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The Nation-State Celebrates: Research Horizons in Slovenia¹

Państwo narodowe się bawi: horyzonty badawcze w Słowenii

Summary: The article places the contemporary anthropological, ethnological and culturological research of state holidays in Slovenia within the disciplinary tradition of Slovenian holiday research and the broader frame of issues related to political rituals. Up until the past few decades, holidays as celebrated in the Slovenian lands had been a parade of ethnological/folklorist subjects framed within the context of folk culture research. It is thus not surprising that folk holidays were put at the forefront of examination, thematised from the perspective of a relatively static concept of tradition. The rapid political, economic and social change characteristic of the period after the Second World War was reflected not only in the transformed holiday landscapes, but also in a re-configuration of the research horizons. These are presented through the findings concerning state holidays that resulted from a recent research project on the Slovenian holidays and constitution of national community.

Key words: state holidays, political rituals, Slovenia

Translated by Jeremi Slak

Streszczenie: Przeprowadzona w artykule analiza umieszcza współczesne badania antropologiczne, etnologiczne i kulturologiczne dotyczące świąt państwowych w Słowenii, w kontekście badań nad metodami świętowania w tym kraju oraz na szerszym tle problematyki rytuałów politycznych. Jeszcze kilka dekad temu święta obchodzone na ziemiach słoweńskich ograniczały się do tematyki etnologiczno-folklorystycznej ujętej w ramach badań kultury ludowej. Nic zatem dziwnego, że badania koncentrowały się na świętach ludowych postrzeganych z perspektywy stosunkowo niezmiennej koncepcji tradycji. Gwałtowne zmiany polityczne, gospodarcze i społeczne charakterystyczne dla okresu po drugiej wojnie światowej uwidoczniły się nie tylko w transformacji krajobrazu świąt państwowych, lecz także w zmianie konfiguracji horyzontów badawczych. W artykule horyzonty te przedstawione są na przykładzie ustaleń na temat świąt państwowych uzyskanych podczas niedawno przeprowadzonego projektu, dotyczącego procesu świętowania w kontekście tworzenia się społeczności narodowej Słowenii.

Słowa klucze: święta państwowe, rytuały polityczne, Słowenia

Tłumaczenie: Klaudyna Michałowicz

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*[E]vents are not just there and happen, but they have a meaning
and happen because of that meaning.*

(Max Weber)

Framework

Public holidays are lived and conceived as a special category of holidays, recorded in the official state calendar. As many other categories of holidays they represent a paradigmatic-syntagmatic chain, a linear sequence of specific content-charged days in a year, repeating in cycles. The paradigmatic succession and syntagmatic polyphony reinforce their enduring character and effect a simultaneous subjection to locally specific transformations, relating to broader contexts of politics, economy and culture.² The two characteristics also inform the perception of the phenomenon of the festive, and may be used as instruments in the outlining of research focuses.

Though state holidays share certain characteristics with holidays at large, they yet belong to a particular category: that of political holidays.³ To a casual observer, they may appear to merely serve the enrichment or festive embellishment of the people's daily lives, yet celebrations of the state are not just picturesque decorations or manifestations of political power. Following here Clifford Geertz (1980: 121–136), they also carry power: through ritual manifestations, they (co)create and cyclically reinforce that power; not only do they *relate* to politics, they *are* politics. Concisely, their rituals may be summarized thus:

Political rituals are practices set in concrete chronotopes. They express and materialise a sense of belonging, the formation of identities, and the establishment of local, regional, ethnic, national, or state entities. They also represent an area of social cohesion, self-identification, the marking of social affiliation and the exclusion of the Other. Political rituals are unavoidable in social integration (Lukes 1975), socialisation of hierarchies, relations, and the use of power. They are used repeatedly, year after year, to define, embody, and materialise ethnic, language, and other barriers which do not allow a single person, socialised in any community, to remain unaffected or undecided. As Steven Lukes has put it, political rituals mobilise bias, but they also raise questions about the relationships between different discourses, for example, between the official political discourse of the ruling parties, media discourses, the so-called common sense

² “[Holidays] are generally known and widely celebrated, but always under particular circumstances, at particular places, with a particular group. In one sense, all celebrations of a holiday are the ‘same’, because the occasion and frequently the symbolic components are socially and historically derived. In another way, no two celebrations are ever the same. Holidays are always manifested as particular instances, particular events” (Santino 1996: xvi–xvii).

³ By this I mean “political” in a narrow sense: related to the intentional management of the state and its citizens; whereas a broader definition would encompass the meaning of actions that create, recreate and transform the relationships of inequality between the people. In the latter sense, one could assert practically all human activity to be political.

discourse, and the subcultural discourse present mainly among various extremist groups. Rituals speak to and about society and its institutions, and enable and recreate their extractive or inclusive characters (North 1991) (after: Fikfak 2015: 51).

Political holidays and their rituals thus always operate with the objective of managing the community. They are enacted by the authorities with the commitment of running and governing the administrative, economic, religious, communal life in general. In this aspect, they may be understood as a constituent part of civil religion (*r eligion civile*) in the original sense of Rousseau's Social Contract (*Le contrat social*, 1762). Its purpose is to shape common social foundations through the reinforcement of social links and loyalty to public matters. When public holidays perpetuate the social contract in ritual ways, they function as one of the civil religion's tools or intermediaries of education for citizenship or public life habituation. Civil religion does not exclude religious holidays, though it does exclude religious intolerance. According to the relations between the civil authorities and religious institutions, the official state calendars of societies with varying political systems also display changes in the relations and ratios between secular and religious holidays.⁴

Into the social order and communal praxes, holidays by repetition and memetics imprint the values of the "shared common"; these materialize e.g. in the memory of the communal origin myth, mythological personas, breakthrough historical events, famous personalities and their presented virtues. The contents and meanings of all these memory columns serve the building and strengthening of groups and communities, i.e. the nation, the religious community and so on; these values, reined into national or other ideologies, are inscribed into holiday calendars as the process of selection and control. A holiday is namely "an especially dramatic attempt to bring some particular part of life firmly and definitely into orderly control. It belongs to the structuring side of the cultural/historical process" (Moore, Myerhoff 1977: 3), which transforms chaos into order, in accordance with the supposition that social life oscillates between "imaginary extremes of absolute order, and absolute chaotic conflict and anarchic improvisation". Between "structure and anti-structure", there exists a "perpetual dialectic relationship over time" (Turner 1969: 112, 203).

