforts to 'descend' from power, and to present itself as a progressive, future-oriented and pro-European political body. In 1989 the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia stopped publishing its old party paper the *Komunist* [*Communist*] and started publishing a new paper entitled *Evropa zdaj!: Z Jugoslavijo k Evropi* [*Europe now!: With Yugoslavia to Europe*] (1989). Also the aesthetic form of the paper was radically altered. The red colour disappeared and was substituted by a combination of yellow and blue. The red Communist star was replaced by the yellow European star. The first issue advertised the forthcoming eleventh Congress of the Communist Party of Slovenia with the slogan: 'For a European quality of life' (1989). This was the indication that the socialist idea was no longer alive and the Communist Party had accepted the new programme, which was very different from the old, socialist one. The then leader of the Slovenian Communist Party, Milan Kučan, who became the first president of the Republic of Slovenia in 1991, wrote on the first page: 'We want to become part of the leading thoughts of the modern world and civilisation on the threshold of the third millennium' (1989).

> *secession. The results of this research in Slovenia show that Slovenians have a very low – you will find it hard to believe – self-esteem. In the times of the SFRY the average Slovenian thought that Slovenians are stupid, worthless, lazy… everything we [Serbs] thought they thought about us. The agency that carried out the research was then hired to organise the campaign that would change the Slovenian self-perception (internal marketing) – and this is how all those kitschy spots were produced, depicting a beautiful land in which good and hardworking people are growing old: they paint their fences, coat their façades and their workshops, with their children helping them, women are smiling, the sun is shining… And when people identified with this beautiful image (and who wouldn't?!), it was easy for them to say: Europe now! because most of them already firmly believed that they do not belong to the zone B [the Balkans]. And they went – to Europe*" (Milenković, 2002).

Notwithstanding this foreign comment on the re-actualisation of the *Slovenija, moja dežela* campaign, it is important to note that it coincided with yet another exclusively Slovenian self-awareness-raising campaign that propagated skiing. This was in fact a nationwide, media supported lottery campaign called *Podarim Dobim* [*I donate, I gain*]. This lottery was founded by the Yugoslav Skiing Association in order to raise money for Slovenian skiing after the 1984 Winter Olympics in Sarajevo and it was the most popular and successful Slovenian sports lottery of all time.

The *Podarim Dobim* campaign was limited only to Slovenia and was openly exclusivist from the national point of view. Only the inhabitants of Slovenia were able to participate because *Podarim Dobim* postcards were only sold in Slovenia. People from other Yugoslav republics were allowed to participate but they had to buy the *Podarim Dobim* postcards in Slovenia. Further, the quantity of prizes and their value were unprecedented; people could win houses, Western-made cars, buses, tractors, motorbikes, and even helicopters and planes. This added to the distinctly non-Balkans and non-socialist image of the campaign, and emphasised the Slovenian pro-European orientation. At the same time, the whole action was inseparably intertwined with skiing. In order to compete in the lottery, one had to correctly answer the three questions printed on the postcard; all the questions pertained exclusively to Slovenian skiing. The participants in the lottery had to answer, for instance, how many times Bojan Križaj[8] had won World Cup Slaloms; which competitions Mateja Svet[9] had won etc. People were thus educated about the successes of Slovenian skiing and were invited to remember them – the campaign was directly building the Slovenian collective memory, to use Halbwachs' term (1992). *Podarim Dobim* was a repetitive ritual; it lasted for several years, featuring the same host and the same content, and it was limited to the skiing season only.[10] This meant that people had the feeling that they were directly supporting the skiers who, in turn, elicited their national pride every winter. Expecting the beginning of winter became inseparably

[8] Bojan Križaj is one of the greatest legends of Slovenian skiing. He was the first Yugoslav skier to achieve big international successes, starting in 1975 with a victory in the Junior World Championship slalom. In the 1977/78 season he won his first bronze in a World Cup race and became the icon of Slovenian skiing with many World Cup victories in the 1980s.

[9] Mateja Svet is the most successful female Slovenian skier of all time. She contributed greatly to the popularisation of skiing in Slovenia by including women's World Cup races amongst Slovenian skiing victories. In the late 1980s she was one of the most popular Slovenian athletes.

[10] The draw of the prizes was initially scheduled once a month; during the second year of the lottery the draw took place three times a month and, finally, every week. The draw was broadcast on prime time Slovenian national television and after each skiing season there was the main draw to distribute the most valuable prizes.

connected to the beginning of the new *Podarim Dobim* season. No other sport in Slovenia ever achieved a comparable accompanying ceremonial, and consequently, the capacity to homogenise nationalist feelings to such an extent. In addition, towards the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s the *Podarim Dobim* campaigns became more openly nationalist, a fact that was also reflected in its slogans. The slogan of the campaign at the end of the 1980s was, for example, *Za Slovenske zmage* [*For Slovenian Victories*] which implicitly suggested that supporting skiing through the lottery meant supporting Slovenia and not Yugoslavia. In February 1991, the Slovenian ski jumper Franci Petek won the World Championship; the congratulatory note of the *Podarim Dobim* leadership that was published on a whole page in the daily *Delo* stated: 'We congratulate Franci Petek for the first Slovenian victory in 1991.' On the bottom of the page, there was the signature: 'PODARIM DOBIM, with one million votes and contributions to SLOVENIAN VICTORIES' ("Čestitamo Franciju", 1991). The note was very provocative given that in December 1990 Slovenians had voted with a nearly 90 percent majority in favour of independence at a referendum, which was very disturbing for the Belgrade government. The calculated ambiguity of the mammoth ad nevertheless sent a clear signal to Slovenian readers who were well aware what 'the second victory' in 1991 would be. The advert clearly made a statement about the national consensus of 'one million votes' in favour of independence. It was an obvious sign that the discourse of brotherhood and unity of Yugoslavs that had worked so efficiently from 1918 onwards was no longer valid; from then on, skiing was perceived as an anti-Yugoslav, pro-Slovenian sport that owed and dedicated its successes only to Slovenians and Slovenia. The sport journalist Borut Šauta (1991a, p. 9), for example, emphasised the national importance of Nataša Bokal's silver medal at the 1991 World Championship slalom in this way:

> *"Nataša Bokal's silver slalom medal put everything back in place, as in the times of Bojan Križaj, Rok Petrovič, Boris Strel, Jure Franko, Mateja Svet, and others. This was the medal that convinced us, Slovenians, that nobody can suppress our love for skiing. This medal means a lot to us in these times of strengthening of our independence, and our quest for international recognition. This medal is worth more than the gold it is made from."*

The names of Slovenian skiers were reiterated and emphasised in order to ensure to the readers that these skiers were Slovenian men and women – the ideal representatives of the nation. Skiing was a euphemism for independence. The sentence: '… nobody can suppress our love for skiing' was, at that time, read as: 'nobody can suppress our determination for independence.' Skiing was positioned as an all-encompassing symbol of the Slovenian struggle for independence. All skiing victories were perceived as Slovenian and were denied any Yugoslavness, although they were accomplished under the Yugoslav flag.

