

Skiing memories in the Slovenian national mnemonic scheme: An anthropological perspective

Gregor Starc

University of Ljubljana, gregor.starc@guest.arnes.si

ABSTRACT

The socio-political transformations of Slovenia in the 1980s and 1990s were not founded on the verifiable facts but mostly on the popular cultural myths, beliefs and practices that have been established by a new regime of truth about the Slovenian nation. The old hegemonic discourse of Yugoslav brotherhood and unity started to loose its persuasiveness and people started to raise new borders between the Yugoslav nations by referring to the newly invented old traditions and the freshly discovered forgotten memories, and by selective forgetting of events that could challenge the new order of truth. Slovenian skiers and their sporting results played especially visible role in this remembering process. Because of its omnipresence in people's everyday life skiing became an integral part of this new national mnemonic scheme and served as a material proof of Slovenian national distinctiveness. This paper focuses on a genealogy of collective memory of skiing in Slovenia until 1991 that was legitimised by science, politics and the media; they jointly transformed skiers and skiing into sites of national memory that were disseminated as a part of everyday popular entertainment.

KEYWORDS: sport, skiing, collective memory, Slovenia

Introduction

When I try to remember the exact moment when I first felt I belonged to a larger community than just my family, my school or my town I am left only with flashbacks of a skiing World Cup race sometimes in the 1980s. I remember the excitement of my primary-school schoolmates when our teacher suddenly looked at her watch, stopped the lecture and told us to open the TV case at the back of the classroom. This was the first time we were allowed to open that case and also the first time our class was interrupted with something bigger and more important than learning. When the headmaster entered our classroom, followed by other teachers and other pupils from the entire second floor of our school, I realised something important was about to happen. I managed to force my chair to the right side of the front row and I started sharing the excitement of my schoolmates and teachers who were crossing their fingers, biting their nails, silently whispering 'Go,

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Bojan, go!’ I do not remember watching the race or its outcome but I do remember the growing excitement, expectation and unrest, the emotional reactions of teachers, who were covering their eyes in the horror of Bojan’s risky ride and peeking through their fingers, and especially the pleasant feeling that we all wished for the same thing and that I was a part of it. This is one of a few memories that still give me a pleasant hair-raising feeling. Although the skiing of Bojan Križaj was in those moments so many years ago at the centre of everybody’s attention I now believe that the pleasure of watching did not derive merely from love and interest in skiing *per se*. It originated from the shared belief that skiing was something special, that it was connected with the essence of who we believed we were and the belief that it made Us special. This knowledge, the collective consensus and the feeling of belonging was in those moments transmitted to me in a more effective, persuasive, yet imperceptible and indefensible way than any of my teachers could have done it with their lectures.

Aware of my undoubtedly subjective and probably imprecise autobiographical recollection of the event I am now trying to grasp a better understanding of such occurrences, of the functioning of sport in identificatory practices, and of the ways in which sporting events and heroes become memories, shared by the masses of people and owned by individuals who might have not even witnessed them. If I was to epistemologically characterise this endeavour I would say I am trying to produce a genealogy of collective memory of skiing in Slovenia until 1991 that has been formed and transformed in the constant struggle for meaning between historiography, politics, sportspersons, sport associations, advertisers, the media and its audiences.

In 1978 Jean-Marie Brohm published a book with the title that symbolises the functioning of collective memory in sport—*Sport: A Prison of Measured Time*. Brohm showed that sport memory is usually reduced to statistics of a single result or of consecutive successes. The term *re-cordare* itself means bringing back to the heart and thus back to memory. In this sense, the whole systems of competitions are built on memory. Once a certain team wins a world championship it does not become only the best in the world but becomes a point in memory of the best teams that had won world championships in all previous seasons. The meaning of the victory is in this sense worthy of remembering only because great teams and players of the past are remembered to be so great. Sporting events are subject to constant processes of such selective remembering and forgetting.¹ The mobilising capacity of their aesthetics goes mostly unnoticed by the mobilised people, because it is so common and so well domesticated; sporting victories and heroes are turned into symbols, inscribed with golden letters in the sport yearbooks, they reside in the halls of fame, their achievements are captured on film and afterwards assembled into

¹ There have been many examples worldwide in which certain sports have been functioning as invented traditions that have been regulated by selective remembering and forgetting, for example in the Celtic Games in Ireland (Bairner 2005), skiing and football in Slovenia (Starc 2005, Stankovič 2004), or football, polo and tango in Argentina (Archetti 1999).

documentaries, or their sporting equipment is displayed in sport museums and turned into exhibition artefacts. These symbols function as sites of memory or *lieux de mémoire*, purposefully built to

[...] stop time, to inhibit forgetting, to fix a state of things, to immortalize death, and to materialize the immaterial (just as gold, they say, is the memory of money)—all in order to capture the maximum possible meaning with the fewest signs (Nora 1996: 15).