In addition to structuring natural and social time (Makarovi  1995; Rihtman-Augu stin 1990, 2001) and pausing social time by directing attention to the memory of "holy" days (Velikonja 2013), the regulative and integrative function and the stratifying impact are

⁴ In this analytical distinction, we must take into account the general problem in delineating the sacred from the secular; they are perhaps best specified as the extreme ends of a spectrum of various social activities, which often involve the elements of both (Shils, Young 1953; Leach 1954: 12–3; Lukes 1975; Moore, Myerhoff 1977; Hunt 1977: 143; Falassi 1987; Koster 2003).

the central pillars co-shaped by public holidays in society. According to classical functionalist theory starting with Durkheim (1912), an essential goal of society is integration, meaning the creation and persistence of social cohesion, spiritual bonds between the people based on a common horizon filled by

objects, relationships, roles, situations, ideas, etc., which have a special place in the life of the group and towards which at certain times, through the mediation of ritual, the attention of its participants is drawn, at different levels of consciousness and with varying emotional charge (Lukes 1975: 291).

Bonds between the members of a community with a common heritage and especially values, which are (also) performed and re-created through celebration, are posited to reduce the perceived differences between them by fostering concordant perception, thinking, action (Warner 1962: 7) in the spirit of consolidating social and ethical norms. Or: “Social cohesion demands a creed, or a code of behaviour, or a prevailing sentiment, or, best, some combination of all three; without something of the kind, a community disintegrates” (Russel 1938: 157). It is expected that “participants think and feel coherently about their mutual relationships” (Poderman Sørensen 2008: 528). The functionalists overlooked, running parallel to the cohesive force and evident in the ritual practices, also a counteracting and unwanted stratification or segregation effect.⁵ Namely, given the class, interest and other types of social differentiation, social cohesion is an *ideal* or a political project. When celebration and ritual on the one hand create members of a community, they on the other necessarily also exclude non-members. The institution of the holiday and its celebration is thus an identification of social belonging and non-belonging, the attribution of an identity connected to a specific mode of action (Bourdieu 1991: 119–121). Insofar as it achieves a legitimate social consensus, we may speak of social magic.⁶ With regard to state holidays or their nation-building potential, this means they succeed in making the people perceive themselves as citizens, despite their individual, social and other differences.

⁵ For a summary of this critique see Lukes (1975: 296–301, 305).

⁶ Bourdieu, to note, thematized social magic through cases of classical rites of passage (e.g. initiation rites, marriage, rituals in the academia – all these are rites of (de)marcation between one group and another, between those who belong and those who do not), yet the concept may also be applied to the passage/transformation of societies and the relationships within. Social magic only works when the entire community recognizes the differences between the social groups and their expected behaviour, when it is based on the shared acceptance of the homogenous group to know and respect the existing ritual or ritual code. Its symbolic efficiency ebbs and flows depending on the degree to which its actors “are more or less prepared or more or less disposed, to receive it” (Bourdieu 1991: 125).

When looking at holidays from the particular perspective of celebration – since only their embodied enactment, through implication of mythological basis, instils them with “phenomenal” nature – ritualization⁷ shows itself

as a strategy for the construction of a limited and limiting power relationship. This is not a relationship in which one social group has absolute control over another, but one that simultaneously involves both consent and resistance, misunderstanding and appropriation (Bell 1992: 8).

In this sense, holiday calendars are a kind of symbolical seismogram, inscribed in the cognitive and social map, and constitute, like a multitude of other human activities, a “metasocial commentary” (Geertz 1973: 448).

Research tradition

The charted frame of the conceptualization of holidays, especially public holidays, oriented our reflection on the past research of holidays and their contemporary study. In Europe namely, since the 19th century onward, holidays were mostly a flagship topic of the discipline of national ethnologies or *Volkskunde*, which also defined the horizon of research in the Slovenian ethnical space. The central concept was folk culture, founded on tradition and the community, empirically located in the rural area. For decades after the Second World War, ethnographers believed that rural areas were least infected with the civilizational or modernization novelties – generated largely in the urban centres or by way of migration flows. In the search of *differentiae specificaе*, especially on the axis folk-civilized, rural-urban, old-new, traditional-modern etc., which legitimized a two-stratum conception of culture, the researchers noticed certain changes, which were frequently regretted and thus saved from oblivion. Yet even though the changes occurred right before their eyes (or precisely because of it), they were interested primarily in those cultural forms that expressed a continuity in time, space and communities, and in this way, as they posited, usefully strengthened cultural as well as national identity. Just as other cultural elements, holidays and rites were encapsulated in the *Volkskunde* “rescue project” and its cultural-historical paradigm of ethnicity, the latter having been focused in great degree on the changing of typology from the (supposedly) oldest, “primordial” cultural forms and their contents. Such an interpretative framework recorded primarily national and regional cultural particularities and differences. It should be noted that in the process of nation- building, folk culture was nationalized and promoted to a status of the

⁷ According to Catherine Bell, ritualization is a strategic mode of action that operates within a specific social order or social circumstances, separate from other action (Bell 1992: 67, 74); in itself it does not “control” individuals or society, but is tightly knit with the concept of power; in this vein, “it is a strategic arena for the embodiment of power relations” (Bell 1992: 170).

solid cultural foundation, the beckoning symbol as well as stereotype of the nation's culture (cf. Löfgren 1989; Johler, Nikitsch, Tschofen 1999; Smith 1999; Rihtman-Auguštin 2004; Kaschuba 2008; Rogelj Škafar 2011). The ideological grounds of the *Volkskunde* thus maintained, for quite a long time, a romanticized infatuation with the emanations of the nation's spirit (Weber-Kellermann, Bimmer 2003). In this, folk culture was invariably robbed of the specificities that go hand in hand with real societal structure and its internal tensions.