In his commentaries on the 1992 Winter Olympics, Borut Šauta attacked the Yugoslav 'erroneous claim' to 'Slovenian medals'. The subtitle of one of his reports (1992a, p. 8) read: '*How did the gentlemen of the Yugoslav Skiing Association picture the "separation balance sheet" of the results with their beloved Slovenians*'. He reminded the readers, that the national struggle was far from over, and that Slovenians had to reclaim the achievements of Slovenian athletes appropriated by the Yugoslavs because the world should recognise them as Slovenian successes:

> *"During the time of Slovenian independence, Tanjug[11] sent into the world one of its sophisticated comments. If Slovenia will secede [from Yugoslavia], it said, its athletes will have to start from*

[11] Tanjug was the Yugoslav press agency.

> *zero because all the medals, titles and laurels will stay in the Yugoslav sports treasury. Despite its empty-headedness, this idea has its practical implication on the Olympic scene. In the computer system, one can find information about all the athletes … in this file, all the present Slovenian national team members are listed twice. Once they are tagged with the abbreviation 'Yug' … and then with the label 'Slo' … the last year's medal of Nataša Bokal from Saalbach is, according to the computer, as well as in the eyes of the whole world – just like Tanjug claimed – a Yugoslav victory, and there is no mention of the medals won by Bojan Križaj, Mateja Svet and others" (1992a, p. 8).*

Formal agreements about the status of Yugoslav medals presented no serious obstacle to the imagined Slovenian community because the accomplishments of the Slovenian skiers were considered 'purely' Slovenian all along, and Yugoslavia was about to be forgotten. A reporter from the *Delo* newspaper, for example, commented on the Slovenian participation at the 1992 Winter Olympics as follows: 'Finally, Slovenians entered the Olympic family. Of course, we have always been part of it, and we are storing our medals' (Koren, 1992).

This last statement clearly reflects the process that Evans-Pritchard's termed structural amnesia (1940), or the idea expressed by Mary Douglas (1987) that institutions remember and forget. The nation as one of the basic human institutions of modern times is especially prone to this process. In the collective memory of the Slovenian imagined community, Slovenian skiers occupy the positions of heroes through a constant reproduction of their past successes and a consistent disregard for their failures. The part of history in which the Slovenian skiers were winning medals for Yugoslavia is especially well managed. The medals are remembered, while Yugoslavia is forgotten and replaced by Slovenia. Mary Douglas' (1987) description of how people manage their memories pertains here:

> *"When we look closely at the construction of past time, we find that process has little to do with the past at all and everything to do with the present. Institutions create shadowed places in which nothing can be seen and no question asked. They make other areas show finely discriminated detail, which is closely scrutinized and ordered. History emerges in an unintended shape as a result of practices directed to immediate, practical ends. To watch these practices establish selective principles that highlight some kinds of events and obscure others is to inspect the social order operating on individual minds."*

Slovenian skiing achievements are in this sense always depicted as remarkable events that have to be remembered as historical, national triumphs, while all the failures are to be forgotten. Slovenian journalist Otto Giacomelli (1994) entitled his article about the failures of Slovenian ski jumpers at the 1994 Winter Olympics as follows: 'German success historical, but Slovenia only placed ninth'; the subtitle emphasised: 'The Slovenian performance should be forgotten as soon as possible'.

Football's contesting national aesthetics

Before the Slovenian national football team ever qualified for the 2000 European Football Championships, football occupied a special place in the Slovenian collective memory. In contrast to skiing, historical emphasis was put mostly on its failures and scandalous events that accompanied Yugoslav football. When the Yugoslav national team lost a match against the Australian team at the 1988 Olympic tournament, there were many headlines in the Slovenian newspapers that condemned their behaviour and their poor performance. One of them even posed the question:

'Did our football players sell the match?' ("So naši nogometaši", 1988). Football was burdened with a bad reputation that was exploited whenever something went wrong, especially in the late 1980s when it became one of the signifiers of non-Slovenianness. The majority of cartoons about the 1988 Olympic Games that were published in the Slovenian daily *Dnevnik* mocked Yugoslav football. One example depicted a big kangaroo that carried in its pouch a small man wearing a distinctive Serbian hat and shouting: 'Football, football, football…' (Novak, 1988a, p. 10). This cartoon reproduced the stereotype of Serbian football enthusiasm and combined it with Serbian nationalism that was at that time manifested at big public gatherings where Serbian hegemonic nationalist ideas were publicly expressed. The cartoon mocked the Yugoslav (e.g. Serbian) foolish love of football that was put to shame when the exotic Australian team defeated them. The Serbian identity of the small man was emphasised by the text (football, football…), written in the Cyrillic alphabet that is used only by Serbs and Macedonians. Another cartoon depicted a Yugoslav football player on the winners' podium accompanied by the words: 'April 1st – April fools day' (Novak, 1988b). The message was that the Yugoslavs had overestimated their football players' abilities (there were no Slovenian players in the Yugoslav national team at that time) and that the Yugoslav team was not fit to play at major competitions, let alone to win the Olympic tournament, as they had bragged before the Games. The last cartoon had a drawing of a giant cracked eggshell that resembled a ball, and a tiny nestling walking away from it (Novak, 1988c). This one read in two different ways, but neither was flattering for football. The first reading was that Yugoslav football players were making big haughty promises but were really akin to a tiny helpless nestling since they had demonstrated that they cannot really play ball. But there was another possible meaning. The shape of Slovenia on the map resembles that of a hen; this resemblance was likewise used by many designers of the pro-Slovenian campaigns in the process leading to independence.[12] Therefore, the cartoon might also be read as if the giant cracked football egg with the sign YU (Yugoslavia) depicted the breaking-up of Yugoslavia, while the nestling walking away from it depicted Slovenia. In this reading, football was posed as a symbol of the disintegrating non-Slovenian Yugoslavia.

Once Slovenia's independence was internationally recognised, some football enthusiasts tried to improve the game's public image. One of the best motivated public defenders of football has been the writer and publicist Peter Božič, who in his articles to this very day ruthlessly attacks anything and anybody that still opposes football. At the end of 1991, he published an article in the prestigious *Sobotna priloga* [*Saturday Supplement*] of the biggest Slovenian daily *Delo*. The title was: 'Everything kicks, everything cheers: Slovenia is learning that football is not a corrupt Balkan thing but an instrument of universal prestige' (1991). Božič defended football, but at the same time implied that only a small number of spectators were really attending the matches of the Slovenian first league, and that the stands were half empty. However, he was able to assign guilt to the very same popular scapegoat that was at that time accused of very nearly anything undesirable – the fifty years of Communism:

> *"Almost everybody credits the first Slovenian national league for the football bonanza, but actually, it is only a return to the old, universal values that have been, for several decades (un)successfully hindered by Communism; football and its magical powers of attracting the masses simply was too dangerous. Just before the summer, a handful of Slovenian clubs still participated in Yugo-*

[12] The designers exploited the chicken-like shape of Slovenia on the map and turned it into a popular aesthetic form. It has been used, for example, as a logo of the most popular web browser *Mat'kurja* [*Mother Han*] and as a logo of the Slovenian puppet festival.