Although Nora focused mostly on places of memory (such as museums) and on practices of memory (such as commemorations) sites of memory that carry homogenising collective potentials can exist also in less stable and interim forms, such as sporting achievements that are inseparably linked with their dissemination through media texts.² Sport occupies a considerable part of media space with sport sections in the newspapers, specialised sport newspapers, television broadcasts of sport competitions, sport shows, specialised internet sites, forums, etc. The media uses specialised sport reporters to cover the events and their narrations become an important source of people's memories of certain sportspersons or events and of their understanding. However, the reporters usually do not only verbalise the actual event or the current state of a certain sportsperson but utilise people's memory to spice up the information. They do not say only that, for example, a Slovenian athlete won an event but that this was the third time that he or she won and that this was the greatest victory that will go into the chronicles of Slovenian sport along with the past victories of other Slovenian sporting legends.

In order to understand how people's emotions get aroused by such images and statements, the social should be informed by the biological. David Bohm's (2005 [1992]) understanding of the bio-social nature of memories provides an explanation on how feelings and thoughts, in our case the memories, affect each other. The intellectual centres of human brains lie in the cortex while the emotional centre lies deeper in the brains. Between them there is a very thick bundle of nerves, by which both centres communicate very closely. The intellectual centre will normally tell whether an emotion is appropriate or not but it can go also vice versa. Also the emotional centre can send the received information to the intellectual centre and than the intellectual centre tries to justify the emotional response. After we stop thinking and feeling about, for example, the national importance of a certain victory, this thinking does not disappear. It goes in the brain and lives a trace that becomes 'thought' and acts automatically as a reflex. The same happens with feelings—they leave a trace and they become 'felts' that act automatically. Once we experience pleasure at the victory of a national team or at an old snapshot of a long time winner, it is then very likely that we will experience pleasure when we recall the event or experience

² Because of the inseparable intertwinement between sports and the media some researchers suggest the use of the term 'sport-media complex'. Rowe, McKay and Miller for example claim that: 'There is surely no cultural force more equal to the task of creating an imaginary national unity than the international sports-media complex' (1998: 133).

a similar one. Media images of sporting successes and defeats and of sport heroes in this sense function as points that are referred to whenever the perception of a community (and its history) is challenged or needs to be emphasised to increase pleasure of victory or to comfort disappointment of defeat.

Some notes on the studies of memory as a social phenomenon

The attempt to produce a complete genealogy of studying of memory is limited by time, printing space and, I am afraid, also by my own incomplete knowledge of the matter, but I should be able to produce a selective version of a genealogy that includes those concepts that I find most useful for the understanding of social functioning of memory. In general, studies of societies and cultures deal with three aspects of memories: forgetting, remembering and their managing. Nietzsche talked about ‘active forgetfulness’ (1998 [1887]), a mechanism that safeguards our mind from the experienced trauma by forgetting:

Forgetfulness [...] is an active and in the strictest sense positive faculty of suppression [...] that is the use of this active forgetfulness, a door-keeper as it were, an upholder of psychic order, of rest, of etiquette: from which one can immediately anticipate the degree to which there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no *present* without forgetfulness (1998 [1887]: 35).

It could be argued that individuals forget in order to preserve their sanity, to preserve their own acceptance by their community and to retain their ability to see their own community as something worthy to be a part of. In this sense, the act of forgetting among members of a certain community assures its preservation. Although Evans-Pritchard was not deriving his analysis from the work of Nietzsche, his ethnographic work among the Azande tribe (1972 [1937]) brought him to similar conclusions about forgetting. He introduced the concept of ‘structural amnesia’, according to which the members of the Azande tribe were inconsistent in their traditional belief of a witch transmitting her or his characteristic to her or his offspring. Evans-Pritchard observed how the tribe members managed to forget that a parent of one tribe member was a witch, while they remembered that a parent of another one was a witch and this made the latter also a witch. In a similar manner Laura Bohannan (1952), who named this phenomena ‘selective forgetting’, demonstrated how, among the Tiv people of Nigeria, only ancestors relevant to the present situation were evoked from past, while others were forgotten. Both anthropological accounts as well as Nietzsche’s demonstrate that forgetting is an essential part of struggle for preservation of society, and in the continuation I will try to show that this mechanism is still very well and alive in our society despite the highly developed modern mnemonic technologies and the accessibility of data unprecedented in the past.

The importance of remembering in the making and preservation of community is by no means a new invention and has been exploited many times in the past, although one of the first clearly articulated written account on the political utilisation of the past can be found in Rousseau’s nation-building recipe entitled *Considerations on the Government of Poland and on its Projected Reformation*. Rousseau, among other things, suggested

the Poles to use sport-related public spectacles in order to ‘remind’ people about who they were and where they descended from:

The amphitheatres in which the youth of Poland used formerly to exercise should be carefully restored; they should be turned into theaters of honor and emulation of these youths. Nothing could be easier than to replace the fights that formerly took place in those amphitheatres by exercises less cruel but nevertheless requiring force and skill, and with honors and rewards for the victors as in the past. Horsemanship, for example, is an exercise well suited to Poles and it readily makes for dazzling spectacle (2003 [1771]: 186).

Rousseau’s account was a very direct guide of how to invent a tradition and make it look as if it had existed already in antiquity. He clearly defined a magic formula of how to turn anything into a commonly shared tradition—a materialised form of memory—with spectacular ceremonies and repetitions.