The synthesis of typological research generally falling under the “older” ethnology or *Volkskunde* is in Slovenia best exemplified by the outstanding work of Niko Kuret *Praznično leto Slovencev* (The Festive Year of Slovenians, Kuret 1965–1971). Kuret interpreted holidays or customs and the rites that accompany them as a historically and structurally syncretic phenomenon. He presented the festive calendar as a historically emerging syncretism of various traditions – from pagan or pre-Christian to Christian and folk, meaning rural, partly also those from the higher strata that seeped into the masses and were assimilated. The structural moment was stressed in the conceptualization of holidays, rituals and beliefs as a cross-phenomena of the general characteristics of the human condition (existential fears, worries, needs, desires...), and then, in the observation of the specific cultural manifestations of the holiday calendar on the culturally-historically volatile and ethnically mixed Slovenian territory. In a diachronic perspective, his rich materials presented the “old folk customs and lore”, with a focus on native traditions and harmony (Fikfak 2005), in his mind characteristic especially of the religious rural communities.⁸ This is also the reason behind the apparent incompleteness of the structural image of the Slovenian holiday calendar: namely, the research of 19th century festive phenomena left out certain other holidays (e.g. national, urban etc.) and most notably particular aspects (complexity, agency, dynamics, presentation, narrative character, rhetoric) that might reveal the complex underlying relationships between the social milieu, its particular segments and distinctive festive calendars. Furthermore, the “harmony of tradition” failed to encompass the inequalities and ambivalences of daily life, since it stood not only as the researcher's own model, but also presented an idealized image of what the populace being explored, meaning the actors themselves, would prefer to hold in their mind when experiencing and/or reflecting the authenticity of their ritual practices (Fikfak 2005: 76).

⁸ According to Jezernik, the “holiday calendar of the Slovenians as interpreted by Kuret was actually the calendar of the Catholic church adapted to fit the local countryside folk. [...] In other words, Kuret's conceived definition of a Slovenian community included mostly such inhabitants who were rural and Catholic by creed” (Jezernik 2013b: 11).

The generally dissonant critique of Kuret's work notwithstanding, it is nevertheless fair to state his "encyclopaedia of the holidays" filled a gap in the ethnological understanding of holidays, celebrations and festivities as a significant segment in the past communal life, while the constituent comparative interest and findings placed Slovenian folk holidays within the broader European context. In this sense, it presented at least a threefold contribution: providing scholarship with a foundation for future research, existing as a kind of manual to a larger audience, a compendium of holiday norms, frequently a source for the later reconstruction or revival or an inspiration for new stagings of ritual practices,⁹ and finally also being a practical vault of material for critical methodological reflection (cf. Simonič 2004; Fikfak 2005; Dapit 2008; Habinc 2008a, 2009; Poljak Istenič 2008, 2013; Jezernik 2013a). The latter process followed a thorough conceptual and methodological break, which occurred in European ethnology in the second half of the 20th century, and is best represented by the phrases "a farewell from folk life" (*Abschied vom Volksleben*) and "research of mundane / daily / everyday life" (see e.g. Bausinger 1970; Bausinger, Jaeggli, Korff, Scharfe, Maase 1978; Greverus 1978; Gerndt 1981). It was then, namely, that ethnologists began profoundly wondering how the intricate interplay of temporal, spatial and social circumstances, alongside communicational and symbolic processes, constitutes daily human practices, delineates differentiated forms of culture, and maps cultural differences.

Holiday calendars on the Slovenian territory¹⁰

The above briefly outlined tradition of the ethnologic notion of holidays in Slovenia thus omitted many aspects of the phenomenon of public holidays and celebrations, as well as leaving out certain holidays that did not receive their place within the older ethnographic canon. As noted, researchers were not specifically preoccupied with underlying social developments and breaks such as the secularization and nationalization of the Slovenian society, which emerged as a modernization processes in Slovenia in the 19th century when the Slovenes lived in the multi-ethnic Habsburg monarchy, then in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes or so-called first Yugoslavia between the two World Wars, subsequently in socialist Yugoslavia in the wake of the Second World War up until 1991, and then, finally, in their independent state, which has since 2004 been a member of the European Union.

⁹ Thus some traditional folk holidays became part of the national canon of cultural heritage, while some even made it into the contemporary calendar of public holidays.

¹⁰ Examined in detail in Slavec Gradišnik (2015, 2017).

In that span of time, four different political regimes inscribed their ideologies into the calendars of the public holidays, most explicitly by removing former “inappropriate” holidays and introducing new more “appropriate” ones, strengthening thus their particular political agenda and goals, stressing new values and, as part of this process, always re-evaluating the past in light of current interests. Above all, these tendencies did not occur without conflict (Jezernik 2013a; Slavec Gradišnik 2017). State calendars were imprinted not only with the imperatives of the political regimes and their ideologies, but also with the current political status of Slovenia(ns): whether a (dependent) part of a greater community or independent, whether an ethnic minority or the majority. These and similar circumstances visibly mark the contents of the holiday calendar and, naturally, the state holidays in it. In the strictest sense, Slovenian state holidays only emerged after the independence, whereas the previous holidays were of the monarchy, the kingdom, and the federal republic the Slovenian territory was part of.

In the 19th century, the Slovenian people at last constituted themselves as a nation, though yet without their own state. It was a time when the calendars of many European states featured new public holidays celebrating events of pronounced importance for the nation and the state, related especially to the celebration of particular rulers and dynasties as well as personalities that played a critical role in civic affairs.¹¹ The March Revolution of 1848 brought with it the promotion of progress on many levels of social life, especially the economy; and also the so-called spring or (re)birth of nations in the multi-ethnic Habsburg monarchy, where the process of nation-building based specifically on the unity of the ethnic group and its language, a matter of primordial significance, so to speak, for the Slovenian people, ran successfully until its disintegration following the First World War.