> *competitions*[13] *and they were indisputably better [than the ones taking place now]. … But the 'Yugo' scene in Slovenia just didn't 'pan out' and football enthusiasm simply watered down in the last few years"* (Božič, 1991, p. 25).

This was one of the first attempts to rehabilitate football as an old Slovenian tradition that was corrupted in the hands of Communism.[14] The formula was: from culprit to victim – while football was perceived as a signifier of the Serbian hegemony in the 1980s, it had now turned into its victim.

But despite these efforts, in the next few years football was still scorned and ambiguously distrusted. Its status improved only after the Slovenian national team unexpectedly qualified for Euro 2000 and the World Cup Finals of 2002. If its non-successes had previously been remembered and emphasised, they were now conveniently forgotten. In the course of research I came across a tiny, funny brochure that looked a little ridiculous at first, but later proved to be a good example of how knowledge is produced and managed in nationalist forms of discourse through the most banal and marginal channels. The brochure is an advertisement for canned condiments (Papijev nogometno kuharski vodnik po svetovnem prvenstvu 2002, 2002) but, in fact, it was about football. It was full of images of Slovenian and international football players, and information about the 2002 World Cup: various teams, the schedule of TV broadcasts of the matches, charts for keeping scores etc. It was designed as a viewer's manual for the World Cup. The most astonishing thing was the presentation of the history of Slovenian football; namely, the whole Yugoslav era was simply non-existent. What was offered was the information that the Slovenian football team played its first and only match before WWII in 1920 against France, and lost 0:5. This created an impression that Slovenia had its own national football team as early as 1920. Further, the history of Slovenian football was presented in five sentences that never mentioned Yugoslavia:

> *"… did you know that the first Slovenian football club was a student club named Hermes (1910) and that the first 'real' football club was SK Ilirija (founded on 10 May 1911) …, that students won the first match between Hermes and Ilirija with a score of 18:0 …, that the first football was brought to Ljubljana by Stanko Bloudek in 1909, and that he played for Ilirija for a while …, that ASK Primorje, the Slovenian champion in 1928 and 1929, was a Ljubljana based team established by people from the Primorska region that after WWI the club came to Ljubljana from the territory previously occupied by Italy …, that (the club) Slovan, founded in 1913, is the only Slovenian football club that has preserved its original name to this day"* (Papijev nogometno kuharski vodnik po svetovnem prvenstvu 2002, 2002, p. 3).

This history was carefully selected to conceal anything that could link football to Yugoslavia. The period after WWII was especially 'problematic' from that point of view and was left out entirely; a half-century gap was ignored and the course of history was resumed with the most important dates in Slovenian football that began not in 1910, 1919, or 1945, but in 1992 with 'the first official international match of the Slovenian A team'.

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[13] Slovenia declared its independence on 25 June 1991.

[14] The history of corruption in Yugoslav football, nevertheless, goes back to pre-WWII times when football in Slovenia was attacked because of the growing professionalism and financial frauds that accompanied it. The unpopular professionalism in Slovenian and especially Serbian and Croatian football that started to rise in the 1930s only added to the poor public image of football in Slovenia that was a result of the common belief, propagated by the biggest and most powerful Slovenian sporting organisation Sokol, that football contributed nothing to national education and had a bad effect on the moral and physical development of youth.

Football and skiing in the pop-cultural production

As Slovenian football gained respect nationwide, it also acquired its nationalist ceremonial features. When it was clear that the Slovenian team would play at Euro 2000, the supporters from rival Slovenian football clubs saw no problem uniting to form the Association of Slovenian Supporters. Describing football and its supporters – previously mainly referred to as 'hooligans' – the Slovenian media began to use the language of admiration instead of the old language of disdain. The iconography that developed in this nationalisation process was based on national symbols. The jerseys of the Slovenian team were green with a white zigzag on the chest, symbolising Triglav, Slovenia's highest mountain and one of the 'sacred places' of Slovenianness. Green became the colour of the united supporters who were much admired by the foreign media for their sporting behaviour at the European Championship matches. Suddenly, football players with 'foreign' names also became fully integrated members of the Slovenian national community.

A trio of legendary Slovenian rock musicians, Zoran Predin, Vlado Kreslin and Peter Lovšin,[15] joined forces when the Slovenian team qualified for Euro 2000 to produce a Slovenian football anthem that became a folk song, entitled *Slovenija gre naprej* [*Slovenia Moves On*] (Predin, Kreslin & Lovšin, 2000):

Look, look, look, look the sun is in the east,
look, look, look Slovenians are on the quest.
Look, look, look, over the mountains and lowlands,
look, look, look, for the glory of the homeland.

All faithful supporters to the match we speed,
in good and bad, for Slovenia we breathe,
Europe look on, Slovenia moves on.
Look, look, look, look the sun is in the east,
look, look, look Slovenians are on the quest.
Look, look, look, our cups we raise,
look, look, look, in our football players' praise.

All people of goodwill, victorious we feel,
we're uncompromising, when we have to finish something,
So tell to everyone, Slovenia moves on

The public linked the message of this song with the forthcoming accession of Slovenia to the European Union. The phrase 'Slovenia moves on' became a synonym of economic and political advancement and was even used as a slogan in the election campaign of Slovenia's strongest parliamentary party. The idea of unstoppable progress was expressed through the success of football that underwent a transformation from an ugly duckling to a beautiful swan; the impression was that Slovenians had finally got rid off the Balkan influences.

The lyrics of the song are simple and include a whole array of Slovenian national symbolism. The sun in the east depicts a rising nation, the mountains and the valleys are the stereotype of the Slovenian landscape, the success of the football players is reminding Europe that Slovenians are coming, and their iron will is depicted as a basic feature of the national character. At

[15] All three musicians started their careers in rock bands in the 1970s and the 1980s when rock music was perceived as a symbol of resistance to traditional (socialist) ideas. Today, they are considered to be the 'classics' of Slovenian pop/rock music.

the same time, Slovenians are portrayed as a 'people of goodwill' who propose a toast in honour of our football players – just like in the Slovenian national anthem *Zdravljica* that depicts Slovenians as a righteous nation, and invites the offering of toasts in honour of (young) Slovenian men and women. With this aesthetic manoeuvre, football was directly incorporated into the Slovenian national iconography while the official Slovenian football anthem became one of the most popular songs.[16]

But this football anthem was not the first sporting anthem that Zoran Predin wrote. In the late 1980s he wrote a song entitled *Bela simfonija* [*White symphony*] (1989) that glorified skiing and the famous Slovenian skier Bojan Križaj and thus incorporated Slovenian nationalism and skiing into popular culture. The lyrics were full of parables that Slovenians and other Yugoslavs were able to read as being 'purely' Slovenian:

Will I ever be able to forget
your torso on the slopes,
the iron strings of the eagle from Gorenjska,
the winning gaze,
the heroes of mountain tea.
And your intermediate time,
my cultural catharsis,
and the first word of the youngest Slovenians
should not be mother, but RC Elan

And a shot in the silence,
as our poet predicted.
Now we're raising our cups and singing the 'ducks',
we jointly yodel by the course:
'We have no fear when our skiers are here.'
Our blonde joy who warms our homes,
the summer is in our hearts,
and snow is on the screen,
the connections are good,
in just a little while,
it will be for real.