Emile Durkheim’s work *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1965 [1915]) dealt exactly with these two phenomena and can in this regard be considered as one of the pioneering works on the social working of memory. Although Durkheim did not even address memory directly other than in his brief discussion of commemorative rituals (Durkheim 1965 [1915]: 420; see also Olick 1999: 334; Olick & Robin 1998: 107), he did emphasise the importance of ceremonies, repetitions and representations in the establishing of communal ties and feelings of belonging:

There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and its personality. Now this moral re-making cannot be achieved except by the means of reunions, assemblies and meetings where the individuals, being closely united to one another, reaffirm in common their common sentiments; hence come ceremonies which do not differ from regular religious ceremonies, either in their object, the results which they produce, or the processes employed to attain these results (1965 [1915]: 474-5).

By this he in a way paved a path to Eric Hobsbawm and his colleagues (Hobsbawm 1983a; 1983b; Trevor-Roper 1983; Morgan 1983; Cannadine 1983; Cohn 1983; Ranger 1983) who in 1983 published a landmark work *The Invention of Tradition* in which they showed on numerous examples that invented traditions do not have much to do with the past but have everything to do with the present, because they are ‘responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own post by quasi-obligatory repetition’ (Hobsbawm 1983a: 2). Their focus was on the profane, everyday practices, and was in this regard different from Durkheim’s focus on religious ceremonies, but this shift to profane was already made earlier by Maurice Halbwachs, Durkheim’s student, who legitimised the view that individual memories are always socially framed and that people normally acquire their memories in their society (1992 [1925]: 38). Halbwachs introduced the concept of ‘collective memory’ (1992 [1925]; 1950), a memory preserved through individual remembering of events or persons who are deemed important for a certain group of people.

All these analyses of social functioning of memory were performed as archaeologies of knowledge—searching for the starting points of certain traditions and memories—but they lack the genealogical analysis of disseminative mechanisms that enabled the diffusion of the past among members of a certain community. Although Halbwachs, for example, acknowledged that memories become generalized over time and develop its inertial nature, he did not provide a very thorough insight into this process. In order to better understand the management of memories we should thus look at the mechanisms through which certain communities enrol its members into remembering and the authentic preservation of their memories. Memories are apparent fixations of shared understanding, shaped through the process in which a certain reminiscence of the past is turned into a black box³—a thing all the members of a community accept and use but do not question its truthfulness or its mode of operation. As Latour says,

[...] two things are needed in order to build a black box: first it is necessary to *enrol* others so that they believe it, buy it and disseminate it across time and space; second, it is necessary to *control* them so that what they borrow and spread remains more or less the same (2001 [1987]: 121).

Both, enrolment and control have to do with the process of dissemination that was first limited to public ceremonies and oral communication but has later developed into a system of media networks that enabled simultaneous dissemination of almost unlimited amount of information among anonymous masses of people. Benedict Anderson demonstrated in his most known work, *Imagined Communities* (1991 [1983]), the ability of the media to grasp sporadic statements or contingent events and make them a part of the discourse that mobilises individuals into a community. He uncovered the connection between national membership and historical imagination which can, through media representations, be transformed into a tangible reality. As Anderson notes, during this process: ‘[...] fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community’ (1991 [1983]: 36). When the collective memorabilia of media texts is read and accepted by a group of individuals it immediately sets up a sense of a limited community whose members differ from the outsiders by the sense of a common past. Media representations of the past are, however, incomplete and fragmentary because they are selective and because this process of selection determines what is to be mentioned and remembered and what is to be left out and forgotten. Raymond Williams (2005 [1973]: 136) described this ‘selective tradition’ that produces the impression of representing the significant past:

³ Black-boxing is a social mechanism that was best explained by Bruno Latour (2001 [1987]), who showed that when a certain thing (including historical facts and myths) becomes a black box, all the supporting facts adopt a *vis inertia* of their own (2001 [1987]: 133)

[...] the selectivity is the point; the way in which from a whole possible area of past and present, certain meanings and practices are chosen for emphasis, certain other meanings and practices are neglected and excluded. Even more crucially, some of these meanings are reinterpreted, diluted, or put into forms which support or at least do not contradict other elements within the effective dominant culture.

Williams, in other words, talked about the management of the past, about the management of collective remembering and about the management of collective forgetting. However, the media and all other texts can not be produced, disseminated and read without active actors that are absent from Williams' account. These actors are people who are actively involved in the production of knowledge by making constant classifications of things that are turned into signifiers of their collective identification. There is a mass of anonymous individuals who produce knowledge about its community and who are never recognised as authors after their discourses are selected and granted a privileged position in people's collective mnemonic schemes. Michel Foucault showed that in each society this occurs inside a certain regime of truth, or:

[...] '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 (Foucault 2000a [1977]): 131).