The first state holiday on Slovenian territory was the birthday of emperor Franz Joseph I (celebrated between the years 1849 and 1916), which nurtured the cult of the ruler and strengthened dynastic patriotism and the Catholic faith (cf. Jezernik 2013a). Next to the traditional religious holidays of the Catholic calendar, festive rights were granted to personalities significant for Slovenian culture, especially the men of letters. Among them, paramount stature was attributed to the poet France Prešeren, so glorious that the anniversary of his death (8 February) continues to last as a widely embraced national holiday (the Slovenian Cultural Holiday or the Prešeren Day).

¹¹ In this, they more or less put forth a statehood concept based on the national foundation, which differed from the secular French republican calendar, one that proved to be short-lived and of little consequence on the patterns of state calendars in the 19th century. The French revolutionary calendar namely expelled all the saints and all royalist allusions, and replaced them with the celebration of virtues – hard work, talent, liberty and equality, patriotism etc.

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia continued the celebration of the ruler cult whose persona bound together the Nation of Three Names¹², the Yugo-Slavs. If, in the preceding century, the celebration of the emperor's birthday was met with practically widespread support, the celebration of the king's birthday in the first Yugoslav state was a matter of clashing opinions, much like certain other newly-introduced holidays (cf. Jezernik 2013c, in this publication) that in the three-national state acted as an important instrument of Yugoslavization under the guidance of the Serbian hegemony and the Karađorđević dynasty. In Slovenia, these holidays appeared to be a consequence of authoritarian dictate, having nothing to do with the Slovenian nation's collective memory and self-consciousness, and their reception across the kingdom as a whole with respect to individual nations – and their internal political group dynamics – was rather conflicting and mixed overall.

Similar was the fate of holidays introduced by the invaders during World War Two, when parts of the Slovenian territory were under German, Italian and Hungarian occupation. Conversely, we can observe the emergence of the so-called Partisan holidays instead, which were at first clandestine tokens of the people's liberation struggle, furthering brotherly bonds with the other oppressed Yugoslav nations. By the end of the war, they already served to promote specific class-based and ideological goals, coalescing ultimately into the institution of the post-war (Socialist) Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

In the socialist state calendar, the most obvious strategies employed were the gradual removal of religious holidays, the elimination of old and the introduction of new holidays, whereby their content was often erased and/or altered. The state celebrations of the federal Yugoslavia of six republics, symbolized also in its coat of arms and flag (cf. Mønnesland 2013), honoured its formation (Republic Day), its values – freedom, brotherhood and unity among the nations arising from the liberation struggle, progress, labour, prosperity (Victory Day, days of nations' uprising during WWII, Labour Day, Day of the Yugoslav People's Army), as well as the cult of personality (Tito's Birthday/Youth Day). Revolutionary and post-revolutionary messages likewise permeated other secular holidays (e.g. New Year, International Women's Day, and All Saints' Day/Deceased Day). The process involved extensive mimicry and ambivalence within the system, which in part followed traditional holiday practices while at the same time disrupting them with nomenclature and semantic shifts, reduction or accentuation. In addition to the holidays' role as the generators and markers of collective memory, they were also an extremely effective tool for mobilizing "the masses", since the authorities ensured, across all the levels and spheres of social life, that the people observed public holidays with

¹² Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

appropriate ritual expression. With the relatively convincing ideological habituation in the spirit of “socialism with a human face”, and with efficient control, they managed to seize symbolism-ownership of practically all living arenas and achieve in the people an internalized holiday sentiment – thus, the political narrative was still present and lingering after the message began to dissipate from the 60s or so onward, and holidays were starting to get celebrated more casually, as work-free days in particular.

Upon the disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia and Slovenia’s independence in June 1991, the fledgling nation-state found itself in a “holiday mess” since in principle all the old Yugoslavian holidays remained valid until the adoption of a new Public Holiday Act (on 21 November 1991).¹³ Discussions on the institution of new public holidays were characterised by the ideological polarisation of the political parties. Some considered excessive the number of re-introduced religious holidays as work-free days (Easter, Assumption Day, Christmas), others took issue with holidays linked to the former calendar (e.g. 27 April – Liberation Front Day, renamed to the Day of Uprising Against Occupation; 9 May – Victory Day), debate was also evident on the content and meaning of certain other holidays (1 November – All Saints’ Day, 31 October – Reformation Day), and especially with regard to the ways of celebrating the announcement of Slovenian independence, or the Statehood Day (25 June), and in proposals to abolish specific holidays and two-day celebrations.¹⁴

In the new Slovenian state, holidays thus became an eminent setting for the unravelling of political conflict and struggle for dominion over the interpretation, revision or new readings or re-readings of the past. After decades of essentially one-party politics and unified ideology of socialism, where memory was also constructed through enforced forgetting (Ricoeur 2004) or imposed traumatised (narrative, terminological) silence (Connerton S. a.: 2–3), the new political pluralism allowed dissenting voices to participate in the public discourse. Furthermore, the mass media, in its journalistic practices frequently more market-oriented than earnestly critical, co-shaped public opinion with the summarizing of exclusive rather than tolerant and inclusive narratives. It seems that public holidays, which from the standpoint of the state should be fostering cohesion and strengthening collective identification, were with the instrumentalization of “one” history in Slovenia marked more profoundly by an emergent identity of otherness than a successfully over-arching sentiment of belonging to the state and its citizen community.

¹³ Official title: Law on Holidays and Days off in the Republic of Slovenia.

¹⁴ The celebration of the New Year and 1 May each inherited two work-free days from the socialist past, while another day off is the Easter Monday. More on that in: Slavec Gradišnik (2014b, 2017); Habinc (2017).