Today at one in the afternoon
he fell and laid still,
at the beginning of the second run,
this hero of heroes,
at gate number thirteen.

You can wipe your nose on my shirt, darling,
I really can't look at your teary eyes any more.

In comparison to the lyrics of the football anthem, these lyrics address the listeners in a much more personal way. The song is a description of the slalom race that most Slovenians already experienced and knew. Bojan Križaj is described as a powerful eagle from the Gorenjska region, our blonde joy that delights Slovenians with his victories. The skiers are described as the 'heroes of mountain tea' because they were sponsored by a Slovenian company that produces a very

[16] The chorus of the song is today probably more familiar to Slovenian people than the national anthem itself.

popular mixture of tea called Planinski čaj [Mountain tea]. The poem is a good depiction of just how enthusiastic some Slovenians were about skiing in the 1980s. They would sit in front of their TV sets and nervously wait for the race to begin, keeping their fingers crossed for Bojan Križaj, and whenever he achieved a really good intermediate time the people would celebrate, dance and offer toasts in his honour. Whenever Križaj missed the gates or dropped out, people did not criticise him. He was perceived as a hero who would sometimes lose his fight for the nation, but also as a hero who would never give up and always land on his feet again. This image perfectly fitted in with the popular nationalist perception of the Slovenian nation, subdued by foreigners for centuries, yet always managing to survive.

Križaj was transformed into a Slovenian legend. He was a superhero: strong, invincible and morally impeccable. A renowned Slovenian writer, Vitan Mal, wrote a children's book entitled *Za čas in čast* [*For Time and Honour*] (1983) which describes Križaj's career as the story of a boy, Bojan, who experiences various difficulties as he travels from one skiing race to another. The book depicts Križaj as the hero of the white slopes. At the very beginning of the book, Mal (1983) wrote:

> *"Bojan's life is a struggle for fractions of seconds, his days and nights are eternal travels, eternal competitions. And longing for home. Crowned with glory and medals he is the loneliest of men at the very same moment when we are all crossing our fingers for him."*

The book presented real events within a fictitious account, which was meant to teach children about skiing. This produced the impression that things really happened as they were described, that Bojan really said the things that were written. Children were taught to love Bojan and to support him at any cost. And a lot of kids really did, as most of my informants who were children at that time confirmed.[17]

The aesthetic forms were thus used to stir people's nationalist emotions and 'Slovenian national moral values' were disseminated in the most subversive and imperceptible ways as products of popular culture. However, there was no master plan behind it all, no organised Slovenian nationalist conspiracy. Behind it all was the need of the people to identify with their community, to set its boundaries, and to create the Other who is different from Us.

The shattering of the skiing myth

The Slovenians/Yugoslavs dichotomy was marked by contrasting features such as hard working/lazy, men of principle/opportunists, organised/improvising, honest/cunning, reserved/spontaneous, realistic/sentimental, individualistic/collectivistic etc. National stereotypes were often exploited when sport was in question. Serbs and Croats saw Slovenians as incapable of team sports because of their individualism, while Slovenians often perceived the other two as unfit for individual sports because of their lack of discipline. The latter trait was inadmissible in individual sports. But in group sports, the team can make up for the mistakes of an individual player. The belief that Slovenians were bad at team sports was also accepted by Slovenians themselves: skiing as individual sport fitted perfectly into that picture. However,

[17] Among the heterogeneous group of my informants there was also a group of skiing and football fans from various parts of Slovenia who were born after 1970. At the times when Bojan Križaj was at his peak they were children and the majority of them sentimentally perceived Bojan Križaj as a heroic figure.

as long as the discourse of brotherhood and unity of the Yugoslav nations still applied, all the differences, stereotypes, jokes and other signifiers of otherness were tolerated: Yugoslavs were a single family and, although the family members differed one from another, they always stuck together.

The most sacred Slovenian sport myth was seriously questioned in the season of 1997/98 because for the first time in history Croatian skiers defeated Slovenian skiers in the World Cup races. The Slovenian public's disappointment was obvious. The idea of Slovenia's 'skiing superiority' was losing its persuasiveness. This attitude was apparent even in the media that had traditionally been skiing's strongest allies. The commentary in the Slovenian daily *Dnevnik* (Pogačnik, 1998, p. 19) was not very sympathetic:

> *"Some time ago one of the Slovenian Alpine team's trainers (not from the women's team) said that he would abandon his profession immediately should a skier from the territory of former Yugoslavia ever come ahead of 'one of his competitors'. But it so happened that the Croat Vedran Pavlek (he used to spend a lot of time with Slovenian competitors and he speaks Slovenian as if he were one of us), who will finish his career with this year's Olympic slalom, already got ahead of one or other of our competitors but only in a less important competition. But yesterday something more serious happened. The 16-year old Janica Kostelić defeated our second ranked competitor and came 11 hundredths of a second close to our first ranked in entirely regular competitive conditions […] some of our skiing experts should start considering the possibility that the whole skiing science and enthusiasm are not limited only to some [Slovenians]. With a strong will and enthusiastic work many things can be done also elsewhere. Underrating often backfires."*

Although Slovenian skiing experts were said to be arrogant, Vedran Pavlek was still perceived as 'one of us' – he learned his skiing skills, in addition to his Slovenian language, from Slovenian competitors and trainers. This manoeuvre reassured the Slovenian audience that skiing was still a Slovenian domain.