In Foucault's view (1982b [1969]: 28), each statement is an event that is linked to the gesture of writing or articulating the speech that opens up to itself a residual existence in the field of memory; after it is produced it becomes subjected to repetition, transformation and reactivation; and it is not linked only to the situation that provoke it or to the consequences it causes but also to the statements that precede and follow it. Foucault showed in his works (1976; 1988 [1961]; 2000b [1979]; 2000a [1977]) that a certain thing starts to exist only after it is brought into speech.⁴ In the case of Slovenia the narrativisation of skiing in history books, media reports, internet sites, forums and blogs, in scientific accounts, personal narratives and all other possible storages of particles of the past transform skiing into history and turn this history—by its constant repetition and appeal to it—into a memory, flowing in the discourses of collective identifications, feeding the intimate forms of personal memories and materialising in people's actions.

⁴ In *The History of Sexuality* (1976) Foucault showed how children sexuality appeared in the eighteenth century at the moment it was brought into speech through educational, medical and administrative discourses. He identified the same principle before in *Madness and Civilization* (1988 [1961]) when he showed how psychiatric discourse materialised madness. Bruno Latour, following Foucault's epistemology, also gave a picturesque example of how microbes became a part of our everyday reality only after Pasteur discovered them: 'After 1864 airborne germs were there all along' (1999: 173).

Bringing skiing into speech: The invention of the Slovenian national tradition?

Modern skiing, including Nordic and Alpine skiing, was introduced in Slovenia in the beginning of the twentieth century. Early skiing enthusiasts were members of a group called *Dren* [Cornel] that functioned on an informal basis but played an important role in the collective remembering of skiing. This group, and especially Rudolf Badjura,⁵ were responsible for the dissemination of the belief that skiing was an old Slovenian tradition. Although the *Dren* group learned about skiing from Scandinavian, Austrian and Swiss skiers, Badjura began exploring the history of skiing and discovered that: 'Slovenians are the only Central European nation which retains written proof that our skiing evolved in the Inner Carniola already 400 years ago' (1931: 1). Badjura legitimated his claims with reference to medieval writings of Janez Vajkard Valvasor⁶ who, in his book *Die Ehre Deß Hertzogthums Crain* [Glory of Dukedom of Carniola],⁷ described an odd practice of the peasants around Turjak who have: '[...] a rare invention that I saw in no other country. In the winter, when the high hills are covered with snow, they slide with incredible speed towards the valley' (1977 [1689]: 94). That Badjura sought to prove his claims with reference to this written historical record instead of just inventing them, made them very believable; they were uncritically accepted by Slovenian skiing enthusiasts as well as by the wider Slovenian public and, not in the least, by the Slovenian national history, skiing professionals and by the media.

The acceptance of skiing as (re)invented tradition should be analysed in the socio-political context of the time. Badjura wrote that the *Dren* group started skiing in 1911 (1956), three years before the start of WWI. Further popularisation of skiing was hindered by the war after which the people, living on the territory of Slovenia, found themselves in an entirely new situation. The old Austro-Hungarian Empire fell apart, leaving some of its most faithful subjects unprepared for independent political existence. The reasons for political dithering of Slovenian leaders in 1919 are probably many-sided (from inexistence of national army, unclear national borders, poorly developed national historiography to non-uniform national culture) but whatever they may be, Slovenians decided to join other ex-Austro-Hungarian Yugoslavs in the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs.⁸ After this

⁵ Rudolf Badjura (1881-1963) was one of the most diligent skiing activists. He used ethnographic methods to 'prove' that skiing was an ancient Slovenian tradition. On the basis of his findings he invented the Slovenian skiing terminology and eagerly defended it against foreign, especially German, words.

⁶ Janez Vajkard Valvasor (1641-1639) was a polyhistorian and a member of the London Royal Society. Although he never wrote in Slovenian language he is today considered as one of the giants of Slovenian culture. Valvasor's book is a description of Carniolan geography, nature, history, customs, and language in the tradition of polyhistory.

⁷ Valvasor's book is a description of Carniolan geography, nature, history, customs, and language in the tradition of polyhistory.

⁸ On 28 October 1918, Slovenia was able to proclaim its independence, not in the least due to the then Wilson administration in the US that stood for the independence of small nations. A national government was elected and Ljubljana was recognised as the capital of Slovenia. However, self-standing independence was not the final goal. A few days later, the State of Slovenians, Croats and Serbs was established; the new political entity proclaimed its intention of uniting with the Kingdom of Serbia and Montenegro in the near future.

political formation joined the Kingdom of Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenians became citizens of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians.

During the period of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Slovenians materialised their national community mostly in opposition to the German national community of the Empire. German speaking citizens of the Empire were the generic Others mostly in the terms of language but also in the terms of culture—including sports. It was in opposition to the German *Leibacher Turner Ferein* that Ljubljana townsmen established their own gymnastic association *Južni Sokol* in 1863 (see Zaletel 1933) and in opposition to the German soccer clubs that they established the Slovenian soccer club *Ilirija* in 1911. Skiing, too, was characterised by nationalist games, but mostly on the linguistic grounds. Badjura was for example sternly attacking the linguistic impurity of Slovenian skiing slang:

One would expect that Slovenian skiers will be proud of their beautiful and culturally interesting national heritage that they would preserve with special enthusiasm this national possession inherited from the grandfathers, and would carefully avoid the use of foreign words and deformed expressions (1931: 1).