New perspectives on holidays and communities

The above, even in the Slovenian historiography (Rozman, Melik, Repe 1999) only briefly touched upon transformations of the public holidays, which up until the past decade did not receive their due research attention in domestic ethnology and socio-cultural anthropology, were reason enough to incite a rethinking. The researchers¹⁵ framed it as a question of correspondences between the public holidays and the formation of communities. Here, it should be noted that in Slovenia, national independence and the new democratic political system locally revived – in line with global tendencies – the flourishing of academic, laic, media and economic interest in cultural heritage. Research into one of the *par excellence* themes of this heritage, holiday life, in this context received a fresh spark of research enthusiasm. Within ethnology, it partly built on the aforementioned revised research paradigm, in which the frozen concepts of time, space and community were translated into the dynamics of social chronotopes and diversification that enable the thematising of cultural heterogeneity, in the past and present alike. In addition, in the new political circumstances in Slovenia (characteristic of the former socialist milieu after 1990), the theme of public holiday research was finally released from the burden of the old system's ideology. At times namely, researchers were forced to bow to the ideological dictate of the authorities (cf. Roth 2008) or at least make excessive argumentation for any permitted, highly selective examinations of cultural past (especially curtailed was the research of religious manifestations), whereas now these same phenomena represent – if nothing else – an attractive element of the new national mythology, birthed in the years of the independence effort.¹⁶

In Slovenia, new research of holidays first critically distanced itself from the preceding research of cultural heritage (see e.g. Hudales, Visočnik 2005; Jezernik 2010a, b) that was more or less closely tied to the ethnic paradigm. Hitherto overlooked political, social, territorial, and other contexts that played the setting of the past and contemporary holiday life made it, then, to the forefront of historical inquiry. More than the issues of cultural continuity, what interested the researchers is how people in various historical and local circumstances, as individual actors or in communities, experience and recreate their lived

¹⁵ Meaning here the research group of the aforementioned research project (cf. footnote 1); consisting of anthropologists, ethnologists and culturologists.

¹⁶ An outstanding example in Slovenia, and also Croatia, is the rehabilitation of Christmas: with 1952, it was banished from the Yugoslavian holiday calendar. It made its return in the second half of the eighties, when the politics again gave the green light for a “public” or relatively mass celebration of Christmas, which had been in the process of the postwar de-traditionalization and de-Christianization of culture pushed deeply into the private sphere (Rihtman-Auguštin 1990, 2004; Slavec Gradišnik 2014b).

holiday world, what they remember, nurture, or forget and abandon.¹⁷ Presented was also a new (temporal) typology of customs as the ritual aspect and medium of celebration (Šega 2001; Bogataj 2003), and especially an emerging focus on issues of agency, performance and politics (cf. Bell 1992, 1997; Kreinath, Snoek, Stausberg 2008).¹⁸

If, thus, the official holidays are perceived as a meta-social commentary and also possessing the formative and performative power to (potentially) co-create communities, analytical interest is best directed at the participants, meaning all the involved social actors, and then also at the issues of the holidays' selection, or the contents and phenomena in which they manifest, the patterns of their distribution across the calendar year, and ritualization as a performative means or property inherent to holidays.

By social actors, we mean all those whose particular political, ideological or ethical motivations guide the institution, codification¹⁹ and canonisation of holidays, and all those who are the addressed audience of the public holidays and encouraged in various ways to celebrate them. In this sense, state holiday practicees, in which the "desired/expected" is institutionalized, contain built-in conflicts. This reflects in all periods of ancient, recent and contemporary history: on the discourse level by the discussions on their content and message, the suitability of this or that public holiday and the ways of its celebration, and on the other, tangible level, by various degrees of indifference to the observance of the prescribed rites, in extreme cases as anti-celebration or rituals of resistance.²⁰ When state holidays, as the expressions of hegemonic power, reveal and conceal, reinforce and push into oblivion events and personalities from the past, they are mapping not only the social/

¹⁷ New perspectives on the research subject unveiled certain previously ignored and unreflected aspects and characteristics of past and contemporary holiday life (see Fikfak 1999, Gačnik 2000; Šega 2001; Peršič 2003; Fikfak et al. 2003; Simonič 2004, 2006, 2009; Habinc 2006, 2008b, 2009, 2011, 2012; Slavec Gradišnik 2008; Jezernik 2010a, b; Fikfak, Fournier 2012).

¹⁸ On the other hand, in the wake of 1990 we saw a range of popular science works intended for wide audiences, catering to both national as well as public needs for identity symbols and knowledge of cultural heritage. These publications connected the past ethnological tradition of rites as the central markers of holidays, and followed the changes occurring in the past decades and the causes behind them. In more detail, they treated individual holidays, revealing the general characteristics of the "new" holidays landscape. Thus, the book *Slovenija praznuje* [Slovenia Celebrates] (Bogataj 2011), in addition to state and religious holidays also treats, in manner scientific as well as popular, also contemporary tourism events, various gatherings, public merrymaking and other festivities creating bonds with cultural heritage or expressing contemporary reception and creativity.

¹⁹ Some researchers believe it is precisely legal codification that acts as the strongest instrument of social stability and "mobilization of consent", as it specifies what is practically held as a behavioural matter of course from the viewpoint of the authorities in regard to the citizens (Lukes 1975: 301).

²⁰ Among the traditional holidays, the most evident is the carnival which gives room for a symbolic inversion of social statuses and roles, while a contemporary example are alternative counter-official celebrations of modern or old public holidays (cf. Simonič, in this publication; Velikonja, in this publication). The so-called rituals of resistance were first identified by the anthropologist Max Gluckman, who next to the classic integrative function of the rituals also located an expression of social tensions, cyclically relieved to keep the social system in balance.

collective memory and forgetting (Jezernik 2013b: 9–10; cf. Makarovič 1995). By these mechanisms, they also mark the conceptual path of society between the past and the present, and at the same time more or less directly control the lives of the people, by way of telling them where and how they are supposed to be positioned within the social world. On the other hand, alternative or subversive “bottom-up” practices challenge the power status quo and the imposed narrations of common identity.

In general, those who shape “new” calendars, the choice and distribution of the holidays, often lean on secure, well established, traditional content and forms close to the people, while the addressed citizens in practice, in line with the “prescribed” rituals, celebrate in a variety of adapted ways. Although in general the public holidays are set up “top-down” by the ruling authorities, it is not an exclusively one-way process embodying the asymmetric distribution of power in society, but rather a dynamic reciprocity. Groups with greater or lesser political power and influence do create and define holidays, and to some extent their rituals, but in order for these to be effective, they must also be transformed, adapted to the dynamic social circumstances and existential mood of the citizens. When these do not overlap, as it happens with controversial meanings or ritual failures (Grimes 1990; Hüsken 2007), the people will reshape the holidays for themselves. Only through a manner of public consent, holidays are gradually able to mould the beliefs of the individual and the community and their (self)understanding and (self)delineation, prodding these to synchronize with the commitment of state holidays and celebrations to create citizens.