But something else threatened the privileged position of skiing: the moral side of it. Skiing began to display features that were perceived as arrogance, greediness, blackmail – the features that were in the times of Socialist Yugoslavia attributed to football. It all began with a dispute between the Slovenian Olympic Committee and the Slovenian Alpine Skiing Team about the number of Alpine skiers selected to represent Slovenia at the 1998 Winter Olympics. Initially, the Olympic Committee only gave permission to those who fulfilled the Olympic norm, meaning that the Slovenian competitors in Downhill and the Super Giant Slalom would stay at home. The Slovenian Alpine Skiing Team objected to this decision and wrote a letter of protest that was published in Slovenian newspapers, announcing their intention to boycott the official presentation of the Slovenian Olympic team. With public opinion on their side and media pressure adding extra weight to the argument, five additional Alpine skiers were allowed to go to the Olympics. The daily *Dnevnik* journalist Jože Okorn (1998a, p. 21), for example, commented on the decision of the Slovenian Olympic Committee in this way:

> *"We have to abide by the norms but we also have to consider the interests of sport when it comes to the ambitions of individuals and the nation […] They should therefore not stick to the norms like fat to the bone, although some representatives of summer sports demanded it – but they obviously have no clue about psychology, let alone sporting rules at Olympic competitions."*

The message was clear: when the national interest is in question rules should be adjusted. Unfortunately, the Alpine skiers were proven wrong. Not only they did not bring any medals home from the 1998 Winter Olympics but, to add insult to injury, two Slovenian competitors in the Super Giant Slalom were defeated by a Bosnian skier, Enis Bečirbegović. In the eyes

of the people, this meant that the Olympic Committee was right when they had insisted that some Slovenian competitors stay at home. Instead, two of them had been unceremoniously defeated by an unknown Bosnian skier. The manager of the Slovenian Alpine Skiing Team, Tone Vogrinec, responded immediately and stated:

> *"This was unfortunately a moment of truth for our fast disciplines. […] On the level of the national team, we will no longer use 'worn out' competitors or those who were unsuccessful in technical disciplines to compete in fast disciplines"* (Pogačnik & Okorn, 1998, p.17).

He described two Slovenian competitors, Peter Pen and Aleš Brezavšček, as 'worn out' to emphasise that the best Bosnian skier had only been able to defeat our most mediocre competitors. Indirectly, however, Vogrinec admitted that the members of the Slovenian Alpine Team had been wrong to blackmail the Olympic Committee. However, the reaction of the Slovenian public and the media was unforgiving; the moral standing of Alpine skiing had never been this low before. Although the media supported the protest before the Olympics, it now changed its mind:

> *"Permanent critics and grumblers who were hardly waiting for the regression from the three Lillehammer medals were given enough material to tear everybody to pieces, but especially the Alpine skiers and their manager Tone Vogrinec. Alpine skiers lay themselves before the critics' teeth with their unsympathetic boycott of the Slovenian Olympic team presentation. They will now pay for all their mistakes because sponsors will close the pipes through which the money flows. The Olympic Games without an Olympic medal does not only mean a times of crisis for Alpine skiing because the whole of Slovenian sport will see its funds cut"* (Okorn, 1998b, p. 17).

Andrej Novak drew two cartoons that expressed the public disappointment with Alpine skiing. The first one (1998a) depicted the reaction of Slovenians to Bečirbegović's victory over Pen and Brezavšček: a husband and wife are sitting on the couch in front of TV. The text on the TV screen says: 'Bečirbegović (BiH) in front of Pen and Brezavšček'. The husband – visibly upset – shouts: 'Look, it's not a mistake, the Bosnian Bečirbegović has really defeated Brezavšček and Pen!', while the wife wisely and calmly replies: 'Why are you so upset? In sport, the best men win!' This cartoon expressed disappointment and doubts about Slovenia's skiing supremacy, and mocked the popular traditional opinion that Slovenians were invincible in competitions against skiers from other parts of former Yugoslavia.

The second cartoon (Novak, 1998b) was published a few days after Slovenian skier Jure Košir failed in his run for a medal in the Olympic Giant Slalom. This cartoon depicted a desperate Slovenian man sitting under the gallows and thinking about suicide. Another man comes rushing through the door and tries to dissuade the desperate man from hanging himself. The desperate man then reveals the cause that made him think about committing suicide: 'I don't think I'd be able to hold on if Košir too was beaten by some Bosnian or "Zagrebčan" [a citizen of Zagreb – a Croat]'. This cartoon displayed the feelings of humiliation that would arise should 'our' best skiers get beaten by 'inferior' skiers from other parts of former Yugoslavia.

Football's national fairytale

In 2000 football was suddenly turned into a vehicle for Slovenian national pride. While skiing became a symbol of the Slovenian nationalist struggle against Yugoslav hegemony in the 1980s, at the end of the millennium football became part of another nationally important story – the inclusion of Slovenia into the European Union which symbolised to many people the

final break away from the Yugoslav past. The Slovenian national football team's qualification for the European Championships of 2000 was a surprise. Those who believed in the popular myth that Slovenians do not know how to play football needed suitable explanations that could make them proud of football. The President of the Republic of Slovenia, for example, commented on the matter:

> *"It [the success of the Slovenian team] goes to confirm that Slovenians […] possess enough talent, persistence, knowledge and strength to be counted among the elite. This success is also stimulating for other spheres, including Slovenia's accession to the European Union. At the same time, Euro 2000 is an opportunity for Slovenia to gain wider international recognition"* ("Slovenija skriti zaklad", 2000, p. 1).

The idea of 'sportsmen as the most successful ambassadors of Slovenia' was used here, but the statement was still somewhat reserved. Stereotypes about football's immoral nature were still expressed despite the growing enthusiasm. When asked to comment on the UEFA's evaluation of Slovenia on the eve of Euro 2000 (where Slovenians were poorly rated), Vlado Šajn, the President of the Slovenian Football Referees Association said:

> *"I think this [evaluation] does not pertain to our [national] league but to our clubs in international competitions, and the matches of our national team. It is about the number of yellow and red cards, the attitude of the players towards the game, the behaviour of the functionaries, and the behaviour of the players towards the referee. These are indicators of bad behaviour at international competitions."* (Štefančič & Cerar, 2000, p. 52).

This statement by a professional referee indicates that football's immorality was still an issue. He said that the national league was not problematic but that the best players who played for the national team and for the best clubs that compete in international competitions were still ill behaved. This would have been of little interest to the nation were it not for the fact that the majority of these best players originated from other Yugoslav republics. They were therefore perceived as misbehaving outsiders who cast a shadow of the old Balkan immorality upon Slovenian football.

However, the perception of the immoral character of football was about to change. Igor E. Bergant (2000, p. 52), one of the best known Slovenian sport journalists who used to commentate live on all World Cup Alpine skiing races of the Slovenian men's team, emphasised the importance of Slovenia's appearance at Euro 2000:

> *"…Euro 2000 is the greatest promotional success of Slovenia in its entire history since independence. The interest of various journalists is tremendous, TV networks daily broadcast news about Slovenian football players, the specialised European sport press has never been writing about Slovenia to such an extent – and never so unilaterally positive. (A Slovenian) person cannot help but feel slightly embarrassed to read such beautiful things about ourselves. In all truth, it is quite nice to catch oneself thinking that we Slovenians are really something special and exceptional. To be honest, many people in Slovenia think like that about Slovenians (especially when we compare ourselves with the nations that live to our south); but international acknowledgement is a whole new dimension. In short, Slovenia's image at the beginning of Euro 2000 is as good as we could have wished for."*

Interestingly, Bergant, who is currently editor-in-chief of sports programming at the Slovenian national television broadcaster, was often criticised as being an enemy of football but in this article he proved his critics wrong. He too, like the other commentators who were suddenly converted into football believers, distinguished Slovenian football from Yugoslavness. This done, he was even able to allude that Slovenian football is special and exceptional. In order

to justify his claims, he used a statement from the famous trainer of the Yugoslav football team, Vujadin Boškov, who identified the features that made Slovenian football so special: 'Slovenians are special people. You know, they live in a mountainous country and are used to hard work. And besides, that they are extremely well disciplined'. This was then the winning formula: hard work and discipline. These two 'unique Slovenian national characteristics' were the foundations of the new nationalist image of football and were constantly reproduced and disseminated by the Slovenian media.