After Slovenians became citizens of Kingdom of SHS the Slovenian national identificatory potential of gymnastics and soccer was paralysed by the fact that gymnastics became the official pedagogical tool for national homogenisation of the Kingdom, and that Slovenian soccer was underdeveloped in comparison to Croatian or Serbian soccer. Skiing, on the other hand, remained a local peculiarity and was much more developed in Slovenia than in the other parts of the Kingdom. Its potential to symbolise the primordial Slovenian rootedness was undisturbed also by the fact that skiing in Slovenia grew into a popular practice in the 1920s and 1930s—approximately at the same time than in Austria (see Horak & Spitaler 2003: 1510)—and that it was not perceived as something that was brought to Slovenia from elsewhere (like gymnastics from Bohemia or soccer from England). Skiing was in this regard privileged with its seemingly pure national roots and local indigeneity.

The idea of skiing as a ‘Slovenian national sport’ first appeared in newspaper articles already in 1934. The Slovenian monthly *Naša pota* [*Our trails*]*—specialized in tourism, sport and cinema—was habitually reminding Slovenians about the importance of their skiing tradition and wrote in its February edition of 1934 in nearly prophetic tones:*

Do not forget that skiing was adopted to such an extent that we will soon be able to talk about skiing as our national sport. It looks as if Slovenia was purposefully created for this particular winter sport. Rolling plateaus with various configurations and naturally moderate slopes give everyone a chance to choose the place where they can satisfy their snowy lust. The value of correct practicing skiing by the individual as well as the entire nation will be revealed in the years to come.

Similar descriptions often reminded readers about the natural dispositions of Slovenian landscapes for skiing and about its national origin that was lost but was luckily found again. When on 18 January 1936 the newspaper *Slovenec* published a critical article about the reasons why sport was not prospering in Yugoslavia, it was, for example, stated

that: 'In the last few years, only skiing became so widespread that we can again call it our national sport'.

The privileged position of skiing in the Slovenian national imagining was established also on the level of sport ethics—especially regarding professionalism that was characteristic for soccer but not for skiing. Throughout the 1930s Slovenian newspapers have been constantly condemning professionalism and large amounts of money that were spent on the purchase and salaries of the soccer players (from other parts of the Kingdom) while at the same time the skiing Olympic team (consisting of only Slovenian competitors) was always lacking funds to even buy skiing equipment or travel to the Olympics. In order to raise the money for the 1936 Olympic team the Yugoslav Skiing Association organised the fundraising 'Skiing Sundays' that were strongly advertised also in the Slovenian newspapers. In its 19 January edition, the *Slovenec* newspaper advertised the event:

[...] we appeal to all our public who still cares for our sport even a bit and who still values our pride [...] not to deny its support. One Dinar is a small amount, a small expense that can be a huge sacrifice for some, but if we just think what is the purpose of this donation we will easily spare it.

Such fundraisers produced a sense of communal care for skiing that was unjustly neglected by the state and had to be kept alive by the Slovenian people because it was about the Slovenian people. After WWII skiing continued displaying its 'Slovenian' character, but also the feeling of Slovenian superiority. The 1946/47 sport chronicle, published on 1 January 1948 in the *Ljudska pravica* newspaper confirmed that in skiing Slovenians are by far the most numerous among Yugoslavs and have '[...] great predominance over them'. Sport chronicles, published in all major newspapers at the end of each year remained a permanent feature of the sport discourse throughout the period of Socialist Yugoslavia. Skiers from other Yugoslav republics were never mentioned because they never attained visible successes at either national or international competitions. This is why also in the eyes of other Yugoslavs skiing looked like a Slovenian peculiarity and an exotic sport.⁹

In 1956 Badjura wrote another book entitled *Bloško starosvetno smučanje in besedje* [*Ancient skiing of Bloke and its terminology*] that efficiently fixed the popular perception of skiing as an ancient Slovenian tradition. The book was dedicated to 'Skiers for the 45th anniversary of organised Slovenian skiing' (1956: 2), and it was an exemplary work of how to build the historical memory of Slovenian skiing by finding the meaning of contemporary practice in the past. Badjura employed ethnographic methods and col-

⁹ In one of the numerous conversations I had with an informant who was born in Bosnia to a Bosnian father and a Slovenian mother, he told me that in the 1980s he was—because of his mixed origin—often the target of other Bosnian children's teasing and was usually referred to as *Skijaš* [*Skier*] or as *Janez* (the latter being the generic pejorative name for a Slovenian in the Yugoslav context, much as 'Hans' stands for a generic German in European context). This demonstrates how other children excluded him as a Slovenian foreigner on the basis of the most exotic feature they could imagine—skiing, although he had never skied or spoken Slovenian before he came to Slovenia in 1992.

lected old stories, personal histories and home-made skiing equipment among the inhabitants of the Bloke Plateau. After his book was published the Bloke Plateau became the birthplace of ancient Slovenian skiing and Badjura realised his hope that the book:

[...] would evoke new eagerness for collecting more information on the antiquities of this kind among the young skiing patriots and that we would soon get a universally perfected collection on the ancient skiing of Bloke and its terminology that would evoke pride among the people of Bloke and leave a lasting memory of the first Slovenian skiing steersmen to our future generations (1956: 6).