The efficacy of holidays also draws from the fact that calendars are simultaneously non-recursive and cyclical. The cyclical aspect, which implies repetition, the reproduction of content and the (suggested) patterns of its enactment, contributes to an internalized and embodied nature; the latter, when reflecting on the social actors, is one of the mechanisms that expounds the socialized production of belonging (through upbringing, education, participation in ritual practice, mass media) and the language of its expression. In this, the people are not inanimate representatives of an imagined community following a set of enforced rules, but rather active participants. The challenge, then, is how to explain their enthusiasm or lack thereof when it comes to community rituals, and the mechanisms of their individual and collective internalization, of which the sentiment of citizenship is a constituent part. Is group spirit simply the consequence of mental indoctrination and continual drill as tools of social control, can it be explained with the effects of collective ritual practices on the psychology of the individual and the creation of reciprocal relations between the people (Bell 1992: 169)?

Several assertions attempt to address this question: they touch upon the complex relationships between individual and collective identifications, emotional upbringing or emotional development (Geertz 1973: 449), banal nationalism as the thematization of implicit and naturalized social reproduction of categories (Billig 1995), collective emotions (Anderson 1983), cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1997), the power of the symbolic community (Cohen 1985), the personal (Cohen 1996), the emotional and the sensual, relating to mood and embodiment (Antonsich, Skey 2016; Militz, Schurr 2016), and embedded nationalism (Hearn 2007), and nationalism as an affective state (Closs Stephens 2016). In this framework, identity or identification is naturally understood as a dynamic, shifting, relational, ambivalent and situational concept, in which intertwine the contemporary projection of the past and reflection of the present.

The mentioned characteristics are most closely related to the performative turn placing social actors in the focus of attention, when it proposed a shift from the symbolic aspects of rituals (their content, meaning, implications) onto rituals as lived events, practices, embodied action. This means that holidays, in their essence, are not just expressive, symbolic, but operate and act, being a ritualized form of performative practice (Bourdieu 1977; Bell 1992, 1997). Their meaning originates more in the ritual enactment itself than in the ideas or beliefs that might be decoded from the rituals or are expressed by them (McGraw 2015: 37; cf. Kreinath, Snoek, Stausberg 2008; specifically on ritual efficacy see Poderman Sørensen 2008; Sax, Quack, Weinhold 2010).²¹ Ritual enactment repetitively imprints itself into the emotional experience of the participants, into their embodied memory (Connerton 1989),²² which generates each following enactment; perhaps we may even assert that the ritual as embodied collective agency (Bell 1992: 94–117, 2008; Sax, Quack, Weinhold 2010: 8)²³ is what evokes its content, or put differently, that thought and action are one and the same. Recurring, relatively formalized and invariable, often tradition-based characteristics of the use of symbols (gestures, words, motion, paraphernalia, clothing, foods etc.) and performance (Bell 1997: 138–169) are the pillars of holiday endurance. This means that holidays as practices – even when relating only

²¹ A discussion on the power of rituals was announced by Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss in the “*Esquisse d’une théorie générale de la magie*” (Hubert, Mauss 1902–1903), followed by Émile Durkheim (2002 [1912]: 41, 42) with his separation of religious phenomena into the categories of beliefs and rituals. He stressed that the ritual leads to a “collective effervescence”, is thus powerful, which he exemplified on the case of Australian aborigines with their compelling ritual repetition and motion. More on this, for example, in Bell 1992; McGraw 2015.

²² Connerton elsewhere specifically stressed: “images of the past and recollected knowledge of the past are conveyed and sustained by ritual performances, and that performative memory is bodily. Bodily social memory ... is an essential aspect of social memory, but it is an aspect which had until then been badly neglected” (Connerton S. a.: 1, cf. Connerton 1989: 72).

²³ For the concept of “embodied collective agency” see Nellhaus (2016).

on Bourdieu's original meaning of *habitus* – simultaneously shape and re-create the cognitive and emotional experiences of the celebrants, while these in turn maintain the continuity of the celebrations themselves; they are both structured and structuring – like all the social world. From this central (though not singular) aspect of celebration, it is easier to understand the concept of the holidays' formative power.

In conclusion

The purpose of the research project presented in the introduction was not the typologically exhaustive overview of the holiday calendar, or a detailed examination of all the holidays within; after all, even the contemporary holiday landscape eludes a concrete typology (Bogataj 2011; Slavec Gradišnik 2014b). Rather, researchers critically addressed the power of rooted traditional practices, and that of the strategies of inventing and introducing new holidays, recording in the curious interplay between them the transformation of official calendars during the time between the second half of the 19th century and present day. We wished to establish which collective values were advocated by the public holidays, what ideas their promoters and legislators appealed to, how the holidays were selected and ritualized, and how they were accepted by the citizens in their daily practices. In this sense, both the “historical” overview of public holidays on the Slovenian territory between the 19th and 21st century (Slavec Gradišnik 2017) as well as studies of individual holidays²⁴ were traditionally informed by the paradigm of nationalism studies, which exposed the authoritative/elite production of holidays (“top down” model) and called attention to the fact that state celebrations *may* facilitate nationalist sentiment and feelings of belonging, but lacked understanding on the precise processes of emotional reception, even though rituals appear deliberate and thoughtfully executed (Fox 2014: 38). Such a perspective was warranted due to the systematically insufficiently explored subject matter (for the reasons behind this see Habinc 2008, 2012; Jezernik 2013b; Slavec Gradišnik 2014b). Nevertheless, the holiday framework deserves analysis from the viewpoint of social communication, ritual transmission and specific audiences, which were consequently the subjects of the research project's inquiries, while we also touched upon the issue whether, and how, the holidays in question actually succeeded in shaping the consciousness of citizenship, applying a “bottom up” perspective. The production and reception of holidays are namely complementary or reciprocal processes, which deserve a deeper look at some of the ways the people become and remain citizens in mind and body.