These unique 'national' qualities of Slovenian football were, of course, constructed in relation to the Other – the Yugoslav team. By coincidence, the first match of the Slovenian team at Euro 2000 was against the Yugoslav team. The match was burdened with nationalist symbolism: two nations that used to live in the same state and had split up amidst violence were now facing each other on the football field. The Yugoslavs had a great football tradition while the Slovenians had none. The Slovenian media constantly portrayed this match as a fight between David and Goliath. The Yugoslavs were portrayed as a team of technically superior individuals while the Slovenians[18] were praised as the more disciplined team with superior morale. As the daily *Delo* sport journalist Franci Božič (2000, p. 12) noted:

> *"This is our starting point at the Euro for Slovenia against Yugoslavia: when it comes to skill, Slovenia is weaker; when it comes to morale, stronger… Usually, the morale of a team is the decisive factor, given that the two teams are not too technically different. This is the thesis that predicts success in the Slovenian premiere at the Euro and was best proven after the Falklands war by the famous Argentinian trainer and former world champion Cesar Luis Menotti who experienced a debacle at the 1982 World Championship in Spain: No team is so good that they can win the game after the war was lost."*

Slovenians were depicted as morally stronger in an obvious insinuation relating to the outcome of the Slovenian war for independence with Yugoslavia in which the Yugoslav army was defeated. The message was: Slovenians won the war; now they must show the Yugoslavs that they can also beat their foul-ridden way of playing football.

The match ended in a 3:3 draw after the Slovenian team had led 3:0. For the Slovenian audience, this was the match of Euro 2000, and the result was accepted as a victory – a moral one, of course. In the Slovenian media the draw was represented as a missed opportunity, but a good thing after all. The impression was that Slovenians could have won and would have deserved victory but they refrained from it because winning over Serbians and Montenegrins would have meant robbing them of everything that made them proud and kept their spirits high after they had been abused and judged by the whole world.

The language of discipline and moral virtue accompanied almost every report from Euro 2000. The Slovenian selector, Srečko Katanec who was then worshiped as a national hero, constantly reminded people of the moral uniqueness of Slovenian football. When the Slovenian team lost the next match against the Spanish team, he admitted: 'We are not corrupted enough just yet. I mean in a sporting sense. If we had stopped Mendieta with a foul, and we had three

[18] With the qualification of the Slovenian national team to Euro 2000 the national composition of the team ceased to be problematic from the nationalist point of view. Although there were 10 players whose surnames revealed their non-Slovenian origin, the old public reproaches that the Slovenian national team consisted only of players from other Yugoslav republics were silenced. The newspapers even started changing the letter ć (used only in the Serbian and Croatian alphabets) in the surnames of the players into the letter č. In this way, Zahović became Zahovič, Ačimović became Ačimovič, Karić became Karič etc.

opportunities to do that, the second goal probably would not have happened' ("Rekli so v Amsterdamu," 2000). Another sporting defeat was turned into a moral victory. Slovenian football was presented as the only football style in the world that prefers fair-play over victory. The next match, against the Norwegian team, again ended in a draw, and the Slovenian team was out of the competition. But upon their return to Slovenia they were welcomed as winners: nobody expected them to win but only to behave and play in the noble (Slovenian) spirit. An advertisement by the largest Slovenian retail trade company Mercator that was published in virtually all newspapers best captured the feelings of the Slovenian people: 'We congratulate you for your courageous game! You made all of Slovenia proud.'

After such a successful appearance at the Euro 2000, football's popularity rocketed in Slovenia and some believed that it finally replaced skiing as the national sport. A cartoon in *Delo*, entitled *Nogometni narod* [*The Football Nation*], for example, depicted a man dressed in threadbare Slovenian national garb, throwing his skis away in pursuit of a football, exclaiming: 'Oh, man, this is sport!' (Kočevar, 2000). Enthusiasm grew in leaps and bounds when the same team qualified for the World Cup Finals in 2002 after defeating the Romanian team. Brane Oblak, a highly respected football veteran and expert, and one of the very few Slovenian football players to have played in the Yugoslav national team during the 1980s, made a direct comparison between Slovenian football and the legendary Slovenian skier of the 1980s, Bojan Križaj:

> *"Slovenia now cheers for the Slovenian national football team much like it once cheered for Bojan Križaj. In those times the supporters very nearly 'forced' Križaj to win; this time they 'forced' the football players to bring the Romanians to their knees. This is the higher power that carries sportsmen to success. … It does not matter who we will play against – we will be a dire challenge for anybody. The Slovenian team's style of playing is unpleasant to any opponent because it is very hard to break through a disciplined and firm defence, stop the counterattack, and at the same time respond to the elements of 'Balkan' boldness that spices up the game"* (Okorn, 2001, p. 23).

The symbolism in this statement was very strong: football equalled skiing, a higher power (of nation-wide pride) carried football players to their success, and a special Slovenian football style existed. Slovenians now had another famous but elusive sporting 'school': the Slovenian football school that was, like the 'Slovenian skiing school',[19] based on moral values rather than specific technical skills.

The image and new moral potential of Slovenian football were best described by the political commentator Miha Kovač (2001, p. 5):

> *"… only the players who give their best and firmly stick to what was agreed all the time at the games and in training can play in the national team. … it's like in a Protestant moralisation: modesty, discipline, hard work, and 'help yourself and God will help you' … this fact becomes no less than subversive if we consider that these values are embodied in the members of the national football team from whom more than half are descendants of immigrants from the other republics of former Yugoslavia. We should not forget that in the times of struggles for independence, we Slovenians used to perceive ourselves as disciplined hard-workers who were … unable to live in symbiosis with the far more relaxed 'southerners'. The success of the football team is therefore not only proof that people who are not Slovenians by their ethnic origin can fight for the colours of*

[19] Even in expert circles in Slovenia, the use of nationally labelled idioms such as Slovenian skiing school are quite common and – because of the authority of the experts – also widely believable. The Association of Skiing Teachers and Trainers of Slovenia, for example, legitimates its existence with two programmatic points: 'Implementation of the yearly programme of Slovenian skiing school in all Slovenian skiing resorts,' and 'Representing and introducing the Slovenian skiing school in the international arena' (Smučarska zveza Slovenije, 2003).