Although the descriptions of the traditional Bloke skiing practices show that they did not have much in common with the modern skiing—accept for the skis—the Slovenian sport history and sport experts accepted this ‘fact’ and included it in the linear historical timeline of Slovenian skiing.¹⁰ The image of Bloke Plateau skier is today a part of Slovenian skiing iconography: it is used as a logo of the Slovenian Skiing Association, and a few years ago also the national television morning show *Dobro jutro, Slovenija* started awarding the best Slovenian skiing resorts with the wooden statue of skier from the Bloke Plateau. The skiing of Bloke plateau is being constantly brought into speech through various channels; the first documentary movie *The Skiers of Bloke* from 1932—directed by Rudolf Badjura’s brother Metod—was in 1995 followed by another documentary *The Ski Slopes of Bloke*, directed by Jože Perko; organised demo skiing groups and individual skiing enthusiasts demonstrate the Bloke skiing technique in traditional garbs at various promotional occasions in Slovenia and abroad; sport historians are publishing scientific articles on the topic; while in 2007 the Sport Association Bloke-Nova vas is going to organise its 21st cross-country competition *Bloški teki [Bloke runs]*. In Pierre Nora’s terms, people in Slovenia have succeeded to produce various sites of skiing memory ‘[...] in which a residual sense of continuity remains’ (1996: 1) and in which skiing is constantly being brought into speech in a distinctive national tone.

Bringing skiing into songs: Skiing iconography in the nationalist games

Although skiing already had a special position in the national imagination of Slovenianness, the international successes of Slovenian skiers the 1980s gave it epic proportions. Alpine skiers Bojan Križaj, Boris Strel, Veronika Šarec, Mateja Svet, Rok Petrovič and Jure Franko, and ski jumpers Primož Ulaga, Miran Tepeš, Bogdan Norčič, the

¹⁰ The skiing technique on Bloke plateau was different from the skiing technique that was used by the *Dren* group. The skiers from Bloke used skis mostly for walking and when they would ski down the slopes they would use one long skiing pole that functioned more as a brake than a steering tool. However, in the collective memory of skiing in Slovenia, the historical inconsistencies are ignored and people have no troubles with the perception that modern skiing in Slovenia evolved from the ancient skiing of Bloke plateau. The discursive manoeuvres that enabled the joining of the two unrelated practices in the Slovenian national mnemonic schemes do not endanger the truthfulness of this claim while the data which could jeopardise the legitimacy of the current regime of truth are conveniently forgotten.

Debelak brothers were the sporting heroes, the sites of memory that materialized the myth of skiing as the Slovenian national sport. Zoran Predin, one of the most popular Slovenian singers of the time, in 1986 even wrote a hit song entitled *Bela simfonija* [*White symphony*] that glorified skiing and the famous Slovenian skier Bojan Križaj. The lyrics were full of parables that Slovenians and other Yugoslavs were able to read as ‘purely’ Slovenian:

Will I ever be able to forget
your torso on the slopes,
the iron strings of eagle from Gorenjska,
the winning gaze,
the heroes of mountain tea.

And your intermediate time,
my cultural catharsis,
and first word of the youngest Slovenians
should not be mother, but RC Elan.

And shot in the silence,
as our poet predicted.
Now we’re raising our cups and singing the ‘ducks’,
we jointly jodl 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 gates number thirteen.

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

The song was a description of passionate feelings that are set free by a slalom race—the feelings that many Slovenians developed after watching skiing competitions became one of the most popular wintertime leisure activities of the 1980s. Križaj was described as a powerful eagle from the Gorenjska region, ‘our blonde joy’ that delighted

Slovenians with his victories. The skiers were described as the ‘heroes of mountain tea’ because they were sponsored by the Slovenian tea company that produced a very popular mixture of tea called *Planinski čaj* [*Mountain tea*]. Zoran Predin also sung that the first word of Slovenian children should not be ‘mother’ but ‘RC Elan’. As the only Slovenian producer of skis and skiing equipment Elan is and was during the 1980s the pride of many Slovenians. Križaj used a model of Elan skis that was named ‘RC’ (racing). One of my informants who was in primary school in the 1980s explained how important it was for him to possess RC Elan skis:

My father promised me a new pair of skis and we went shopping. But when we came to the shop he wanted to buy me some cheap Elan skis to which I objected. I wanted to have RC Elan skis—just like Bojan. If you were on the slopes on some other model of skis, other children would tease you as the beginner. It did not matter if you could ski or not. What was important was that you had RC Elan. If you had the same skis as Bojan, you were respected.