Some accents of research into political and other celebrations on the Slovenian territory (Jezernik 2013a; Slavec Gradišnik 2014a), along the Slovenian border (Fikfak 2015)

²⁴ Cf. studies collected in this publication.

and in the Slovenian diaspora (Repič 2017, in this publication) demanded parallel readings of related research findings across the geographical area Slovenia has been historically closely connected to, formally since the emergence of the first Yugoslav state when traditional folk calendar holidays received the company of shared national holidays.²⁵ To establish the different modes of origination, recognition, celebration as well as withering of the holidays, the official holidays calendars of Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro between the 19th and 21st century were thoroughly studied (Slavec Gradišnik 2017; Škrbić Alempijević, Uzelac 2017; Prelić 2017; Vujačić 2017). The common comparative grounds asserted that the purpose of national holidays was the integration of citizens, that this is achieved in the discursive and performative (celebrations, rituals) addressing of the people, that the content of state holidays necessarily discloses specific agendas (promotion of myth, events, personalities constitutive for the state/nation), that the dynamics of remembering and forgetting transform culture, and that holiday rites follow detailed scenarios composed of relatively universal elements of solemn public manifestations (schedule, time and location of the setting etc.). The efficacy of the holidays depended not only on their political or ideological persuasive power (or weakness), but was motivated from the domains of the national, the religious, the social and the psychological as well.

The second research axis was directed at a more detailed examination of individual state holidays from the times of the different political systems – the unitarist “first” Yugoslavia (Unity Day/*Dan ujedinenja* and St. Vitus Day/*Vidovdan*²⁶), the socialist “second” Yugoslavia (Republic Day and ritualized memories on the revolution in the Slovenian diaspora in Argentina), and independent Slovenia (Statehood Day, alternative celebrations of the socialist Republic Day). A central finding here is their apparent contested character, expressing itself as a national, political, ideological, generational polyphony. Our contributions support the theses of Anthony Cohen that the symbolic expression of the community and its delineation grows in significance the more the social and geographical boundaries of the community are weakened or blurring (Cohen 1985: 50–51).

Historical and critical research shows that no political or social system represents a complete break with the past, even though that may be its aim. In the examined periods, and on the example of individual holidays, the transformed practices display the preserved elements of preceding calendars – at times these are content-related, at times performative, where it makes no difference whether we discover within them tradition, nostalgia

²⁵ Cf. international conference *Državni in narodni prazniki na območju bivše Jugoslavije* [State and National Holidays in the Former Yugoslavia] (Slavec Gradišnik, Jezernik, Strmčnik 2014) and the book *Države praznujejo* [Nation-States Celebrate] (Jezernik, Slavec Gradišnik 2017).

²⁶ See Jezernik, in this publication, and Jezernik (2013c).

or a socially critical charge. In this context we can see that calendars, once they are entrenched in the consciousness of the people, are one of the instruments of maintaining cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1997), which is also expressed in the creative reception and transformation of holiday practices. Calendar holidays – not only state ones of course – create, sometimes in the spirit of harmony, sometimes indifference or even resistance, the national imaginarium and emotional life which are visibly marked by personal memories, personal histories and experiences of everyday life. Thus for example, in Slovenia, the memory of socialist holidays remains preserved to this day. In this case, temporal distance provides room for a variety of remarkably divergent interpretations (e.g. romanticising the symbols of the totalitarian regime, Yugo-nostalgia, Tito-nostalgia, ideological resistance, non-conformity to the current dominant nationalist and neoliberal discourse). In the “second” life of the holiday, the old symbolism acts as a critique of the new, or perhaps as ironic entertainment, a market pop-cultural phenomenon. Popular culture is also tied to such remembrance by the venues, open public and virtual spaces (electronic media, social networks). Also, e.g. the celebration of the socialist Youth Day has in the Croatian Kumrovec, the birthplace of Marshal Tito *post festum* developed even further (Škrbić Alempijević, Mathiesen Hjemdahl 2006; cf. Velikonja 2008), while conversely in the Croatian religious rites, certain groups are now remembering the establishment of the so-called Independent State of Croatia from 1941 (Škrbić Alempijević, Uzelac 2017). Serbia for example saw the return of the “crown prince” with his mythological mission to represent “all the nation” (Prelić 2017). The post-socialist Montenegro on its Statehood Day, 13 July, remembers two events at once – the national liberation uprising of 1941 and the Berlin Congress of 13 July 1878 when Montenegro was first recognized as an independent state (Vujačić 2017), whereas the Slovenian Statehood Day has been a controversial topic ever since the 90s of the past century (Simonič 2009, 2013, in this publication) which is also implied by its many failed celebrations.²⁷

In the area of the former Yugoslavia, as is supported further by the studies from Serbia and Croatia, an especially dynamic phenomenon has been the relationship between the church and state; though these institutions are officially separated, their discourses very frequently overlap with arguments of the ruling political coalition or opposition. The ruling and opposition politics, concentrated in the parliament, has also fundamentally shaped the public discourse on holidays in Slovenia (Habinc 2017; Slavec Gradišnik 2017; Simonič, in this publication). After the disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia, diverse relations between the religious and secular holidays also reflect in the fact that in some

²⁷ Among the Slovenian public holidays, a single one perhaps escaped these contestations: the Slovenian Cultural Holiday or Prešeren Day. This is also the holiday with the longest and unbroken tradition, a testament to the highly efficient canonisation of the great poet as a cultural saint (Dović 2017).