> *their Slovenian homeland in a way that all the rest of us can only learn from … Slovenian society is open enough to enable the integration of people who are not Slovenians by their ethnic origin … there are universal values in this society that allow non-Slovenians – let's put it this way – to become more Slovenian than Slovenians. Or, if I may afford a little pathos, through the successes of its football team Slovenia established itself as a cosmopolitan and open state rather than a stale nationalist community based on blood – and I like this even better than the fact that I will be able to cheer for someone at the World Football Championship".*

This description is important from multiple perspectives. First, the moral value of Slovenian football was equated with the Slovenian 'national character': modesty, discipline and hard work. Identical values were once attributed to skiing, as in the comment on Nataša Bokal's 1991 slalom victory:

> *"It would not be an exaggeration if we imitated the Italian newspapers and wrote 'Nataša nazionale'. In so many ways, she is a pure reflection of the image that we Slovenians have about ourselves. She is hardworking, busy as a bee, and pedantic … but at the same time very modest and cautious"* (Šauta, 1991b, p. 19).

This indicated that football was now morally virtuous enough to become the Slovenian national sport. Second, Slovenian football was now perceived as pure and non-hybrid and totally unrelated to Yugoslav football – members of the Slovenian national team were hard-working and disciplined and were, unlike the wild 'people form the Balkans'[20] who improvised and showed off all the time, responsibly obeying their coach's rules. Third and most interestingly, football was perceived as a tool that could turn non-Slovenians by their ethnic origin into Slovenians, and a tool that could convert bad Slovenians who rejected their national values back into good Slovenians. All this was praised as a noble, democratic project but this was far from the reality. Football was not presented as a tool to sustain ethnic differences and acknowledge the hybridity of the 'Slovenian nation' which today includes people of various provenances, but as an instrument whereby non-Slovenians could be acculturated, assimilated and homogenised into true Slovenians.

This last idea was somewhat different from that advanced in an article describing the responses of 'non-Slovenian Slovenians' to the dramatic match between Slovenia and Yugoslavia at Euro 2000 (Aleksič, Hrastar, Mekina, & Bergant, 2000). The authors presented a very good and humorous ethnographic description of events during the game in a Ljubljana café favoured by people from other Yugoslav republics. In this café, two teams of supporters jointly watched the match – those who supported the Yugoslav team occupied one side of the room, while the more numerous supporters of the Slovenian team sat on the other side. However, there were no 'pure' Slovenians among the latter; Aleksič was amazed by this and described them as true patriots. He went on to tell the readers how, on his way to the pub, he picked up two hitch-hikers, 'pure' Slovenians, who were complaining that *čefurji*[21] enjoyed more rights than Slovenians, that the Slovenian football team was ridiculously bad, and that most of the players were *čefurji* anyway, which was why they would support the Yugoslav team. Aleksič was disgusted by these two and wrote:

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[20] In the 1990s the adjective *balkanski* [Balkan] was popularly used in Slovenia to characterise everything backward, primitive, wild, uncivilised or corrupt. It was used to depict moral features that seemed incompatible with the prevailing view of Slovenianness. In this sense, the Balkan origin of other Yugoslav nations was constantly emphasised while Slovenians perceived themselves to be unrelated to the Balkans and firmly rooted in Central Europe.

[21] The word *čefur*, pl. *čefurji* is a pejorative expression denoting people who live in Slovenia but originate from other republics of former Yugoslavia.

> *"To these two specimens, if they can indeed read, I would just like to say this: that summer Tuesday night when a squad of Slovenian titans played out the match of their lives in Benelux, I was privileged to observe in Fužine a numerous bouquet of l-emphasising[(22)] čefurji in training suits and hair dripping with gel, who have, with all their invested emotions, irreparably damaged fingernails, and tattered plastic cups, proved far better Slovenians than the two respected hitchhikers ever will be"* (Aleksič et al., 2000, p. 41).

In 2000, Slovenian football was obviously still perceived as a hybrid that could potentially establish a symbiotic relationship between ethnically heterogeneous Slovenian citizens; in 2002, however, it was turned into a pure Slovenian sport that had the power to convert individuals into Slovenians. The Slovenian media of course played an important role in the dissemination of such ideas and has, unfortunately, completely failed to accept hybridity as a valid national option.

However, the Slovenian 'football fairytale' took another surprising turn that degraded football once more. Already in 2000, Igor Bergant (2000) predicted that things would not go smoothly: 'The toughest times will come later – after Euro 2000 is over, and after the achieved reputation and stereotypes have been confirmed. But not on the football field …'. In 2000 the Slovenian football team returned from the Euro morally victorious; but their return from the World Cup finals in 2002 was morally disastrous. The reason was not their poor performance but disputes within the team. During and after the match between the Slovenian and Spanish teams, the Slovenian selector Srečko Katanec and the star member of the Slovenian team, Zlatko Zahovič, engaged in a violent quarrel.[23] The matter was not settled in the locker room but was aired in the media. The dispute divided the Slovenian public: the majority supported Katanec and his decision to send Zahovič home, while some believed that this was not the appropriate course of action. Both Katanec and Zahovič gave very emotional statements to the media. Katanec called a press conference that stirred the emotions of many Slovenians. Jože Okorn (2002a, p. 33) described the conference that was broadcast on radio and television:

> *"The appearance of a visibly tired … selector Srečko Katanec was a real shock for the 21 otherwise seasoned Slovenian reporters. The monologue … was filled with emotion. His voice was trembling, at one point he lost his voice completely, and could not suppress tears… 'I'm sorry if my thoughts will stray. You may not be used to the kind of communication you are about to hear …. Many things happen in the locker room. It is normal for people to curse at one another. But the matter ends there and then and the public never learns of it. Unfortunately, this is not the case with us. I wanted to get over it, to take certain things in my stride, but it is no longer possible.' Then he took a long breath and told us that we are going to hear for the first time a true report of the communication between himself and Zahovič: 'It began during the game; he called me a c… from Ljubljana, told me I'm merely substituting players from Styria and that I should take more players from Styria out so that even more players from Ljubljana will be able to play. After the*

[22] Some people who came to Slovenia from other parts of Yugoslavia have a particularly thick pronunciation of the L sound which is very uncommon in the Slovenian language. This sound is often used as a sign of non-Slovenianness. I was surprised when I came across a Japanese football cartoon entitled *Dragonball* that had been synchronised into Slovenian. The coach of the heroic football team was using this sound. In this way, the nationalist stereotype of football = Balkans is being introduced to Slovenian children at an early age.

[23] The quarrel was a result of local antagonisms in Slovenia and was not based on national grounds, although it was translated into nationalist speech in the media. Zahovič was from Maribor, the second biggest city in Slovenia while Katanec was from Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. Despite its smallness, the regional rivalries in Slovenia are very strong, especially between Ljubljana and Maribor. The games between the Maribor Football Club and Ljubljana Olimpija have always been classified as high-risk matches. When Katanec substituted Zahovič for another player from Ljubljana in the game against the Spanish team, Zahovič accused him of being biased and only substituting players from Maribor.