However, Elan became the object of Slovenian national pride, not just because all Slovenian skiers used Elan skis, but also because Ingemar Stenmark—the legendary Swedish skier whose successes remain unparalleled to this day—used Elan skis. His successes were, therefore, seen as Slovenian successes too, and Slovenian media often represented Stenmark as one of Us despite the fact that he was a direct rival of Bojan Križaj.¹¹

Given the absence of competitors from other Yugoslav republics, and taking into account the successes of the Slovenian ones, the Slovenian public remembered and believed that Slovenians have it ‘in Us’, and that skiing talent is something nationally (e.g. genetically) determined. Even the expert circles in Slovenia adopted nationally labelled idioms such as Slovenian skiing school and—because of the authority of the experts who are privileged to say what counts as true—this idiom became widely accepted. It functioned as real and unique although this uniqueness is never discussed or tested. According to this idea, there ought to be a distinctive Slovenian turn or a distinctive bodily poise of a skier which would testify that this skier is a product of the Slovenian skiing school. However, asked to tell the difference between Slovenian and Austrian way of skiing, one would encounter dire difficulties. In the 9 February edition of the *Delo* sport journalist Borut Šauta for example wrote about Slovenian skiing school when Nataša Bokal won her silver medal in slalom at the 1991 World Championship:

[...] her strictly rational, elegant skiing style reveals that she comes from Slovenian skiing school which gained its international acclaim with Bojan Križaj. Especially this—Slovenian skiing school—is highly valued in the world; considerable demands for our trainers are the proof of that.

¹¹ The inclusion of Stenmark into Slovenian skiing imagery was facilitated by his personal friendship with Bojan Križaj; the Slovenian public looked at Stenmark’s victories with great sympathy.

What was emphasised here were not technical characteristics but ethical-aesthetical contents of the Slovenian skiing school—namely, rationality and elegance. An example of common use of such ideas is observable in the student's notes from the lecture on skiing technique at the Slovenian Faculty of Sport. Under the title *Slovenian Skiing Style* the student (probably following the professor's lecturing) did not mention the technical characteristics of Slovenian skiing style; instead, there was only a comparison between the Slovenian and the Japanese way of skiing:

If we compare Slovenian and Japanese way of skiing it is obvious that Japanese skiers will never be as good as Slovenian ones. Slovenian trainers that worked in Japan tried very hard but with no visible success. Japanese skiers are too aggressive. They are thoughtlessly attacking, without control. Skiing demands self-control. The skier should not surrender to his or her emotions.

Although such national stereotyping through skiing has been present ever since skiing started to be proclaimed as the Slovenian national sport the national stereotyping started to matter in the 1980s. After Tito's death in 1980 the prevailing Yugoslav discourse of 'brotherhood and unity'¹² started to lose its appeal and people started losing their ability to imagine themselves in the Yugoslav national community. The sign of decline of the Yugoslav discourse in the 1980s was observable also in a wide media campaign *Slovenija, moja dežela* [*Slovenija, my Land*]¹³ that was launched at that time and had extensive nationalist effects. It 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 green 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'. But this campaign coincided with yet another exclusively Slovenian self-awareness rising campaign that propagated skiing. It was a nation-wide, media-supported lottery campaign called *Podarim Dobim* [*I donate, I gain*]. The lottery was founded by the Yugoslav Skiing Association in order to raise money for the Slovenian skiing and it was the most popular and successful Slovenian sport lottery of all times. It was limited only to Slovenia and was openly exclusivist from the national point of view. The *Podarim Dobim* postcards were sold only in Slovenia. People from other Yugoslav republics were allowed to participate,

¹² This discourse presented the Yugoslav nations as a family within which every member had its own characteristics, but contributed them to the common interest. The same rule was applied to the field of sport and Slovenians contributed to the success of this unifying mechanism by the successes of their skiers.

¹³ 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, the poetic quality of the term transversed to mean *peasant* in the pejorative sense of *backward* and *thick*.

but they could buy *Podarim Dobim* postcards only in Slovenia. Furthermore, the quantity of prizes, and their value were unprecedented; people could win houses, western manufactured cars, buses, tractors, motorbikes, and even helicopters and planes. This added to the distinctly non-Yugoslav and non-Socialist image of the campaign.

In order to compete in the lottery, one had to evoke one's skiing memory and 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 won World Cup Slaloms; which competitions Mateja Svet won, etc. People were actively involved in the dissemination of collective memory because they searched for the information in the sport chronicles or consulted their family members, neighbours and other people to make sure they remembered right. The campaign was in this sense directly building the Slovenian collective memory agenda. The draw of the prizes was at first scheduled once a month; during the second year of the lottery the draw took place three times a month, and finally, every week. It was broadcasted on prime time Slovenian national television and in the last show of each season there was the main draw to distribute the most valuable prizes. *Podarim Dobim* was a repetitive ritual; it was on for several years, featuring the same host and the same content, it was limited to skiing season only and the skiing stars were personally drawing the cards out of the drum. This meant that people knew they were directly supporting the skiers who, in turn, elicited their national pride every winter. Expecting the beginning of winter became inseparably connected to the beginning of the new *Podarim Dobim* season. No other sport in Slovenia ever achieved comparable accompanying ceremonial, and consequently, the capacity to homogenise nationalist feelings and insure collective remembrance to such an extent.