places, public holidays are accompanied by sacred rituals, which had been common prior to the Second World War and then utterly unthinkable in the socialist state. On the other hand, in the newly ex-Yugoslavian states, the presence of military forces during protocolary celebrations is notably reduced to a significant degree compared to all the previous state regimes. Similar holds true for the drying up of celebrations related to the cult of the ruler – emperor, king and his kin, president, which on the territories of former Yugoslavia are all but abandoned by now,²⁸ though this cult, once so significant to the monarchy, the kingdom and socialist Yugoslavia, did persevere somewhat transformed, ephemerally, in Serbia and Croatia even after the collapse of the common state with then-presidents Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman. Alongside locally, politically and culturally-specific reactions to state tradition, a multitude of other parallels exist, which transcend the framework of public celebration and are related more to memory and experience of everyday life.²⁹

Given the dynamic multiplicity and multi-layered or hybrid character of contemporary individual and collective identifications, statehood sentiments and belongings – addressed by state holidays and their symbols in times of relative peace – are most often not a dominant factor, manifesting also as internally heterogeneous. Expressed simultaneously within or through them are generational, gender, religious, ethnic, linguistic, social and local identifications, and in this aspect state holidays and celebrations are a node of multiple networks (Thomas 2008: 339). Among the researched periods, it would appear that politics, and with it the politics of holidays and celebrations, was most ubiquitously present in everyday life in the decades of socialism. Then, in a certain sense, the politics was also “most effective”; celebrations of the system and the state were an important aspect of private and public life and work alike (cf. Roth 2008; Habinc 2013). Noteworthy, of course, is to understand how that process occurred and unravelled. The answer lies in the broader issue of power, and particularly in the (dis)harmony between various social discourses – the political discourse of the ruling parties, the academic and mass media discourses, the so-called common sense discourse. This also means that the acceptance of rituals is never merely a “dialogue” between two poles or levels – between the politicians and the people, the rulers and the ruled, but rather a complex and intertwined agency of numerous actors, documented in relative detail since the 19th century when public holidays began to be celebrated.

²⁸ In no way, though, have the memories (long recorded also in *lieux de mémoire*) yet disappeared. Thousands continue to live in the cities that bore Tito’s name. These were explored by Amir Muratović’s documentary film *Bila so Titova mesta* [There Once Were Tito’s Cities] (cf. Muratović 2017).

²⁹ For the horizon of popular socialist Yugoslav sentiment, see e.g. Andrić, Arsenijev, Rusić (2004); Luthar, Pušnik (2010); Petrović, Mlekuž (2015).

Research of state holidays thus not only answers the questions of state/national belonging or citizenship, but is also a highly suitable lens for the observation and reflection of the ways the people were, and are, strapped into various groupings and communities, the ways these are connected to one another, and which ones tend to manifest as dominant in specific circumstances. The findings of contemporary holiday research, not only of state holidays, relativize and partly demystify the power of tradition, while also outlining further reservations about other, frequently stereotypical notions, for example the imposed and coercive character of holidays, especially political ones. These, too, are accepted and internalized by the people in idiosyncratic, often creative ways, which is exemplified by the form and content of local celebration in times of socialism and the present day. The history of holidays reminds us of the relative power of politics and ideology, which strive to exile from the memory and experience of the people all that which is not tailored to their worldview. Thus, new holidays in independent Slovenia made busy primarily the politicians and legislators, while the people were, and still are, generally interested in the actual annual calendar, especially when it comes to work-free days, implying that the general “need for holidays” is growing due to reasons not entirely political.

Taking into account all the above, it is sensible to continue critical reflections in both the plotted courses. Research of the history and politics of holidays ought to be somewhat relieved of constructivist assertions, namely that history is not a product of the past but of the present, that it is thus treated as myth and the reinforcement of concrete, ideologically biased interpretations of the past (e.g. Lowenthal 1985). It is that, too, naturally, yet not exclusively: history is also a sediment of the past, which often operates in non-obvious, opaque and unpredictable ways, an emanation that influences cognition and social atmosphere in long wavelengths playing out in a variety of social settings. As enlightening as it is to reflect on the uses of the past, a no smaller intellectual challenge capable of illuminating the present is the exploration of the effects of the past when it does not exhibit particular explicit purposes of legitimisation, but is rather guided by the remnants of memory and experience (cf. Scheer 2012). Thus, we are dealing with a renewed turn of focus to the study of the implicit, the non-reflected – with historical depth and cultural sensitivity, which most often eludes the individual strategies and reflected choices (cf. Eriksen 2002).

In-depth historically oriented research and cultural sensibility locate state holidays among the other holiday practices involving various social groups and running their course on various levels³⁰ – from the individual to the global – thematising next to politics also

³⁰ Meaning all the other holidays, official or not, work-free or not, which are part of the contemporary holiday landscape (cf. Bogataj 2011; Slavec Gradišnik 2014a).

other dimensions of social life, as an expression of the distribution and relocation not only of political but also other identifications, which the individual may consider more relevant. Furthermore, contemporary research strives to reveal, understand and link the key factors that generate and proliferate holidays: traditions and innovation, processes of socialization or inculturation, collective memory and forgetting, ideologies and economies, and above all the concrete actors participating in the celebrations – individuals, family communities, educational and schooling institutions, political formations, local and religious communities, mass media, profit organizations from the fields of trade and tourism, etc. All these, namely, are involved in the production and reproduction of social meaning and values (patriotism, localism, nationalism, faith, love, happiness, hedonism, spectacle etc.), symbolic capital and preservation of cultural heritage, yet to a no lesser degree in the daily economy and politics.

Public holidays on the one hand used to – and still do – connect the people into imagined communities, and on the other separate them into quite specific groups, some readily apparent, other fluid in nature. This holds true regardless of the way the holidays are re-traditionalised or de-traditionalised in the sense of new interpretations, (re)invention, reconstruction and deconstruction of tradition, and irrespective of how their ritual aspects (repetition, symbolism, internalization) strengthen, crush, or transform into tension between traditional social and cultural patterns and newly transmitted ones.

Historical parallels and cultural sensibility are thus essential instruments for the critical reflection of holidays and celebrations, revealed in a string of embodied practices, actualized between social transmission and universal human creativity, and torn between the chronotopes of harmony and controversy, competition, appropriation and ambivalence so characteristic of the human condition.

Translated from Slovenian by Jeremi Slak

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