> *game I heard that, as a coach, I am the same sorry f… that I was as a player and that he could buy me, my family, my house, the entire Šmarna Gora…' Srečko was unable to restrain his tears any longer. Nearly three full minutes of awkward silence followed and he asked the TV people to turn off their cameras".*

The reactions to the selector's emotional speech in Slovenia were strong. It was discussed by experts in media shows, while newspapers, television and radio channels organised public opinion polls on the subject, Internet forums blossomed, and even the Slovenian President intervened and called upon the President of the Football Association of Slovenia to clarify the matter. The majority of the Slovenian public sympathised with Katanec,[24] while Zahovič was accused of disobedience, undisciplined comportment and arrogance – all the features that used to characterise football in the old days. The old opposition between Slovenianness and Balkanness in football was now established along the Katanec/Zahovič axis. Katanec symbolised the Slovenian morality while Zahovič symbolised the 'dark', Balkan side.[25] The result was that Slovenians again lost faith in football; in the words of one commentator, 'We will now witness the painful process of 'dis-identification': the public feels betrayed and is calling for revenge, a lot of pleasure can be extracted from the humiliation of yesterday's idols' (Šetinc, 2002). The illusion that Slovenian football was special had been shattered as the old Balkan vices had once again clearly come to the fore. Zahovič now represented, as most people agreed, everything bad in football. As Jože Okorn (2002b, p. 2) noted:

> *"The fairytale of Slovenian football is over, but we have lived to see performances at the World and European Championships that will be almost impossible to repeat. Now comes a time for settling the accounts and airing the dirty linen, as Slovenia now has two million selectors".*

The two million selectors – the entire Slovenian nation – seemed to share Katanec's opinion: Zahovič's behaviour was inadmissible and primitive (Balkan-like); when Katanec announced his resignation from his position of selector, the remaining piece of Slovenianness was gone from football. The people's disappointment was best described in a letter by a fifteen-year-old girl published in the daily *Dnevnik*:

> *"Neither of you will ever read this, but anyway… I am fifteen and a proud Slovenian. Do you know why? Because of you, Katanec, and because of you, Zahovič, and because of all of you Slovenian national team players. I cried out of sheer happiness when you qualified for the European and World Championships. You made my dreams come true. Why are you taking them away from me now? Why are you fighting each other now that you are the best, that you are at the very top?*

[24]The Slovenian daily Dnevnik, for example, published the results of a public opinion poll in which people were asked who they thought was right. Almost half of the respondents replied that they supported Srečko Katanec, while only 6.7% backed Zlatko Zahovič. 18.5% claimed that they were both right, each in his own way, while the rest of them remained undecided ("Anketa", 2002). After the clash there were many other 'pro' and 'contra' public opinion polls in the Slovenian media. On average, over 60% of people supported Katanec while Zahovič received less than 15% of the support. This result shows that ethnic divisions in Slovenian football continue to support the hegemonic Slovenian nationalist discourse.

[25]The clash between Katanec and Zahovič bears some striking similarities with the dispute between the star of the Irish national team Roy Keane and the manager of the team, Mick McCarthy, that also took place at the 2002 World Cup Finals. Both events invoked nationalist issues and divided the public although, in the Irish case, the nationalist provocation came from Keane himself when he insulted McCarthy for being an 'English cunt' while in the Slovenian case the nationalist part of the story was brought to life by those working in the media. The ironic thing was that both Katanec and Zahovič were born and raised in Slovenia while their families originated from Croatia and Serbia, respectively. They can thus both be considered as 'non-Slovenians' but the irrationally motivated rules of the nationalist game turned the first one into the ideal representative of Slovenianness while the latter was marked in the public debates as a symbol of undisciplined and uncivilised Balkanness.

> *You could be world champions; not because of a few good players but because you were the team. Because you are friends. Or rather, were friends. I'm forgetting what happened. But everything can be fixed if only each of you lets go a bit, if you apologise to each other, and shake hands and be the best again. … Please, give me my smile back. Please, give me back my dreams"* (N. N., 2002).

The letter does not need much interpretation. People believed in the Slovenian football team because it symbolised the unity of the Slovenian nation; once the conflict happened, the unity was gone and, with it, the capacity of Slovenians to identify with football.

Conclusion

The story of skiing, football and the Slovenian nation-building process is a story imbued with contradictions and oppositions, successes and failures.

It is a story of contradictions and oppositions because it clearly shows how people with their nationalist logic used both sports to propagate purity and hybridity as criteria of national originality and value. One of the contradictions is rooted in the understanding of the past. Skiing and football came to Slovenia almost simultaneously but both from abroad. None of them was 'originally' Slovenian yet skiing was from the beginning characterised as a pure Slovenian practice, saturated with 'natural' Slovenian national features while football started and remained perceived as a foreign or, at best, domesticated but still hybrid cultural practice and a sign of a non-Slovenianness. This contradiction was seemingly discarded after the stories of the historical development of skiing and football were turned into a nationalist narrative that imposed its own rules, agendas, selective memorising and even more selective forgetting. Another contradiction that was never resolved was the media transformation of Slovenian national team players from despised foreigners with foreign names into heroic representatives of the nation whose names and attributed moral features were unnoticeably made more Slovenian than Slovenian while their 'impure' hybridity was ignored.

On one hand, the story of skiing and football can be perceived as a political success because national oppositions nurtured through both sports helped people to imagine themselves as a Slovenian national community and to legitimise their decision for an independent state. On the other hand, however, it is also a story of failure. It is has been proved on many occasions that national and ethnic identifications are motivated processes which enable people to occupy strategic positions in society. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia and constitution of the new state the old differences between the newborn citizens could be put aside because the main motivation point had been achieved, but in the case of Slovenia this never happened. For nearly a decade, skiing and football continued to occupy their traditional positions of 'hero and villain' and functioned according to the same old nationalist exclusivist formula. Football remained a Balkan sport and skiing continued to be characterised as a Slovenian national sport. The failure of sport as a possible vehicle for democratic changes was further confirmed after the Slovenian national team qualified for Euro 2000 and the World Cup Finals in 2002. Instead of acknowledging hybridity as the ultimate state of democracy which respects and nurtures differences, the story moved in the opposite direction. Football started to be represented as a tool of Slovenisation with the magic ability to turn 'people from the Balkans' into ideal disciplined and hardworking Slovenians instead of just turning all of them into honourable and tolerant human beings. This should be seen as a missed opportunity to include hybridity in Slovenian national identification. The hegemonic understanding of national purity

and originality as the only proper condition thus still prevents citizens of non-Slovenian origin participating in Slovenian society on equal terms and produces concealed but nevertheless constant tensions, frustrations and xenophobic reactions. This remains a continuing game that still has to be won and some battles should clearly be first won on the sporting field.

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