Towards the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the nineties the *Podarim Dobim* campaigns became more openly nationalist—a fact that was also reflected in its slogans. The slogan of the 1990/1991 campaign was, for example, *Za slovenske zmage* [*For the Slovenian victories*] which implicitly suggested that supporting skiing through lottery meant supporting Slovenia and not Yugoslavia. In February 1991, the Slovenian ski jumper Franci Petek won the World Championship and the congratulatory note of the *Podarim Dobim* leadership that was published on a whole page in the 16 February edition of the *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'. The note was very provocative given that in December 1990, Slovenians voted with a nearly 90 percent majority in favour of independence at the referendum that was very disturbing for the Belgrade government. The calculated ambiguity of the ad sent a clear signal to Slovenian readers who were well aware what 'the second victory' in 1991 will be. The advert clearly made a statement about the national consensus of 'one million votes' in favour of independence.

In the commentaries from the 1992 Winter Olympics, the Slovenian newspapers also attacked the Yugoslav claim to the medals, won by the Slovenian skiers. The subtitle to one of the reports in the 20 February edition of the *Delo* read: 'How did the gentlemen of the Yugoslav Skiing Association picture the 'separation balance sheet' of the results

with their beloved Slovenians'. It reminded the readers, that the national struggle was far from over, and that Slovenians had to reclaim the achievements of the Slovenian athletes, appropriated by the Yugoslavs, because the world should recognise them as Slovenian successes and they should be remembered as such. The struggle for the memory was present also in the statement, published in the 10 February edition of the *Delo*: 'Finally, Slovenians entered the Olympic family. Of course, we have always been part of it, and we are storing our medals'. The part of history in which the Slovenian skiers were winning medals for Yugoslavia was especially well managed. The medals were remembered and glorified, while Yugoslavia was forgotten and replaced by Slovenia. In Latour's terms it could be said that before 1991 there was no doubt that the successes of the Slovenian skiers were the Slovenian successes of the whole Yugoslavia but after 1991 there was no doubt that the successes of the Slovenian skiers had never been Yugoslavian. What happened in 1991 was that the old regime of truth changed, that the nationalist structural amnesia altered the face of collective memory and that the old certainties started to be seen in an entirely new light with entirely new dark places that covered the forgotten truths.

Conclusion

This paper has touched on a number of examples on the memories of Slovenian skiing that will, I hope, provide at least a rudimentary insight in the potentials of sporting memory studies to supplement the studies of collective identifications on the ethnic, national, religious or any other local or global grounds. I tried to show that history, utilised as memory, always tells more about the present than it does about the past. In Mary Douglas' words:

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 (1987: 69-70).

Memory is, therefore, a phenomenon of the present, a phenomenon of emotion and magic that accommodates only those facts that suit it. To remember or forget is always a motivated activity of the groups and individuals; in order to fully understand people's memories one has to understand also their motives. During my own studies of the Slovenian national identification processes through sport I soon realised that the studying of collective identification is inseparably linked to the studying of collective remembering and that the 'becoming-a-memory process' always depends on the when, where and who. In other words, collective remembering is a contingent activity which can pass by the big sporting successes or defeats and emphasise the minor ones, or do the opposite the very next day.

This analytical attempt should be seen only as a starting point for my further research on sporting memory. With it I tried to present an epistemology according to which our criterion of truth is managed by our memories that tell us what has the potential to count as true. This, however, means that—in order to find the mechanisms of truth—a complete analysis of a certain sporting memory should look into the conditions of its production, regulation, distribution and operation. In this case, I focused mostly on the production, regulation and distribution of the Slovenian skiing memory, while its direct operation was only superficially indicated because the revealed traces of memories in personal narratives were only a contingent ‘collateral damage’ of the ethnography that dealt mostly with the identificatory practices of Slovenians. The next study should, therefore, be focused on the operation of memories, on their personal utilisation by the individuals and not only on the where, when and who, but also on the how and why.

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POVZETEK

Družbeno-politične spremembe Slovenije v osemdesetih in devetdesetih letih 20. stoletja niso temeljile na preverljivih dejstvih temveč na popularnih kulturnih mitih, verovanjih in praksah, ki jih je vzpostavil novi režim resnice o slovenski naciji. Stari hegemoni diskurz o jugoslovanskem bratstvu in enotnosti je začel izgubljal svojo prepričljivost in ljudje so začeli vzpostavljati nove meje med jugoslovanskimi narodi s sklicevanjem na novo iznajdene tradicije in na sveže odkrite pozabljene spomine ter s pomočjo selektivnega pozabljanja dogodkov, ki bi utegnili izzvati novi režim resnice. Slovenski smučarji in smučarke so s svojimi športni dosežki igrali še posebno vidno vlogo v tem procesu spominjanja. Zaradi svoje vseprisotnosti v vsakdanjem življenju ljudi je smučanje postalo sestavni del nove nacionalne mnemonične sheme in je služilo kot materialni dokaz slovenske nacionalne posebnosti. Prispevek obravnava genealogijo kolektivnega spomina smučanja v Sloveniji do leta 1991, ki so mu dale legitimnost znanost, politika in mediji; skupaj so smučarje in smučanje preobrazili v mesta nacionalnega spomina, ki so se med ljudmi razsejala kot del vsakdanjega ljudskega razvedrila.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: šport, smučanje, kolektivni spomin, Slovenija